Establishing the Open-Source Tradecraft Exploratory Lab (OSTEL)

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Project Budget:

$22,650

Abstract:

Open-source intelligence and its collection are emerging areas of skills-based aptitudes used by government, military, and intelligence organizations; businesses and non-profits; and more to identify and leverage a broad array of data. The proposed Open-Source Tradecraft Exploratory Lab (OSTEL) would seek to provide JMU students with related resources, training, and active learning opportunities on real-world problems. Additionally, with the focus on real-world problems, these research outputs may shape and inform policy as there is a great demand by policymakers and news organizations for this type of research and analysis, which has the potential to increase publicity for JMU and the affiliated programs.

Project:

Open-source intelligence (also known as OSINT) and its collection are critical to several fields, including government, military, and intelligence organizations; businesses and non-profits; newspapers; and more. The goal of OSINT is to identify and leverage a broad array of tools to locate, process, analyze, model, and assess a variety of publicly available data. While OSINT tradecraft and collection can be reviewed in a classroom or through traditional learning methods, it is a skills-based expertise that requires trial and error on a variety of problem sets to obtain sufficient aptitude. As such, another venue for students to gain this experience is needed.

The proposed Open-Source Tradecraft Exploratory Lab (OSTEL) would seek to fill this gap by providing JMU students, Intelligence Analysis program students at the outset and expanding in time to all interested students, with resources, training, and active learning opportunities on real-world problem sets. Through a laboratory approach, students are provided during weekly meetings with tools and problems while the lab director offers guidance on overcoming challenges and pursuing alternative methodologies, as well as other assistance to aid and provide feedback. This environment would foster creativity and innovation in problem-solving, enabling students to actively engage in real-world issues and produce policy-relevant research. For example, students could work on tracking military assets or changes in military postures, tracking illicit trafficking of goods, identifying damage for first responders in the wake of a natural disaster, tracking down nefarious actors, mapping the corporate ecosystem of illicit front companies, and so forth.

To this last point, there would be numerous benefits to the students and JMU beyond the skills development and the building of a portfolio of work to aid students in job seeking. The research outputs stemming from this work could potentially shape and inform policy, and there exists a great demand from policymakers and news organizations for this type of research and analysis, so this also has the potential to increase publicity for JMU and the affiliated programs. While not commonplace, these skills and opportunities to build these skills are rapidly emerging at many academic and nonprofit institutions.

OSTEL will have three primary goals:
1. Provide space, structure, resources, and training on OSINT methods.
2. Facilitate and publicize innovative research by JMU students.
3. Increase the notoriety of JMU/CISE/IA through pioneering and timely research targeted at critical global problem sets.

The project's budget includes funding for two student research assistants to facilitate research, funds to publicize student outputs to a broader community (including printing of materials and an outward-facing website), and funds to enable two experts in the field to OSINT to visit JMU and conduct a short course on a relevant subject.

This would be a unique and innovative approach to teaching collection methods for undergraduate students. Smaller-scale efforts are known at two organizations, but these are coursework and not focused on elevating the research of students or providing systematic guidance.

Project Budget Amount: **$22,650**

Personnel:	$14,000
Travel:	$1,700
Postage/Printing:	$150
Speakers:	$1,000
Other:	$5,800

Additional information to explain or expand on budgetary needs:

Other purchases include software subscriptions to facilitate data collection and analysis. This would include services providing, for example, satellite imagery or corporate information. As part of the element to highlight OSTEL outputs, a website will be set up to publicize these efforts. Costs are included to purchase a domain and SSL, as well as website development.