Request for Strategic Development Funding (Research and Scholarly Activity)

Oct. 17, 2011

Total Amount of Request: $2650.

**Applied Digital Cultures Lab**

The creation of the Applied Digital Cultures Lab, housed within the Office of Research and Scholarly Activity, will provide a space for faculty to experiment with, and develop projects utilizing, emerging digital tools for research and dissemination. Taking its cue from current trends in humanities scholarship toward a more collaborative environment that encourages the use of on-line communities and modes of dissemination, the lab will provide a “storefront” for external funding and position the College as an innovator in supporting modes of digital practice for higher education in the lower mainland.

The Applied Digital Cultures Lab will, after initial institutional stipend requested below, be entirely self-supporting. Culling resources from faculty on the vanguard of current trends in research and pedagogy, the Lab aims to build an on-line “sandbox” where individuals—students, faculty, community members—can employ digital tools to develop research projects or engage in collaborative environments. All software associated with developing “sandboxes” for digital research and the presentation / dissemination of research underway at the College will be open source and free. In fact, one of the initiatives of the Applied Digital Cultures Lab will be to encourage the manipulation of open source platforms so that they are tailored to the specifics of the research itself. One of the Lab’s primary goals is to identify and develop the different subject-area requirements for integrating current research practices into emerging modes of digital scholarship.

Ideally, the Lab provides a structure where the College asserts its stake in building and nurturing digital environments that engage faculty and students. Experiential and experimental in nature, the Lab creates pathways for institutional collaboration with other emerging digital research / pedagogical initiatives such as CultureNet (Capilano), Digital Café (Kwantlen), the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab at the University of Victoria, and the “Digital Literacy and the Digital Humanities” project in the Language and Literacy Education department at the University of British Columbia. In short, there are a number of burgeoning enterprises in precisely the areas covered by the Applied Digital Cultures Lab; we would be remiss to let ourselves be left behind.

The Lab’s existence would also provide a forum for sharing integrated practices and involving students in research. A consistent problem for the College’s attainment of outside research funding is the difficulty—particularly in the Humanities and Languages—finding ways for faculty to integrate students as assistants in their research. The Lab, with its cross-disciplinary and cross-platform approach, provides precisely the space in which, for example, a student enrolled in Computer Science courses could work with a faculty member in Biology or English to create an on-line database, website, or otherwise, for the faculty member’s research. Moreover, the Lab would support a faculty member wanting to develop an international project or partnership by utilizing the collaborative tools for digital scholarship, allowing for ongoing work without the demands of international travel. While not all digital tools relevant for higher education translate into corporate or community settings, the Lab nonetheless provides a space where students can understand the demands and apparatus for digital communication, something they will no doubt find invaluable as they move on into other pedagogical and professional venues.

The Applied Digital Cultures Lab, as its name implies, seeks to provide a space for the application of emerging digital cultures—social media, blogging, database development, data mining, collaboration—in the research practices at the College. While there are numerous sites for the application of digital tools in research and pedagogical practice at the University level, Colleges remain an underserved and nascent space with a distinctive set of institutional demands. As the College moves forward into more on-line teaching, encouraging student engagement through its on-line portals, and an even greater international profile, the Lab will represent a space for innovation and experimentation, opening spaces for faculty and students to connect and produce a variety of digital “storefronts” that showcase our position as a leader in the creation and support of digital cultures for higher education.

**Support Requested:**

1. The College recognizes the existence of the Applied Digital Cultures Lab, allowing the Lab to then apply for external funding and begin to recruit interested individuals.
2. The College provide dedicated server space on the College website, or an outside server within Canada, for the Lab, and that this space **not** be administered or supported by CEIT. The annual cost for an outside service would be $150.00
3. The College covers the cost for David N. Wright to attend the week-long 2012 Digital Humanities Summer Seminar at the University of Victoria in order to initiate partnerships and publicize the Lab. The cost of the seminar, including accommodation and travel, is $2500.00.

**Timelines:**

1. November 2011 through May 2012: establish the Lab, establish web presence, collate possible projects for the Lab.
2. May 2012 through September 2012: publicize the Lab, investigate and initiate partnerships with similar structures at other institutions locally and internationally. Prepare to integrate the lab with on-line pedagogical professional development.
3. September 2012 through January 2013: apply for SSHRC startup grant, begin projects as possible, investigate and initiate liaisons with programs at the College (Business / Humanities Fine Arts Degree / Media Studies in LLPA / Environmental Ecology / Training Group / The Library). Support faculty moving into on-line pedagogical environments as needed.
4. January 2013 through May 2013: Assess the viability and success of the Lab, refine or develop as needed.
5. May 2013 through September 2014: Sponsor a summer institute for College-level students and faculty in digital scholarship, or an “unconference” on digital practice in higher education. Investigate and initiate a course in the Digital Humanities as a cross-Faculty course.
6. September 2014 through January 2015: Investigate and initiate a Digital Studies program that puts into practice the applications developed in the Lab over the preceding two years of its existence.
7. January 2015: examine the viability and success of the Lab. Reassert strategic directions to align with College strategic directions.