

Bamboo Planning Project

Final Report to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

December 21, 2010

Introduction

In March 2008, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation approved a grant of \$1.3 M to the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Chicago to support a large planning project aimed at identifying how best to support research in the humanities through technology. We are pleased to present our final report on the Bamboo Planning Project. The Bamboo Technology Proposal is the primary document in which we have articulated the outcome of the planning project; our aim in what follows is to summarize our planning goals and the processes by which we achieved them and to add our reflections on some of the broad challenges that the Bamboo initiative will be addressing in the months and years to come.

Program Goals

The question we aimed to address was this: how can research in the humanities be supported and advanced through the development of shared technology services?

Even as digital archives proliferated, scholars in the humanities faced significant barriers to using these archives productively in their work. Researchers in the humanities were equally eager to find fresh opportunities for debate and collaboration across far-flung scholarly communities. While a number of technology projects aimed to address such needs as these, they were not easy to share, sustain, and reuse. Technologists and librarians wanted to be of help but often did not know where to direct their efforts.

This set of circumstances suggested the value of a community planning process, one that would at the outset involve many different kinds of institutions and people from the diverse worlds of humanities, libraries, and technology. Such a planning process would aim to identify the shared technology services that most deserved significant investment, and it would aim to identify a set of institutions ready to carry out the work of developing those services.

Community Planning Process

We were overwhelmed by the response to our initial invitations to participate in the Bamboo planning process. In the end, over 600 people from 114 institutions and organizations took part in a series of workshops and online conversations that together contributed over 15,000 person-hours of discussion. The participating institutions included colleges and universities from eight countries; public and private educational institutions; and scholarly and IT organizations. Colleges and universities were encouraged to participate via the creation of institutional teams including people from the humanities and from the library and technology spheres.

The heart of the planning process was a series of 9 workshops held over a period of 18 months. Our strategy was to use these workshops both to identify key issues and to identify strong partners who would contribute resources and expertise to the technology projects. We set low barriers to participation in the early workshops and higher barriers for the later workshops. We hoped to identify a total of 5 to 7 institutional partners; in the end, we identified 10. The agendas in the earlier workshops were fairly broad and aimed to elicit helpful accounts of scholarly practices that could be supported by technology.

To keep participants informed and to support the exchange of ideas, we made significant use of a wiki web site. The present report aims to summarize and analyze, but we have pointed to greater detail by providing URLs for key documents and archives on the web.

Workshops

Workshop 1 (April – July 2008) was held four times, in Berkeley, Chicago, Princeton, and Paris. It encouraged participants to describe how they work, what challenges they face, and how Bamboo could help them meet those challenges. We provided participants with a common vocabulary in which to develop definitions and descriptions of their actual and possible scholarly practices, an exercise that most participants found both challenging and stimulating. After distilling and analyzing the large number of data gathered in Workshop 1, we used the Bamboo wiki to publish themes of scholarly practice that had emerged, possible directions

for Bamboo, and descriptions of consortial models to be considered. A summary of these materials can be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Themes+and+Directions>

An analysis of the meaning of these themes of scholarly practices for the digital humanities can be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Project+Bamboo+Scholarly+Practice+Report>

During and after the Workshop 1 series, we also solicited the help of participants to form a collection of reports, articles, and terminology to inform ongoing planning efforts. These too were published on the wiki. Links to materials from the first workshop may be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Workshop+1+Notes+and+Presentations>

A summary of references is here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Terroir+-+Related+References>

And a selected literature review may be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Project+Bamboo+Literature+Review>

The agenda for Workshop 2 (October 2009) was set by the directions identified in Workshop 1 and led to the formation of working groups on education, strategic communications, scholarly networking, shared services, scholarly narratives, tool and content partners, principles of leadership, and standards and best practices. (The scholarly narratives group was the one that continued the work of describing scholarly practices.) Each group was encouraged to start thinking about how to define the scope of future Bamboo projects.

A summary of the working groups, their charters, members, and work can be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Working+Groups>

The work of the Scholarly Narratives group was especially helpful, gathering together 75 stories about humanities scholar's use of technology:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Scholarly+Narrative+Repository>

Participants in Workshop 3 (January 2009) continued collaborations within the working groups and worked collectively on a consortial model for Project Bamboo. The discussions held at Workshop 3 resulted in a program document outlining an ambitious 7-to-10 year program for a Bamboo community. With the help of this document, planning participants were invited to consider what activities Bamboo should carry out during its first 3-year implementation, especially in light of priorities at the participating institutions. The program document may be found at:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Bamboo+Program+Document>.

Workshop 4 (April 2009) focused upon systematic review of the program document, and it culminated in a series of discussions and polls that determined priorities for the first phase of Bamboo activity. Participants then developed general plans for each of the areas of work that had been defined in the earlier workshops. Summaries of the discussions and polls may be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Workshop+4 - Workshop4-Polls>

Drawing upon the results of Workshop 4, we drafted a Bamboo Implementation Proposal that became the basis for discussion, refinement, and polling at Workshop 5 (June 2009). Successive drafts of the Proposal may be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/BIP+Phase+1>

A record of activities at Workshop 5 is posted here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Workshop+5>

Many months elapsed between Workshop 5 and Workshop 6. During this time, we worked with program directors in the RIT program at the Foundation to narrow our proposal scope substantially, putting out of scope the ambitious but somewhat unformed ideas about a "Bamboo Commons" and a "Bamboo Consortium" and focusing instead on technology projects. With RIT's advice, we gave special emphasis to the development of technologies that focused on shared infrastructure. With the integration of RIT into Mellon's Scholarly Communications division in December 2009, we were able to shift to what struck us as a more balanced approach to our technology project, one in which applications and environments for humanities scholars were at the forefront and shared infrastructure played a supporting role. During the spring of 2010, we consulted extensively with the Foundation, on the one hand, and the potential partner institutions, on the other. We held several

small-scale meetings with potential partner institutions to develop the technology proposal and to define partner roles.

Workshop 6 (June 2010) reassembled the 25 institutions that had participated through the full series of five workshops , including the 10 that had become partners in the Bamboo Technology Project. This group discussed the development of the Bamboo Technology Project, but its primary focus was the question of how to develop a realistic plan for a broader Bamboo consortium that might eventually support a number of programmatic initiatives extending beyond the first technology project.

Demonstrator Projects

Half-way through the series of workshops, we developed several “demonstrators” to illustrate, explore, and test the kinds of technology tools, applications, and services that were under discussion. As scholars and technologists worked on these projects, they made fresh discoveries about the rewards, challenges, and open questions that were simultaneously under discussion during the workshops.

Demonstrators coordinated by UC Berkeley used work on specific scholarly projects to explore what happens when they are advanced using key concepts that were emerging from the Bamboo planning process: modular design, interoperability, and workspaces. Meanwhile, the University of Chicago focused on developing illustrations of ways in which modular design and interoperability might be implemented, supported, and sustained. Executing both kinds of demonstrator projects brought valuable clarity and specificity to the difficult and sometimes theoretical work of designing a technology infrastructure for scholarly work in the humanities. A recently posted summary of the demonstrator projects may be found here:

<https://wiki.projectbamboo.org/display/BPUB/Project+Bamboo+Demonstrator+Report>

Post-Workshop Planning

After Workshop 6, planning efforts continued on three related areas. The first was finalizing the scope for an initial technology project, in light of a realistic estimate of potential resources. The second was assembling the consortium of 10 institutional partners, negotiating their prospective

contributions in light of their interests and resources. The third, of course, was drafting the Bamboo Technology Proposal itself. Changes in each of these three spheres entailed changes in the other two, and we were very pleased that the process led to a focused project that has the support of the ten consortium partners. The partnering institutions are making cash contributions and are contributing time and work from humanities faculty, humanities centers, libraries IT organizations, information schools, and computer sciences. During this final phase of planning, a number of partners contributed significant work as cost-share to produce pre-implementation deliverables for the Bamboo Technology Project. This has proved to be a beneficial investment.

Challenges Met, Challenges Remaining

Soon after the launch of our planning process, a major economic recession set in. While this highlighted the value of coordinated multi-institutional investment in sharable services, it also entailed downward revisions in our estimates of resources that might be committed to the initial Bamboo project. That meant that some of the ambitious thinking that many early participants found exciting needed to be tempered by a dose of realism (something that would to some degree have been necessary in any case). We found ourselves constantly engaged in a balancing act: trying to encourage bold thinking about a potentially long-term project, on the one hand, and trying to find an affordable scope for a carefully conceived initial project, on the other. Complicating our efforts was the fact that we were not trying to create a single tool or to solve a single problem; we aimed to create a “cyber-infrastructure” for the humanities. At times we veered towards what one scholar of eighteenth-century literature called the “technological sublime”: a set of Bamboo tools that could be all things to all people. With the wisdom of hindsight, we would have focused earlier on questions of a feasible scope for the initial Bamboo projects. Certainly we now realize that we must focus at first upon relatively small and achievable steps and then demonstrate success, all the while building a foundation for future projects that can be undertaken in a fruitful sequence.

Other balancing acts posed their own challenges. One was weighing the importance of meeting the relatively “vanilla” needs of a large number of scholars against the importance of meeting the more complex needs of a smaller number of faculty members. Especially toward the end of the planning process, we also gave special attention to striking the right

balance between investing in applications of immediate direct use to scholars and in the back-end infrastructure that will help to sustain new applications as they are built. And finally, we needed to reflect upon the potential benefits and pitfalls of our early assumption that services-oriented architecture (and, to some extent, social-networking tools) would form the technological backbone of our efforts. In each of these arenas, we believe the partner institutions arrived at good balances in creating the Bamboo Technology Proposal.

One of the most instructive challenges was that of finding a common vocabulary that would be of use to scholars, technologists, and library professionals. We were collectively intrigued by what was, or was not, easy for one constituency or another to grasp, and over the course of the workshops, we were pleasantly surprised by improvements in our collective ability to talk and think together across our various realms. Many participants reported that this experience helped them in cross-campus communications at their home institutions.

So much important work is being done in related areas that at times we scrambled to keep up. But the effort has been worth it: we are engaged in a wide range of partnerships from which our projects will benefit and to which we hope to contribute. These include, among others, CenterNet, the Consortium for Humanities Centers and Institutes, HubZero, JISC, HATHI, MONK, NINES, ResearchSpace, CollectionSpace, and the Coalition of Humanities and Arts Infrastructure Networks (CHAIN).

Managing communications, especially toward the end of the planning process, was not easy. Some of the people and institutions involved at the outset became discouraged as the scope of the initial project was trimmed and as the date of completing the initial proposal was delayed. For some, the "Bamboo" name may conjure a grand plan that never came to fruition, but our Bamboo Steering Council has recently gauged the overall response to the name as positive and is planning to continue using it as the technology project moves forward. We will provide regular communications with non-partner institutions to keep them engaged, especially as we look ahead to the adoption phase of our work. We believe that it will be essential for us to prepare and circulate a succinct and focused message about the Bamboo Technology Proposal and of course to share news about progress and successes. For these reasons, we are developing a communications team whose work will start in January 2011.

Despite the challenges we have faced, some intrinsic to a large collaborative planning effort and others generated by particular

circumstances, we are in no doubt that the effort was a valuable one. It will benefit the humanities not just through the first technology projects we are carrying out, but also through the broader connections and conversations that will foster continued collaboration going forward. We are hopeful that it will help to create a turning point for scholarly research in the humanities, enabling technology tools to make research easier and more fruitful in the years to come.

Financial Narrative

UC Berkeley and the University of Chicago expended funds to support staff who handled project management and architecture, workshop logistics and coordination, workshop documentation, wiki support, and proposal development. Funds were also allocated at both institutions to support the demonstrator projects. A substantial portion of the grant funds supported the costs of the 9 multi-day workshops, including partial subsidies for the lodging costs of participants.

Expenditures departed from the original budget in three main areas. First, as the interest in the workshops grew, we moved funds from planned consultants to schedule more, and larger, workshops. Second, as the project progressed, we realized that we would not need consultants to spend substantial time educating selected participants about services-oriented architecture. (Here, our experience was different from that of Kualii.) Third, we ran the project for one additional year with the help of a no-cost extension from the Mellon Foundation.

Finally, the University of Chicago expects to have a surplus of funds, which it will be returning to the Foundation. This surplus arises from two contingencies. One is that during the period of the no-cost extension, we did not run as many workshops as we had expected to. The other is that we did not need to hire consultants to provide training in service-oriented architecture.