From Digital to Post-Digital: Digital IDEAS in Practice

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Abstract
In the second decade of the 21st century we are beginning to realize the networked, emergent, and even highly personal affordances of the digital world that make it more, not less, human. The merging and mixing of digital, pre-digital (analog), and post-digital in today's libraries makes it important to pause and take a fresh look at what we are focused on: digital objects, people, or process. In 2012 Cal Poly's Kennedy Library began a three-year sprint to systematically integrate digital technologies with all our core programs. The next phase of our Initiative for Digital IDEAS (<iDi>) will embed library services more deeply in the life of the campus, creating a fully hybrid, more fully networked, immersive digital and human environment.

What is a digital library today?
A symposium focused on digital initiatives raises an important question: what is a digital library today? And more provocatively, at this point in time, is any library "digital"? Is every library "digital"? I'll begin by looking at what a digital library was yesterday, or rather, about two decades ago, in the early 1990’s.

As related by the National Science Foundation's Maria Zemankova, the concept of “digital libraries” dates back only about 20 years, to an NSF-sponsored workshop that called this idea an “electronic library” (Zemankova, 2016). Subsequent NSF workshops later adopted the term "digital libraries," to describe the emerging transformations in practices and possibilities for scholarly communication and research (Griffin, 1998).

Like the "World Wide Web," a name invented just five years earlier, in 1989, the name “digital libraries” has stuck, and we have witnessed a two-decades-long blossoming of the digital library community, spawning many national organizations and conferences dedicated to "digital library" theory, research, development, and practices (Arms, 2012). Among many others, these include the IEEE/ACM Joint Conference on Digital Libraries, the Digital Library Federation,
internationally, the Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries conference and the Digital Curation Conference; organizationally, the Digital Public Library of America, and the California Digital Library.

**Trends in digital library organization**

In the earliest days of digital libraries, academic and research libraries began to apply digital library funding and new digital skills through well-defined special project portfolios and projects. Many early digital library activities took the form of grant-funded projects conducted by specially hired staff, and run out of a library special projects office. One of the earliest and most persistent digital library projects like this was the Library of Congress’s American Memory project, which began in 1991. A breathy article in the *Washington Post* wrote about American Memory: “The Library of Congress has seen the future, and books may not have much of a part to play,” with unintended irony given that the American Memory project was, by definition, about the past (Weeks, 1991).

Creating special digital library units led by new digital library leadership positions has remained a common approach two decades out from the first emergence of digital libraries. In 2000 the MIT Libraries announced a $1.8M grant from Hewlett Packard that funded the creation of a unit to lead the production and management of DSpace (Smith, 2003). Harvard University established its Library Digital Initiative in 1998, and 9 years later the program web site reflected the persistence of this organizational form (Harvard University Library Digital Library Initiative on Internet Archive, July 1, 2005 (Internet Archive, 2016). It’s common to find digital library projects and expertise gathered within a library department that is organizationally distinct from other library services and programs. A snapshot of the University of North Texas library’s organization in 2015 reflects this approach in their Digital Projects Unit (University of North Texas, 2016).

As at these institutions, many academic libraries’ digital library initiatives have been centered on collecting and managing digital objects – whether print surrogates or born digital content. Whether this focus has driven organizational choices, or vice versa, is an interesting question. A possible hypothesis is that digital library development focused on digital objects is naturally conducted by specialized and independent project teams; and that in contrast, digital library development that is focused on digital services, will be organizationally integrated across the library. What follows is an example of digital library development following the latter model. After describing this example in detail, I raise the question whether this latter model is a more appropriate one for what some term a “post-digital” age.

**Cal Poly San Luis Obispo**

Cal Poly is a public polytechnic university of 20,000 students located halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco on California's central coast. Founded in 1901, Cal Poly serves the state of California through well-regarded undergraduate programs in architecture, engineering agriculture, and business, as well as distinctive polytechnic programs in fields that include graphic communications, bioengineering, kinesiology, journalism, entrepreneurship, and psychology. Cal Poly has a fierce and long-standing commitment to hands-on, personalized
learning, having long ago adopted as its singular brand, “Learn by Doing” – experiential learning across every discipline, in the curriculum and co-curriculum, and at every level of the undergraduate experience. Cal Poly’s student culture is creative and action-oriented, and characterized by students who eagerly span disciplines, and want to do, make, and change the world.

Cal Poly’s six colleges and 20,000 students are served by the Robert E. Kennedy Library, built in 1980 when enrollment stood at just over 16,000. The Kennedy Library’s 2000-seat space is used intensively with an average of over 71 student visits per year and over 1.4 million annual visits. In addition to library services, Kennedy Library serves as a campus hub for core academic services, including a university-run copy shop, a café, faculty development center, the university honors program, academic planning offices, and student academic tutoring services. Library personnel and budget resources include a total staff of 45, supplemented by over 100 student employees who are mentored and trained to provide high levels of customer service, graphics services, programming, research assistance and instruction, and communications services. Kennedy Library’s $7 million budget represents a campus investment of about $350 per student per year, putting Cal Poly in the middle ranks in the 23-campus California State University system in terms of library expenditure per FTE. Despite its modest size, in 2014 Kennedy Library’s staff was awarded ACRL’s Excellence in Libraries Award in the university category (Olin, 2014).

Though not a research university, Cal Poly undergraduates are regularly engaged in research with their faculty, and every Cal Poly undergraduate completes an individual senior capstone project, or an equivalent team or group project. Approximately 1000 masters degree students also produce theses. Since establishing its Bepress-hosted DigitalCommons institutional repository in 2009, it is Cal Poly’s student research that has driven archive downloads to nearly 3 million in the past year alone (2015-2016), with an aggregate total of more than 12 million downloads since the archive opened six years ago.

Cal Poly’s DigitalCommons site is arguably one of the library’s first major digital library initiatives, together with the adoption of ContentDM to manage digitized archival resources. Both projects were focused on the management of digital assets, and both projects were managed from a ‘special projects’ office: our Special Collections and Archives unit. These early successes set the stage for the library’s 2012 digital initiatives.

**Initiative for Digital IDEAS**

In 2010, Kennedy Library completed a strategic plan that laid out a people-centered set of values and commitments. The library’s newly stated vision began with the words, "Because people are at the heart of our vision," and then laid out a plan of aspirational goals and desired impacts (Kennedy Library, 2010). As strong as this plan was, in 2012 we realized that it had a significant gap: the plan provided no guiding framework for our work on digital initiatives and projects. In fact, the word "digital" appeared just three times in the 8-page strategic plan document, twice in reference to the DigitalCommons archive. In 2012, using our people-centered vision as a guiding principle, we began to articulate a digital strategic plan for the library that complemented our original strategic plan. This digital component of our plan began with the
statement that “scholarship, communication, and learning are empowered and enhanced by
digital systems and applications, and by access to digital content.” Since 2012, digital library
work at Kennedy Library has been structured as a library-wide initiative under the name <iDi> -
the Initiative for Digital IDEAS (Innovations in Digital Expression, Access, and Scholarship)
(Kennedy Library, 2016).

In designing this initiative, our overarching goal was to systematically integrate digital
technologies with all our core programs. Rather than creating a digital library enclave, we
challenged ourselves to do innovative things with digital technologies across all our programs.
We especially wanted to use digital initiatives to foster hands-on, engaged learning, in the spirit
of Cal Poly's Learn by Doing and polytechnic culture. We laid out the following guiding
principles:

1. Develop an integrated program of digital services across all areas of the library’s mission.
2. Leverage shared and collaborative digital infrastructure to sustain and enhance digital
learning and scholarship.
3. Prioritize digital strategies and projects based on the unique strengths and needs of the
Cal Poly community.

We also charted an ambitious, three-year course of specific projects and activities to
support digital innovations and services, including:

• redefining and hiring three new positions;
• creating new student spaces for work with digital technologies;
• systematically shifting the balance of both our journal and monograph collections from
print to digital;
• designing responsive, mobile-friendly, web-based digital information systems; and
• linking our physical spaces and presence using digital tools and experiences.

Guided by these principles, in three years from 2012 to 2015, with the support of three newly
hired colleagues, the library accomplished important milestones in multiple areas:

• digital content management, by migrating our digital archives from ContentDM to
Islandora;
• digital preservation, by adopting new web and archival digital preservation policies and
strategies;
• digitization, by planning and executing significant large-scale in-house digitization of
archival content;
• digital services and learning, by creating a new Data Studio, and a new data and GIS
services program; and
• integrating physical and digital library programs, spaces and collections, by creating
ubiquitous, creative linkages between physical and digital services and spaces through
signage, maps and navigation, web apps, and discovery systems.

Initiative Organizational Strategies and Steps
We started, as befit our strategic plan and vision, with people. Given the opportunity to fill positions opened up by recent retirements, we began by identifying critical skills that we needed in three areas: digital archiving; data and GIS; and open content and open education. In our first year, 2012-2013, we hired three new professionals, with the goal of integrating each of them into one of two departments: academic services and special collections. Filling these positions took the better part of a year: developing these new positions was itself a creative process that helped us to clarify our priorities and intentions. For example, one new position was for a digital archivist. We intentionally framed this position as an archivist, not as a digital asset manager, even while we knew that digital asset management would be a part of their responsibilities. Each position was defined not in terms of technologies or collections, but in terms of a new or redefined program of services. These three programs were (1) open education; (2) digital data and GIS services; and (3) digital archiving.

Once these new colleagues had joined us in 2013, we formed three library-wide teams. Each team was charged with developing a strategy for filling a critical gap in our digital library services. One team focused on analyzing future strategies for ensuring a robust, sustainable, and functional information architecture of our digital asset collections. Our digital archivist played an important role leading this team. A second team focused on digital preservation policies and priorities, helping us determine whether our preservation initiatives should focus (as they had in the past) on preserving publisher content, or rather on our own unique digital content. This team was led by our director of special collections. A third team focused on addressing the campus’ need for a sustainable platform for curating digital images used in teaching and learning. This team, co-chaired by our open education librarian and another faculty librarian, acquired Shared Shelf, enabling our colleges to move thousands of digital art and architecture images into a stable, standards-based, accessible platform for use in teaching and research.

While these teams were working, all the library’s program directors were also developing strategies and solutions for integrating digital technologies and resources within their program and service areas. All of these projects and activities were also considered part of the <iDi> initiative, encompassing our application of digital technologies to problems and opportunities in all areas of our work, from building navigation, to collections management; from resource discovery to digital and data literacies; from outreach and communication, to designing digitally-enhanced active learning environments. Outcomes of these projects included:

<i>Digital “legibility” and functionality of the building and our networked infrastructure:</i>
- digital building maps that provide real-time information about computer availability
- digital building occupancy information that allows us "datify" building use
- adding hundreds of power outlets to support Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) throughout the building

<i>Improved discovery and engaging digital user experiences:</i>
- responsive web redesigns embracing strong trends toward mobile-first
- integrated resource discovery across all digital and non-digital resources
- social media engagement featuring lively multi-media promotions and documentation (e.g. Vines to promote artists books and historic documents; routinely sharing in-person events through live-tweeting, podcasts and video.
**Improved faculty outreach about digital collections, and improved access to information resources:**

- planning a phased, long-term shift of resources from print book purchases towards ebooks, based on faculty data on format preferences reported in our Ithaka faculty survey, and adding access to over 200,000 new titles with no increase in our book budget
- data-informed thinning of print book and journal collections using Sustainable Collections Systems (Services) reports, resulting in preserving and increasing student study space
- acquiring and using ERM software to analyze our big deal digital journal packages, using a model borrowed from the UK that allowed us to project total cost of ownership vs. resource borrowing costs over time

**More accessible digital tools, instructional software, learning environments and services:**

- researching, testing, and deploying an innovative cloud-based virtual desktop infrastructure that efficiently delivers high-end software to all library user desktops
- designing and building a unique and digitally-rich prototype Active Learning Lab to be used by faculty in exploring active learning strategies
- creating a One Button Studio recording space to support students in practicing communications and pitches, without a steep digital learning curve
- expanding our portfolio of lending technical devices from laptops and tablets to cameras and other devices.

**Library faculty and staff learning:**

- increased training and awareness of data, GIS, and visual display of information across all our library faculty
- increased focus of instructional outcomes on data, visual information, and digital skills, reflecting a much broader definition of 21st century digital literacies.

**Culture Change**

While the Kennedy Library experience is far from unique, our rapid, people-centered, integrated approach to digital innovation has represented a significant cultural change for us. We could summarize our cultural change in terms of three major shifts in how we work together.

**Everybody in:**

The first of these was our commitment to invite, and bring “everybody in.” In our early digital library initiatives before <iDi>, a relatively small number of staff and administrators (2 or 3) was involved in making decisions, acquiring systems, or developing digital library services. Today, nearly every person in the library has had some part, or many parts, in one or more of our digital library projects. Our expectation is that digital strategies are everyone’s issue and everybody’s business. This also means that we expect to be accountable to each other: a digital strategy that doesn’t serve our mission and keep people at the center is a strategy we will not pursue – at least not for long – no matter how glamorous or exciting it may be to us as professionals. In the course of developing our <iDi> initiative we’ve considered, then shelved or rejected, more than one opportunity. For example, we considered deploying sophisticated
software to enable group collaboration; then asked in one of our annual student surveys if students were satisfied with the availability of collaboration tools (white boards, large monitors). When they overwhelmingly said yes, this indicated that more sophisticated software was not a high priority for investing time and resources.

*Everybody learns:*

We’ve encouraged every one at every level in the library to learn and participate in understanding, using, and providing ideas about digital skills. As a result we’ve seen a high level of staff and faculty participation in formal and informal learning about spatial data, data analysis, visualization and inventive use of social media. Despite a very steep learning curve, a growing number of library faculty are learning about GIS; several are professionally active in learning and teaching visual literacies; and several library faculty have attended intensive workshops on data curation. In addition to library and information conference and workshop opportunities, we’ve invested heavily in sending both staff and faculty to educational technology conferences, web and user interface design, conferences on open education resources, on open repositories, on digital preservation, as well as the recent CNI-co-sponsored "designing libraries" conferences that showcase technologically-enabled learning spaces.

*A community of innovators:*

An environment like Cal Poly’s where resources are scarce, vision is strong, and risk-taking, learning, and responsibility are encouraged for all, is one that can create a community of innovators. If someone has an idea for how to advance a goal, and can convince the library’s directors, as “venture social capitalists,” to OK a small budget or a new student assistant, they can quickly get the organizational support to go for it. Pilots and learning from experiment are encouraged, and our student assistants are key players in developing proposals and creating unexpected value. In addition, students outside the library, in disciplines ranging from fire protection to journalism and architecture, challenge us with proposals for library improvements. In spring 2016, within the space of a week, we received reports from student teams with ideas for adding more seats to the library, analyzing building energy use, and increasing access to electrical power; while a computer science student provided several apps for providing data on books that circulate or viewing the library’s colorful digital signs from a mobile device. One idea leads to another, and we keep adapting until we find something that best fits our mission.

A prime example of this was our work with the dean of Cal Poly’s Orfalea College of Business to create a student video contest that invited students to pitch their ideas for improving Kennedy Library. Over a period of several years the contest was refined to reduce the length of videos and to emphasize the idea being pitched, not the video. While the winning ideas themselves turned out to be very difficult to implement, the most exciting outcome was merging the library’s support for pitch development into a service: with funds from the college the library created a One Button Studio that students can use year-round to record and practice their pitches at the touch of a button. The new service reaches many more students and supports communication skills development across every part of the Cal Poly curriculum (Rajaee, 2015).

*Lessons Learned*

The <iDi> experience has not only changed our culture but also brought about some
important lessons. Three lessons in particular stand out three years out from the initiative launch in 2012.

Who’s on first?
First, we realized that for all the advantages of a fully integrated digital initiatives program, it became clear that we made the most progress on projects or programs where we had very clear expertise and ownership, primarily in the form of our new hires. At a state institution with lean staffing and routinely over-committed staff and faculty, a non-trivial challenge we face is creating the time, space, and clear focus needed to build a new program and integrate it into everyone's work. One of the symptoms of this challenge is that whenever we begin to take on a new digital project, it can be difficult to agree on the most logical leaders and contributors. As a result we are very careful in putting together timelines and project teams that minimize the impacts of additional work for busy staff, and we are also very careful to scope digital project assignments so that responsibilities complement and are aligned as well as possible with other core roles.

Limits to growth
Another lesson learned is that we are reaching the limits of what we can accomplish as a single institution. To extend our digital programs and services, our strategies are increasingly based on developing collaborations, partnerships, and collective work with external partners whether at our university or at other institutions. This change means we need to invest more time in both cultivating external relations and in assessing external interests, priorities, and needs in order to make better matches in our collaborations and partnerships. We need to know, with much more precision:

- what do others in our community care about?
- what are they capable of doing with us, and when?
- what risks and uncertainties are all the parties willing to live with?
- what resources can we pool for greater impact?
- what are the politics of our working together, since this may change existing, established, or expected relationships?

As a result of this realization we have made one more new hire: a director of external relations, who will help lead, plan, and coordinate our development of tools, skills, and programs to achieve better results together.

Platforms or showcases
A third lesson of our first three years of <iDi> has been the realization that offering a single platform for digital scholarship of any kind – whether digital publishing, curating digital images, managing researcher profiles, even archiving digital scholarship – is a tough sell at our campus, and we think, at many universities. One of our assumptions in the first few years of our digital initiatives was that our users wanted and would use library-provided platforms for conducting, creating, and sharing their digital scholarship: blogging platforms, eportfolios, scholar profile systems, digital exhibits, and the like. For example, we knew several faculty members were experimenting with Omeka to create digital exhibits, and assumed, before further research, that the library should support them by offering an Omeka platform. But the deeper the staff and faculty dug into this assumption, the less they were convinced that there was a real need for the library to support these faculty. Similarly, we'd seen a growing interest among students
in publishing online student research journals. We provide a rich, well-regarded online publishing platform - Bepress. Yet we repeatedly found that faculty and students enjoy producing their own publications and choosing their own publishing platforms. We’ve struggled as well with Selected Works as a platform for faculty profiles: its use is not mandated, many faculty use LinkedIn or other profile platforms, and they see no reason to manage more than one professional profile. At first we were exploring VIVO as an alternative that might be more attractive as an institutional solution with growing adoption in other universities. Now we think that teaching faculty about ORCID and working toward institutional adoption of ORCID might make more sense in our environment. Meanwhile, the proliferation of (mostly free or low-cost) researcher tools that support every phase of the research life cycle has been well documented (Kramer B. & Bosman J., 2016). Our conclusion is that for now, the availability and variety of free content management, personal portfolio, and publishing tools makes a single institutional solution, in most cases, both undesirable and unnecessary.

Similarly, we think when it comes to library-provided digital curation platforms like Shared Shelf, interest may be limited to individuals or groups at the university with library-scale, long-term projects. We’ve found the primary users of Shared Shelf are the staff responsible for managing collections of thousands of images, not small personal collections. On the other hand, there remains a strong institutional interest in digitally showcasing faculty and student work. Whether this happens in our community galleries in the library, in interviews or faculty-led conversations captured digitally, or as part of our institutional archive, the library serving as the curator and exhibitor of digital showcases of distinctive institutional output seems to be valued. Indeed we are already beginning collaborations with one of our research centers on a data-oriented faculty showcase project.

What's next

In January 2016, we took a long look at our progress in <iDi>, in light of our new library strategic plan that we completed the previous fall (Kennedy Library, 2015). Our vision in this new plan is still stated in terms of human goals: “We connect people and inspire learning.” Emulating the strategic planning effort of the ARL which included identifying a “system of action,” we’ve adopted a system of action of our own, that describes the human activities that we engage in, and that we support. "Digital" is woven throughout this plan, with several strategic outcomes specifically focused on digital initiatives, and in other instances, we’ve identified outcomes that can be accomplished, in parallel, through both physical and digital strategies.

<iDi2>

A major commitment in the next phase of our digital initiatives is our participation in the adoption of ExLibris as a common library services platform across all 23 California State University (CSU) campuses, integrating discovery, collection management, and other business workflows. The decision in 2015 to adopt ExLibris as a Unified Library Management System (ULMS) has in turn opened up greater awareness among the 23 CSU libraries of the potential for other collaborations within and across our network (CSU Libraries, 2016).

Some of these opportunities are very ad hoc and involve fairly simple exchanges and sharing of resources: in 2015, Cal Poly borrowed another CSU campus’ microfilm digitizer and
was able to use student assistants to complete the digitization of 100 years of student newspapers. In 2016, the Cal Poly data services team drove to CSU Fresno with a collection of aerial photographs. The Madden Library at Fresno used high-end scanning equipment to digitize the photos for and deliver them back to Cal Poly on a hard drive (Rajaee, 2016).

Our team of directors has been learning together about recent developments in digital asset systems and interfaces: we’ve all helped each other become conversant with a digital zoo of products, including Fedora, Islandora, Hydra, Spotlight, Mirador, and Hydra in a Box. We sent a senior programmer to Hydra Camp and they are now using what they learned to bring up a pilot instance of Collective Access to manage the campus collection of artwork. As early adopters of Islandora within the CSU system, we are also beginning to collaborate with other CSU programmers as they explore using Islandora to replace DSpace as a system-wide platform for digital content.

In support of learning and scholarship, we’ve begun learning more about another kind of digital zoo – the array of scholarly tools and services available to researchers to support every phase of research, up to and including research analytics and impact analysis tools, in partnership with our university’s research programs office. Another major focus now is retooling our information literacies programs to more explicitly encompass digital scholarship and digital research skills, while aligning our work with campus learning outcomes assessment.

Our most important next step - reflected in virtually all of these new endeavors - has been to focus much more on collaborative strategies. In addition to the collaborations in the CSU described above, our library is establishing collaborative partnerships with several Cal Poly campus centers of innovation and entrepreneurship, including groups working across business, engineering, communication, and the arts. An important example is our new partnership with Cal Poly’s Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Planning and fundraising are in progress that will bring a student-run Innovation Sandbox from its current engineering college location into the library. This space – offering lab-like work areas, peer support, tools, community, and freedom to experiment – will be a hub, a platform, and a visible showcase, combining digital technologies with physical making in a way that is, very possibly, post-digital. We are now in exploratory discussions with the department of journalism about the potential for creating a parallel new media sandbox in the library.

The next phase of our Initiative for Digital IDEAS will, we hope, embed library services even more deeply in the life of the campus through collaborations that enhance research, collaboration, and learning.

**Our post-digital future**

In my introduction I asked whether any library today, or every library today, is “digital.” Could they be “post-digital”? This term was coined by the electronic music composer Kim Cascone in 2000, to describe an "aesthetics that no longer considers digital-ness revolutionary" (Cascone, 2000). “post-digital” means we are more concerned with being human (Postdigital Humanism, 2014).
One symptom of a post-digital age is the changing relationship we have to our digital machines, as both extensions of our neurons and expressions of our personalities. We decorate and personalize our mobile devices, unlock our iPhones with a fingerprint, and entertain arguments over whether a smartphone is an extension of our mind, and should be protected from invasion by the FBI. Responding to the recent Apple vs. FBI struggle over encryption of an accused terrorist's smartphone, Matthew Noah Smith published an article in *Slate* that made this argument. The "extended mind hypothesis," he writes, means that "we have no reason to treat the brain alone as the only place where mental processes can occur." (Smith, 2016). Then there’s the datification of events and things in the physical world: turning invisible (undocumented) activity and events into data. (Elliott, 2013). In these and other contexts, the human experience of the digital has evolved quickly to the point where the relationship between the digital and the non-digital is becoming a matter of great human interest. The digital has become co-extensive with much of our human life and indeed with living and physical phenomena in general.

This idea of the post-digital implies we are developing new relationships with the digital. For one thing, the digital is just not about technology. Digital libraries are not just a mirror world where we can reproduce our non-digital items, documents, or experiences. Nor do they offer a separate peace - a clean well-lighted region unsullied by human personality and limitations or social and cultural issues. In fact, to truly understand the digital we have to return to the human and physical roots that remind us of what can be thought of as the “lumpiness” of things in the world. The flatness of the digital (for the most part, the digital still remains presented in two dimensions), and its typically framed constraints (the form factor of the device we're using), tend to hide that lumpiness from us. That lumpiness includes irregularities, issues of scale, and dimensionality, and many less visible qualities such as provenance or location in time and space (data comes from somewhere, and it's going somewhere).

And this may be the most important trend in digital libraries: the merging and mixing of the digital and non-digital in today's libraries makes it important to pause and take a fresh look at our digital library practices, acknowledging a greater focus on the networked, emergent, and even highly personal affordances of the digital world that make it more, not less, human.

**Conclusion**

Cal Poly’s digital library program has been premised on our understanding of our library as a richly networked, immersive environment whose mission is to connect people and inspire learning. We’ve created a digital program that is fully integrated with our human organization and the human experiences of our users. We’ve systematically looked across all our programs and asked, how can digital affordances, systems, tools, or skills, be integrated into this environment to serve our mission? We’ve also looked at this development as an ongoing and emergent transformation of our practices, across the entire library. We have all been learning, and our understanding continues to evolve with our practice.

Perhaps the most important lesson we've drawn from our efforts has been the excitement and motivation and momentum that come with keeping the human experience primary, whether it's the human experience of our focus groups or the experience of our staff as they learn new skills and see new opportunities to do their jobs with more impact, more efficiency, or simply
more delight.

A second lesson we've drawn is that there is tremendous energy released when the digital and non-digital are not framed as alternatives, competing for funding, attention, or space. Moving beyond either/or thinking is useful in many of our endeavors, and treating our work like a lively and ongoing negotiation with reality helps. A typical story line for the digital transitions affecting libraries is the displacement of book space by digital content and people space. Cal Poly’s library has done this too. But we've also intentionally privileged how we provide access to certain print collections: architecture and art print collections now live in a spacious reading room with low-profile shelving that double as exhibit space for student architectural models. Meanwhile, an air-conditioned server room that became available as we moved to a virtual server strategy, suddenly offered itself as an ideal, secure, high-density storage space for very traditional special collections.

A third lesson of our digital initiatives is that it’s possible to move forward on all fronts at once. An entrepreneurial approach that gathers data, loosens imaginations and invites creativity, and that empowers every member of the staff to be part of the digital future can be very successful across a wide range of library programs and services. At the same time, just like the human and physical world, the digital world is full of uncertainties, driven by technical skills or resources, but also as much or more by human intentions, choices, social milieu, opportunity and luck, and, very often, by the personality and skill of individual humans who bring things into being by experimenting, designing, thinking, talking, and persisting.

In the end, a library with its culture of "yes" can provide just the right momentum and support to power digital users and makers and human collaborators outside the library, and allow us to achieve bigger things together.

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