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Date: Monday, August 20, 2018

Subject: Provost's Grant for Completion of Project "Contributing to a Values-driven Digital Humanities: The World is Harrisonburg"

Context and Summary

In January 2017, I submitted a grant application that proposed to revise a recurring project-based version of "Critical Issues in Recent Global History" and to develop a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) research project that will provide evidence of the ways in which a curriculum-based values-driven Digital Humanities project can contribute to infusing a culture and value of diversity into not just the classroom, but also into the community that surrounds and supports the enrolled students. I committed to continued revision of the project-based course, including the development of definitive project objectives and the articulation of a full timeline of activities required to assure project completion by 2020. In addition, I also indicated that I would begin to explore a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning research question that would provide evidence of the ways in which integrating a values-driven Digital Humanities project into the curriculum serves to infuse a culture and value of diversity in the larger social network that surrounds and supports the enrolled students.

Highlighted Accomplishments

In terms of the grant monies, almost all of it was spent on a trip to explore historical displays on immigration and refugee resettlement in Massachusetts, specifically Boston, Lowell, and Rochester. These regions have a rich history in immigration and refugee resettlement. Obviously, there are the Lowell mill girls, but the legacy continues to evolve into the 21st century. For example, outside of Cambodia, there is no greater per person population of Cambodians than in Lowell. This was a valuable trip in terms of making some connections, as well as developing a comparative lens for *The World is Harrisonburg* project. I had anticipated that these locations would have professional up-to-date immigration and refugee resettlement displays, particularly Lowell, as part of its National Park Service designation. What I discovered—and this will affect some of the SOTL scholarship that I will be pursuing—the story of refugee resettlement since the 1970s has yet to be developed as a permanent exhibition, even in some of the most likely locations on the east coast.

Developing SOTL project: At the end of the summer 2017, I produced and shared with a number of peers an essay called "Harrisonburg, Virginia: Documenting a Global History of Immigration and Refugee Resettlement," which serves as a beginning point for the development of a SOTL project that I am pursuing this year. A number of these colleagues responded by providing valuable feedback.

Student-to-student and student-faculty experiences: In Fall 2017, I worked with Paige Normand, DigiComm Coordinator, and Catie Willet, DigiComm Media Fellow, to improve the student classroom experience—in terms of familiarizing them with the technical aspects of contributing to “The World is Harrisonburg” project. Six undergraduate students also presented their course work in two panels of the General Education Undergraduate Research Conference in late September.

Community Engagement: At JMU, for a project to be a true “community engagement” project, a community partner is required. Abby Campillo, currently a rising senior at Harrisonburg High School, became the first community partner in Fall 2017. She has been working with me in a professional mentor/mentee capacity to advance The World is Harrisonburg project. In Spring 2018, Abby and I developed and submitted a proposal for a workshop presentation at the JMU Conference “Engagement for the Public Good: Connecting Learning to Community and Civic Engagement,” on November 7-9. Our presentation, which has been accepted, will involve Abby and four JMU students who have previously contributed to the project. The presentation is titled: “The World is Harrisonburg”: Documenting International Diversity and Motivating US 2020 Census Participation.

Faculty Project/Skills Development: Over the course of the year, I made essential connections to continue building the supportive network for this project and, more specifically, I invested in acquiring the skills needed to assure the legality of the project in terms of copyright issues. The Carrier Library librarians have proven to be most helpful. Also, in Fall 2017, I met with Mary Lou Bourne, Director of Office of Technology Innovation and Economic Development, to discuss faculty-initiated innovation, strategies for marketing, licensing and commercialization of intellectual property, and fostering economic development collaborations. In Fall 2017, I participated in the Digital Humanities and Social Sciences (DHSS) alumni version of Andrew Witmer and Sean McCarthy’s DHSS network program. Their goal was to develop a supportive space for thinking about how DHSS should be branded on the JMU campus and beyond. Our collective work resulted in the launching of “Networked Humanities” at JMU. For me, this was a space of reflection that gave rise to a number of ethical concerns about what “Openness” really meant in the context of my project. This is one of the core values of their DH initiative: “an invitation to embrace the ethic of sharing and collaboration championed by the DH community.” As part of my effort to place The World is Harrisonburg project on a coherent development timeline and to explain how the project navigates the tensions between the DHSS value of “openness” (which implies that we do not hide behind firewalls) and something that I am calling “Digital Dignity” (which concerns itself with the social implications of DH projects that present human experiences), I produced a web-based TimelineJS product (in-progress). It charts the progress of the project and serves as a tool for familiarizing others with our trajectory. You can view it here https://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=1oTWwOZ20YkILBxB6nYHetuU3snLyhNkvIzC84N_KWLc&font=Default&lang=en&initial_zoom=2&height=650 .

The questions that emerged from this grant period have propelled me towards greater exploration of place-based learning pedagogies, which will be especially relevant as “The World is Harrisonburg” project transitions from a “practice space,” that was limited to me and my students, fully into a community engagement project, where I hope to mediate collaborative relationships between the students and the community.

I was informed in Fall 2017 that we would need to transfer “The World is Harrisonburg” website to a new WordPress platform. In late Spring/early Summer 2018, I began the process of transferring the site from the old platform onto the new platform. (An unanticipated, unavoidable technology headache; but a good opportunity to review and clean up the project before the public launch.)

I also began developing the social media presence that will be useful to publicizing the forthcoming public launch of “The World is Harrisonburg” project. We can now be found on twitter:

<https://twitter.com/WorldisHburg>

Student Experience/Community Impact: Finally, my grant proposal hypothesized that I would find evidence that integrating a values-driven Digital Humanities project into the curriculum serves to infuse a culture and value of diversity in the larger social network that surrounds and supports the enrolled students. Intellectually, one of the most important “The World is Harrisonburg” discoveries has been that, if I want to count on student buy-in beyond the classroom experience, then, it is essential to create scenarios in which students have opportunities to observe me acting as an engage professor/citizen, who is actively invested in the development of a critical public sphere debate. Over the course of AY2017-2018, 62 of the students involved in The World is Harrisonburg project filled 337 seats at 65 different extra-curricular events (both on and off campus) that, for the most part, I attended alongside them. Below, I highlight some of the comments that students provided on my end-of-semester course evaluations. These are just one part of the evidence that I am thinking about as I continue developing the related SOTL project.

Students were asked to comment on the aspects of the course that contributed to their ability to achieve their learning goals: “one specific example of an opportunity of this is watching how she is so willing to contribute to the conversation and speak her thoughts at extra credits. Like the one about the issues in the city of Harrisonburg”; “The extra credit assignments and their subsequent requirements of interacting with the Harrisonburg community stimulated critical thinking and application of knowledge from the course”; “going to the extra credit events enhanced perspective and made connections to the topics we were learning in class”; “The extra credit opportunities allowed me to attend various events on campus. This allowed me to explore other interests”; “The extra credit provided many opportunities outside of the classroom to be able to apply community activities to the course”; “Going out to events in Harrisonburg with Dr. Gayne taught me a lot about the community. She provided us with lots of materials to stimulate our learning as well”; “I really learned who Dr. Gayne was outside of the classroom which was beneficial to my skills of connections. I was out of my comfort zone in this class which was good.”; “the picture assignment we had for the International Festival really helped me get a glimpse into the life of local residents of Harrisonburg, specifically minorities”; “extra credit opportunities were a great way to become more involved part of the Harrisonburg community. Also, I think the International Festival was fun and beneficial to my learning”; “the extra credit opened my eyes to the happening in JMU as well as Harrisonburg as a whole.” “There were plenty of extra credit events that I was able to go to that allowed me to connect with other people from the community”; “Dr. Gayne went out of her way to provide multiple resources so we could succeed in her class”.

Students were also asked to comment on what of value they will remember from the course and carry into other courses or aspects of their lives: “The empathy for immigrants and refugees. How it is important to listen to the full story and research prior to judgement and decision making”;

“Understanding other people’s lives and cultures and being able to accept them”; “Discussing issues of importance & standing for what you believe in regardless of opinions outsiders hold”; “Civil discourse is important. Being involved with your community is essential. Don’t be afraid to question things”; “I will carry many things from this course into my career at JMU, and later into my real life. Something I am currently finding most helpful is reminding myself that the world is much bigger than JMU and using my time here to act fully will be crucial. Meaningful connections! Thank you!”; “She provided me with an interest in the Harrisonburg community and taught me of its importance”; “I will take the connection I have made with people in the Harrisonburg community as well as the knowledge about current events regarding refugees”; “I will remember how to connect with others like people from Harrisonburg when I’m in a school that has a divided line between them”; “The ability to use digital tools will be very helpful in the future, but most importantly the opportunities to go out and interact with the Harrisonburg community, in order to make meaningful use of my time here”; “The most valuable portion of this course was the impact of heavy interaction with the community can seriously influence the perception of the surrounding environment”; “I will forever look at immigrants differently and have a better understanding of where they come from”; “Going out into the community and observing the different kinds of people; to not be apathetic towards others”; “Connecting the community to what I was learn to accomplish the project”

Closing

Thank you very much for your support of the original proposal. I hope you will agree that I have used the financial support, the motivational energy, and the available human resources on campus to advance the project positively and beneficially for our community. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there are any additional questions/concerns.