Proposal for Digital Scholarship Incubator, 2016–2018
Prepared by Liz Lorang
February 8, 2016

Abstract

This proposal seeks a commitment of three years of funding (summer 2016, summer 2017, summer 2018) for the Digital Scholarship Incubator. Funding will support the creation of up to four 12-week fellowships each summer, including stipends for fellows; online training memberships (Lynda.com); financial support for travel, training, and professional development; and financial support for hardware and software. The maximum total cost for three years of funding is $64,413, if four fellows are selected each year and if each fellow uses the total amount amount of available funding. See the budget (page 4) for a year-by-year breakdown of projected expenses, which average approximately $21,500 each year. In addition to putting the Incubator on surer footing for another three years, the support of the Libraries will enable me to expand the Incubator to include students working in a broader range of disciplines, including in the social sciences.

The Incubator aligns with strategic focus statements of the UNL Libraries, including brokering access to knowledge resources; fostering a transformative environment for scholarship; creating new scholarly resources for research; and developing inspiring and functional spaces to encourage creativity, collaboration, and knowledge.

Background and Significance

In 2014, University Libraries' Research and Innovation funding supported the development of the Digital Scholarship Incubator (DSI). The DSI was designed to meet a need in digital humanities infrastructure at UNL, particularly the need for support for student-led digital research and scholarship. Since 2014, I have led two cohorts and seven students through the Incubator program. Students from the departments of Art & Art History, English, History, and Modern Languages & Literatures have thus far participated in the program. Colleagues from throughout the University Libraries have played important roles in the success of the Incubator. Thus, while it has been formally housed in the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, it is truly a UNL Libraries-wide initiative.

In the first year of the DSI (2014), Fellows had the challenge of adding their Incubator time and projects onto already full workloads, including coursework (or dissertation hours), teaching, research assistantships, and other employment—to say nothing of non-school and non-work commitments. While the 2014 Fellows demonstrated tremendous dedication to their projects, their Incubator work was an additional responsibility on top of already full schedules. Therefore, when some part of their schedule needed to be flexible, it was students' Incubator time/schedule/projects. Students did exceptional work considering this arrangement, but in all

cases the students and their projects have far more potential than the Fellows were able to realize, since they juggled the Incubator alongside other commitments.

Therefore, in 2015, based on feedback from the students and my own observation of the Incubator during its inaugural year, the Incubator shifted to a summer Fellowship. As part of the Fellowship, students committed to working on their projects for a minimum of 15 hours each week (as compared to 2014, when students committed to a minimum of 3-5 hours each week on their projects). The paid fellowships allowed students to triple the amount of time they spend on their DSI projects. This change also allowed me to dedicate more time to the DSI Fellows in the summer than during the academic year, when the academic schedule is more chaotic. Holding the Incubator period in the summer and awarding the students a stipend as part of the fellowship is crucial for the long-term viability of the Incubator and for our ability to attract the best students. The summer fellowship model for 2015 was hugely successful, based both on student feedback as well as on the measurable outcomes of the student's projects.

Impact

The impact of the Incubator on the fellows' research has been profound, and their research has similarly had significant impact in their disciplines. In the most recent cohort, one Fellow's project--the digitization, digital presentation, and digital analysis of the work of a Lincoln, Nebraska outsider artist—exemplifies what I most hoped to see emerge out of the Incubator: a diverse group of people coming together around a student's research to advance original scholarship for a range of audiences. This Fellow has major ambition for the project he incubated in the Libraries: his next step is visual analysis of outsider art using computational methodologies. Without the investment of the Libraries and librarians' roles in teaching and research, however, it is unlikely he would have gotten this project off of the ground. The same is true for the other six students and projects over the last two years, which covered topics including the Spanish literary avant garde; 3d reconstruction of ancient architecture; a bilingual edition of religious writing from Canada; a network analysis and set of digital modules exploring the economic rise and fall of Grand Rapids, Michigan; electronic text analysis of primary materials documenting the experiences of Jewish and Native American people at the time of the settling of the American west; and the development of a scholarly edition and resource on the most widely read nineteenth-century journalist, Fanny Fern. As I've continued to work with the student developing the Fanny Fern project, beyond his time in the Incubator, we've started working toward developing what he calls a "FannyPack": a packaged, customized configuration of the Drupal content management system and the rest of the apparatus he has created, along with a full set of documentation and instructions, to allow others working on women's recovery projects an option for getting their own sites up and running relatively easily. This Incubator grad has the potential to make a major intervention in a problem that has proven vexing for digital editing: how to enable scholars and creators who do not have significant technical experience or much institutional support to develop digital scholarship.

Local, national, and international audiences have learned about the DSI Fellows' projects in 2014 and 2015. In April 2014, two Fellows shared their early efforts at a UNL student projects

showcase sponsored by the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities. Another attended a TEI customization workshop at Northeastern University in May and discussed her work with colleagues at the Digital Humanities 2014 conference in Lausanne, Switzerland. Also that summer, one Fellow talked about his project with attendees at the International Whitman Week in Hamburg, Germany, while another discussed her work with colleagues onsite in Turkey, as she continued her archeological fieldwork. This Fellow presented on her Incubator work and the larger methodological issues it raises in January 2015 at the meeting of the Archeological Institute of America. Reaching perhaps the largest audience of all for the first class of Incubator Fellows, one student's blog post about his project was picked up by the major aggregator of digital humanities content, DHNow.

The 2015 Fellows have had a similarly significant impact. One student leveraged his Incubator research into a second fellowship at another institution, for which he was required to present on his Incubator project. All of the students have presented at major conferences, including at the American Historical Association annual conference and at the University of Kansas Digital Humanities symposium, and they all continue to seek new venues for their work. One of the Fellows also traveled to and participated in an international outsider art festival in New York, to discuss his Incubator project and develop new partnerships. In addition, they have all maintained public, open websites to document their work in development.

In addition to sharing about their work with a variety of audiences, DSI Fellows have become student leaders within the local digital humanities community. In Spring 2014, one of the DSI Fellows co-led a Digital Humanities Bootcamp, which preceded the 2014 Nebraska Forum on Digital Humanities, and another chaired a session at the 2014 Forum. Meanwhile, one of the 2015 Fellows is the founding president of the new Digital Humanities Student Association at UNL. The DHSA exists to to support University of Nebraska-Lincoln students who are interested in the digital humanities. The association is interdisciplinary, and encourages collaboration across different departments. As part of this goal, the association will organize events that foster digital humanities research. All of the Incubator students are an important presence at the range of digital humanities events at UNL, including presentations and workshops. While the Incubator makes direct investments in only a small number of student research initiatives each year, the impact is felt significantly beyond only those students. Furthermore, several students have already inquired about the availability of the Incubator in future years, and I have heard multiple people use the Incubator as a selling point for prospective graduate students.

2016–2018: The Humanities and Beyond

For the next three years, I propose to continue the summer fellowship model of the 2015 DSI. I plan to revise some elements of the 12-week fellowship based on feedback from the students, but the general parameters will remain the same as in summer 2015: a competitive, compensated, 12-week fellowship that requires the students to develop their research in a collaborative, co-working environment. Students play a crucial role in developing one another's projects through the blending of disciplines and methodologies. For this reason, I seek now to expand the DSI beyond only the humanities. While the Incubator thus far has focused on

students doing work in the humanities, I intentionally gave it the broader "digital scholarship" title, aspiring over time to bring in and work with students outside the humanities. The support of the Libraries for up to four Fellows each year will give me the flexibility to include at least one—and no more than two—student Fellows from the social sciences and related fields for the next three years. In 2016, I anticipate reaching out directly to the College of Journalism & Mass Communication, where I already have connections, and/or to the College of Education to identify potential fellows from beyond the humanities. Throughout the next three years, the Incubator will maintain its emphasis on the humanities, since it was for students doing work in the humanities where I first realized the underlying need. At the same time, I seek to move beyond disciplinary boundaries that are sometimes arbitrary—particularly when addressing challenges or seeking new knowledge—as well as to prepare the students in the Incubator to participate in truly cross-disciplinary teams.

Budget

Expense	Base Calculated	2016	2017	2018	Total
Stipend for Fellow #1	12 weeks x 15 hours/week x $20/hour (+ 3% annual increase)	$3,600	$3,708	$3,819	$11,127
Stipend for Fellow #2	12 weeks x 15 hours/week x $20/hour (+ 3% annual increase)	$3,600	$3,708	$3,819	$11,127
Stipend for Fellow #3	12 weeks x 15 hours/week x $20/hour (+ 3% annual increase)	$3,600	$3,708	$3,819	$11,127
Stipend for Fellow #4	12 weeks x 15 hours/week x $20/hour (+ 3% annual increase)	$3,600	$3,708	$3,819	$11,127
Lynda.com annual memberships	$359.88 x 4 (+ 3% annual increase)	$1,440	$1,483	$1,527	$4,450
Travel/training/professional development funds	$500 x 4 (+ 3% annual increase)	$2,000	$2,060	$2,122	$6,182
Hardware	$2,000 + 3% annual increase	$2,000	$2,060	$2,122	$6,182
Software	$1,000 + 3% annual increase	$1,000	$1,030	$1,061	$3,091
Grand Total		$20,840	$21,465	$22,108	**$64,413**