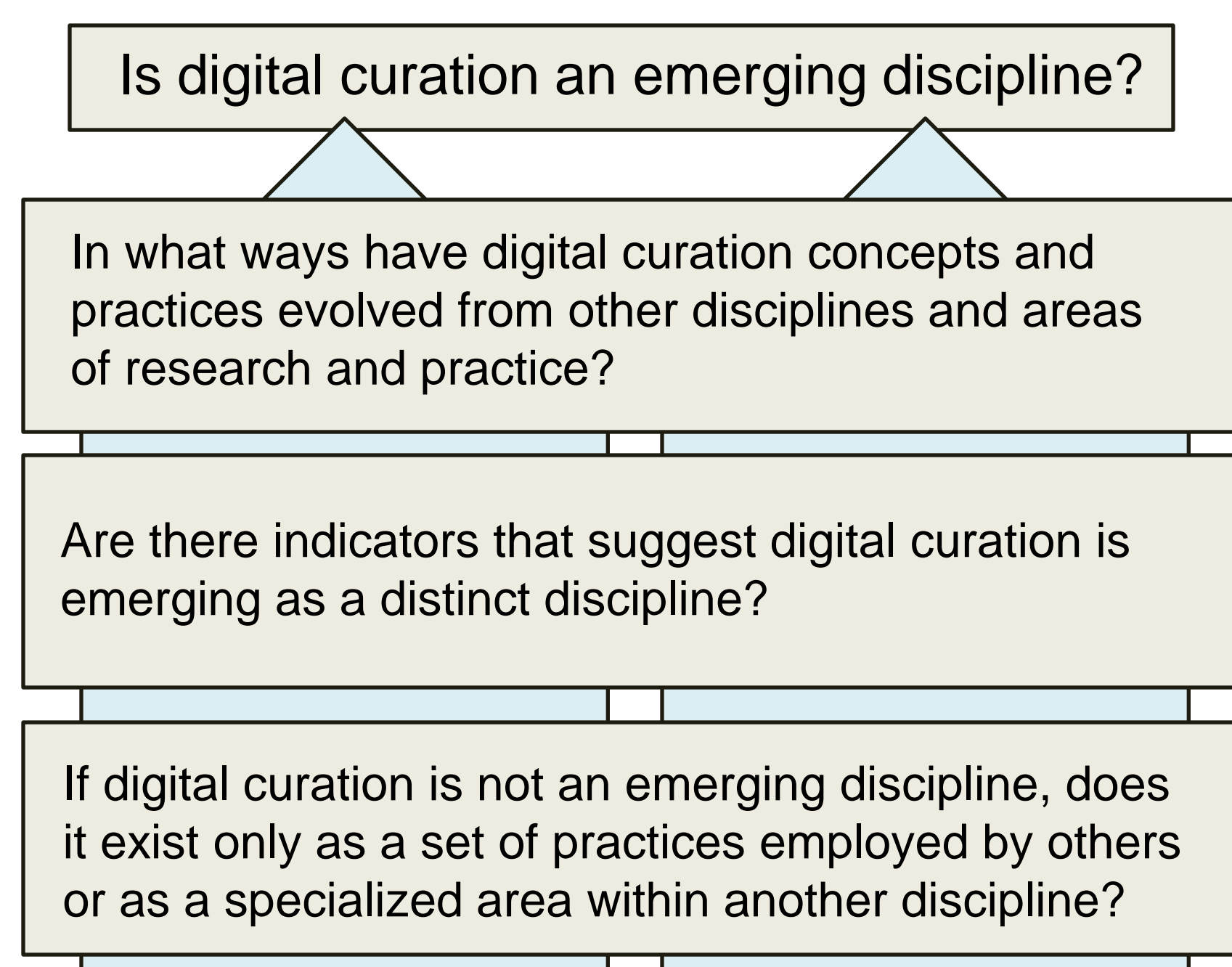# Digital Curation: A Set of Practices or an Emerging Discipline?

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Research Questions

Is digital curation an emerging discipline?

In what ways have digital curation concepts and practices evolved from other disciplines and areas of research and practice?

Are there indicators that suggest digital curation is emerging as a distinct discipline?

If digital curation is not an emerging discipline, does it exist only as a set of practices employed by others or as a specialized area within another discipline?
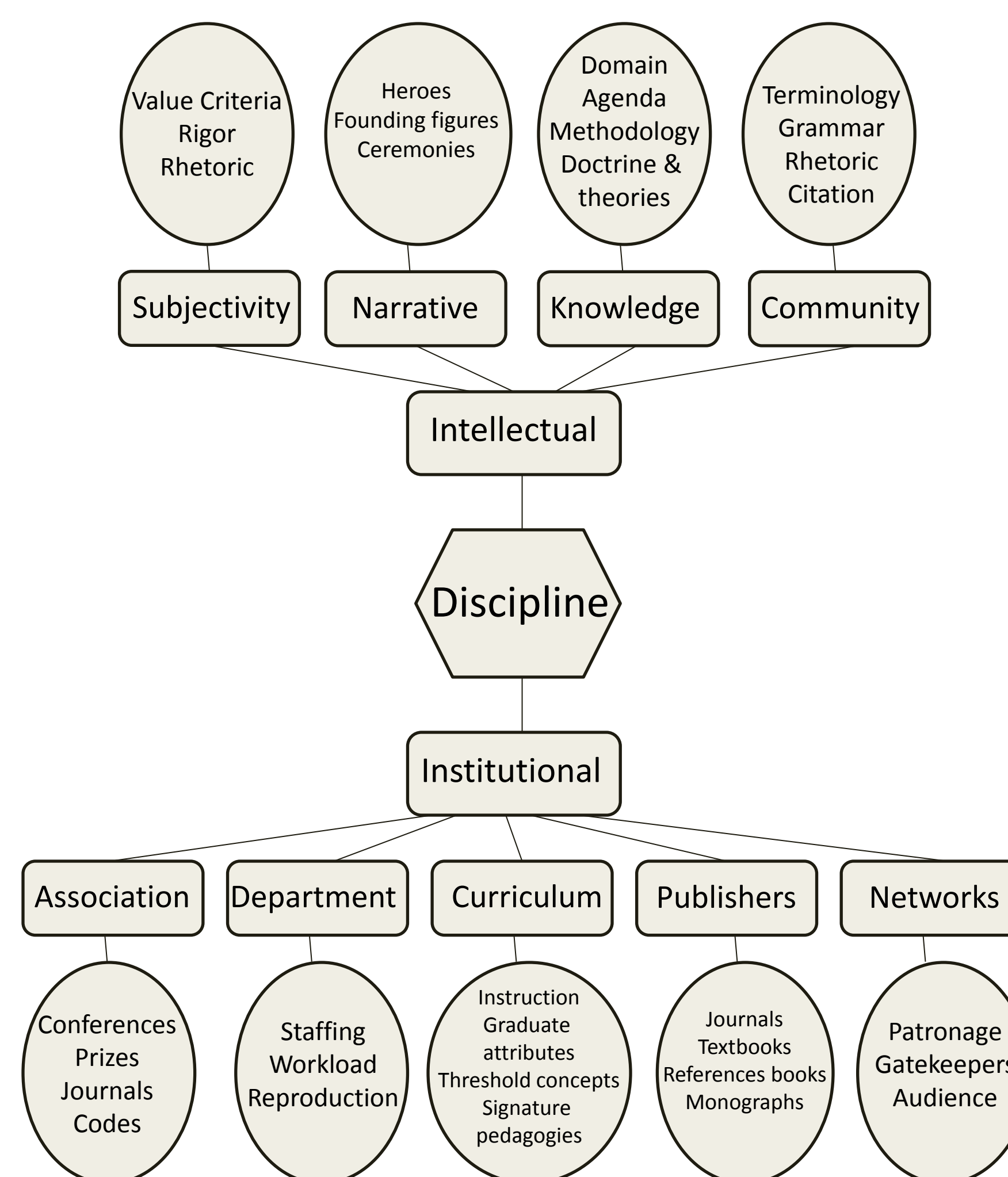
Background

Principles and practices of digital curation are increasingly recognized as requirements for the management and long-term preservation of data. However, some indicators suggest that digital curation is more than a set of practices, rather it is emerging as a distinct discipline.

The purpose of this study is to explore what it means to be an emerging discipline by conducting an exploration of digital curation.

Insight gained from such a study will be useful for stakeholders seeking to understand the current position of digital curation within the academic disciplines and professional practice and research.

Conceptual Framework

Disciplines are often discussed in terms of metaphors. One such metaphor is to represent a discipline as a cultural system. In this schematic (D'Agostino, 2012), a discipline is comprised of the elements of, and interaction between, an intellectual field of inquiry and institutional infrastructure.

- Value Criteria / Rigor / Rhetoric → Subjectivity
- Heroes / Founding figures / Ceremonies → Narrative
- Domain / Agenda / Methodology / Doctrine & theories → Knowledge
- Terminology / Grammar / Rhetoric / Citation → Community

Intellectual

Discipline

Institutional

- Association → Conferences / Prizes / Journals / Codes
- Department → Staffing / Workload / Reproduction
- Curriculum → Instruction / Graduate attributes / Threshold concepts / Signature pedagogies
- Publishers → Journals / Textbooks / References books / Monographs
- Networks → Patronage / Gatekeepers / Audience

Methodology

This study employs a two-phase mixed methods research design. The coding instrument and interview protocol are designed to collect data about the elements that characterize a discipline.

Phase I: Bibliometric and Content Analysis
- Citation Analysis; Content Analysis; Descriptive Analysis
- Scope:
  - 2001 to 2013
  - Journal articles, conference papers, white papers, dissertations
- Sample selection
  - Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science
  - Comprehensive list of search terms

Phase II: Interviews
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews
- 10 one-hour interviews
- Purposive sampling of experts in digital curation

Going Forward

The criteria established in the conceptual framework are used to structure the data analysis and provide a context for clarifying the disciplinary status of digital curation and answering the research questions.

Below is my schedule going forward with this research:
- Finalize and defend research proposal
- IRB approval for Phase II
- Pilot study of the coding instrument for Phase I
- Data Collection for Phase I: Bibliometric and Content Analysis
- Data Collection for Phase II: Interviews
- Combine Phase I and II data for analysis and interpretation

References

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Becher, T., and Trowler, P. R. (2001). *Academic tribes and territories* (2nd ed.). Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

D'Agostino, F. (2012). Disciplinarity and the Growth of Knowledge. *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*, 26:3-4, 331-350.