

REPORT ON THE SURVEY OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES NEEDS AMONG H-FRANCE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

I. Introduction

In summer 2023 H-France constituted a new committee to assess the Digital Humanities (DH) needs of its members and develop initiatives to address them.¹ The committee met on a monthly basis during the 2023-2024 academic year. One of its first decisions was to create a survey that would allow us to understand these needs better. English and French versions of the survey were made available online to H-France subscribers during the month of March 2024.²

¹ Committee members in 2023-2024 included Melanie Conroy, H el ene Huet, Stefano Milonia, Lynn Ramey, Jeff Ravel, and Michael Breen (*ex officio*).

² The English version of the survey can be found at Appendix A below.

Ninety-three people responded to the survey. In the first section of this document we summarize the background of these respondents. In the second section we report on data we collected about the needs of H-France members in the DH realm. In the third section we outline the initiatives we intend to pursue in the 2024-2025 academic year and beyond, based in part on these survey responses. These initiatives include, in order of the priority we have assigned to them:

- Launching an online review of DH projects in French and Francophone Studies.
- Creating a database of already available DH workshops, and assessing the need for H-France-sponsored workshops and mentoring.
- Hosting web sites created by H-France community members, and creating a data repository.

II. Background of Respondents

We advertised the survey uniquely on the H-France Discussion list, posting reminders several times after our initial email announcing the opening of the survey on 1 March 2024. By the end of the month we had received 93 responses. Eighty-four respondents chose to complete the English-language survey, while nine filled out the French-language version. We asked these respondents to identify their countries of residence, their professional status, their fields of study, and their level of experience with DH projects. The tables below aggregate data from the English and French responses.

A. Geographical Location of Respondents

Country	Respondents	Percentage
United States	62	66
France	12	13
Canada	8	9
Other	11	12

Sixty-six respondents, or two-thirds, reside in the United States, while almost another quarter reside in France or Canada. The remainder were split among eight other countries, four of which are in Europe (if one includes the United Kingdom in that geographic category). The remaining countries represented are Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates.

B. Professional Status

Status	Respondents	Percentage
Tenured or Tenure-Track	55	59
Non-Tenure-Track	12	13
Retired	12	13
Other	14	15

Fifty-five respondents, or fifty-nine percent, hold tenured or tenure-track positions in universities or colleges. Twelve respondents hold non-tenure-track posts in institutions of higher education, and another twelve are currently retired. Three library or museum professionals, three graduate students, and one post-doc responded. Our other seven respondents were interested non-academics in varying situations.

C. Fields of Study

Field of Study	Respondents	Percentage
History	56	60
Literature	23	25
Art History	6	7
Other	8	8

Fifty-six respondents, or sixty percent, listed French history, Francophone history, or another field of history as their primary interest. Twenty-three respondents, or twenty-five percent, identified their primary field as French literature, Francophone literature, or the study of literature outside these fields. Six art historians responded to the survey. Other primary fields of specialization include Cultural Studies, French Linguistics, Economics, Medieval Studies, Musicology, Architectural History, and Religious Studies.

D. Highest Level of DH Experience

Level of Experience	Respondents	Percentage
Directed or Co-Directed a Project	28	31
Participated in a Project	26	29
Never Participated in a Project	37	40

A plurality of respondents, thirty-seven or forty percent, have never participated in a DH project. Twenty-six, or twenty-nine percent, have participated in but not directed a DH project. Finally, twenty-eight, or thirty-one percent, have directed or co-directed a DH project.

E. Analysis of Respondent Backgrounds

How representative of all H-France community members is our sampling? As of May 2024, H-France had 3069 subscribers to its discussion list. At any given time, according to H-France Editor-in-Chief Michael Breen, up to ten percent of list members may not be receiving some or all of the messages. Assuming that number of total subscribers was roughly unchanged from March 2024, it would appear that about three percent of all H-France members took the time to respond to our survey. Of course, there are many reasons why the remaining members of the community may have chosen not to respond, ranging from technical difficulties with the subscription list to a lack of interest in DH methods. Many colleagues do not have the time to respond to surveys during an academic term, or are suffering from “survey fatigue” associated with endless online questionnaires sent out by commercial and non-commercial organizations and their own institutions. At the end of the day, while the committee wishes we had achieved a greater response, we are grateful to those who did take the time to respond to the survey. We believe that the data generated by these 93 respondents will be helpful as we decide how to prioritize the initiatives we will undertake.

Beyond the number of subscribers to its discussion list, H-France does not break down its subscribers by location, professional status, field of study, or DH experience, as we have done above. While a majority of our respondents reside in the United States, hold tenured or tenure-track positions, are historians, and have directed, co-directed, or participated in a DH project, we have no way of knowing if these percentages line up with the overall profile of the subscriber list. The best we can do is assume that this breakdown of responses roughly reflects the demographics of H-France users most likely to avail themselves of any DH support that H-France might offer. We note, however, that significant numbers of respondents live in France or Canada, are retired or occupy non-tenure-track positions, specialize in the study of literature or art history, and have never been involved in DH work. We are determined to serve as many sectors of the H-France community interested in DH as possible, regardless of geography, employment, field, or DH experience.

Given the limited response and the absence of more granular information about the H-France community as a whole, we do not think we should craft programs exclusively for an imaginary colleague who is primarily resident in the United States, holding a tenure-track or tenured position, and trained as a historian. For one thing, DH methods do not divide along disciplinary lines. Historians are interested in text mining, literary scholars employ network analysis, and art historians can profit from mapping techniques. Some of the most avid and important practitioners of DH, especially those in Library or Museum positions, may not have tenure stream positions in universities. And as DH has grown, it has repeatedly been criticized for its Western and English-language-centric biases.³ The committee’s path forward should be as inclusive as possible.

³ See, for example, the contributions by Cindy Ermus, David Joseph Wrisley, and Christy Pichichero to the forum entitled “Digital Humanities – Ways Forward,” in *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* 49-3 (Winter 2023),

With these caveats in mind, we move on to analyze the answers to our questions about the types of support for DH work our respondents would like H-France to provide.

III. Responses to Questions about Support for DH Work

The second part of our survey asked respondents to share thoughts about their needs for DH support. The first two questions sought information about DH projects in which respondents have been involved, and which DH initiatives they would like H-France to pursue. The second two questions were open-ended queries that allowed respondents to offer their views on the initiative they would most like to see H-France undertake, and offer comments on any other relevant topics they wished to address. Here again we have aggregated data from the English and French responses.

A. Types of Projects With Which Respondents Have Been Involved

Type of Project	Respondents	Percentage
Editing & Publishing Digital Texts	34	37
Database Construction	32	34
Geo-Spatial or Mapping Projects	27	29
Open Access Publishing	26	28
Search & Visualization Materials	18	19
Network Analysis	17	18
Creation of Personal Web Site	16	17
Creation of Online Archives	14	15
Curation of Visual Material	11	12
Professional Blog	11	12
3-D or Immersive Environments	2	2
Other	9	10
None	21	23

Respondents were able to indicate all types of DH projects with which they have been involved, hence the number of responses is greater than 93, the number of respondents. The responses indicate that a little less than four-fifths of all respondents have been involved with some type of DH project. This finding is at odds with the data in question II. D. above, which shows that 40% of respondents had never participated in a DH project. The discrepancy might be attributed to uncertainty in defining a DH project, or it might suggest that some respondents

pp. 17-47. This forum was commissioned in part to honor David Kammerling Smith, long-time Editor-in-Chief of H-France, on the occasion of his stepping down from that role.

may have realized, after seeing the lengthy list of DH project types in this section, that they have in fact been involved in DH work.

It is worth noting that over a third of respondents had engaged in editing and publishing digital texts and in database construction. Over a quarter had participated in mapping projects or open access publishing. These four categories, constituting the most popular types of DH projects our respondents have undertaken, encompass activity in online publishing, and in database construction and geo-spatial analysis. They suggest that members of the H-France community already involved in DH work devote their energy in this domain to making primary and secondary texts available online, and to database construction and mapping projects. One might conclude that these are the most relevant DH applicants for our community, and that H-France’s DH initiatives should be designed to support this type of work. At the same time, community members are also interested, at slightly lesser rates, in search and visualization tools, in network analysis, and in creating web sites and blogs, online archives, and curated visual resources.

Finally, it is noteworthy that approximately one in five of our respondents have never participated in DH projects, but have an interest in these techniques.

B. Types of Initiatives H-France Should Pursue?

Type of Project	Respondents	Percentage
Workshops on DH Methods	71	76
Workshops on Starting & Maintaining DH Projects	65	70
Peer Review of DH Projects	61	66
Providing Server Space & Maintenance	56	60
Individual Mentoring	50	54
Other	7	8

The second question listed five possible DH initiatives that H-France might pursue, and also offered “other” as an option, with a chance to elaborate. The committee chose these five possible initiatives because we think we will initially have the resources to support these kinds of projects, and because we imagined these were the greatest needs within the community. Respondents were asked to check all of the options that they wished the committee to undertake. Here again, because respondents were able to check more than one alternative, the number of total responses exceeds the number of respondents.

Three types of projects attracted the interest of more than two-thirds of our respondents. There appears to be a strong desire on the part of respondents to participate in workshops that either introduce the basics of different types of DH methods, or that offer advice on starting

and maintaining DH projects. The third most popular type of project calls for H-France to initiate an online, peer-review publication of DH projects in French and Francophone Studies. Such a publication might parallel existing H-France initiatives such as the Book Review, the Salon, and the Imaginaries series.

Two other types of initiatives also received a nod from more than half of our respondents. Three of every five respondents would like to see us provide server space and maintenance for DH projects, while a little more than half wished for one-on-one mentoring opportunities. Finally, a small number of respondents offered suggestions for other types of support, including tips on DH publishing opportunities and guidance on open access publishing.

C. Respondent Thoughts on Prioritizing the Work of the DH Committee

The third question in this section asked respondents to offer written comments explaining which of the five initiatives listed in the previous section should be the initial focus of the H-France DH committee. Below we excerpt some of the most insightful comments we received regarding each of the five options, in the order of their popularity.

Workshops on DH Methods:

“People doing computational analysis of French sources are presenting work at DH and CS venues, not French History venues: if we can offer more of a sense of community around digital/computational work at SFHS/WSFS and cognate conferences elsewhere, this would be fantastic. I think offering workshops showcasing work in progress paired with how-tos on specific methods is a good way to do this.”

“I think that there’s a chicken and egg issue in that there’s digital humanities funding but depending on one’s home institution [one has fewer] opportunities to get guidance about what might work as a DH project in a particular field.”

“Workshops on methods and starting DH projects would be amazing -- it would help newer researchers (or researchers new to DH) to learn more and create a community of similarly inclined scholars.”

“I believe that workshops and webinars on DH methodologies would be the best place to start. Many of us, particularly early career scholars, are eager to move into the space, but don’t know how.”

Workshops on Starting and Maintaining DH Projects:

“For someone who has little experience with DH projects, a workshop on starting and sustaining a project would be most useful. I imagine that there are a lot of folks like me who simply don’t know what the possibilities are or how to get started.”

“I think workshops on starting/sustaining are of evergreen interest and relatively attainable in terms of organization and execution. Other goals are longer horizon.”

“Given how few of us have a deep background in the DH, everything H-France can do to assist interested scholars and teachers with getting started, especially in Anglo-Francophone collaborations, is welcome.”

“I think many historians are unnecessarily afraid of computers and databases and therefore it would be good if H-France offered seminars that would demystify them.”

Peer Review of DH Projects:

“Faculty on the tenure track need these projects to be viewed as "legitimate" research by our peers. Having this scholarship reviewed by H-France would go a long way toward helping us count this as scholarship in our portfolios.”

“Peer Reviewing DH projects is a much-needed service which would greatly assist DH project PIs with proving the value of their project, and its scholarly bona fides, to institutional administrators when applying for tenure and promotion. Peer Review would also be a wonderful way to demonstrate to a broader academic public (for example, teaching instructors) that a given project has been vetted by outside scholars and deemed of worth.”

“It is difficult for people with no expertise or experience to assess projects fairly and rigorously; in my experience as a reviewer, it would be great to have some tools to apply to review of DH projects.”

“I would love to see French Historians participating in reviews of DH work being published in journals, conference proceedings, but not just as "projects". It's a problem to frame DH work principally in terms of projects and not in terms of what the outputs are: articles, books, datasets, visualizations, code, online exhibits, etc. For promotion/tenure/hiring purposes, it's important to assess these outcomes and ideally this is something that French historians can get more involved with! However, there are also already venues for reviewing DH work that are building lots of experience with this. Why doesn't H-France collaborate with <https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/> on a special issue of French DH projects? I think this would be very welcome.”

Providing Server Space & Maintenance:

“The greatest need is for server space and/or maintenance to house DH projects. This often requires resources, screening processes, and maintenance calendars to sustain the project. H-France is well positioned to support scholars who are short on time and resources to continue and circulate their DH projects.”

“Colleagues who have done DH projects in the past are disillusioned by the lack of sustained support after an initial grant, for example. The problem of where to house projects online seems to be an important issue and I know of at least two DH projects that are no longer consultable because they had no sustainable digital home. The prospect of essentially wasting time and energy is a huge deterrent to starting a DH project. Server space and maintenance would make it more possible to imagine starting a project.”

“I think it's a slippery (and expensive) slope to get into hosting. I think resources would be better used both reviewing the field and serving as a resource to help colleagues looking to do DH work.”

“Selection and maintenance are tricky issues. Maintenance of DH material is onerous and must be left with the creators, and that means some kind of contractual commitment to perform these tasks irrespective of institutional funding coming and going.”

“I would argue that providing server space or offering to maintain DH projects is a bottomless pit of problems. There are so many issues with this, I think it would not necessarily provide the aid to people that you intend. Instead, perhaps partnering with a press to support the development of a series of major digital publications in French history/studies akin to new series like <https://mitpress.mit.edu/mit-press-and-brown-university-library-launch-seeing-book-series-committed-centering/> where there is both a commitment to a particular theme/field and a technical component of figuring out how to sustain digital publication. Alternatively, at the level of journal articles, H-France/society support for digitally-inflected work (such as experiments now happening at AHR

(<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/american-historical-review/digital-media-submissions>) would be very exciting.”

Individual Mentoring:

“Individual mentoring - starting a DH project is the hardest part especially when many institutions do not offer support or encourage work outside conventional deliverables.”

““I think serving as a space to connect folks working on DH projects would be a great use of H-France's existing resources - this would include individual mentorship.”

“I think the first choice would be offering...individual mentoring for starting and sustaining DH Projects. I have the feeling that many of us are at this stage -- I am six months in on my first co-directed DH project and practical workshops have been so helpful. Individual mentoring would be amazing. I see online workshops offered more often through various associations, but have never seen any individual mentoring.”

D. Other Comments, Questions, Suggestions

The last question in this section provided respondents an open-ended opportunity to share any further thoughts with the committee. Below we reproduce some of these responses.

“People doing computational analysis of French sources are presenting work at DH and CS venues, not French History venues: if we can offer more of a sense of community around digital/computational work at SFHS/WSFH and cognate conferences elsewhere, this would be fantastic.”

“It seems to me that at this stage, most scholars are taking part in various DH projects, and make use of DH tools for their research, whether they are aware of it or not. It seems to me the next frontier is AI and everything that comes with that. I wonder whether we - historians in the H-France communities - are somewhat behind the times here.”

“Focus on sustainability is good (and vital!) but we should also look at how to formulate a long-term strategy that focuses on providing stability, growing to meet our community's needs in a measured way, and providing services that respond to the needs of our community (and who is our community? Just researchers/university profs? Libraries? Cultural Heritage? Research engineers? private sector? In North America, France, the world?). Also, you'll need to quickly decide whether this is a North American (research infra is less holistic, based on university investment) or European (RI is a real concept, exists in every country and guided by ESFRI).”

“Having one or two virtual roundtables a year where researchers present their DH projects would also help reach a broader audience and gain recognition for the research that went into the projects.”

“Please continue to offer support to the needs of faculty who because of age or other issues have not been able to adapt to the fast-changing changes brought about by the electronic revolution.”

“I would appreciate more information about grant and funding opportunities — I have experience looking for funding in the discipline of French history, but have had trouble knowing where to begin in digital humanities.”

“While not all of us have created online platforms, many have put digital material together or collected data for an interactive database (i.e. done the initial steps). There is also a step between creating an online database/archive and publishing one. Not all DH projects to date have got as far as being offered online let alone to a wider audience/public. So there will be a number of projects in an advanced half-baked state so to speak.”

“Peut-être proposer un document sur le site de H-France qui expose et résume les différentes bases de données existantes avec des interfaces qui peuvent être utilisées par les membres de la communauté (par exemple: Gallicagram).”

IV. Plans for Initiatives in 2024-25

Since its inception in Summer 2023, the H-France DH Committee has debated how best to serve the DH needs of the H-France community. These debates shaped the survey we designed. Its results, in turn, have contributed to our efforts to establish our priorities for the 2024-25 academic year and beyond. Below we detail the goals we have identified in their order of importance, the rationales for these goals, and the plans we intend to pursue to implement them.

A. Reviews in Digital Humanities

The committee believes that the initiative which will have the most immediate and significant impact, and that we will be able to implement most efficiently given H-France resources, is a review of DH projects in French and Francophone Studies. H-France already has a successful history of developing online reviews and publications, including its Book Reviews, *Fora*, and the *Imaginaires* project. In addition, an online DH peer review publication would complement the existing H-France DH database. Respondents to the survey noted the need for a DH peer review publication to help legitimize these projects in the eyes of tenure and promotion committees, and to underscore the value of DH projects to a broader public and to potential funders.

In the coming academic year, the DH committee proposes to undertake the following actions in preparation for the launch of an online Reviews in French and Francophone DH projects:

- Consult with the editors of the H-France Book Reviews, *Fora* and *Imaginaires* to learn about their editorial processes, and to see if resources might be shared.
- Constitute an editorial team, learning from the proven structures in place for other H-France digital publications.
- Consult with the editors of already-extant online DH review publications, such as [Reviews in Digital Humanities](#), to learn more about the possibilities and pitfalls they have experienced. As one respondent suggests above, we might want to start by publishing a special in such a venue devoted to reviewing French and Francophone DH efforts.
- Plan for the publication of the first reviews.
- Explore the possibility of partnering with Duke University Press, which currently offers support to the H-France Book review program.
- Coordinate publication of reviews with the ongoing efforts of the DH Database Editor to publicize one DH site in that database per month.

B. Workshops and Mentoring

The next priority for the DH committee will be to explore the solutions to the H-France community's stated need for workshops in DH methods, in starting and maintaining DH projects, and in individual mentoring for those wishing to start or expand DH work. While a number of survey respondents expressed enthusiasm for DH workshops organized by H-France, the DH committee notes that there are already a number of workshops available online from other organizations, and from a number of universities and colleges. To give only one example, a group called [The Programming Historian](#) offers 108 online lessons in English, and 32 in French, on various DH matters.

We propose, therefore, to begin our work in this area by publishing as extensive a listing as possible of currently available tutorials and classes, and institutions that offer instruction our community members would find helpful. Once we have compiled the list, we will examine it carefully to determine gaps of particular interest to H-France users that we might fill. We will also explore the possibility of setting up small mentoring sessions to support those who might want to begin DH work or expand on projects already underway. These mentoring sessions might take place online or at the annual meetings of societies in French and Francophone Studies. Finally, we will explore the possibility of offering an "H-France DH Certificate," which might be analogous to the [Canadian Certificate in Digital Humanities](#).

C. Hosting Websites and Creating a Data Repository

A third area which we will investigate in the coming year is that of hosting web sites providing access to DH projects and creating a data repository. H-France currently has the server space capacity to host websites created by its members, but we do not have the resources to offer support services for these projects. Support would require technically savvy volunteers who would have the time and expertise to migrate websites from platform to platform and update code and other elements as the underlying technology changes. We may be able to offer hosting for simple websites that do not offer access to databases or digitized texts, but we will need to carefully define the kinds of projects to which we could make a long-term hosting commitment.

Some respondents and others we have consulted suggested that we offer a digital repository to H-France users. Academics at public universities in Canada and France, for example, have access to the state-run repositories Compute Canada and HumaNum, respectively. The United States, and other countries in which our members reside, have no comparable service. Here again, some technical support would be necessary so that data creators would be able to serve their data from the H-France servers. We will look into the possibilities for H-France support of such a repository, keeping in mind the limited means currently at our disposal.

D. We Welcome Your Ideas and Participation

We will keep the H-France community informed of our progress during the 2024-25 academic year via the H-France Discussion List and the H-France DH page. If you have comments or suggestions based on this report, or would like to participate in the work of the committee, please contact us at hfrance.dhcommittee@gmail.com.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

(This is the English-language version of the survey that the H-France DH Committee circulated in March 2024.)

I. Background Questions

1. Professional Status
 - Pre-university instructor
 - Graduate Student
 - Post-Doc
 - Non tenure-track college or university instructor
 - Tenure-track or tenured college or university instructor
 - Retired
 - Library or Museum professional
 - Interested non-academic
 - Other (please specify)

2. In which field did you receive your highest degree or training?
 - French and/or Francophone history,
 - French and/or Francophone literature,
 - Art history,
 - Communication or media studies,
 - Cultural Studies,
 - Other history,
 - Other literature,
 - Other (please specify)

3. Nationality and Institution (Optional)
 - Country of primary residence?
 - Institutional employer?

4. Highest Level of Engagement with Digital Humanities (DH)
 - Never participated in a DH project
 - Participated in a DH project but have not directed one
 - Directed or co-directed a DH project

5. Are you aware of the Digital Humanities Database maintained by H-France (<https://www.h-france.net/dh/registry/search.php>)?
 - Yes
 - No

6. How frequently have you consulted this database?
 - Never
 - Once or twice
 - More than two times

II. How Should H-France Support its Members' DH Needs?

1. With which types of digital projects have you been involved (check all that apply)?
 - Editing and publishing of digital texts
 - Open Access publishing
 - Geo-spatial/mapping projects
 - Network analysis
 - Database construction
 - Curation of visual material (Omeka site, for example)
 - Creation of search and visualization tools
 - Creation of online archives
 - Creation of personal web site for French or Francophone material
 - Professional blog
 - 3D or immersive environments
 - None
 - Other (please specify)

2. Which potential DH projects do you think H-France should pursue (check all that apply)?
 - Providing server space and/or maintenance to house DH projects
 - Peer Reviewing DH projects in French and Francophone studies
 - Offering workshops and webinars on starting and sustaining DH projects
 - Offering workshops and webinars on various DH methodologies

- Individual mentoring for those interested in starting projects
 - Other (please specify)
3. Given what you see as the needs of the H-France community, please tell us which of the options listed above should be addressed first and why? [comment box]
 4. Any other comments, questions, or suggestions for the H-France DH Committee?
[comment box]