

Hacking the Academy: New Approaches to Scholarship and Teaching from Digital Humanities. Daniel J. Cohen & Tom Scheinfeldt, Eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780472051984

Digital humanities is a popular buzz word which has been increasingly used in various institutions of higher education over the past few years. Countless academics claim to work with digital humanities, as evidenced by the number of recent books published in this field. Yet, the need for a book which unites the diverse voices and perspectives of academics in a critical conversation has not been met until now. Daniel J. Cohen and Tom Scheinfeldt, professors at George Mason University, initiated publication of this book in 2010 by asking a series of digital-humanities-based questions online. They solicited answers through the use of social media blogs during a brief week. The short time frame and limited exposure might not have resulted in many participants a decade ago. However, the rise in the accessibility of technology resulted in the contributions of a surprising 177 authors. Cohen's and Scheinfeldt's goal with this collaborative edited volume is to explore the ways in which digital technologies can reshape academic scholarship, teaching methods, and institutional dynamics in order to remedy the traditional academy's staleness. This text is the result of these responses, which were woven together in order to display diverse perspectives and pose thought-provoking inquiries.

The book is divided into three main sections: Hacking Scholarship, Hacking Teaching, and Hacking Institutions. The term *hacking* appears prominently in the text and serves a special importance. Hacking in the traditional technological sense refers to the illegal access and manipulation of digital content. Additionally, colloquial uses of the word *hack* frequently appear in blogs and articles and refer to a shortcut that simplifies life by solving a problem. The introductory pages present academia as having an uncertain future whose only hope lies in change through the embrace of the Hacker Ethos. This perspective seeks to hack around the problems of academia through the promotion of creative solutions fostering authentic joy and freedom from both tradition and the status quo.

The first major section of the text, Hacking Scholarship, includes contributions from thirteen authors and consists of eleven short chapters. The main themes of this section center on the problems surrounding academic scholarship, such as access, its effect on tenure, its popularity, and its outdated model in a time when the democratizing power of the internet has changed the way scholarship and knowledge are transferred. The contributors of this section agree that traditional academic publishing and writing practices in general require an update in order to meet changing technological trends. True to the term *hack*, the contributors propose creative solutions addressing these problems, such as the acceptance of peer-reviewed open-access journals and even the legitimacy of blogs as comparable to traditional media outlets. Contributors also call for the re-conceptualization of the peer-review process as a dynamic and inclusive activity as opposed to the traditional peer-review method. The concept of the traditional academic audience is taken to task and broadened to include audiences from all backgrounds and academic levels, spanning from casual web surfers to professors researching current information on their fields. In the contemporary context of declining academic publishing, which favors more democratic manifestations online, this chapter proposes refreshing and critically-needed dialogue on possible solutions to the current crisis in academia.

Hacking Teaching, the largest section of the book, comprises eleven texts and nineteen contributors. The main theme in this section focuses on the prevalence of stagnant traditional curricula which have failed to evolve with the needs of students. Several contributors assert that

academia must reinvent evaluation and lecture strategies in order to promote learning that possesses real-world applications. Innovative practices such as the creation of digital portfolios, for example, mirror the skills that employers value and potentially provide more insight into student learning than traditional transcripts and assignments do. Many assessment techniques are also not efficient in determining innovation and the true qualifications of an individual in the real world. Rigid assessment criteria are not only outdated, but also stifle innovation and are best suited for ranking how well a student follows the crowd. Instead, the contributors argue that students should be encouraged to create their own learning through methods such as building their own cyber-infrastructure. In this way, creativity, personal progress, and personal networking merge and allow for a collaborative learning experience for the teacher and student. Other contributors in this section argue that students need to acquire digital literacy, which allows them to navigate the information overload from the internet by learning how to sort through and locate the information that best suits their needs. These changes start with the teacher. Instead of blaming disengaged learners, educators must think of themselves as digital role-models who encourage students to use technology in the classroom rather than shunning it.

Hacking Institutions, the final section of the book, includes ten chapters with contributions by sixteen authors. The main argument of this section states that academic conferences, libraries, and archives must find ways to re-invent themselves in order to encourage and facilitate collaboration. Several contributors argue that academic conferences are problematic because they often incur the presenter or audience costs that do not fit practically into the budgets of many contingent professors. There is a growing trend among institutions to cut travel funds, to hire adjuncts rather than tenured professors, and to increase class sizes. These factors make traditional conferences impractical because contingent faculty—who are the majority in academia—often have to juggle a heavy workload with a limited budget and a shrinking possibility of tenure all while participating in an activity lacking authentic collaboration. Possible alternatives include embracing digital participation within a collaborative format. This would not only expand the audience but also be more cost effective and result in the true goal of all conferences—an increase of information exchange. “Unconferences” are a possible solution suggested by several contributors and work well either on their own or as part of traditional conferences. They are organized on a much smaller scale than traditional conferences, with the benefit of having smaller registration fees and promoting authentic conversations and collaborations. Furthermore, unconferences have the advantage of being great networking venues because connections are formed as a result of these conversations.

Several authors in this section broaden the discussion in order to include the dilemma facing traditional libraries and archives. It is widely accepted that traditional libraries are challenged by digital media. Libraries’ traditional function as the gatekeepers of knowledge has failed since the advent of the internet, which provides unprecedented access to information. Libraries are attempting to stay relevant by increasingly promoting their services instead of evolving in order to better meet the needs of researchers. Much like traditional conference practices, libraries and archives should be preserved as social places where interactions among librarians, archivists, and researchers are productive, lead to access to quality information (instead of the quantity the internet offers) and facilitate interdisciplinary academic inquiry. The contributors conclude that libraries should emphasize improving and enriching the research experience itself.

One of the strengths of this text is that it is a product of the types of best practices that the contributors advocate. The individual chapters were all compiled in a digital space and included

collaborations from across the nation. It is apparent that the formatting of the book was set in a way that highlighted the conversations the contributors had with each other. Some might argue that the book itself, by virtue of being published by the University of Michigan Press, goes against the open access format it promotes. However, the editors were very open that the purpose of publishing this book was to reach those academics who have not yet embraced digital media. They provide a companion website (hackingtheacademy.org) which is instrumental to continuing the conversation online.

Overall, this book poses a variety of insights on the problems facing academia today. The variety of contributors enriches the conversation and demonstrates that these issues are not isolated to certain institutions. Some critics might assert that this book does not provide deep-level analysis or contribute concrete solutions. Cohen and Scheinfeldt were clear that this text is intended as the starting point towards conversations that lead to change rather than as a handbook for how these changes occur. If used correctly, this book can contribute to inspiring conversations and actions that will revolutionize the academy. If over 350 submissions were generated within a week, imagine what could happen if academic discourse practices made it a priority to debate these issues constructively on a daily basis without the fear of change. *Hacking the Academy* is a must read for intellectuals, students, and administrators who feel eager to join in the public discourse surrounding the digital humanities and its implications for traditional academia.

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