

## Professionalization in a Digital Age

### Scholarship in New Media: Implications for Graduate Study

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Scholarship in digital environments consists of three related but distinct areas: print scholarship about digital literature and art; scholarship about literary and artistic works, whether published in print or digital media, that employs the affordances of digital environments as intrinsic components of its arguments and conclusions; and practice-based research that takes exclusively digital forms. All three modes present extraordinary opportunities as well as challenges to professionals at early stages of their careers.

In general, digital work is showing signs of reaching new levels of maturity. The strong performance of game studies as an area of serious academic investigation, the emergence of electronic literature as a rapidly developing area of twenty-first century literature, and the growth of blogs and websites as vehicles for academic research, are all on steep upward trajectories, along with correspondingly rapid growth in academic jobs. All this makes new media the fastest-growing and arguably one of the most vital territories of the contemporary academic terrain. With prestigious presses bringing out a wealth of scholarship on new media, publication in print in this area is now widely accepted. More challenging is research that appears in digital environments. Scholarship using new media affordances still has relatively few prestigious online journals; one of the few is *Vectors*. Even more challenging are websites and blogs that present practice-based research in new media. Sites such as Todd Presner's *Hypermedia Berlin*, for example, tend to be collaborative, requiring external funding and a team of researchers to complete successfully. Some blogs, for example *Grand Text Auto*, have now become major sites for academic discourse. Developing appropriate guidelines for this kind of research is still in nascent stages.

Systemically, innovation is made difficult by departmental structures that replicate themselves, a tendency that affects hiring priorities, evaluation procedures, publication protocols, and many other areas that impact graduate students intending to work in new media and other emerging areas. Rather than take a piecemeal approach (for example, appointing committees to develop guidelines for practice-based research in new media), it may be time to re-think the problem on a larger scale. If we take the continuing reconfigurations of knowledge structures as a given, it makes sense to think about organizational structures that can respond flexibly and quickly to the changing shapes of academic terrains. One solution is to abolish departments as such and move to problem-based research and teaching clusters that are inherently interdisciplinary. In this model, each faculty member would be asked to identify the problems she or he is focusing on

and the resources necessary to make headway on them. This self-survey would be the basis for establishing problem-based clusters not currently represented on the academic map; for example, a cluster on cultural mapping might include literary scholars, geographers, historians, archeologists, and architects. Other clusters might emerge that would look much like existing departments, but they would be the exception rather than the default. How such clusters might work will as curricular and research units be outlined, as well as ideas about how to begin incorporating them into academic institutions.