

H-Net at Ten Years: Growth, Change, Impact, and Future Direction

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January 1993: H-Net Announces Itself to the World

- Small green screens, big floppy drives, 1200 baud modems, and early adaptors of email
- Professor Richard Jensen's announcement of a new History Network on usenet boards
- H-Women, Holocaust, H-Urban
- The idea: Edited scholarly discussion lists

Immediate Appeal, Rapid Growth

- Cadre of Internet pioneers developed new lists: H-Latam, H-Labor, H-Law, H-Teach
- Nearly 20 lists within a year, 10,000 subscribers, 40 editors
- Self-proclaimed outsiders challenging the scholarly establishment to open up the profession

Using H-Net to Open Up Academy and Build Bridges

- Teaching as well as research
- Interdisciplinary discourse
- International communication
- Across levels within the academy
 - Faculty and graduate students
 - Elite institutions and the periphery
- Beyond the academy to larger public

The Beginnings of Institutionalization

■ Tensions within H-Net Community

- Internet culture of anarchistic democracy vs. professional need for policies, scholarly standards
- Graduate students and established scholars
- Role of the founder vs. new editors

■ 1994 Charter: H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online

- Executive committee/executive director
- A virtual organization with no physical presence

The Dynamic of Continued Institutionalization and Professionalization

- The challenge of scale:
 - Within four years, 40 lists averaging over 1000 subscribers
 - Impact on careers
- Desire for new services beyond discussion
 - H-Net Reviews
 - Jobguide/Announcements
- Need for Increased technological sophistication and control
 - Development of Web
 - Scale of computer services needed
- Necessity for institutional resources/money
 - Grants
 - University backing

Dynamic of Institutionalization and Professionalization

- From moderators to editors
- From lists to networks
- 2000: New constitution and the incorporation of a virtual scholarly organization
- Hosted by MATRIX at Michigan State University

H-Net at 10 years

- 140+ Networks
 - 150,000 subscribers in over 90 countries
 - Over 500 editors worldwide
 - 800,000 pieces of email a day
 - Over 1 million messages in ten years
 - All on web at same url
 - Dozens of new networks in formation
- H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences
- H-Net announcements and jobguide
- H-Net website: 750,000 discrete connections a week, average over 10 minutes

Understanding and Evaluating H-Net

- Quantity does not equal quality, BUT
 - Strong, growing market for H-Net networks: inviting H-Net mail into overflowing mailboxes, visiting website
 - Willingness of scholars to serve as editors and advisory board members
- Persistence of networks over time: most over two years old, most on second generation of editors
- Clear consensus-driven editorial standards: agreement on professional quality editing, quality control gate-keeping

No Longer Outsiders: Scholarly Societies Eager for Affiliations

- Many networks tied to scholarly societies from the start: H-Latam, H-Shear, JHistory, PSRTL, H-Education, H-Mideast-Medieval, etc.
- Others tied to journals: H-History-and-Theory
- Others begin with one scholarly society and the grow to knit together several: H-Environment
- For others, ties to scholarly societies grow over time

H-Net had Become an Established, Central Means of Scholarly Communication

- Rapid means to get the word out
- Influential evaluator and distributor of prestige
- Presence at conventions, in print publications, in departments
- Part of graduate education
- Part of the hiring process
- Although uneven, incomplete, frustrating

One Key to Understanding H-Net: Decentralization and Diversity

- A common model
 - Editors, advisory boards, intellectual missions, open procedures
 - Respect for copyright
 - Respect for fair intellectual exchange
 - Adherence to academic procedures
 - Volunteer labor and intellectual contributions
- Community control and direction
 - Very different types of networks: size, mission, cultures

The Challenge of Bridging Differences and Distances: Diversity in Approaches

- Interdisciplinary
 - History networks with input from other disciplines
 - Area studies networks
 - Multidisciplinary networks
- Professional status
 - Wide range in treatment of hierarchy
- Reaching out to the public
 - Public humanities networks
 - Scholarly networks with broad professional outreach
 - Closed scholarly networks

The Challenge of Bridging Differences and Distances: A Commitment to Internationalization

- Two successful models within H-Net
 - Networks devoted to broad international editing teams and participation
 - National networks
- Uneven progress towards internationalization
 - Few fully internationalized networks
 - Few non-US national networks
 - Language barriers
 - Commitment to lowering barriers of access (ascii email)
- Deep commitment to continued internationalization

Major Challenges

- Scale of H-Net

 - Need to preserve all resources

 - Caution

 - Cost

- Desire for multi-lingual content/access

- Programming to harness power of the web to enhance discussions

Looking To the Future

- Increased e-print capacity
 - Pre-prints, post-prints, e-journals
- On-line teaching resources
 - Fair use database of primary materials
 - Syllabi, teaching aids
- Enhanced web-based interfaces
- Affiliations and partnerships with scholarly societies and other e-scholarly networks