Engaged Scholars Project Proposal:
Boulder Fringe Festival Outreach Project

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1.   Proposal

The first fringe festival took place in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1947 when eight theater companies were excluded from the Edinburgh International Festival and they decided to hold independent performances in different venues around the fringes of the official festival. Since then, fringe festivals have popped up in more than a hundred cities around the world. Each fringe festival is different, but they all share two defining characteristics. First, the festivals do not intermediate the shows that are chosen to participate. Rather, performers and artists apply to be in a fringe festival and some are chosen to participate, either on a first-come basis or through a random lottery. And second, the shows take place in non-traditional venues around the city, like churches, alleys, hiking trails, and buses.

The Boulder International Fringe Festival is a Colorado 501(c)(3), founded in 2004, which produces a festival every summer featuring theater performances, music, magic, stand-up comedy, etc. The festival attracts artists from all over, for the purpose of building community, making the arts more accessible, attracting tourism, and creating opportunities for collaboration between local artists and the larger community. All proceeds from ticket sales go directly to the artists.

I will be working with the Boulder Fringe Festival to improve outreach and communication using technology. My primary contact is David Ortolano, the founder and executive director of the Boulder Fringe Festival, and he will communicate with the board of directors about this project.

Based on survey responses and conversations with the Boulder Fringe community, we have determined that the Boulder Fringe Festival can better achieve its community-building goals by more clearly explaining the story and purpose of the fringe festival and by reducing friction in communication between artists, the festival, and the public. I will help the Boulder Fringe Festival meet those goals by creating an online virtuality fringe museum and conducting a strategic technology assessment.

1a.   VR Fringe Museum

For the first part of this project, I will develop a Fringe Museum in virtual reality, which will help tell the story of the Fringe Festival, unite different fringe locations, and reach out to the broader community. The museum will be modeled loosely after a VR art gallery I developed recently (viewable at nippers.github.io/gallery). It will include photos, posters, and videos from past and upcoming shows and maps to different venues.

While the locational aspect of the fringe festival is part of what makes it unique and community-focused, having shows disbursed around town is a challenge for cohesion and marketing. Having a central virtual location, where artists can post information about their shows and the public can find out what the fringe festival is and where shows are happening, will help connect shows with audiences. It will also help out-of-state performers market their work to audiences in Colorado. The museum will be viewable in VR with two Oculus Go headsets, one of which will be stationed at festival headquarters, and the other will move to different venues throughout the festival.

Additionally, I will try to make the museum as accessible as possible. Although the museum will only be viewable in VR by using a headset, it will be online and viewable in 3D on any computer or smartphone. The code will be open source and available on Github so other Fringe festivals can replicate it for free.

We would like to complete a demo version of the Fringe Museum before this year's festival, which begins August 15th, 2018. We will gather feedback on the demo from the Fringe community and incorporate it into the final product, which will be ready for the 2019 festival.

1b.   Strategic Technology Assessment

For the second part of this project, I will assess the current state of the Boulder Fringe Festival's software infrastructure and research options for website hosting, online ticket sales, collating applications, informing performers of their acceptance or waitlist status, and automating the process of matching shows with venues. This research will result in a report outlining possibilities and recommendations for streamlining communications over the next three to five years. The Boulder Fringe Festival can use the report to inform its long-term planning, goal-setting, and resource allocation.

2. Budget:

We would like to purchase three Oculus Go virtual reality headsets with 64GB storage, one for development and testing, and two for artists and patrons to use at different Boulder Fringe Festival venues.

64GB Oculus Go   x3 $249

Total   **$747**