

**Report on
ASECS Digital Humanities Caucus's
Technology Survey**

July 18, 2012

Table of Contents

[Summary](#)

[Technology Expertise](#)

[Which of the following social networking tools do you use?](#)

[What Digital Humanities topics are you working on or interested in learning more about?](#)

[Would you prefer another discussion group format to C18-L?](#)

[What kinds of session formats would you like to see at ASECS conferences?](#)

[What best describes your opinion of and participation with the Digital Humanities Caucus?](#)

[What topics or sessions would you like Digital Humanities Caucus to offer at the annual ASCES meeting?](#)

[Which forum or forums would you like to the DH Caucus to use for communication between ASECS meetings?](#)

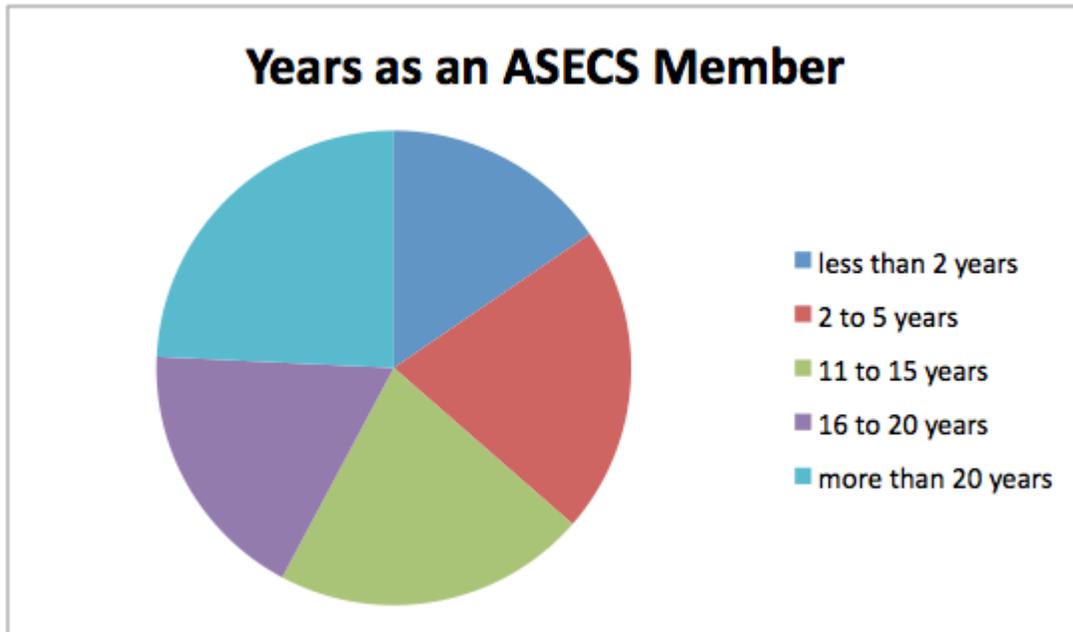
[Attending THATCamp](#)

[Preferred time for THATCamp ASECS 2013](#)

[Additional comments from survey respondents](#)

Summary

The Digital Humanities Caucus of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) recently conducted a survey of its members about technology. A link to the online survey was sent to all ASECS members. Three hundred and forty-three members completed the twelve-question survey. As the following chart illustrates, the number of members completing the survey represent a well-balanced cross-range of new members and longstanding ones.



The results indicated that over half of those responding used technology regularly as part of their research and teaching and that over a third more considered themselves fairly skilled. Although knowledge of specific technology and tools varied, a majority supported ASECS devoting more attention to technology in the form of hands-on workshops, an updated website, demonstrations of pedagogical practices, and the like. At the same time, most did not wish to see technology replacing traditional forms of conference sessions and scholarly practices but rather desired that technology be far better integrated in these areas. Finally, a number also expressed concern with being over-connected and with using social media such as Facebook because of privacy issues.

Technology Expertise

While the first question sought information about how long the respondent had belonged to ASECS, the second, a multiple-choice, turned to expertise in using technology.

In response to this question, the majority of respondents (56.3%) reported that they “use technology regularly for my research and teaching and am always interested in learning more.” The next sizable group—27.1%—were those stating that they were “fairly skilled and knowledgeable but willing to enhance my skills and understanding.” Only 1.2% of respondents said that they were “not very skilled and often intimidated by technology,” while 7.7% considered themselves novices who use basic technology such as MS Word and email but who are “interested in learning new skills.” Another small group—2.7%—indicated they were “not interested in technological developments beyond electronic resources such as ESTC, EEBO, ECCO, OED, DNB, Burney, LION etc.” Five percent of members responded that they were “highly skilled and willing to collaborate and share expertise with others.”

The open-ended comments to this question ran the gamut. Some felt the choices did not accurately reflect their position. For example,

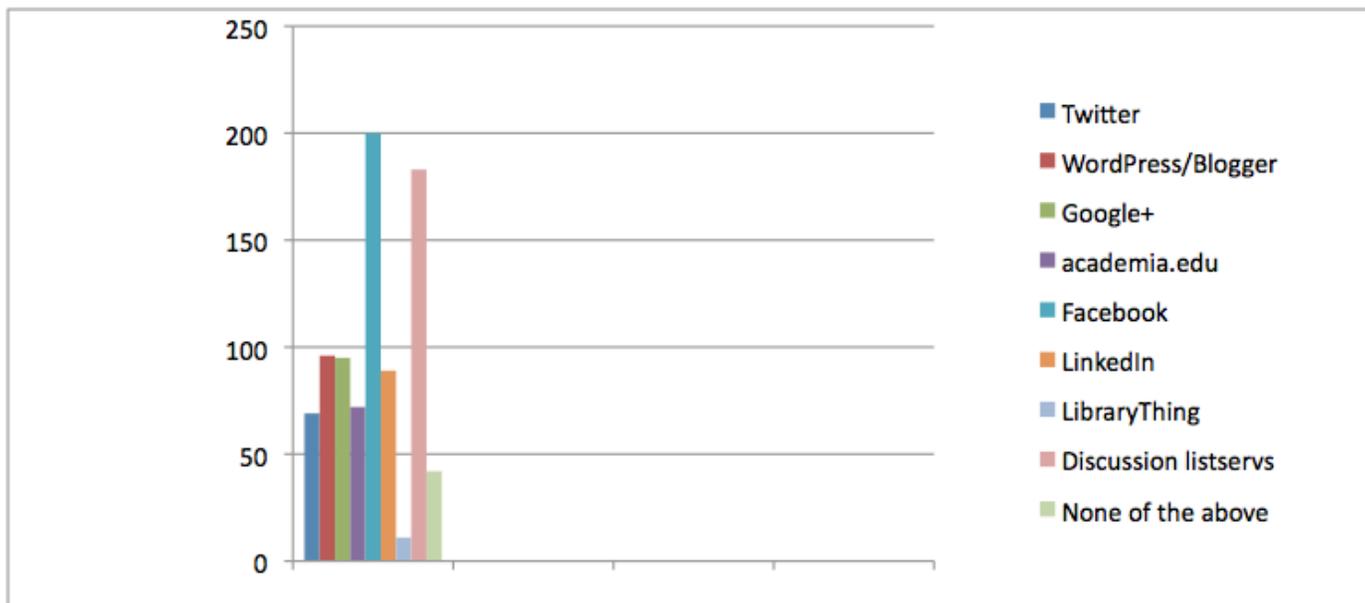
- “I’m not sure I’m always interested in learning more, but I seem to have no choice”
- “I am “highly skilled” but I am not “willing to collaborate and share expertise with others.” I am also not “always interested in learning more.”
- “None of the above is quite accurate for me & for many other new or soon-to-become ASECS members: we are highly skilled with technology but are not particularly enamored with it.”
- “I think a lot of “technology” is a waste of brain-power and time. Too many citizens of the world are infatuated with technology for its own sake and not for the ways it truly does promote better living and learning on the globe. I greatly appreciate the work of EEBO and ECCO, but equally support and frequent rare book library rooms and support the use and collection of mss, early/unique edition collections in material form. Both are needed and important to my research.”
[Note: many involved in DH work are also quite involved with rare books and value highly the evidence provided by the physical artifact.]

Many expressed being quite skilled in some areas but lacking in others. Some stated that they did not use social media tools because of privacy issues; others limited their technology to university-wide coursework delivery systems such as Blackboard. A few members mentioned not knowing xml coding; others mentioned using Drupal, Photoshop, Ngrams (for example, see http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=novels%2Cromance&year_start=1700&year_end=1850&corpus=0&smoothing=3), VUE, WordPress, Omeka, Javascript, and more. Some indicated that they used technology primarily in research but very little in teaching, while others stated the reverse scenario or asserted that they used technology in both teaching and research. One respondent was frustrated with needing to learn new systems with every new tool that emerges but also acknowledged the need to advance

our understanding and use of technological tools. Finally, the very important issue of access arose—especially the inequity emerging between scholars who have access to EEBO, ECCO, and similar commercial databases and those who don't.

Which of the following social networking tools do you use?

The responses to the third question, "Which of the following social networking tools do you use? (Check all that apply)" generated the following results:



Once again, the comment section generated a range of responses. Some seemed to have tired of C-18L as a discussion listserv, while others either did not know about it or did and were highly satisfied. Some suggested art, architecture, and music listservs; others noted blogs such as the Long Eighteenth Century or Early Modern Online Bibliography (EMOB). Some felt over-connected. There were those who praised Facebook and Twitter, and others who felt that FB was not suited to academic purposes and that Twitter among DH users often produced needless repetition through too much re-tweeting.

What Digital Humanities topics are you working on or interested in learning more about?

The fourth question—“What Digital Humanities topics are you working on or interested in learning more about?”—yielded the following results:

pedagogical practices	200
data- or text-mining	88
Wikis	79
scholarly editing	166
GIS mapping	28
TEI	21
semantic or meaning-based searching	77
visualization tools	85
text analysis	67
digital archives	269
gaming	18
remediation of print	48
transformation of research questions and methodologies	102
open-source software	47
electronic literature	75
sociocultural impact of new media	74
Creative Commons	62
18thConnect	109
resource equity	64
electronic publishing	137
SGML/XML	20
cognitive effects of new media	65
reading in the digital age	133
corpus linguistics	12
collaborative authorship	77
new models for scholarly publishing	154
new media and public humanities	63
information architecture	31
metadata	41
Google Book Search	157
Zotero	62
using social media in academia	75
creating websites	83
search tools	133
effective use of databases and online archives in teaching	164
effective use of databases and online archives in research	171
sustainability of digital projects	103
economics of digital projects	49

Topics that garnered interest by at least 150 respondents have been highlighted in yellow. As the chart indicates, “digital archives” ranked the highest, with 269 out of 343 respondents expressing interest. In the comment section a few other topics were noted: evaluation of DH projects in tenure and promotion, mobile technology as teaching tools, limited form of crowdsourcing (e.g. requiring proven expertise to correct bibliographic records), universal design/access, and teaching eighteenth-century topics in online courses. About five respondents mentioned that many topics on the list would have benefited from some definition or clarification.

Would you prefer another discussion group format to C18-L?

Question 5 asked, "Would you prefer another discussion group format to C18-L?" The results appear in the following chart:

RESPONSE	# OF RESPONDENTS
I am happy with the C18-L listserv as it is	87
I would also like a blog in addition to the listserv	33
I would also like an online forum in addition to the listserv	27
I would prefer a blog	17
I would prefer an online forum	21
I don't use C18-L	123
Other (please specify in comments)	11

While 147 respondents were happy with the C18-L listserv as it is, 60 of those would also like to see either a blog or online forum as well. However, 123 indicated that they do not use the listserv. Some indicated that they had not heard about the listserv and wondered why it was not publicized. Others said that they either had become too inundated to keep up with the listserv or had simply tired of it (some because the discussions seemed irrelevant to their work; others because of a few who seemed to dominate the discussions). A few suggested that the listserv would benefit from a moderator, while several stated how very pleased they were with the listserv as is. Others stated that they already follow several 18th-century and DH blogs and participate in LinkedIn academic forums. Still others mentioned using Facebook's Eighteenth-Century Questions. As for other desired formats, Tumblr, a moderated blog (noting the potential problems with labor this might entail), a Facebook site, or a forum akin to HASTAC (<http://hastac.org/>). A key point that emerges from these responses is a need for better communication about existing ways to exchange information. That a few indicated not knowing about C18-L is just one illustration of this need.

What kinds of session formats would you like to see at ASECS conferences?

The answers to Question 6—What kinds of session formats would you like to see at ASECS conferences? (Check all that apply)—indicate that while members would also like to see other formats, the traditional 90-minute panel and the roundtable are highly valued.

Eighty percent (80%) of all respondents wanted the conference to feature traditional panels, with many comments noting the substantive nature of this format for both presenters and audience. A few stated that these panels were the main reason for attending the ASECS conference, and others also highly endorsed this format. Similarly, seventy-six percent (76%) of respondents highly valued the roundtable format, yet some remarked that not all roundtables truly adhere to the definition of this format. Specifically, roundtables on occasion have featured four or five presenters who delivered what amounted to actual papers, leaving no time for audience participation or even exchange among the roundtable participants. The next most popular choice was the workshop format that offered hands-on opportunities to work with digital tools and learn about their pedagogical uses. A large number—161 respondents—also indicated that a Point/Counterpoint session that featured two or four presenters offering different perspectives on a timely topic was desirable. Not far behind, 156 respondents desired the addition of more opportunities for informal meet-ups for special interests. The chart below details all the responses, with the choices receiving more than 150 responses highlighted in yellow.

FORMAT	#RESP.
Traditional panels featuring three to four papers and followed by Q & A (90 minutes)	274
Roundtable sessions featuring four or more speakers who each offer brief opening statements to generate substantive follow-up exchange with audience (90 minutes)	260
Poster displays (no set time; in a designated exhibit area)	59
Poster displays in which all presenters are available at a set time to explain and discuss the work show-cased (90 minutes)	99
Digital project "poster" sessions in which six to eight presenters use laptops to demo their projects and exchange ideas with attendees one on one and in small groups (set time; 90 minutes)	127
Point/Counterpoint sessions in which two or four presenters offer different perspectives on a topic currently being debated in the field for 45 minutes followed by audience and panelist exchange (90 minutes)	161
Interactive workshops held in spaces designed for small group team-based discussions (tables and chairs) to be followed by large group discussion and synthesis (facilitated by appropriate technological tools such as whiteboards)	143
Workshops that offer hands-on opportunities to explore new digital tools, demonstrate innovative pedagogical practices or address other topical timely issues	214
Live streaming of presidential address Clifford lecture and any plenaries to be made available as podcasts on the ASECS website for later viewing	121
Video-taping of select sessions	54
Panels tied to pre- and post-conference blog discussions	77
Speed-networking sessions (could be designed for various purposes such as mentoring of graduate students or finding collaborators)	64
Interest group breakfasts lunches or other less formal meet-ups	156

In the comment section a few elaborated on preferring personal interaction and disliked the idea of posters, while others expressed an interest in posters and wondered if colleges and universities funded faculty to present posters. Likewise, some were enthusiastic about videotaping keynotes or sessions, while others wondered if doing so would decrease the size of the audience or diminish spontaneity or the opportunity for exchange. And although many welcomed other formats alongside more traditional ones, others worried about replacing intellectual substance with sound bites. A few suggested pre-circulated papers, akin to a format used at the Renaissance and Modernist conferences. And others embraced new media tools but thought that they would be best used as follow-up to the actual conference. One respondent mentioned screening of films and new media; another pleaded for anything but PowerPoint. Finally, here are some additional comments:

- I'd love it if ASECS would sponsor a project on "what we teach". Whenever anyone asks C18L about teaching particular texts, the list lights up. ... among those of us who teach 18thC, how many 'stray' from canonical works? And where do we stray to? What technology do we use to teach anything not available in hard copy - especially if our institutions can't or won't afford ECCO? I'd like a brainstorming ASECS session on this and a follow-up website/resource/publication even?
- The small-group/large-group workshop model can be frustrating when you're forced to choose among subgroups of equal interest.
- Forum for presentation of faculty-student collaborative research. Informal Pecha Kucha [i.e., 20 slides, 20 seconds each] type sessions during lunch where people could present projects or idea in 5 minutes or less.
- Suspend each panel speaker over a tub of water and immerse speaker as soon as that person's paper-reading takes up more than the scheduled 20 minutes. Thus allowing some time for questions, etc., so often never gotten to. Same for any panel chairperson not enforcing limits.

What best describes your opinion of and participation with the Digital Humanities Caucus?

In response to question 7—“What best describes your opinion of and participation with the Digital Humanities Caucus?”—167 respondents said that they were “vaguely aware of it and would like to learn more”.

Thirty-three said that they had either attended most (30) or a few (3) of the DH Caucus sessions. Thirteen stated that they had not heard of the caucus and were not interested, while 87 respondents said although they had never heard of the caucus, they would like to learn more. Thirty-four were vaguely aware of the caucus but did not feel it was something that would interest them.

What topics or sessions would you like Digital Humanities Caucus to offer at the annual ASCES meeting?

Question 8 was open-ended and asked respondents “What topics or sessions would you like Digital Humanities Caucus to offer at the annual ASCES meeting?”

The following list represents excerpts, grouped somewhat according to similar responses, from the many remarks received.

- Informational. What archives/databases are "out there" for specialists in our field, and how do we best use/access them? Is there equal availability of these for all academic professionals? Etc. What different tools, forums, methodologies etc. can do for non-techy people. The basics.
- Pitfalls of Digital Humanities: Cautionary Tales from the Classroom From Digital to Print: What do people need to know about copyright, etc. (especially regarding, but not limited to images) as they move from use of digital archives to their own print publications. Also, how electronic research tools are changing student research for the worse and how faculty might overcome the effects of those changes.
- A survey of existing c18 projects on the web or in the works; a survey of ebooks available for Kindles or iPads.
- The presentations on ECCO, EEBO, Burney Archives & metadata issues, etc. have been terrific, informative, and made for better and more skeptical users. Others noted a desire for sessions on these commercial databases including something on the limitations of ECCO and EEBO; how to account for its limitations and get around them; how best to use these tools now that word-searching is commonplace.
- "Technology for Luddites"--finding the balance between embracing the best of new technology without losing the value of more traditional teaching methods
- archives; digitization; pedagogy; visualization; more on data-mining; blogging the 18th-century; scholarly editing; databases for use in teaching and research; more on pedagogy (not nearly enough—a common theme); more on technology's role in multidisciplinary approaches.
- Teaching applications of technology and textual analysis in scholarship and in increasing scholarly collaboration.
- A talk about CESAR and the Comedie Francaise Register Project; Teaching the Encyclopédie; Late Enlightenment perspectives on colonization.
- How-to sessions: walk-throughs, demonstration/instructional sessions on how others are using technology for their research or pedagogical aims. "How-to" stuff

shouldn't be done in the form of traditional panels. If the tools themselves are the topic, then the workshop is a better format than panel.

- Substantive discussion of successful research projects that would not be possible without technology.
- Employment opportunities for Digital teachers at established universities. Ways to help the academy accept digital projects count for promotion/tenure.
- Print Culture and Book History as linked with digital humanities. Something on useful ways of combining digital research with traditional archival/rare books work something that doesn't presume we're all already committed to social networking.
- Some space to learn and discuss issues/tools (like THATCamp--keep the interactive quality of those breakout groups in the official ASECS settings. Perhaps sessions could emphasize more the idea of projects in progress? So often papers are introduced as part of a bigger project.
- Digital Humanities Caucus, like all of us in ASECS, needs to focus its energies on the SUBSTANCE of 18th-century topics --on discussion & analysis of texts in the various areas of 18th-century studies (history, literature, science, art, architecture, music, government, politics, etc.).
- A continuing problem, that's not specifically tied to 18thC studies, is the inequality of research resources. This issue needs to be addressed so that colleagues who landed jobs at schools with poor libraries and few database subscriptions have a fighting chance of maintaining their careers as scholars.
- Explaining the activities and purposes of the DH Caucus

While more than a few of the suggested topics have had panels, roundtables, or demos devoted to them at past ASECS meetings, the comments suggest a continued need to feature these subjects. The list also introduces many new topics for exploration. Perhaps some of those who suggested these topics will propose sessions at future ASECS conferences.

Which forum or forums would you like to the DH Caucus to use for communication between ASECS meetings?

Question 9 asked, “Which forum or forums would you like to the DH Caucus to use for communication between ASECS meetings?”

Respondents were instructed respondents to “drag each choice to rank [their] preference; the first slot represents the person’s highest preference.” Unfortunately, not all devices (the iPad, for one) supported the drag-and-drop feature. Thus some respondents listed their preference in the comment slot; most, however, were able to use the drag tool to rank their preferences. The ASECS weekly update was the first communication choice for 101 respondents, the second for 55 respondents, and third for 23. The eighteenth-century.org blog was the runner-up: 67 ranked it as their first choice, 52 as their second, and 24 as their third. A listserv and group email were also popular options.

Means of Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Responses
the eighteenth-century.org blog	67	52	24	10	2	1	0	1	0	158
Twitter	13	12	10	0	5	4	4	1	1	50
Facebook	25	27	18	5	9	4	1	1	0	90
a listserv	40	45	38	13	4	2	0	0	0	142
group email	30	36	24	17	3	1	2	0	0	113
the ASECS weekly update	101	55	23	16	5	2	0	0	0	201
LinkedIn	1	2	1	4	3	8	10	0	0	29
Other (list in comment field)	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	5	1	10
Not interested in receiving any DH communication between ASECS meetings	6	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	12

While a few listed EMOB (<http://earlymodernonlinebib.wordpress.com/>) or the Long Eighteenth Century (<http://long18th.wordpress.com/>) blogs in the comment field, most used this space to either elaborate on their choices or argue against using some of the listed forums. Several noted how much they appreciated the ASECS weekly updates, while others noted that they would prefer to have the weekly update information contained in the body of the email message rather than as a link (many holding this view noted that the current link procedure was too cumbersome for smart phones). Others used the comment space to argue against using Facebook for this purpose. A few noted that they had never heard of the eighteenth-century.org blog. Finally, some stressed the need for the information to come to them—as in an email—rather than need to check in with a blog or the like.

Attending THATCamp

Questions 10 and 11 dealt with THATCamp (The Humanities and Technology Camp). As the THATCamp website explains, "THATCamp is an open, inexpensive meeting where humanists and technologists of all skill levels learn and build together in sessions proposed on the spot" (<http://thatcamp.org/>). In conjunction with Initiative for Digital Humanities, Media, and Culture (IDHCM) at Texas A & M, the Digital Humanities Caucus hosted the first THATCamp at ASECS 2012.

Question 10 asked survey takers to identify the reason or reasons for not attending this pre-conference event.

Reason	# of respondents
Lack of interest	26
Financial costs for adding another day/night prohibitive	82
Inability to be away from teaching/campus duties for an additional day	86
Unaware THATCamp was occurring until after making travel plans	42
Unfamiliar with THATCamp	116

In addition to these reasons, respondents were able to supply their own reasons in the open-ended section. Fifty respondents provided additional comments here. Roughly half of those indicated that they did not attend ASECS this year, and several added that a lack of travel funds made it impossible for them to attend. Four others had planned to attend THATCamp, but travel disruptions (late planes, weather delays) prevented them from attending. About four respondents indicated that they live abroad and rarely attend ASECS, while five respondents had a time conflict with ASECS Executive Committee/Board meeting. About a half a dozen noted that they were not aware of it or found out about it after they had purchased plane tickets. One respondent had thought THATCamp was for showcasing digital projects in progress but expressed interest in attending if there were more training-oriented sessions (and that's certainly the case). Two wrote that they had attended. Finally, there was a general call for better publicity in the future.

Preferred time for THATCamp ASECS 2013

Question 11 asked respondents to rank which time slot for THATCamp at ASECS 2013 would make it more likely for them attend. This question also employed the drag-and-drop feature, and those on smartphones or iPads encountered the same problems as they did with Question 9.

Preferred Time	1	2	3	Responses
Pre-conference Wednesday 8 am to 4 pm	25	33	26	84
Pre-conference Wednesday 1 pm to 9 pm	120	40	1	161
Post-conference Sunday 9 am to 4 pm	80	18	31	129

In the comment section several expressed how difficult it is to cancel classes for yet another day, and still others cited the extra expense. (N.B., there was no additional fee to attend THATCamp beyond perhaps the extra night at a hotel). For some, the location of the conference in relation to their home made a difference; depending on how far they had to travel, Wednesday might work better, but other locations might make Sunday a better choice. A few people asked whether THATCamp—which is actually a mini-conference (or “unconference”)—could take place during the conference. One person stated that evenings should be kept free for socializing, while a few others noted that ASECS already feels too long.

Additional comments from survey respondents

The last question, No. 12, asked members to supply any additional comments.

Twenty-one members did so. About twelve of these used this question to express thanks for the survey and excitement about DH initiatives. One respondent asked if there was a DH Caucus/presence at regional conferences. Another recommended that "the ASECS weekly update include a headline in the subject line to grab attention (as the *Chronicle of Higher Ed* does)," while yet another bemoaned that it was "sad to see even the 18th century surrendering to the fashion trends of the day."

Three others offered detailed comments worth noting in full because they illustrate the diversity of the ASECS membership and the potential strength that diversity holds in moving forward:

- Some colleagues may be like me: people who have been teaching for a long time and have worked out old-fashioned, non-digital ways of doing things that work well. But we also see that new technology can be useful; most of us eagerly use ECCO and EEBO, for instance, though surely we could learn more about it. We find, at least I find, that my students--though they readily use social media--don't have much experience or skill with digital research, and we have to experiment and explore together. I'd like to have sessions that focus on teaching us how to teach students (at all levels) how to excel at digital research.
- I feel like within the field of Eighteenth-century Studies, the digital humanities and technology in general are eyed suspiciously. I mean that including technology in teaching or scholarship (especially when this means scholarship isn't in the form of a traditional paper) is not often valued. I have been warned about the dangers of labeling myself as one who works in the digital humanities as I go on the job market. I think this is something we have to work on as a field, and I appreciate the caucus working to do that.
- I am a somewhat unusual case, and your survey may not be aimed at me: I am no longer on the academic career track but I have maintained my ASECS membership because I am still especially interested in the 18th century as an area of research and I hope to keep my contacts in the field; if the opportunity arises in the future, I would love to present at ASECS on a digital humanities topic, perhaps working collaboratively with other members. I now work for a small software company and we do development for digital humanities projects including 18thConnect, the Juxta collation software, and the forthcoming iPad edition of Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* by Brad Pasanek and John O'Brien. I would like to learn more about other DH projects by ASECS members, and I would be interested to see if other researchers come up with innovative uses (in research or pedagogy) for existing tools like Juxta and 18thConnect.

Finally there were various thoughtful calls for updating the ASECS websites.

- The ASECS website sorely needs an update. The aesthetics of the site are dated, and it is virtually impossible for anyone in the ASECS community to add updates to it. I think the largest step to take--before considering digital humanities being

represented at the conference--is to have a more engaging and practical online presence.

- The ASECS website should be improved as a hub and portal to digital projects, resources, and collaborations. It should be the first place people in our field go to learn about and have access to these and it is not.
- There are some missed opportunities in our already existing digital projects -- how can we ensure that the organization maintains and supports new digital initiatives? The ASECS website itself could be updated and curated more consistently: the example I always offer is the Innovative Course Design, which for several years was missing materials for award winners.
- We need a much more sophisticated ASECS web page. The current page is updated too slowly and its design is antiquated. The ASECS web page telegraphs the state of eighteenth-century scholarship to the rest of the world, and the message it currently provides is that we are old-fashioned. This weakens our standing, and it is unlikely to attract graduate students. Some possible improvements: The annual program format must have headers including date and time on each page. The current program is difficult to navigate, requiring flipping back several pages to check the date and time of a given panel. The program should have a "find" function. [\[Note—using Ctrl F will allow you to search the electronic document\]](#) Currently, one must check the index (and hope it's accurate) and then page back to the listed page to find a person's panel. Hotel layouts must be legible in the printed program. This year's program was utterly illegible, and we had to ask hotel officials where rooms were. A list of restaurants and sites (museum exhibits, concerts, etc) should be added to the conference venue site. It should not be merely a link to the hotel. Links page needs updating to include active sites: emob, long eighteenth, etc. We must have greater discipline with roundtables and sessions. Too often people go over their time allotment or ramble or read from longer pieces without first editing. A brief (1-page) discussion of professional requirements might help with this. A link for this could be provided on the ASECS web page. A member directory could be available online (it used to be, and perhaps still is?). A list of board members and agenda for the annual meeting should be provided online to provide a greater sense of transparency. We never see the ASECS membership at conferences. The web page can provide a sense of mission and ongoing work and inform new members about how one becomes more involved with ASECS. Using the web page to break down perceived insularity would be great. Finally, the web page is the place for a sense of the field as it is developing. It needs to stay abreast of developments like the new interest in digital scholarship without losing more traditional scholars. Greater work needs to go into the design and content of the web page.