

Sabbatical Report

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“Bringing Digital Humanities to the Community College and Vice Versa”

Purpose, Goals and Objectives

During my sabbatical, I worked on a 6-month National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Digital Humanities Start-Up grant project, “Bringing Digital Humanities to the Community College and Vice Versa.” For that project, I produced a 40-page white paper which details the purpose, background, goals, activities and products of the grant. I am attaching the white paper in the email with this report. It is also available on the NEH website: <https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx?f=1&gn=HD-51671-13>

Methods and/or Processes Used to Complete the Project

My original proposal was for mostly solitary work, as I couldn’t be assured of the grant when I applied. However, as I found out that I received the National Endowment for the Humanities grant for my project, my work followed the grant proposal more closely than my sabbatical proposal, i.e., a National Survey of Digital Humanities at the Community College, facilitation of two workshop sessions at the national conference, and a grant proposal for further development. For detailed discussion, please see White Paper attached, “McGrail Sabbatical Report Part II.pdf”

Results and/or Outcomes of the Project

I successfully implemented a National Survey of Digital Humanities in Community Colleges, and facilitated/led two workshops at the Community College Humanities Association national conference in Louisville, Kentucky. I also developed the blog/website that I have kept since 2011, and posted the survey results, conference videos and presentations from the conference there: <https://blogs.lanecc.edu/dhatthecc/>

Final Reflection on the Significance of this Project to My Work at Lane

I first came upon so-called “digital humanities” (or DH) when I was working as activity director for faculty development on Lane’s Title III grant. My goal for that work was to provide opportunities for faculty to develop active and collaborative pedagogies that would improve student learning; I was impressed by the culture of digital humanities scholarship and pedagogy, which favors a DIY model of learning and creation. After a year of following the scholarly field online (most of DH work is accessible online), I decided to teach my literature classes with a DH component, and asked to teach one day a week in a computer lab. While writing classes had long been held in labs at Lane (and elsewhere) the idea of offering face-to-face literature classes in a lab was novel. But the response of students was encouraging. Hesitant at first, students eventually embraced this new approach to learning and to

studying literature, and so I knew that DH should not only be a method reserved for upper-division courses, but should be something that our Lane students should learn about early on.

My sabbatical gave me a way to imagine how that might happen on a larger scale and to begin to develop a community that would support it. In the summer after applying for a sabbatical, I spent 100 hours developing the vision and plan for the National Endowment for the Humanities grant that I (and Lane) applied for in September 2012. The best thing about receiving the grant was to know that other people—people I had never met—agreed that community colleges should be a place for DH to thrive. The White Paper that I wrote for the NEH at the end of the grant explains in detail the work I did from Summer 2013-Winter 2014: development and implementation of a National Survey of Digital Humanities in Community Colleges; development of the “Doing DH at the CC” website; facilitation of the all-day pre-conference session at the Community College Humanities Association in Louisville, Kentucky; and presentation of a follow-up workshop at the same conference.

If we are successful in landing this next grant, Lane could become the home of a series of NEH Summer Institutes for Digital Humanities at Community Colleges, drawing 25 community college faculty locally, regionally and nationally to our college for a week-long intensive program of study. (See Appendix I for the grant, submitted March 20, 2013 to the NEH). This will be the first institute of its kind and will complement the institutes offered for university faculty (the Digital Humanities Summer Institute, for example, at the University of British Columbia, Victoria <http://www.dhsi.org/>). It could foster a national community of practice among community college humanists. At a time when many question the value of humanities, digital humanities offers a new approach and relevance and could reinvigorate community college students’ interest in the humanities as it has done with university and four-year school students.

As for my own work, my sabbatical came at a critical time in my career at Lane. At mid-career I am gratified that it’s not only possible but encouraged at Lane to become an expert in something entirely new—in fact, something that barely existed when I earned my degree. (I worked at the Poetry Rare Books Room at the University at Buffalo in the 1990s when they were just beginning to use OCR scanners to scan in original documents for digitization. Now we do this in the workrooms at Lane and email the results.) My work on the Title III Engaging Students grant led me to this new engagement, an unexpected benefit of developing my practice and pedagogy for that grant. Many of us faculty may be teaching for 30 years or more, and it’s essential that we challenge ourselves. This is the way we can best serve students: to continuously renew our intellect, our practice, our horizons, as this is what we ask of our students.