

## Natural-Born Reskillers: The Developing Librarian Project

The Humanities & History department at the Columbia University Libraries initiated the Developing Librarian Project in the fall of 2012. The project is a three-year training program, with the goal of developing new skills and methodologies to support the digital humanities.

The program is based on the assumption that learning happens best in context. The training, therefore, is project-based with all participants engaged in creating a digital humanities research project as a team. This approach enables the team to learn about new tools in a sustained manner that parallels the way other humanities researchers are likely to use them. The program's designers built a set of practical training units and exercises for the purpose of individual and group learning and skills development.

Practical exercises are focused on individual contributions to a common and ongoing project to document the history of Morningside Heights and its environs (the area of Manhattan where Columbia University is located) for the period 1820-1950.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the project is to produce a useful public resource while giving the team an engaging project of manageable scope to increase the likelihood of success.

### ***Methodology/Assessment Design***

The assessment design for the Developing Librarian training program stems from the mission of the Digital Humanities Center: to effectively support the current and emerging information and research needs of humanities scholars at Columbia University. In order to measure the success of achieving this mission, program designers defined three corresponding objectives in specific and measurable terms:

- (1) Learn tools and methods that support the emerging research needs and trends in the humanities;
- (2) Create a more interesting and engaging work environment for liaison librarians and other professional staff; and
- (3) Engage effectively with the humanities research community across the University.

Armed with clearly articulated objectives and aware that some objectives may not be easily measured, program designers developed or selected the following three instruments to measure the extent to which the project achieved its intended results:

- (1) *Explicit Self-Reflections* to assess what participants learned in each training unit;
- (2) The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)* to measure how participants feel about their work before and after the training program; and
- (3) The *Skill Set, Knowledge & Researcher Engagement Assessment* to measure the effectiveness of the training program as a whole at the completion of the project.

## ***Conclusion***

What began, as a supporting element - the assessment of participant learning - has become a cornerstone of this project. Assessment does not sit on top of the project but is thoroughly embedded and operates as the engine of iterative program improvement. This project reminds us that learning always involves some amount of failure. The willingness to engage and quickly integrate learning from failure provides a valuable tool for libraries striving to create distinctive value by investing in the skills and engagement of their staff.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.developinglibrarian.org> for more information about the Morningside Heights digital project.