National Endowment for the Humanities
Office of Digital Humanities

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

This sample of the narrative portion from a grant is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Office of Digital Humanities well before a grant deadline. This sample proposal does not include a budget, letters of commitment, or resumes.

Project Title: Looking for Whitman: the Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman
Institution: CUNY, New York City College of Technology
Project Director: Matthew Gold
Grant Program: Digital Humanities Start Up Grants
Level: Level I
Statement of Significance and Impact

Looking for Whitman: the Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman

In the 1855 edition of the poem that he later titled “Song of Myself,” Walt Whitman advised readers to “look for me under your bootsoles.” This digital humanities project, “Looking for Whitman: the Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman,” will help students and faculty members from a range of educational institutions do exactly that by finding Whitman’s continuing presence in the landscape that surrounds them. Utilizing open-source tools to connect classrooms across the country, the project will create a collaborative, online space in which students can research Whitman’s connections to their individual locations and share that research with one another in a dynamic, social, web-based learning environment. The project will be interdisciplinary, and will have two foci: engaging participating faculty and students in an active learning experience that connects the poetry of Whitman to local resources, and creating an open repository of primary source materials from particular locations that Whitman inhabited. Taken together, these foci offer an innovative educational paradigm for making priceless in situ resources available to learners everywhere.

In concrete terms, the goal of the project is to engage classes at four academic institutions- the New York City College of Technology, CUNY; New York University; the University of Mary Washington; and Rutgers University, Camden—in a simultaneous, connected, semester-long inquiry into the relationship of Whitman’s poetry to local geography and history. Each class will explore Whitman’s poetry at the same time as it begins to research Whitman’s relationship to specific locales. In the New York location, students from City Tech and NYU will explore Whitman’s connections to the Brooklyn Waterfront, Lower Manhattan, and Long Island, and will focus particularly on Whitman’s early work, such as the landmark 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. At the University of Mary Washington, students will consider Whitman’s mid-career experience as a nurse in the Civil War, and will focus on his war-related writing of the 1860s. Students at Rutgers-Camden will explore Whitman’s late career as they explore the city in which Whitman spent the final decades of his long life.

This project would be a third-generation NEH grant, as it grows out of two recent NEH grants to the New York City College of Technology. Those grants, *Retentions and Transfiguration: the Technological Evolution and Social History of Five New York Neighborhoods* and *Water and Work: the History and Ecology of the Brooklyn Waterfront*. This proposal seeks to connect one subject in the latter grant, Whitman’s relationship to the Brooklyn waterfront, to a broader inquiry into Whitman’s life and work.

In addition to providing a provocative model for the future of web-enhanced pedagogy, this project will result in the creation of a valuable and open online resource that will be of use to scholars and students across the country. At its core, the project is consonant with the major themes of Whitman’s poetry: attachment to the people and places that make the American nation strong; openness to new technology and new experiences; dedication to the diversity of the American people; and celebration and promotion of America’s valuable intellectual resources.
Looking for Whitman: the Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman

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Attachment 5: Project Budget and Budget Narrative

Attachment 6: Biographies

Attachment 7: Letters of Commitment
  Letters of Institutional Support
  a. Dr. Bonne August, Provost and Vice President, New York City College of Technology, CUNY
  b. Dr. Alice L. Birney, American Literature Specialist, Manuscript Division, The Library of Congress
  c. Ms. Deborah Schwartz, President, Brooklyn Historical Society

  Lead Faculty Members—Letters and CVs
  a. Dr. Matthew K. Gold, New York City College of Technology, CUNY
  b. Dr. Karen Karbiener, New York University
  c. Dr. Tyler Hoffman, Rutgers University
  d. Dr. Mara Scanlon, University of Mary Washington

Attachment 8: Appendix A
  Letters of Support – External and Supplementary
  a. Dr. David S. Reynolds, Distinguished Professor of English and American Studies at the Ph.D. Program in English at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and Baruch College.
  b. Dr. Carol Singley, Associate Professor of English; Director, Undergraduate Liberal Studies; and Co-Director, American Studies Program, Rutgers University
  c. Mr. James Groom, Instructional Technology Specialist, University of Mary Washington
  d. Dr. Brady Earnhart, Visiting Assistant Professor of English, University of Mary Washington

Attachment 9: Appendix B
  List of Archival Resources and Texts by Location

Attachment 10: Appendix C
  New York City College of Technology (CUNY) Fact Sheet
List of Participants

Earnhart, Brady. University of Mary Washington.

Gold, Matthew K. New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

Groom, James. University of Mary Washington.

Hoffman, Tyler. Rutgers University.

Karbiener, Karen. New York University.

Kelly, T. Mills. George Mason University.

Reynolds, David S. CUNY Graduate Center.

Scanlon, Mara. University of Mary Washington.

Singley, Carol. Rutgers University.
Looking for Whitman: the Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence;
I project myself—also I return—I am with you, and know how it is.

Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt;
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd;
Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh’d;
Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood, yet was hurried;
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships, and the thick-stem’d pipes of steamboats, I look’d.

— Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1856)

1. Introduction

In the 1855 edition of the poem that he later titled “Song of Myself,” Walt Whitman advised readers to “look for me under your bootsoles.” This Level 1 digital humanities project, “Looking for Whitman: the Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman,” will help students and faculty members from a range of educational institutions do exactly that by finding the traces of Whitman’s presence in the landscape that surrounds them. Utilizing open-source tools to connect classrooms across the country, the project will create a collaborative, online space in which students can research Whitman’s connections to their individual locations and share that research with one another in a dynamic, social, web-based learning environment. The project will be interdisciplinary, and will have two foci: engaging participating faculty and students in an active learning experience that connects the Whitman’s poetry to local resources, and creating an open repository of primary source materials from particular locations that Whitman inhabited. Taken together, these foci offer an innovative educational paradigm for making priceless in-situ resources available to learners everywhere.

The goal of the entire project is to engage faculty members (and, ultimately, their students) at four institutions—the New York City College of Technology (CUNY); New York University; the University of Mary Washington; and Rutgers University, Camden—in the preparation of a series of concurrent, connected, semester-long courses that will examine the relationship of Whitman’s poetry to local geography and history. Faculty members will develop, and eventually teach, courses that explore the relationship of Whitman’s work to specific locations. In the New York location, faculty members will design courses that explore Whitman’s connections to the Brooklyn Waterfront, Lower Manhattan, and Long Island, with a particular focus on Whitman’s early work, such as the landmark 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. At the University of Mary Washington, the lead faculty member will create a course based around Whitman’s mid-career experience as a nurse in Washington, D.C. during the Civil War;
this course will focus on Whitman’s war-related writing of the 1860s. The lead faculty member at Rutgers-Camden will develop a course that explores Whitman’s late career as it investigates the city in which Whitman spent the final decades of his long life. Each of these courses will concentrate especially on researching and publicizing the archival records unique to each location -- an activity that, when the courses are taught, will help students experience the value and excitement of literary and historical research. Faculty members will work with local libraries, historical societies, and museums to identify and make available site-specific Whitman-related resources.

2. Enhancing the Humanities Through the Use of Emerging Technologies

Open-source technology is at the heart of this project, for it is through open-source technology that, when the course run, students will be able to connect to one another during the Level 2 phase of the project. The digital center of the project will be a large scale installation of WordPress Multi-User, an open-source blogging platform that enables the creation of multiple blogs from a single installation. Each of the four classes will establish a group blog, and each individual student will have an individual blog to reflect upon his or her experience in the course. The nexus of the entire project will be a central page on the website which will aggregate blog posts, digital images, and wiki entries from each of the four classes exploring Whitman’s poetry, so that students from one location will be able to follow the progress of students in other locations.

In the course of this project, students and faculty members will be encouraged to follow Whitman’s call, in Leaves of Grass, to “Unscrew the locks from the doors!/Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!” as they move their learning outside of the four walls of the traditional classroom and into the geographical locations in which Whitman lived and worked. For example, students in the New York/Brooklyn location will travel to the Fulton Ferry Landing at the base of the old Fulton Street. As they gaze across the East River and read aloud the words of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” which have been etched into the railing encasing the landing, they will experience a scene much like the one Whitman experienced when he imagined future readers standing at the same spot. Students will take digital photographs of this location, add them to the image-sharing service Flickr, and geo-tag them so that they can be located on a map. They will then write blog posts that describe this experience and incorporate photos from it. Meanwhile, students at other project locations will notice a stream of posts and images related to “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” roll through the central site aggregator. A student studying Whitman’s Specimen Days in Camden, who has just puzzled over Whitman’s ruminations upon the “soothing, silent, wondrous hours” he spent aboard the
Camden Ferry, will make an immediate connection to Whitman’s earlier experience at the Fulton Street Ferry.

In this way, the explorations of each class will inform and enrich the learning of the other classes. Site-wide tag clouds will provide an ongoing barometer of the issues, themes, and discoveries that students make during the course of the project. The central website, and the aggregator, in particular, will accomplish one of Whitman’s most cherished goals—to enable the creation of a fully engaged, connected, and democratic populace.

3. History and Duration of the Project

This proposal is being submitted as a Level 1 project with the goal of reaching Level 2 status within a year. During the first phase of the project (2008-2009), faculty members will focus on course development, website development, technology training, archival resource identification, curriculum planning, and workshops and seminars. The website will be established and tested by lead faculty at each institution. This will allow instructors to familiarize themselves with the tools that will be used in the Level 2 project. It will also allow them to begin the process of gathering resources, compiling Help and “Frequently Asked Questions” guides, and designing course/project websites. Participating faculty members will gather three times over the course of the Level 1 Grant to discuss the project in person, to familiarize themselves with the local resources of each participating institution, and to participate in technology training.

In the second phase of the project (2009-10), which we hope will be supported by a Level 2 grant, students from participating institutions will join the project as part of credit-bearing semester-long courses, and will begin to use the resources created during the Level 1 phase of the project. Although plans for continuing the project after its second year are not currently in place, the project could be extended in the future to include other locations that were important to Whitman’s life and work, such as Boston and New Orleans.

4. Staff

This project is being organized by Dr. Matthew K. Gold, Assistant Professor of English at the New York City College of Technology, CUNY. Dr. Gold was inspired to create this project when he heard NYU Professor Karen Karbiener speak to faculty members participating in the NEH-sponsored faculty development seminar at City Tech, “Water and Work: the History and Ecology of the Brooklyn Waterfront,” about Whitman’s connections to downtown Brooklyn. Dr. Gold and Dr. Karbiener will be joined as lead faculty members on the project by Dr. Tyler Hoffman and Dr. Mara Scanlon. Dr. Hoffman is an Associate Professor English at Rutgers-Camden and the editor of
the online Whitman journal, *The Mickle Street Review*. Dr. Scanlon is Associate Professor of English at The University of Mary Washington. Two additional faculty members, Dr. Carol Singley at Rutgers-Camden and Dr. Brady Earnhart at the University of Mary Washington, will serve as supplementary faculty members. Jim Groom, an Instructional Technology Specialist at the University of Mary Washington, and Dr. T. Mills Kelly, the Associate Director of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, will serve as a Technology Advisors for the project. Full biographies and CVs of all participants may be found later in this application.

5. Methods

This project will enable faculty members and students to approach Whitman, and Whitman’s places, in a variety of innovative ways. It will move them out of the classroom and into the locations in which Whitman lived and worked, the places from which he drew inspiration for his celebratory poetry. After visiting these locations, students and faculty members will engage a state-of-the-art digital personal learning environment that will utilize various Web 2.0 services, such as YouTube, Flickr, del.icio.us, and Twitter to enable collaboration on an exciting cross-campus project. Students and faculty members participating in the project will learn valuable technological skills that will make them more attractive candidates in an increasingly competitive job market.

The cross-campus, interdisciplinary nature of this project is very important to its success. Participants will have the chance to work with students from campuses that are quite different from one another: a city university, a large public state university, a public liberal-arts college, and a private research institution. The diversity of the participants in the project reflects Whitman’s own belief that America’s greatest strength lies in the diversity of its citizens and institutions.

Indeed, the project will be consonant with the major themes of Whitman’s poetry: it will forge active connections between participants in various parts of the country, reflecting Whitman’s essential belief in connection and adherence to the benefits of diversity.

6. Final Product and Dissemination

Dissemination is, in many ways, the essence of this project, since the concept of dissemination is inherent in its production. The final product of the Level 1 portion of this grant will be the integration of the various components described in this proposal: faculty members will have developed syllabi for their courses, identified local Whitman-related resources in their locations, and prepared assignments that integrate those resources into the course. Faculty
will also be trained, by the end of the grant, on the technological tools that will be used in Level 2 section of the project. Lead faculty members will have participated in three development workshops during the course of the year. Other final products will be a fully operational central course website with individual sections for each of the four classes.

The final products of the Level 1 grant will be disseminated during the Level 2 grant (2009-2010), when lead faculty members at each participating institution will teach an English course as part of the project. Once the Level 2 of the project has been completed, the central website will remain online as an open resource that can be accessed and expanded by future students and scholars.

7. Work Plan

Academic Year 2008-2009 (Level 1 NEH Grant)

Course Development: Throughout the year, lead faculty members will assemble course texts and syllabi, explore local resources, and make necessary logistical arrangements for their courses to be taught at their universities.

Website Development: Project coders and designers, under the advisement of the PI, will design and implement the website that will serve as the pedagogical center of the project. Tasks include installation of WordPress Multi-User, MediaWiki, and SMF Discussion Boards; graphic design for each classroom space; installation of site-wide plugins; PHP coding and MySQL database management; development of support documents for students and professors.

Faculty Technology Training: Lead faculty members will familiarize themselves with the blogging and wiki tools that will be used on the project website. They will gather for two in-person technology workshops (October 2008 and January 2009) to be led by Mr. James Groom and Dr. T. Mills Kelly, technological advisors to the project, and they will utilize the pilot project website throughout the year as they master the technological tools associated with the project.

Resource Identification and Development: Lead faculty members will research and identify local archival resources related to Whitman’s work that can be used in the project. They will work with library and museum educators to integrate those resources into their syllabi, arranging sets of pre-designed research projects for interested students.

Faculty Workshops and Seminars: Lead faculty members will gather three times during the academic year. Two of those gatherings, as noted above, will focus largely on technology. The third, to take place in May 2009, will occur in New York, where Dr. David S. Reynolds will lead a workshop on Whitman’s life and work.