

Scholars' Lab: A Promising Academic Space For Accelerating Social Science Research

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Abstract

Libraries of social science research institutions and universities striving much to offer a wide range of information and research support services to their scholars and faculty. But, an exclusive 'scholars only' space, is not a common sight. In this regard, this paper gives an overview of such an exclusive research space, which can be named as the 'scholars' lab. This also provides an outline of the 'scholar's lab', its facilities, services, and softwares etc. Also, it recommends establishment of such a 'scholars' lab' in every social science library.

Keywords: Scholars' Lab, Research Facilities, Library Space, Social Science Research.

1. Introduction

In general, the mission of any academic library is to support research, education, and scholarship. Ever since, academic libraries have been engaged themselves in accomplishing their mission of supporting education and research by way of organizing and providing access to information resources, curating and preserving the rare and special collections, and developing and managing physical spaces for collaboration and scholarship. They have been continuously driven by the transformations in ICTs, media, data, and usage culture towards the fundamental changes in the consumption and regeneration of information and the practice of research scholarship. As a result, academic libraries have to rethink about their information services and strategies to meet the challenges and the demands of 'born digital generation' of research scholars.

Social science libraries, in particular, are also confronting these new age challenges as the nature of social science research is being dramatically trans-

formed by the technological imperatives. Both these disruptive and sustainable technologies enable the social science libraries and scholars to collect, distribute, and archive the research data on an unprecedented scale. The social science library's business of collecting, managing, and providing access to the research information has been challenged by the sheer volume of data, authentication, interoperability, documentation, and preservation for reuse.

In this context, the 'Scholars' Lab', being the library's innovative high-tech space for study and research is a promising solution for the innovative social science research. The 'Scholars' Lab' shall have comfortable and flexible seating, spaces supporting work on collaborative projects, well equipped with the high-end computer workstations loaded with all the requisite software solutions, scanning equipments, etc along with the digital rights. It is supposed to have specialized softwares for text manipulation, statistical analysis, OCR and GIS applications and many more. Along with the routine information services of the Library, the 'Scholars' Lab' staff/ associates can assist the social science



research scholars and the faculty in the areas of 'digital scholarship and research'.

2. What Is 'Scholars' Lab'?

The 'Scholars' Lab' is a place for faculty and students to explore digital resources, get help with digital projects, and collaborate on research. It shall be a part of the institute/university's objectives for enabling social science research and scholarship. It can be jointly manned by the staff from the library and computer department. The specific types of technical expertise featured in the 'Scholars' Lab' will include electronic text and image scanning and manipulation, spatial and statistical data analysis, data management and visualization, and other licensed software products. However, the 'Scholars' Lab' can be designed to develop to meet the needs of 'digital scholarship and research' in the areas social sciences.

3. The Challenges For The Scholars's Lab

The social science researchers and libraries have to embrace the challenges which shall be considered while implementing a 'scholars' lab'. The several challenges for the concerned with the social science research are as below:

- ❖ The challenge of sheer volume of social science research data,
- ❖ The challenge of data interoperability,
- ❖ The challenge of preserving and documenting the intermediate products for posterity and reuse, and
- ❖ The challenge of digital scholarship, requiring new levels of documentation, authentication, etc.

4. The Promises Of The Scholars' Lab

The 'Scholars' Lab' has the great potential to offer several promises for augmenting the social science research. They include the following:

- ❖ the potential for new research findings that are possible only through large-scale, computational analyses;
- ❖ a great deal of transparency and replicability in research methods and results;
- ❖ the potential for widespread democratization of social science research, and
- ❖ increasing ubiquity of research results through open access and other protocols.

5. The Scholars' Lab Environment

A 'scholars' lab' environment shall have the below mentioned characteristics and features:

- ❖ Open, inviting space with seating and work areas for collaborative or solitary work
- ❖ High-end workstations with wide-screen, high-resolution monitors
- ❖ Furnished and configured for personal laptop use (wired or wireless)
- ❖ Complete suite of peripheral equipment (scanners, printers, CD/DVD burners, etc.)
- ❖ Enhanced software and digital resources for statistical and spatial analysis, text and image manipulation and visualization
- ❖ Small wired conference room with flat panel monitor
- ❖ Computer workstations enabled classroom with the cutting edge technologies (such as 'Smart Technologies')
- ❖ Equipped with the adequate seating capacity

6. Services Of The Scholars' Lab

A 'Scholars' Lab' can offer various services to the scholars and faculty. Below is the list of such services, but not limited to:

- ❖ On-demand assistance with computing tasks and digital resources
- ❖ Deep expertise in spatial & statistical analysis, text & image manipulation
- ❖ Distribution of and assistance with Institute-licensed software
- ❖ Consultation on digital projects for research and teaching
- ❖ Statistical computing and computational science support
- ❖ Advice on incorporating technology into the classroom
- ❖ Instructional support for classes using digital and/or computing resources, software and tools
- ❖ Scanning and OCRing
- ❖ 2D/3D printing etc.

7. Facilities Of The Scholars' Lab

The 'Scholars' Lab' is equipped to serve patrons as a high-tech facility for study, research, and collaboration. It features:

- ❖ High end PC workstations
- ❖ High resolution large screen monitors at all workstations
- ❖ Scanners with companion software (including flat-bed, sheet-feed, duplex, and large format models etc.)

- ❖ Adequate space for collaborative and individual research
- ❖ Small group meeting room, with PC workstation, DVD/VCR, audio facility, projector and white board etc.
- ❖ Laptop/Tab station where users may bring their own laptops/tabs/notebooks etc. for research

8. Softwares at the 'scholars' lab'

In addition to the software available on all the machines, the 'Scholars' Lab' will feature specialized software in the following categories (indicative list, but not limited to):

- 5.1 Text Encoding, Scanning, and Word Processing
- 5.2 Graphics & Presentations
- 5.3 Statistical Utilities Softwares
- 5.4 Network Utilities
- 5.5 GIS

8.1 Text Encoding, Scanning, and Word Processing:

- ❖ ABBYY FineReader OCR
- ❖ Adobe Acrobat Professional
- ❖ Acrobat Distiller
- ❖ Microsoft Word
- ❖ OpneOffice Word Processor
- ❖ NoteTab
- ❖ OmniPage Professional OCR
- ❖ oXygen XML Editor

- ❖ ezText, etc.

8.2 Graphics and Presentations

- ❖ Adobe Photoshop
- ❖ Adobe ImageReady
- ❖ Microsoft Powepoint/ OpenOffice Presentation etc.
- ❖ GeoExpress View
- ❖ Dreamweaver, etc.

8.3 Statistical Utilities

- ❖ SPSS
- ❖ Access XP
- ❖ Amos
- ❖ Excel XP
- ❖ Intercooled Stata
- ❖ Maple
- ❖ Minitab
- ❖ Stat Transfer, etc.

8.4 Network Utilities (E-Mail, HomeDir, etc.)

- ❖ Web Browser (Internet Explorer/Firefox/ etc)
- ❖ Corporate Time for the Web
- ❖ Exceed
- ❖ Home Directory
- ❖ Mulberry
- ❖ Mozilla
- ❖ Secure CRT
- ❖ Secure FX

- ❖ WinZip,
- ❖ Web 2.0 Applications

8.5 GIS Utilities

- ❖ ERDAS IMAGINE
- ❖ ArcView GIS
- ❖ Street Map
- ❖ Image Analyst
- ❖ 3D Analyst
- ❖ Spatial Analyst
- ❖ ArcGIS (ArcCatalog, ArcMap, ArcScene, ArcToolbox, Spatial Analyst, Geostatistical Analyst), etc.

9. Conclusion

As the modern social science research is often described as data-driven research enabled by various kinds of ICTs etc. This predominantly data-driven social science research characterized by the analyses of increasingly large quantities of data from vivid and distributed data sources. The methodologies include the identification and visualization of patterns, anomalies, and trends from the data mining and analysis, enabling sharing the research results as well as original datasets immediately across the web. In this regard, a well-equipped 'Scholars' Lab' shall be of immense support in empowering the today's social science scholars for the new era of collaborative research.

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