Dear Jordan,

The Inclusion and Diversity Committee, which reviews proposals for the DEI Innovative Initiatives Grants, reviewed your interesting proposal to incorporate machine learning and digital storytelling with foundational STEM courses. There are some strong merits to your idea but we also had some concerns. We invite you to reflect upon our comments below and to revise and resubmit your proposal at any point this spring term for the committee to review and consider for funding. I outline our questions or concerns below.

It is not entirely clear to us what you will do with the digital stories. Please elaborate on who creates these stories and how they will be used pedagogically in the classroom or as a tool to attain the learning outcomes. How does this endeavor come back to students of color in STEM or our 1st generation students, or women in STEM?

While the committee found your proposal intriguing and we believe that there could be benefits to students with this project in terms of accessibility, the framing of the program relies on a deficit orientation of student achievement: "Focusing solely on achievement rather than opportunity can reinforce a deficit-oriented discourse that blames underserved students, families, and communities for disparities between their educational outcomes and those of their more privileged peers. It reveals the symptoms, but not the causes of inequitable attainment. When data reveal students' shortcomings without revealing the shortcomings of the systems intended to serve them, it becomes easier to treat students as deficient and harder to recognize how those systems must be changed to create more equitable opportunities."[1] We encourage you to think about shifting your orientation toward a strengths-based perspective of student achievement. How can this information inform your and your colleagues' practices in the classroom, for example?

Related to the above, the proposal mentions the diversity of our student population and, rightly, considering who students are is paramount to designing this type of project. However, our student population is non-white and STEM tends to be white and male-dominated. We ask you to dig deeper and consider how these voices become part of the digital narratives you are incorporating and to also consider who is doing the designing? How will you ensure that the project incorporates race and gender? We do not see how, for example, a system designed by white men addresses the needs of students of color and women who are marginalized in STEM? Therefore, we ask you to think about the "who" in your project in terms of, not only participation but also in the actual design of it. There is a useful upcoming [series of workshops](#) on inclusivity in STEM that we encourage you to attend. The final one in April, entitled, "WHITENESS AND STRUCTURAL RACISM IN INTRODUCTORY STEM COURSES" may be of particular interest to your project planning. In addition, the book, *Black, brown, & bruised: How racialized STEM education stifles innovation*, by E.O. McGee may be of interest.

1 The deficit lens of "achievement gap" needs to be flipped: https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-the-deficit-lens-of-the-achievement-gap-needs-to-be-flipped-heres-how/2019/07

We cannot provide salaries for students from this funding stream. However, there are funding sources that the College has that will allow you to pay students for their work. There are the POET and SCOTT student internship programs or you can create a student work study position, possibly. What we can do, should your revision be accepted, is provide a stipend for your work on this project and support the purchase of any materials associated with the project. Since this sounds like a substantial investment, consider including a stipend for yourself, following the matrix outline on the call, in your budget.

Jordan, we hope that our critique does not dissuade you from revising and resubmitting. We admire the endeavor and do see merit to it. If you wish to meet with the co-chairs or the committee to discuss your ideas or our suggestions, please feel free to reach out.

Thank you for your interest in developing innovative projects intended to move the College forward in terms of equity!

Sincerely,
Kay Sanders
Joanne Hash
Co-Chairs, IDC