Abstract: This article shares the author's exploratory journey as a senior professor eager to understand and to showcase digital scholarship during periods of faculty performance evaluations. The purpose of this article is to highlight and bring attention to the possibilities of digital scholarship for tenure, promotions, and faculty evaluations.

Title: Exploring the Possibilities of Digital Scholarship for Faculty Performance

The purpose of this article is to highlight and bring attention to the possibilities of digital scholarship for tenure, promotions, and faculty evaluations. The presence of digital scholarship is ubiquitous; however, how should those in positions to evaluate that scholarship weight it appropriately and fairly in our current academic culture that values traditional publications in journals and books. Readers know faculty have digital outlets for their writings and scholarly explorations; such digital outlets include websites, blogs, wikis, podcast, and open access journals. With so many opportunities for faculty to disseminate scholarly ideas the academy should be loudly encouraging faculty to pursue alternative digital publication outlets. Now is the time for organizations in higher education to reaffirm or create highly visible guidelines and position statements about digital scholarship as qualifying evidence for tenure, promotions, and faculty evaluations.

A review of the American Association of University Professors' 2014 *Academic Freedom and Electronic Communication* policies reveals that the organization has done its due diligence to acknowledge that digital scholarship and current technological means of dissemination scholarship must be considered in connection with academic freedom. The policy does not specifically refer to digital scholarship but rather broadly it refers to new mediums of communication that often serve as launching sites for sharing digital scholarship. The policy also has been updated several times since 2004, which perhaps indicates the increasing awareness that technology and faculty use of technology continues to reconfigure the relationship between scholarship activities and academic freedom. AAUP policy makers appear to be aware that the traditional gatekeepers (academic publishers) who defined and

constrained showcase of scholarship should no longer stand between faculty and the dissemination of their authorial works.

With academic freedom in mind, should faculty in this era of digital publication opportunities be required to pursue traditional publications? In certain fields of study, peer reviewed publication in traditional and highly reputable journals are difficult to achieve without the appropriate connections in ones field of study. In fact, the resulting published scholarship that arises due to discipline specific networked connections often serves to silence the work of many deserving scholars. The beauty of current digital publication opportunities is it creates space for mature and less mature scholarship outputs, both of which show evidence of faculty productivity. In fact, one could argue that the current era has opened the academy up for a true and egalitarian way for faculty to engage and share their scholarship.

In 2013, Jason Priem's *Beyond the Paper* predicted that in the future we would be seeing total different ways of assessing and valuing digital scholarship. He made some very bold predictions; two relevant points that caught my attention include the statements that "the reward structure of scholarship will change" and "tenure and hiring committee will adapt [towards respecting digital scholarship] . . . with growing urgency" (p. 439). If either of those predications had come into fruition, then today we would have become accustom to universities across the nation sponsoring and leading workshops encouraging faculty to move boldly into the possibilities of digital publishing. One might also expect university guidelines and academic units of universities would be at the point of clearly articulating support for digital scholarship. As a researcher, I mistakenly assumed the aforementioned as I set out on a brief exploration of available promotion and tenure guidelines to justify my digital scholarship efforts during annual evaluation periods.

Interestingly, a large number of universities have supported digital publications, but they do so to support production of free OERs (Open Educational Resources). Even if a reader does not know exactly what OER means, the acronym is most likely one that has surfaced in an email from an academic administrator at some point. Nationwide and global Open Educational Resource initiatives are being promoted and funded to reduce costs associated with textbook usage in college and K-12 classrooms. The funds to support faculty development of OERs in my home state have been awarded consistently for at least 10 years now; OER funding has been available during periods budget constraints and even more so during times of strong revenue growth. Imagine if the momentum behind digital scholarship was similar to the momentum behind support of faculty to create OERs; perhaps, Priem's bold 2013 predication would now be a reality.

The OER movement and the digital scholarship movement are both connected by the "digital"; yet, the managerial institutions of today place a higher value on appearances of meeting student needs without regards to its own need to recruit and retain faculty who often must reckon with the ever increasing pressure to publish or perish. The goal of OERs is to reduce student costs; a goal of digital scholarship is to reduce dependence of faculty on the

ever-shrinking traditional outlets for scholarship dissemination; both are important investments to ensure student and institutional success.

Today the publish or perish faculty most in need of clear and respected digital scholarship guidelines are junior faculty who must convince evaluators of their productivity. Those junior faculty often face an uphill battle because many of the evaluators are likely to be senior professors who have more trust in printed publications than any form of digital scholarship equivalent. Thus, the purpose of the remainder of this article is to share my own journey as a senior professor eager to understand and to showcase digital scholarship during periods of faculty performance evaluations. I hope faculty who are considering the possibilities of digital scholarship find what I share below to be of assistance.

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In 2012, I earned the rank of Full Professor at Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU); shortly thereafter, my career shifted toward writing center administration and faculty mentoring and away from higher expectations to engage in traditional publications. However, due to a fall 2013 mandated university consolidation, SPSU merged with and became part of Kennesaw State University and my career shifted back to the work of traditional faculty, which included once again focusing on publication projects. During this period of transition, I developed an interest in digital scholarship after having attended a digital humanities conference, and I later developed a small IRB research study that would allow me to systematically learn about digital scholarship by concurrently researching, presenting, and engaging in its production. The research project focused on gathering and analyzing faculty and administrator perceptions of digital scholarship publications in comparison to traditional academic publications including peer reviewed journals and books.

In fall of 2016, I gave a presentation entitled "Academic Freedom in the Digital Technology Age: Exploring Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship for Faculty Promotion and Evaluations" during an AAUP shared governance conference held in Washington DC. The presentation argued that more guidelines were needed to encourage institutions to accept digital scholarship. The rationale for encouraging digital scholarship was that many academics develop good quality manuscripts that are never published due to lack of space and increased competition for peer reviewed and other types of traditional print publications. During the presentation most of the audience members agreed with arguments and rationales that were outlined and discussed. Ultimately what I learned was that my views and my AAUP presentation audience views were in alignment relative to the perils of pursuing traditional academic publications and in alignment relative to the possibilities for engaging in digital scholarship to enhance faculty performance requirements.

My 2016 AAUP presentation was based on professional experiences and the results of my IRB project. The project made use of three survey questions designed to elicit responses

that would help capture perceptions of others at and outside my institution about the value of nontraditional methods of disseminating scholarship. Question one asked for a yes or no answer in response to "Do you believe digital scholarship or creativity (exclusively online journal, informational websites, blogs, podcast, etc.) should count toward tenure and promotion?" Question two asked for respondent to qualify their agreement or disagreement to the following statement: "Digital Scholarship holds potential to be weighted equally alongside peer-reviewed print publications." Question three allowed for written feedback from respondents relative to their understanding and perspective about digital scholarship. My survey data results (see Appendix) were not generalizable due to the small sample of respondents; however, I learned that most of the survey participants like those of my fall 2016 AAUP conference audience did indeed recognize the possibilities and perils of pursuing digital scholarship rather than traditional routes for faculty publication.

With my survey data results and the AAUP presentation feedback, I moved ahead to get my feet wet with some type of digital publication to test the waters with how it might be viewed during annual performance evaluation. I found my feet wetting opportunity when I was invited to write an article about mentoring that would be disseminated as a blog posting via a higher education organizational website. I completed the article which was subsequently reviewed and edited by the marketing and leadership team members before being published. Mission accomplished was my inner pronouncement.

My mission accomplished pronouncement later turned sour after learning during my annual evaluation review that my department had not yet developed guidelines that would clearly recognize my digital blog publication efforts. I believed my activities in the area of digital scholarship were aligned with the recognizable scholarship activities of professors at my university, but after receiving faculty performance evaluation feedback in 2018, my beliefs turned out to be faulty assumptions. For that annual evaluation period, my academic blog publication was a praiseworthy activity; however, it was not a "creditable" scholarly activity. After consulting with other colleagues and carefully reviewing departmental scholarship guidelines, I learned that digital publications such as academic blogs were not clearly designated as a scholarly and creative output. I later learned through informal internet research that many institutions and departments across the nation did not have written guidelines to account for digital scholarship. Before continuing to invest more time into digital scholarship activities, I decided to learn more about its history. After that sour experience, I decided to dig a bit deeper into the history of digital scholarship before committing more time to develop any other digital scholarship projects.

During the summer of 2018, I spent time querying my institution's library databases for journal articles and books using "digital scholarship" key word searches; eventually I settled on five publications for in-depth reading that were related to the topic. The dates of those published resources ranged from 2007 to 2017. In addition to searching the library databases for source material, I also reviewed web accessible departmental, college, and university level

guidelines that described faculty expectations for research and scholarly activities. From late summer of 2018 up to the early winter of 2019, I read, reviewed, and annotated the aforementioned source material in an effort to increase my understanding. Once I had completed my readings, my comprehension of the potentials and the pitfalls of pursuing digital scholarship had indeed increased. Below is a listed synopsis of what I learned that I believe may be of value to others interested in pursuing digital scholarship:

- The topic of how to assess digital scholarship has been an on-going conversation for almost two decades now. The Modern Language Association (MLA) approved in May of 2000 "Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media" to help disciplines contextualize the credibility of this type of scholarship, yet articles and books published since that time demonstrate the academy as a whole continues to question the meaning and value of digital scholarship (Borgman, 2007; Friedberg, 2009; Ren, 2015).

- Digital scholarship's meaning tends to vary; it may refer to research about the impact of digital publications as well as digital platforms used to disseminate information (Ren, 2015; Rafaffaghelli, 2017). Disciplines that lay claims to engaging in digital scholarship activities include the humanities, information science, and information technology. Due to multiple discipline specific engagements with digital scholarship, users of the term should provide a contextualized definition for reviewers of such works.

- Sole reliance on digital scholarship publications such as academic blogs, deposits in digital repositories, and multimedia products is not recommended for faculty who are required to publish scholarship for promotion and tenure. The quality and significance of such publications may be sound; however, institutional guidelines may not allow for full recognition of such digital publications (Braun, 2014; Ren, 2015). Unfortunately, perception about the quality and significance of digital publications in the academy is often less favorable in comparison to traditional print and peer reviewed publications.

Based on the information shared in the above listed synopsis and my own recent experiences, I would advise untenured professors to be careful when pursuing digital scholarship projects in order to satisfy scholarly and creative publication requirements. I likewise would advise tenured professors to be careful; however, based on the point of view of other academics (Braun, 2014, p. 95) and my own observations, I would also strongly encourage those already tenured or in senior rank faculty positions to pursue their interest in digital scholarship in order to set precedents that will hopefully benefit upcoming generations of academic professionals who must increasingly become invested in digital scholarship activities to maintain relevancy in their disciplines against the backdrop of limited traditional print publication possibilities. Finally, regardless of rank and tenure, I strongly recommend reviewing specific departmental, college, and institutional guidelines before investing time in pursuing

digital publication projects because not doing so may increase the likelihood of unexpected negative performance feedback during administrative review of faculty performance.

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# Appendix: Digital Scholarship Survey September 2016 Results

Q1 - Do you believe digital scholarship or creativity (exclusively online journals, informational websites, blogs, podcast, etc.) should count toward tenure and promotion?

8.33%

91.67%

Yes   No   Maybe   Not Sure
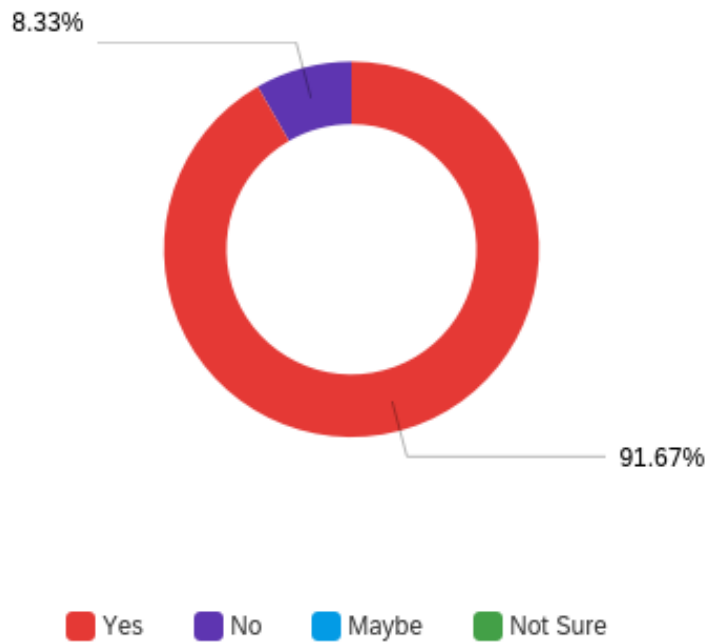
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count	Bottom 3 Box	Top 3 Box
1	Do you believe digital scholarship or creativity (exclusively online journals, informational websites,	1.00	2.00	1.08	0.28	0.08	12	100.00%	8.33%

blogs, podcast, etc.) should count toward tenure and promotion?									

Q2 - Digital Scholarship holds potential to be weighted equally alongside peer-reviewed print publications:
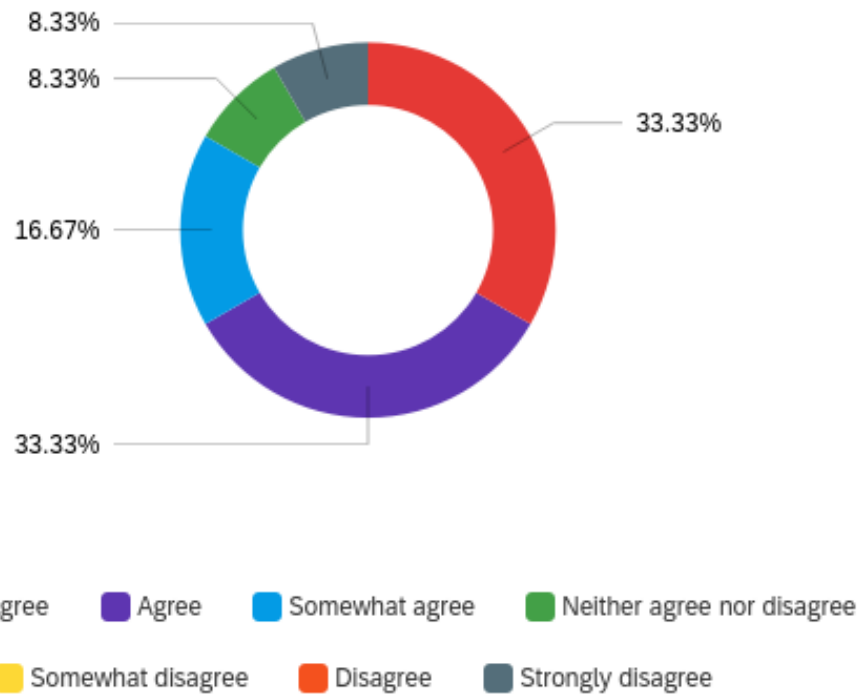
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count	Bottom 3 Box	Top 3 Box
1	Digital Scholarship holds potential to be weighted equally alongside peer-reviewed print publications:	1.00	7.00	2.42	1.66	2.74	12	83.33%	8.33%

Q3 - Please use this space to provide any additional feedback about digital scholarship from your perspective and understanding. (Note: Minor spelling corrections for inclusion as an appendix document; otherwise content appears as written by respondents.)

Please use this space to provide any additional feedback about digital scholarship from your perspective and understanding.

I don't see any distinction between a "digital scholarship" and "paper" articles if we are talking about peer review. Most peer-reviewed articles are in online journals these days. So, I don't see how this differs. Blogs are different of course. They are not peer-reviewed. But an article that is peer-reviewed and the journal is an online journal should be equal. In other words, I disagree with your premise that digital scholarship is scholarship for tenure if it is just a blog. Anyone can publish anything in blog format. Getting a peer-reviewed article published (online or in print) is much different and this should count more for tenure.

It depends upon the type of digital scholarship--if it is peer-reviewed digital scholarship, definitely.

I guess it depends if the digital scholarship is also peer reviewed. I don't think, for instance, that blogs written for a book publisher about one's discipline should count as much as a peer-reviewed article (online or in print). But, digital scholarship should count as well anyway. It also, though, should be measured in some way through reach or response or impact in order to recognize that digital scholarship is vast and should not automatically constitute equal weighted-ness to peer reviewed scholarship.

Publications of articles in online journals must be reviewed carefully, especially given the proliferation of fraudulent online journals that currently invite manuscripts for "peer-review." Also, in the case of websites, blogs, and podcasts, I believe these should be valued in tenure and promotion cases, but universities also need to specify the criteria for equivalency.

Often digital scholarship has a wider circulation than traditional forms, especially print only forms. If influence in the field is something our programs are looking for they should definitely consider the range of influence that can be obtained through online, especially multi-modal, venues, through popular and well-, wide-read blogs.

As long as the journal is refereed, whether it is hard copy or digital should be irrelevant.

A peered review online journal publication should carry a higher weightage compared to a blog, podcast for that purpose.

Digital publications should be held to similar standards of quality and peer review as print publications--when this is the case, it should count equally towards tenure and promotion.

Q4 - Please click and read the following: Online Survey Consent Form. After reading, you may continue or opt out by selecting the appropriate response.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I choose to continue the survey	91.67%	11
2	I choose NOT to continue the survey	8.33%	1
	Total	100%	12

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count	Bottom 3 Box	Top 3 Box
1	Please click and read the following: Online Survey Consent Form. After reading, you may continue or opt out by selecting the appropriate response.	1.00	2.00	1.08	0.28	0.08	12	100.00%	100.00%