

The popularity of phrases like “digital humanities,” “digitization,” and “imaging cultural heritage” often surpasses understanding of the nuances involved. In many cases humanities scholars themselves fail to know, let alone articulate to imaging scientists, what they really want. Over the course of almost ten years and two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities, the Jubilees Palimpsest Project has encountered many challenges in making imaging science applicable to humanities research and teaching. This presentation addresses four categories of what humanities scholars really want from digital imaging. First, we want access from where we are. This means that objects are not only digitized, but digitized at the appropriate level of precision, the images are preserved in stable and sustainable archives, and made available through open standards of interoperability and discovery, in viewers that incorporate our needs for comparison, annotation, and collaboration. Second, we want an interactive experience that compares favorably to first-hand experience. Besides spatial resolution and color accuracy, this requires an interactive experience of texture, including 3D models for large structures and surface textures that capture and recreate appearance in changing light and space. Third, we want processing that overcomes the limitations of the human eye. This can include visualization enhancements that make it quick and easy to see what could eventually be seen in many raw images, but can also include advanced algorithms that learn patterns in data beyond human comprehension. Finally, we want someone to pay for it. A sustainable future for the field will rely less on grants for individual projects and increasingly on lowering costs and improving partnerships with related industries.