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Is Digital Humanities Adjuncting Infrastructurally Significant?

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Adjuncts and "Digital" Humanities

The question of when *digital humanities* will drop the *digital* modifier and become *humanities* has special resonance for adjunct instructors. Stuart Varner, in his 2013 talk "Digital Humanities or Just Humanities," concludes, "I don't think it really matters if you want to say digital humanities or something else. What will matter is whether or not you are doing good work, ethical work and work that makes effective and rigorous use of the tools and methods that are available whether they be digital or not." Varner cites Josh Honn's declaration, "what I am advocating for is a more central role in DH for this skeptical digital work, both embedded in and existing outside of the digital projects and tools we use and build." I open with these remarks because they frame how and why digital humanities tenured and tenurable scholars might bridge the gap between tenured working conditions and adjunct working conditions in crafting field infrastructures, not just because adjuncts merit both employment protections and what I call *microbenefactions* (more on that below) but because adjuncts are the invisible mass of humanities faculty buttressing every kind of institution, from community college to elite research-1 university. Adjuncts shoulder the humanities enterprise, teaching the general education classes that free researchers to pursue critical questions that advance the field.

From 1975 to 2015, non-tenure-track positions of all types grew to account for over 70 percent of all instructional staff appointments in American higher education, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education.[1] The American Association of University Professors notes that "the turn towards cheaper contingent labor is largely a matter of priorities rather than economic necessity," observing that "the greatest growth in contingent appointments occurred during times of economic prosperity" ("Background Facts"). Faculty have seen how funding for technologies, tools, and edu-tech has sharply increased during the attrition of tenure lines and the growth of alt-ac (alternative academic) positions, defined as academic

employment off the tenure track in places such as academic libraries, writing centers, university-affiliated research groups, and cultural heritage organizations.[2] In terms of employment security, alt-ac and non-tenure-track fixed-term (NTTF) positions are a middle ground between the insecurity of adjuncting and the security of tenure-track employment. Alt-acs and NTTFs usually can apply for professional development resources (such as travel funding) and qualify for health and other employment benefits if their appointments are full-time.[3]

Field scholarship about adjunct DH is sparse. The first scholarly article is mine, "Want to Save the Humanities? Pay Adjuncts to Learn Digital Tools" (*Disrupting Digital Humanities,* Digital Edition, 2015); the second is "The New Itinerancy: Digital Pedagogy and the Adjunct Instructor in the Modern Academy" by Andrew Bretz (*Digital Humanities Quarterly,* 2017). Lee Skallerup Bessette made a witty game, *Adjunct Run,* and is a longtime commenter on precarious higher education employment. Acknowledgment of DH adjunct status in talk bios on university websites is a new phenomenon; an example is Dr. Erin Warford's StoryTelling with Digital Maps workshop using ARCGIS at the Digital Humanities Summer Workshop series at Canisius University, a regional Catholic institution in western New York (2017). One hopes such traces in field literature and university websites might be the beginning of increased visibility of DH adjuncts who, for reasons this essay discloses, are hard to reach and count.

This essay examines the infrastructural causes of DH adjunct invisibility and proposes two remedies: to motivate DH adjunct self-identification by convening DH adjunct-specific prizes and bursaries; and to invite senior DH faculty to perform microbenefactions that cost little effort and can give adjuncts access to prize-worthy work opportunities or other benefits, such as renewable funding. First, a word about background and method. I have occupied all three classes of faculty employment: NTTF, adjunct, and now tenured. I wrote this essay because many people have asked me: how can I help adjuncts? While adjunct working and living conditions have been remarked upon extensively in the popular press (for example, *The Atlantic* did a very good occasional series), there is scant documentation about DH and adjuncting. The unspoken assumption is that DH skills are so much in demand that people with these skills are protected from adjuncting. As I informally interviewed seven DH adjuncts (more on that process subsequently), their heterogeneous responses to standard questions reminded me that happy families are all alike; unhappy families are unhappy in their own particular ways. Tenure-track employment conditions are alike; adjunct employment conditions are unhappy in their own particular ways. They vary from state to state and from institution to institution. This essay seeks to situate such heterogeneity in overlapping employment contexts (TT, alt-ac, and temporary) and recommends two practical, simple-to-perform interventions that tenured and tenurable DHers could do to materially improve the prospects and daily working experiences of DH adjuncts.

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DH Adjuncts in the Gig Economy

The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that "up to 162 million people in North America and Europe—20% to 30% of the working age population—engage in some kind of independent work" without the protections or benefits of employment status.[4] Humanities gigging is one facet of this global trend. In just forty years, "adjunctification" has flipped the ratio of tenure-track faculty to non-tenure-track faculty. Tenured and tenure-track faculty now comprise just 24 percent of humanities faculty.[5] Of the 76 percent of faculty working off the tenure track, slightly more than 50 percent of those (approximately 700,000 faculty) are adjunct, according to the New Faculty Majority's "Facts about Adjuncts." Income insecurity is a well-documented feature of this flip. It is less known that 25 percent of all part-time faculty are enrolled in public assistance programs alongside fast food workers, child care workers, and home care workers (UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research).[6]

During the fall 2017 hiring season, I saw the first national job advertisement I recall having seen recruiting a DH adjunct in the United States. The hiring institution was Molloy College in Rockville, New York, which educates about 5,000 students and confers undergraduate and graduate degrees. The ad called for an adjunct to teach "advanced digital media courses." There is a slippage here between *digital humanities* and *online content production* that I recognize as characteristic of organizations whose teaching charge is more general than that of organizations vested with R-1 priorities and funding. As an adjunct in 2013–14, I performed almost exactly the work described in the Molloy job ad at a Portland, Oregon-area private university, which at the time teetered on the brink of insolvency. It has since closed, citing a sharply declining enrollment.[7] Molloy College did not fill the adjunct job for which they advertised. In 2021, their digital humanities and new media program employs three full-time faculty at the assistant professor rank.

As DH becomes not just a course offering but a certificate program at R-2s, SLACs, small private universities, and community colleges, it is hard to imagine that demand for *DH adjuncts,* variously defined, will not increase. "The institutional structure of digital humanities threatens to intensify (both within DH itself and among the humanities more broadly) the proliferation of temporary, insecure labor that is rampant not only in the academy but throughout twenty-first-century capitalism," noted Richard Grusin in his presentation on the "Dark Side of the Digital Humanities" roundtable at the 2013 Modern Language Association convention.[8] Grusin names the push for DH by "university administrators, foundation officers, and government agencies" a "neoliberal instrumentalism [that] reproduces within the academy (both in traditional humanities and in digital humanities alike) the precaritization of labor that marks the dark side of information capitalism in the twenty-first century." Matthew Kirschenbaum, in a longer essay version of his "Dark Side of DH" roundtable talk, shifts the focus of instrumentalism from something

done *to faculty* to something done *by faculty,* in which "galvanized" DH practitioners "wield the label 'digital humanities' instrumentally amid an increasingly monstrous institutional terrain defined by declining public support for higher education, rising tuitions, shrinking endowments, the proliferation of distance education and the for-profit university, and, underlying it all, the conversion of full-time, tenure-track academic labor to a part-time adjunct workforce."[9] However, even an adjunct actively "wielding" DH remains vulnerable to systemic procedures that are normative and functional for most full-time faculty. Emails circulating on a department listserv are not a site of disenfranchisement until adjunct employment status restricts access to them.

In the gig economy, DH adjuncts pay an additional tithe in the now-typical university requirement to create digital course shells using proprietary course management software (such as Canvas, Blackboard, or Desire2Learn) rather than equivalent free and open tools that would enable the adjunct to port courses from one university to another. Such a requirement is onerous, similar to asking a temporary ride-sharing provider to use a different vehicle depending on whether the referring service is Uber, Lyft, or Via. When I adjuncted, I solved the portability-and-intellectual-property problem by hosting almost everything on my own website and server and instructing students how to use freely accessible tools mostly in the Google suite; but in the years since then, as Bretz has noted, universities are more insistent that coursework transpire within the proprietary software. "At the present moment [2017], the sessional instructor and the course are both subject to the curriculum of an individual university and department, despite the fact that courses with a heavy DH component tend towards portability, interoperability, and modularity that renders such boundaries largely incoherent."[10] I would add that this requirement also disenfranchises students who do not learn to make, share, and navigate the open web and who stand to lose access to university work if it is locked within proprietary systems. FERPA laws protecting student privacy must be accommodated in designing digital humanities pedagogy, and this argues against the open web. However, many DH pedagogy practitioners have found ways both to protect student privacy and to permit them to work in public-facing digital projects.[11]

How Many Adjuncts Teach Digital Humanities?

The DH adjuncts with whom I have spoken are typically hired not to teach DH-specific courses but general education or introductory classes that are not marked in the course catalog as digital humanities. They simply teach their assigned classes using DH methods. This makes their DH work infrastructurally invisible. The pedagogy is DH, but its replicability as a DH course is contingent on several factors, such as whether or not DH methods facilitate general education course learning objectives; whether or not the hiring department has capacity to offer access to computers; and whether or not the adjunct is rehired by the institution. Adjunct

DH scholars have no travel support and so are unlikely to present work at or even attend DH conferences, and therefore their DH work is less likely to get telegraphed through DH listservs. These factors impede discovery of DH adjuncts.[12]

The challenge of tallying DH adjuncts is exacerbated by unreliable communication systems. Some adjuncts lose access to faculty listservs if they are not employed by that university or college. Some are on adjunct-only listservs. Some work several jobs and open only the mail that is directly related to the classes they teach. Twitter, once a reliable DH meeting place circa 2009–12, is decentralized in 2020. In preparation for this article, my tweets to reach adjunct DHers were retweeted by prominent DH pedagogues, reaching hundreds of thousands of potential viewers, but that yielded just two new practitioners I had not previously met. I had better luck finding adjunct DHers by scouring conference hashtags for people I did not know and participating in discussion threads on my friends' Facebook walls with people whose work sounded like it might be adjunct DH. Still another challenge to quantifying DH adjuncting originates in the blurred lines between DH project work and teaching. Some people working full-time alt-ac jobs are occasionally tapped to teach a DH course. Such teaching is not part of their contract; it is additional work that they take on for a fee. Such adjuncts' relationships to the hiring institutions are not precarious, but neither are such adjuncts integrated into faculty meetings and department listservs. They are frequently overworked. Their offices may be located offsite or across campus from the department in which they are adjuncting.

Adjuncting is the apogee of the *lone wolf* phenomenon observed by Elena Pierazzo in her 2017 keynote at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute in Victoria, British Columbia. The lone wolf is the DHer whose community is not embodied in a department but is virtual in online DH venues.[13] However, many adjuncts have scant time to participate in online conversations because most are working several piecemeal jobs. In one case, in which student access to campus computers was impossible, the adjunct designed assignments around cell phone network access. I identify this technique as "micro DH," a term Roopika Risam coined to account for DH work done in impoverished environments and "at small scale."[14] Such conditions of computer scarcity can apply to adjunct professors as well. Most of the seven DH adjuncts that I interviewed for this essay do not necessarily identify their teaching as digital humanities because they are not hired specifically to teach DH, although their methods are consistent with DH pedagogical practices. *Imposter syndrome* is intensified by employment insecurity and DH definitional heterogeneity.[15]

In its mentoring, promotion, and awards structures, the humanities professoriate is legacy bound, oriented to a tenure system that now pertains to only one quarter of the people working in the field. Travel bursaries and other awards for "young" scholars (under age 35), such as the Paul Fortier Prize conferred by the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, elevate and support the work of junior scholars. There is no equivalent support for the DH adjuncts I talked with, more than half of whom were too old to qualify for existing awards. If, as James English contends in

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The Economy of Prestige, the key indicator of any contemporary cultural phenomenon's entering the mainstream is the creation of a prize, then perhaps it is time for digital humanists to create criteria of DH excellence specific to DH adjunct working conditions because adjuncting is now the humanities instructional mainstream.[16] Doing so would motivate adjunct DHers to identify their work as DH and contribute recognizably toward DH research and pedagogy development.

Adjuncts and the "Hot" DH Job Market

DH senior scholars may not recognize that adjunctification is a DH problem. Tenured and tenure-track DHers may not know that adjuncts working at their own institution are using DH methods in the classroom, because these courses are introductory or general education and rarely are singled out for special attention or accolade. Some of the challenges adjuncts face are exacerbated versions of problems caused by state defunding and faced by all workers in higher education. As lines for tenured or tenurable humanities faculty are eliminated after retirement and replaced with adjunct, NTT, or nothing, more service work falls onto the shoulders of remaining faculty. When I began my career in 2000, NTT faculty hired in teaching lines were not expected to do university service, but that is no longer the case. Some adjuncts volunteer to do service labor, some of which is compensated and some of which is not. Job advertisements for new DH hires are issued pervasively by research-1 institutions, regional comprehensive universities, small liberal arts colleges, and community colleges.[17] This prompts some people to see DH as a ballast against dwindling tenure lines. But DH is, like any other humanities subfield, subject to boom/bust cycles that respond to enrollment trends.

Miriam Posner notes that DH's "sexiness" today obscures the "widespread understaffing" of many fledgling DH initiatives. "Launching a program with a two-year postdoc is clearly absurd and shortsighted, but it's nevertheless become standard operating procedure for many places looking to get a program going. So, in a way, many of these conditions are just typical of our corner of academia at our current moment."[18] This is an analog to adjunctification, the shortsighted boom/bust cycles of soft money quickly depleted that then require maintenance funded by a precarious budget. Amy Earhart has documented the unsustainability of early DH passion projects, websites whose hand-built archives decay when the faculty author retires or moves institutions.[19] Start-ups are sexy, but maintenance is not. When today's senior DH faculty retire in ten or twenty years, what infrastructures of care will be in place to stop those vacated tenure lines from converting to untenurable positions?

In 2012, Stephen Ramsay problematized DH as "the hot thing." It's a skepticism shared by many in the field, including panelists of the DH 2017 Conference panel "Challenges for New Infrastructures and Paradigms in DH Curricular Program Development," which openly wondered whether graduate students were well

served by DH certificate programs.[20] The hot thing prompts graduate students to craft their careers along paths mostly likely to result in hiring and future support. So long as digital humanities remains hot and traditional humanities hiring remains implicitly cold, DH would seem less vulnerable to the adjunctification that has decimated humanities tenure lines.[21] But it is just a matter of time until the *digital* drops from view and *DH* becomes no longer specifically referential to using computers for organizing, displaying, and searching for patterns within digitized texts. Such field diversification is already well underway.

There are no adjunct administrators, as Laura E. Sanders and I observe in our essay about DH adjuncting and social justice.[22] Job security for managers but not teachers is a key feature of the neoliberal university. One female adjunct I interviewed became an interim dean at a community college at which for seven years she had cobbled together several part-time teaching and grant-writing jobs. "I had to get out of teaching," she told me. "I feel terrible for saying it, but it just doesn't pay." Some of the arts-based DH adjuncts I interviewed combine freelance arts work (graphic design or website building) with teaching, whereas others teach full time. One just-graduated male DH master's graduate in his twenties took a DH programming job at an Ivy League school, where he is now earning the equivalent of a generously paid assistant professor. Two female DH adjuncts in their forties left teaching and moved into full-time instructional design (alt-ac) work. The gender politics of *sexy, hot* DH summons gendered implications of youth and desirability that actually obscure the realities of labor conditions for anyone off the tenure track. "As a woman of color," Liana M. Silva has wondered, "I am especially interested to know what the women in contingent ranks look like. According to the U.S. Education Department's 2009 report, 81.9 percent of contingent faculty are white. To what extent is contingent labor a problem for white women? Or, from another angle, to what extent is [adjuncting] a white labor issue, where class is meant to trump race?"[23] These questions about contingent labor, gender, race, and age are digital humanities variables that the field has yet to measure.

In my interviews I observed that no two institutions construe the adjunct employment relationship the same way. At some institutions, adjuncts could buy into health care proportionally to their percentage of full-time employment. At others, health care was off the table entirely, no matter how close to full-time was the adjunct's contract. One institution hosts a "sick bank," a crowdsourced pool of unused sick hours from which all employees including adjuncts can draw. Some adjuncts did not even know whom to ask about such benefits. Access to server space, office space, on-campus computers, and technical support varied. The implications of the California Assembly Bill 1690 and Senate Bill 1379, which Governor Jerry Brown signed into law in 2016, mandating that the state's community college districts "come to the negotiating table with part-time instructors to discuss reemployment and termination rules," are still being measured. For example, an April 14, 2021, a legislative panel heard about costs associated with AB 375, which increases

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the maximum number of instructional hours that a California Community College (CCC) faculty member may teach at any single community college district and still be classified as a part-time employee from 67 percent to 85 percent.[24]

An adjunct is a chameleon that changes color to fit the local needs of the temporarily hiring institution. To a certain extent, this is true of anybody applying for grants and framing their skill sets to increase their chances of winning funding. But when such shifts are the baseline of one's professional identity, the cost of frame-shifting can tax energy, capacity, and confidence. From 2011 to 2014, I was publicly a DH adjunct, blogging about what I was doing in the classroom (blog title: *Face-to-Face in the Mediated Classroom*), convening national conference panels about digital pedagogy, and occasionally posting about my challenges finding sustainable work ("Day of DH 2012"). I recognized that I was doing DH work because I measured my pedagogy and the work my students produced alongside what faculty hired to teach DH were posting about their teaching on Twitter and on their blogs. In some interviews for adjunct jobs, I declared myself a digital humanist. In others, I kept it to myself. My work was consistent, but how I positioned it varied depending on local needs. I felt sometimes like Harry Nash in Kurt Vonnegut's short story "Who Am I This Time?": the quiet guy who becomes whatever role he plays on stage.

I told myself—many adjuncts tell themselves—that adjuncting is an audition for full-time work. The hint at the possibility of full-time employment entices adjuncts to perform unpaid labor. It never came to pass that a job where I adjuncted converted to a full-time line; nor did it convert for any other adjunct I interviewed. It was not uncommon in the early 2000s at the regional comprehensive university where I am now tenured for adjunct and fixed-term positions to convert to TT lines. That was laudable. Recently, however, I have observed the obverse, where one- or two-year fixed-term appointments expire and the fixed-term professor converts to adjunct status.

Perversely, standout "star" adjuncts may have a harder time landing full-time work at the institutions where they excel than they might at an institution with no direct experience of their excellence. A star adjunct promoted to a TT line creates an adjunct vacancy which may or may not be filled by an equivalently good adjunct. The prudent administrative move is thus to keep the star adjunct and hire the TT line externally, even though the adjunct has institutional expertise that may take years for the newly hired external candidate to develop. This scenario happened to a star adjunct in biology (not DH) who had been teaching 80 percent of full time at a community college. Her department awarded her curricular innovation grants, praised her teaching, and encouraged her to apply for the job. After making it through three rounds of cuts—there were over three hundred applicants for the job—it was down to her and an external candidate with equivalent qualifications. The dean gave the job to the external candidate. The adjunct's loss of the TT job demoralized the department, which is 75 percent adjunct labor and has only one tenure-track position. The lost job was equivalent to a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity. Losing that tenure line tallies to about $250,000 in lost wages and sabbaticals over the adjunct's remaining years of employment. "It is a wrenching battle between doing my job in a way I am proud, a way that brings me joy, and the sick feeling of being undervalued, or taken advantage of," she said. She continues to teach there because she has built her life around the job, but she now must restrict her impulse to perform unpaid work. "I find it infuriating that there is a huge push for student equity and inclusion, and I have secured small grants to determine student achievement gaps and design course content and pedagogy to reduce gaps—all the while knowing that these same principles do not apply to me [as part-time faculty]."

When I was hired in a tenure-track line, it was by a department that had never employed me as an adjunct. Some of the work I'd done for free collaborating with tenured DHers fortified my expertise and made me a valuable potential colleague who could build things. Performing free labor had connected me meaningfully to senior scholars with whom I collaborated, some of whom wrote me letters of recommendation. This is where DH adjuncting has an advantage over non-DH adjuncting. Building projects together also builds respect, trust, and admiration: qualities that can foster strong advocacy in letters of recommendation. It creates a body of work that is medially distinct from the essays that a search committee typically reads from applicants, and it demonstrates initiative because adjuncts are frequently paid only to teach and not to build publicly visible projects.

In a labor context in which most of the humanities professoriate is insecurely employed and in which the academic publisher Elsevier wins a U.S. patent for an online peer review system, DH should build infrastructure to safeguard and foster status-agnostic collaboration and collegiality.[25] Elsevier's successful effort to put online peer review behind a paywall has been compared to a "restaurant where the customers bring the ingredients, find volunteers to do all the cooking, and then get hit with a $10,000 bill."[26] Elsevier was denied its first two applications for the patent on online peer review. The third, successful patent application makes narrow claims that the Electronic Frontier Foundation surmises will be "hard to enforce." The larger matter of trying to put collegial service behind a paywall is ominous and, I argue, of a piece with adjunctification. Both reduce the branching, expansive shape of collegiality to mere transactions, like the biology adjunct who now must refuse collegial work she wants to do unless she is paid for it. Digital humanities led open-access publishing that loosened academic publishers' control over how readers digitally access published research. So, too, DH should imagine infrastructures of support to safeguard collegial service and working conditions of all teachers, including temporary ones.

DH adjuncting is not a new phenomenon. The problem is that DH's cresting wave did not lift all boats to tenure lines. In the electronic literature community, for example, many adjuncts and non-tenure-track faculty have made and taught digital literature for decades, building generative poems, experimental hypertexts, and multimodal Flash poetry around the same time that Jerome McGann and others

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built the Rossetti Archive and Julia Flanders and others built the Women Writer's Project. But unlike archival DH, arts-based DH is populated by individual practitioners making one-off projects that do not require (or even if they require it, do not command) interdisciplinary teams and shared institutional stakeholders evident in some of the larger DH team-based projects. The institutional insecurity of arts-based DH practitioners is beginning to change as organizations like the Electronic Literature Organization advocate for institutional support (NEH and Mellon grants, sustained archives of work, integration into syllabi, preservation efforts, and swelling membership ranks). Rita Raley and Matthew Kirschenbaum, in separate keynotes at the 2017 Electronic Literature Organization conference, noted those attributes of institutional support as testament to electronic literature's field stability. One hopes that field stability might confer employment stability to the many adjuncts making electronic literature, though there's no necessary correlation between field stability and employment stability, as the broader history of adjuncting has taught us. To the *alternative histories* of digital humanities articulated by Tara McPherson, Amy Earhart, Steven Jones, Padmini Ray Murray, and Roger Whitson in their DH 2017 conference panel in Montreal, I would add arts-based DH adjuncts as a group with a varied and rich alternate DH field history.[27]

Structural Changes and Microbenefactions: A Call to Tenured Faculty

Microbenefaction is a term I invented. A microbenefaction is a small action that shifts the balance of power and gives an adjunct access to prestige or information otherwise inaccessible to them. Note that I use the singular here: *an* adjunct. These acts of inclusion are doable as one-offs or limited to the course of a given term; they are not the Herculean efforts of adjunct advocacy groups such as New Faculty Majority, Adjunct Nation, and the PrecariCorps collective, who publish PrecariTales, 300–500-word anonymously authored adjunct stories.[28] Then there is the wonderful example of Chicana literature professor Karen Mary Davalos, whose mentorship of then-adjunct Annemarie Perez equipped Perez to win her "dream job," a tenure-track position in Los Angeles teaching interdisciplinary studies to a "student population I love." Perez's 2018 blog post "A Radical Idea about Adjuncting: Written for Those with Tenure (or on the Tenure Track)" extols Davalos's generous treatment, in which Davalos, as department chair where Perez adjuncted for six years, treated Perez "basically like a post-doc . . . mak[ing] sure I had office space with a working computer, access to printing, and work-study student support. She read my research and gave me comments on articles I was working on. And, perhaps the most important act of all, she told me she was doing this so she could write a strong and knowledgeable letter of recommendation." Davalos mentored a young colleague: actions typical of a tenure line, but so atypical of adjuncting as to be "radical." (Even more so, because Davalos mentored other adjuncts in her department

with similar care and attention.) Perez's blog post "went academic viral," inspiring people with Davalos's example and Perez's message of status-blind collegiality.

Perez's story is terrific, and the world needs more chairs like Davalos. But not every person feels the ethical commitment to personally repair the shattering effects caused by adjuncting. Why is scholarly mentorship of adjuncts so unusual? It is because of the massive scale of adjuncting. For every Perez who lands her dream job in her home city (and I myself am one of those extraordinarily lucky people!) there are thousands of adjuncts with no clear path out of adjuncting. There is not enough time for all adjuncts to be cared for the way Perez was cared for. Microbenefactions are small and structural. They do not depend upon personal investment, such as when a compassionate chair mentors a promising scholar fresh out of graduate school, as Perez was. Microbenefactions are designed to be temporary and achievable at scale.

What is a microbenefaction? It is action by a tenured or tenure-track scholar who does one or more of the following:

- Gives adjuncts access to information;
- Writes funding for adjunct salary into grant proposals;
- Advises and mentors adjuncts;
- Seeks input from adjuncts about student-centered pedagogy;
- Aids adjuncts in finding university resources or paid extra work;
- Invites adjuncts to meetings;
- Coauthors with adjuncts;
- Does not eliminate adjunct applications when deciding awards and honors;
- Authorizes support for adjunct professional development, such as paid time for mandatory CMS software training;
- Pays to license adjunct-authored course materials after the adjunct leaves the institution;
- Writes letters of recommendation supporting the adjunct's full-time job prospects.

Microbenefactions enact DH's ethical ambit, which the Global Outlook::Digital Humanities special interest group articulates as recognition "that excellent work is being done around the world [and] that students, researchers, and institutions in all geographic regions and types of economies all have much to contribute to the development of digitally enabled work in the arts, humanities, and cultural heritage sector."[29] Although focused on the global dimensions of DH work, GO::DH, with its emphasis on local conditions, also provides an important frame for understanding how adjuncts and their students in the United States practice DH under constraint.

Senior scholars are key to giving adjuncts prizeworthy work opportunities. Microbenefactions given to me by senior scholars when I adjuncted (2011–2014)

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positioned me to win awards that validated my bid for the tenure-track job I now occupy. Katherine Harris, Dene Grigar, Bethany Nowviskie, Stuart Moulthrop, Elizabeth Losh, and Henry Jenkins all invited me to join labs, make projects, curate shows, publish in essay collections, and attend conferences. Those invitations gave me access to nationally visible projects in which I trained myself in techniques that are now a core part of my tenured job. I am grateful to those scholars. Senior scholars using soft influence, often in benign ways that are impact-neutral to their own careers, can make or break an adjunct's career trajectory. Adjuncts are usually cut adrift from decision-making processes, learning of them only when it is time to implement decisions others have made. The most basic microbenefaction is to give adjuncts access to information. Further, it takes almost no effort: forward an email, or better yet, add your department's adjunct list to department-wide communications.

This is human-centered DH infrastructure. We acknowledge that humans are not widgets. DH teaching is not a dissemination of knowledge but is a production of value and values. If the medium is adjuncting, then the message is that learning is transactional. Is that really what digital humanities should impart?

Mutual Win: A Microbenefaction Case Study

A microbenefaction is more likely to make its way through an approval chain if everybody gets something good from the exchange.

I aimed to solve a problem caused by the imminent departure of an adjunct in our book publishing program at Portland State. Like all adjuncts teaching in our program, this book industry professional teaches one class in her specialization, in this case ebook production. Having audited the class, I knew firsthand that the best way to ensure course continuity for our master's students would be to arrange for my department to buy permanent access to her excellent course materials. A replacement adjunct with a solid knowledge of ebook production could, using those course materials, teach a master's class. Licensing the adjunct's ebook production course materials involved consultations with

- A senior scholar in my department, who became an advisor and advocate;
- The adjunct;
- Our department chair;
- Our English department faculty executive committee;
- The Office of Academic Innovation;
- A humanities librarian; and
- Staff overseeing contracts.

It took several months for the various stakeholders to deliberate and confer. I was Hermes, relaying information between the parties. I made the case for why

the course materials merited licensing and conveyed how the loss of ebook production would diminish the professional readiness of our master's students. The senior scholar, Michael Clark, was the microbenefactor. He moved the process along when it stalled. Other actors in the network each represented a gateway at which the licensing effort could pass or fail: those people balanced the licensing request alongside other claims on scarce resources. This is where the senior scholar's stewardship was most beneficial. Involved advocacy cost him very little time—less than two hours altogether, I speculate. And yet his expertise was invaluable, delivering a win for graduate students, the book publishing program, and the adjunct.

In a migrant labor force, getting adjuncts paid for pedagogical resources they leave behind after their university contracts expire is an ethical issue.[30] Adjuncts need TT or tenured faculty to advocate for such payment, because adjuncts lack access to the approval chain in which such decisions are made by deliberation and consensus. In the end, everybody won: the adjunct earned money licensing her course materials, students got course continuity, the book publishing program retained a core competency, and the university fortified its reputation for innovation. (*U.S. News & World Report* named Portland State University a "Most Innovative" campus in 2016 and 2017.)

Awarding Adjuncts

DH adjuncts should be squarely in view when TT faculty organize panels and workshops about DH infrastructure. How to involve adjuncts who are hard to talk to or even identify?

If ADHO (or ACH, the Association for Computer and the Humanities) were to award a prize specifically designed to recognize adjunct DH work, then some adjuncts would be motivated to put themselves forward. It might make sense also to offer adjunct-specific bursaries to the annual digital humanities conference. My DH adjunct work became visible when DH awards and other honors validated it. In 2012, I was nominated for a digital humanities award (Best DH Project for a Public Audience: "Avenues of Access Exhibit of Electronic Literature," cocurated with Grigar). In 2014, I won a midcareer, year-long Fulbright and was the Fulbright Scholar of Digital Culture to Norway. One can measure the boost those awards gave my career if we consider that the universities where I adjuncted when I won the awards did not publicize or even acknowledge them. (Not even an email!) But when I went on the job market during my Fulbright year, I landed a tenure-track job and other campus interviews. Such a stark difference in responses to my DH awards demonstrates how adjunct status can overshadow other qualifications. Disconnected from infrastructures of support, such as faculty department meetings or faculty-only listservs, my awards were invisible to the communities that might have been my best advocates for full-time work.

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An adjunct winning an award typically reserved for tenured or tenure-track faculty prompts uncomfortable questions about merit. There is growing acknowledgment that access to the tenure system is influenced by luck or chance. "I adjuncted twice, each time the year before I got a t-t job—will never forget the experience," tenured Victorianist Talia Schaffer noted in a Facebook comment. "Anyone who was hired within the last 30 years is one step from adjuncting and anyone who has a t-t job just got incredibly lucky, and should never assume it's anything more than luck, imho."[31] Schaffer, along with professors Carolyn Betensky and Seth Kahn, authored a letter urging *U.S. News & World Report* to consider adjusting the "faculty resources" section of the America's Best Colleges rankings to more accurately to reflect current academic realities. "Currently you allocate only 5% of this category to part-time vs full-time faculty, while you give 35% to faculty salaries," they write. "However, those faculty salary numbers do not reflect the majority of college instructors, who are contingent faculty: underpaid temporary workers."[32] The letter garnered over 1,200 signatures, about 75 percent of which were tenured or tenure-track faculty. In response, *U.S. News* met with the Tenure for a Common Good delegation (Betensky, Kahn, Schaffer, and New Faculty Majority president and executive director Maria Maisto) on June 14, 2018. In a Facebook post on the Tenure for a Common Good page, Betensky noted that the magazine is willing to consider "a) refining their definitions for part-time/full-time faculty to reflect the real conditions in higher education today; b) refining the questions they ask of colleges and universities to get institutions to report information about part-time/full-time/contingent/tenure-track instructors more accurately; and c) adding a specific request for colleges/universities to report full-time NTT instructor salaries in addition to the TT/T salaries they currently ask for."[33] *U.S. News* decided not to adjust their metrics. Such data collection would benefit students, tuition-paying parents, and faculty because an accurate disclosure of professorial working conditions and remuneration should factor into rankings of university prestige.

Prizes like a Fulbright or a *U.S. News & World Report* American Best Colleges designation are flags that locate a person or institution in a vast relational field of symbolic and cultural capital. James English calls prizes "a uniquely contemporary form of cultural biography. It is almost as though winning a prize is the only truly newsworthy thing a cultural worker can do, the one thing that really counts in a lifetime of more or less nonassessable, indescribable, or at least unreportable cultural accomplishments."[34] If prizes become one's biography, then adjuncts' lack of access to prizes reinforces their invisibility, making it highly unlikely that even very good research will attain the recognition necessary to vault out of adjuncting.

Does *hot* DH inoculate practitioners against the viral decay of stable humanities employment? No, it does not. When DH infrastructure supplies award incentives for adjuncts to proclaim their work and self-identify, the field will be better able to measure how many DH faculty are working precariously. Such visibility will enable the field to assess the extent to which DH adjuncting is a significant or growing

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phenomenon. It will also give tenured and tenurable faculty more opportunity to practice collegiality with the full range of faculty who grow and advance the field.

Notes

1. American Association of University Professors Research Office, "Trends in the Academic Labor Force."

2. Bethany Nowviskie observed in a 2010 blog post ("#alt-ac") that "we started using the term [alt-ac] in 2009" as "a pointed push-back against the predominant phrase, 'non-academic careers.'"

3. Nowviskie ("#alt-ac") explains that the origin of the term *alt-ac* links to *#Alt-Academy,* an early and digital-born edited collection of essays hosted on Media Commons. The hashtag is an important feature of the title because the movement was facilitated by conversations and shared posts on DH Twitter. Nowviskie launched an ebook version of #Alt-Academy in 2011.

4. Manyika et al., "Independent Work," para. 3.

5. American Association of University Professors, "Here's the News," Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession 2012–13. Adjunctification is well documented by adjunct advocacy organizations such as New Faculty Majority and Adjunct Nation; professional groups such as the American Association of University Professors and the Modern Language Association (2014); intrauniversity studies such as George Mason's, which surveyed 240 GMU adjuncts and "has been hailed as the most comprehensive study of a university's contingent faculty working conditions to date" (2014); trade journals like *Inside Higher Education* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education;* and the popular press. I am struck by *The Atlantic Monthly*'s occasional series (2013–present) that features titles like "There's No Excuse for How Universities Treat Adjuncts" and "The Cost of an Adjunct."

6. Jacobs, Perry, and MacGillvary, "The High Public Cost of Low Wages."

7. Marylhurst University in Lake Oswego, Oregon, which had been in operation for 125 years, announced its closure on May 18, 2018 (https://www.marylhurst.edu/closure/). This decision was contested by students and faculty, to no avail. It is worth noting that since then, two more local Portland colleges and universities have shut or declared their intention to shut: Oregon College of Arts and Crafts (founded in 1907) closed in spring 2019, and Concordia University (founded in 1905) ceased operations in spring 2020.

8. "The Dark Side of DH" roundtable presentations were published in *Debates in Digital Humanities 2016* and also expanded into a full-length essay in a special issue of *differences* 25, no. 1 (2014) entitled "In the Shadows of the Digital Humanities," edited by Ellen Rooney and Elizabeth Weed.

9. Kirschenbaum, "What Is 'Digital Humanities'?," 3–4.

10. Bretz, "New Itinerancy," para. 21.

11. For more on best open-web DH pedagogy practices, see *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities,* a field guide containing fifty-nine curated keywords, each featuring ten ready-to-use assignments that include assignment prompts, syllabi, and faculty reflections on

student results (edited by Davis, Gold, Harris, and Sayers). See also Cohen and Scheinfeldt, *Hacking the Academy;* and Batterskill and Ross, *Using Digital Humanities.*

12. This essay was composed before the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift in 2020–21 to virtual-only conferencing. Whether virtual access to conferences will persist beyond pandemic conditions remains to be seen.

13. Pierazzo, "Disciplinary Impact of the Digital."

14. See Berens's *Debates in Digital Humanities 2019* essay, "Digital Humanities Adjuncts"; and Risam and Edwards's 2017 Digital Humanities Conference talk "Micro DH."

15. The authors of the "Alternate Histories of the Digital Humanities" panel note in their abstract, "Matthew Kirschenbaum's identification of the digital humanities in 2014 as a 'discursive construction' that ignores the 'actually existing projects' of the field set the stage for scholars to rethink how the digital humanities conceptualizes its work and its history ("What Is 'Digital Humanities,'" 48). More recently, in the introduction to *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016,* Matthew Gold and Lauren Klein use the scholarship of Rosalind Krauss who, in 1979, described art history as emerging as "only one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities." Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 30.

16. English, *Economy of Prestige,* 2.

17. Adjuncts are not mentioned in Anne McGrail's essay "Whole Game." It is the first overview of DH in community colleges.

18. Posner, "Money and Time."

19. Earhart, *Traces of the Old.*

20. Cordell pointedly observed in the published version of his DH 2017 talk that "completing the hours required for our robust [DH graduate] certificate program requires students to decide their path almost immediately upon admission, and the decision to pursue the certificate dictates very particular routes through the larger Ph.D. program." See his "Abundance and Usurpation."

21. Jasnik, "Humanities Job Woes."

22. Berens and Sanders, "Putting the Human Back in the Humanities."

23. Liana M. Silva cites the National Center for Education Statistics 2009 report at https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011150.pdf. See also "Women as Contingent Faculty," published by the American Association of University Professors, http://archive.aacu.org/ocww/volume37_3/feature.cfm?section=1; and New Faculty Majority's "Women and Contingency" project at http://www.newfacultymajority.info/women-and-contingency-project/.

24. The provisions of the law requiring California community colleges to negotiate employment protections with adjunct professors:

> Part-time, temporary faculty would be evaluated regularly.
> After six semesters or nine quarters of service, part-time, temporary faculty members with good evaluations would be placed on a seniority list, and assignments would be offered in seniority order.

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> In cases where adjunct faculty receive a less-than-satisfactory evaluation, a written plan of remediation with concrete suggestions for improvement would be provided, and a system of due process would be followed in cases of possible termination.

Reported in Koseff, "Part-Time Community College Instructors." See also the compendious "Resources for Organizing" at https://contingentworld.com/, which gathers state of California legislative reports and data related to contingent higher education employment.

25. Sara Catherine Stanley, in a blog post responding to a faux-provocative tweet ("It's 2017 and still nobody knows what Digital Humanities is"), shifts the "*What* is DH?" question to "*Why* is DH?" She concludes, "To me, all [DH] means is that we are addressing the needs and concerns of our community and engaging in a bottom-up approach to knowledge-making." Stanley's third maxim is particularly applicable to adjuncts: "DH is a response to an environment where the hierarchical structures of the academy don't always map onto the actual expertise held by various members of the community." Stanley's focus in that paragraph is to make visible the work of "librarians, archivists, developers, technologists, and many other actors [who] have played into the formation of DH." As DH adjuncting becomes more visible, particularly in teaching-intensive institutions, it may warrant being added to that list.

26. The quip is from Parker Higgins's tweet, "I'm opening an academic-publishing-themed restaurant."

27. For the disproportional gender distribution of early e-literature women authors as adjuncts and men as tenure track, see my article "Judy Malloy's Seat at the (Database) Table." Just one generation later, as I note in the essay, women e-lit artists made inroads to tenure lines and now run programs at R-1 institutions. But the lack of tenure and other forms of institutional support for many e-literature artists persists.

28. https://precaricorps.org/about/true-stories/. The pinned story at time of writing details an adjunct who has taught at the same university for ten years and has been hired to revise materials for a large-enrollment course. One chair made sure she got paid the first lump sum; the replacement chair didn't with the second, and she's still waiting with "no recourse except to wait." The Twitter hashtags #AdjunctLife and #RealAcademicBios also gather adjunct stories but do not curate them.

29. Global Outlook::Digital Humanities is a special interest group of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organization. Quotation drawn from the "About" page.

30. See also the section "Copyright, Adjuncts & Intellectual Property" in Bretz, "The New Itinerancy."

31. See Schaffer's comment at 7:11AM, October 28, 2017, in this publicly accessible thread: https://www.facebook.com/talia.schaffer/posts/10212355234688778?comment_id=10212359303950507&reply_comment_id=10212366775697296&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D&pnref=story.

32. The letter is viewable but no longer accepting signatures: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ILg0QaMrhzQLQvfPbOrE4BClsWfw_pLNPAUAB4yVR7w/edit.

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33. See the publicly accessible post by Carolyn Betensky ("Last week, a TCG delegation") to the Tenure for a Common Good Facebook page, June 19, 2018.

34. English, *Economy of Prestige,* 21.

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