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I will learn more uses for Python—and more learning will surely produce fodder for another Description & Entry column in the future.

If you want to learn more about Python together, feel free to reach out to [jal360@georgetown.edu](mailto:jal360@georgetown.edu)—I am a newbie.

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## THE INTERNET

# A Summary of Recent Events at the Digital Public Library of America

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In November 2018, the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) fired six employees on short notice, apparently in a shift from aggregated search towards eBook publishing. This article gives a summary of recent changes at the DPLA.

The DPLA launched over 5 years ago and was heavily grant funded at the start, with a goal of achieving long-term sustainability. Early on, from 2010 to 2013, DPLA was housed within the Berkman Center at Harvard Law, which acted as an incubator. See Doron Weber, *A Proud Day for the DPLA* (April 18, 2013), <https://dp.la/news/a-proud-day-for-the-dpla> (last visited Nov. 28, 2018); and DPLA, *Digital Public Library of America makes push to serve all 50 states by 2017 with \$3.4 million from the Sloan and Knight foundations* (June 26, 2015), <https://dp.la/news/digital-public-library-of-america-makes-push-to-serve-all-50-states-by-2017-with-3-4-million-from-the-sloan-and-knight-foundations> (last visited Nov. 28, 2018), both describing early grant funding leading to launch.

A primary goal of DPLA from inception was to provide a centralized search for open access digital library content hosted by a variety of libraries and museums in the US. The public search of these materials is live at <http://dp.la>. This service was modeled after Europeana (<https://europeana.eu>), which provides a cross platform search of open access digital library materials hosted by libraries, museums, and archives in Europe. To operate the search, DPLA collects records for digital library materials and updates coverage on a regular schedule. DPLA works on a model where hubs either aggregate records from libraries and then contribute those records to the DPLA (service hubs), or they host content on behalf of many libraries and send records to DPLA (content hubs).

On September 1, 2017, the DPLA launched a Hub Network Membership program. DPLA, *DPLA to Launch Membership Network Program* (Aug. 1, 2017), <https://dp.la/news/launching-membership-network-program> (last visited Nov. 28, 2018). The membership involves dues paid by each hub at a rate of \$10,000 per year per hub, or \$12,000 per year for multi-state hubs. DPLA, *Membership Program* (2018), <https://pro.dp.la/hubs/membership-program> (last visited Nov. 28, 2018). The DPLA currently has 40 hubs. DPLA, *Our Hubs* (2018), <https://pro.dp.la/hubs/our-hubs> (last visited Nov. 28, 2018).

A broad view is that DPLA is in the process of transitioning from startup grant funding to long-term funding from membership dues by libraries contributing records.

On November 8, 2018, DPLA fired 6 employees. Emily Gore (@ncschistory), Twitter (Nov. 8, 2018, 5:08 PM), <https://twitter.com/ncschistory/status/1060655444216168448>. Leading up to this event, the total staffing at DPLA was a modest 15 employees as of April 2018. Emily Gore, *DPLA: A Look Back on the Last 5 Years* (April 18, 2018), <https://dp.la/news/dpla-a-look-back-on-the-last-5-years> (last visited Nov. 28, 2018). So, the firing is a significant reduction in staff.

Shortly after the firings, on November 10, 2018, the Executive Director of DPLA, John S. Bracken, presented at the Library Information Technology Association (LITA) Forum on the topic “DPLA Update and Information.” A recording of the presentation is available at <https://ala-events.zoom.us/recording/play/qfRXaI6zfJ0YpKRHCncjGYnLY7MDRsQDaFHMzv08jB7cXMSXQ5f7SV20ORKSfX5q>. The presentation covered, in very broad strokes, differences in media and the wider world from 2010 at the DPLA’s inception to present. It then transitioned to a discussion of libraries and cultural heritage institutions as an under-resourced field and a discussion that as libraries, “we need our new Andrew Carnegie.” During the question and answer session following the presentation, the audience was very direct in asking about the firings and about DPLA’s financial situation. In response, the Executive Director said that future funding sources might be membership dues from hubs and eBook sales.

More information about the DPLA’s eBook project can be found at DPLA, *DPLA Launching eBook Pilot* (May 15, 2017), <https://dp.la/news/dpla-launching-ebook-pilot/> and DPLA, *DPLA Exchange Offers Library-Centered Ebook Marketplace* (Oct. 10, 2017), <https://dp.la/news/dpla-exchange-offers-library-centered-ebook-marketplace/>. The eBook pilot project is a relatively recent project developed over the past year.

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Communications immediately following the firings seem to signal a dramatic shift away from promoting open access content made available by US libraries and towards acting as an eBook vendor.

In the days following the firings, the library community authored an open Letter of Concern to the DPLA Board, which is available at [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vkr8\\_YGVv53znW14hT66smTwISltvYOyW0XN70tPZBc/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vkr8_YGVv53znW14hT66smTwISltvYOyW0XN70tPZBc/edit). The letter censures the firings, the vague announcement of new strategic priorities, and the lack of transparency and communication. As of November 28, 2018, the letter had 286 signatories.

On November 14, 2018, DPLA posted a public announcement titled “DPLA Update Q&A,” available at <https://dp.la/news/dpla-update-qa>. The announcement is not in response to the letter, but is rather a frequently asked questions (FAQ) geared towards libraries participating in the DPLA. The announcement states which positions were eliminated: a developer, web designer, eBook team member, administrator, metadata librarian, and curation and education specialist. The announcement consists of a series of questions and answers about the impact of the firings on ongoing established work at DPLA, including updating harvested records in the DPLA search at dp.la and holding community meetings and working groups. The announcement seems to state that all activities will continue uninterrupted.

On November 21, 2018, the day before Thanksgiving, the DPLA released a formal response to the open letter, <https://dp.la/news/dpla-board-of-directors-community-letter-response>. The letter refers to a “transition period” over the next few months and lists financial constraints as a reason for the firings. The response also invites interested parties to join the regularly scheduled board meeting on January 15, 2019 to have a conversation about the future of DPLA.

The apparent change in finances and direction of a high profile digital library organization underscores the need for an emphasis on long-term sustainability in digital projects.

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## Wait, What? Working Productively in a World of Distraction

MANAGEMENT

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During a typical workday, what do you think you do 566 times? Wonder where to go for lunch? Wish you were back on vacation? Sip coffee? If you’re like the average knowledge worker sitting at an Internet-connected computer, what you do an average of 566 times per workday—every 40 seconds—is switch between tasks.<sup>1</sup> Yep, you’re probably already gone from this paragraph!

If you’re a manager, you may not have even made it to the end of the first sentence because others interrupt you even more than you interrupt yourself.<sup>2</sup> If we could all just get right back on task after interruptions, the situation wouldn’t be as dire. But research has shown that it takes an average of 25 minutes to resume working on a task after an interruption, and before getting back to that task we work on an average of 2.26 other things.<sup>3</sup> Also, the length of the interruption is irrelevant; research has shown that task switching even for a few seconds has a massive impact on cognitive performance.<sup>4</sup> It’s no wonder many of us feel extremely busy but are unable to get our actual work done!

Two recent books offer excellent suggestions for improving productivity while reducing stress levels: *Hyperfocus: How to Be More Productive in a World of Distraction* by Chris Bailey and *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* by Cal Newport. As the subtitles indicate, both authors cite technology and our hyperconnected world as major roadblocks to productivity. Additionally, the somewhat esoteric nature of knowledge work, which can be difficult to quantify in productivity terms, can also prevent us from knowing just how ineffectively we are working. Both authors note our brains are also partly to blame—we are neurologically wired to seek novelty—but with deliberate practice, we can improve our ability to focus.

After Bailey finished his first book, *The Productivity Project*, he was embarrassed to realize that he, a self-proclaimed ‘productivity expert,’ was working distractedly and without focus. He turned to the work of attention researchers and concluded that the key to doing complex work well was deliberately managing one’s attention. The term hyperfocus originated in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) literature to describe when a person’s attention is consumed by a single object or action; Bailey’s definition—intense focus coupled with deliberate attention—adds the element of intentionality.<sup>5</sup> He suggests classifying your typical work tasks by level of focus needed and then organizing your day so you hyperfocus on the complex tasks while completing other less taxing and consequential tasks in dedicated blocks of time. While we’d