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PROPOSAL COVER PAGE

Title of Project:
eBlackCU: A Collaborative Portal on the African-American Experience in Champaign-Urbana

Name, Title, and Affiliation of Primary Applicant (Principal Investigator):
Noah Lenstra, Certificate of Advanced Study student, Graduate School of Library and Information Science

Names, Titles, and Affiliation of other Personnel:
Abdul Alkalimat, Professor, African-American Studies and Library and Information Science

Amount of Request: $20,000_____

Type of Project (check all that apply):
Community Related Project _X____
Course Proposal _____
Creative Work/Performance _____
Lecture/Seminar Series _____
Exhibition __X__
Other _____

Names, Titles, Affiliation of Suggested Peer Reviewers (to be consulted only when the Review Committee requests additional information to better evaluate proposal).

Clare H. Crowston
Associate Professor of History
History
309 Gregory Hall
810 S Wright
M/C 466
Urbana, IL 61801
(217)244-2095
crowston@illinois.edu

Jennifer F. Hamer
Associate Professor
African American Studies
1201 W. Nevada
217-333-7781
jhamer@illinois.edu

_____ date_____
Principal Investigator
_____ date_____
Department or Unit Head (required)

I. Narrative

The eBlack Champaign-Urbana (eBlackCU) project, if funded, will create a participatory digital portal on the history and culture of African-American experiences in Champaign-Urbana. Through engagement with local cultural heritage institutions, primary and secondary school educators, African-American citizens and groups, and Black Studies scholars, the project team will digitize materials related to African-American cultural life across Champaign-Urbana in a way that both respects and incorporates the opinions and desires of multiple stake-holders invested in this history. Furthermore, the project team will build sustainable bridges with institutions and historically marginalized populations upon which future University public engagement initiatives can draw.

As the letters of commitment to this grant attest, the preservation and transmission of African-American history and memory in Champaign-Urbana has been a persistent concern. This grant-funded project will help address this concern by creating a virtual place where resources can be digitized, stored, commented upon and made accessible for all. This project will support eBlack Illinois, the vision of UI Professor Abdul Alkalimat. Professor Alkalimat is building a comprehensive digital database of the Black experience in Illinois, created with the participation of both academic and community-based organizations. In addition, eBlackCU will contribute to the technical and social infrastructure necessary for a proposed Music, Access and Digitization Public Computer Center (MAD Lab) to be located in north Champaign with the participation of University faculty and students.[1] Undergirding all these projects is the belief that closing the digital divide requires more than the diffusion of technology; it also requires the collaborative digitization of cultural life and history.

Throughout the implementation of eBlackCU the project team can rely on the support of the Community Informatics Initiative (CII) within the Graduate School for Library and Information Science (GSLIS), http://cii.illinois.edu/, which has among its goals: "to work with people to develop information and communication technologies to achieve their goals and foster collaborations across campus, local, national and international communities." CII has funded and supported similar projects across campus through its CII Fellows program, such as Anthropology professor Christopher C. Fennell's New Philadelphia Archaelogy Project (http://www.histarch.uiuc.edu/NP/). CII director Ann Bishop has demonstrated her commitment to eBlackCU both by pledging $1000 from her University research funds and by donating staff time for the project, if funded. Furthermore, faculty, staff and students of various courses that have public-engagement components within GSLIS can also be counted upon for advice and support throughout the implementation of this project.

The project implementation will be shaped through meetings between the project staff and representatives from our public partners, the Early American Museum, the Champaign County Historical Archives, the American History Teachers Collaborative, and Urbana high school teacher Michael Pollock. Both the Museum and Archives, as publicly-funded cultural heritage institutions, have sought to collect material about, and to tell stories of, the African-American experiences in Champaign County over time. The American History Teachers Collaborative has worked to make these primary sources meaningfully accessible to primary and secondary school educators and students by enabling educators to embed digitized primary sources into lesson plans. Educator Michael Pollock has worked to make his curriculum on African-American History more "localized" by drawing on digitized resources to make history come alive for his students. These public partners' collections, resources, contacts and dedication make them excellent partners to digitize African-American life and culture in Champaign-Urbana and to sustain ongoing efforts after grant-funding terminates.

The development of eBlackCU will involve six main steps. The six stages of the project include: 1) developing a eBlackCU prototype using the open-source Omeka Web 2.0 Publishing Tool (http://omeka.org), built upon a small amount of digitized content from our public partners' collections; 2) holding open meetings at various locations across Champaign-Urbana to advertise the existence of this new tool, to solicit the opinions of citizens about what aspects of African-American history and culture they find most in need of preservation and

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[1] This computer laboratory is part of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's proposed Urbana-Champaign Big Broadband Above Ground PCC (UC2B Public Computing Centers), proposed through the U.S. Government's Broadband USA program, http://www.ntia.doc.gov/broadbandgrants/applications/summaries/2964.pdf

dissemination, and to solicit advice about how these stories should be told; 3) identifying and digitizing resources from the collections of archives, museums, libraries and private individuals, and securing signed permissions to digitally reproduce these resources within eBlackCU; 4) searching the Internet to find other publicly accessible data and resources on African-American experiences in Champaign County that can be linked into eBlackCU; 5) continuing to hold community workshops that will work to ensure that this tool has community buy-in and that potential users and contributors feel comfortable using the tool as it develops; and 6) launching the portal publicly, featuring workshops showing interested community members how they can both download content from and upload content to eBlackCU. The public launch will also feature an on-campus symposium showcasing eBlackCU and discussing how the idea of this project could foster a culture of campus-community engagement and collaborative creation of knowledge.

        Embracing the idea of citizen scholars, this project seeks to put into the hands of everyday individuals the resources necessary not only to learn about history, but also to tell their own stories, share their memories and publish any original research using digital technology. As such, the project team envisions eBlackCU as not only a place to find information, but also as a place in which audiences can create new information. Furthermore, the inclusion of the American History Teachers Collaborative and educator Michael Pollock in this project demonstrates our commitment to making this database a powerful teaching aid for primary and secondary school educators seeking to incorporate local perspectives and digital technology into social studies and history curriculum.

        The sustainability of this project is ensured by our public partners' status as root institutions in Champaign County. The Museum and Archives has each existed for over fifty years; the American History Teachers Collaborative has existed since 2003. Their history as both cultural heritage institutions and as educational institutions places them in a position to continue to provide support and instruction for the portal into the future.

        Furthermore, the project will serve as a learning experiment from which best practices of how to digitize culture collaboratively can be developed. The experience of engaging both the general public and cultural heritage institutions around the digitization of African-American history and culture will produce knowledge that the project team can use as they implement eBlack Illinois. One grant source the project team will draw upon in scaling up this project to a larger geographic level is the Council on Library and Information Resources's "Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives" (http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/index.html), a project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that seeks to enable libraries, archives and museums to better document their collections using digital technology. The project team will apply for this grant to continue, deepen and extend eBlackCU after the funding from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement terminates.

        The project will be evaluated based on the degree of participation in eBlackCU. In qualitative assessments following community workshops we will ask project partners, educators and community members how they perceive the database: Do they see eBlackCU as a useful tool for remembering, sharing and learning about the past? Would they use it in the future to both upload and download content? How user-friendly is the tool? Does it meet the needs of all, or do some believe their voices and insights have not been fully included? In addition, our assessment will investigate whether or not this project has contributed to closing the digital divide by inspiring community members interested in the past to take ownership of a new technology to meet their needs. Finally, the project team will keep track of contributions to and downloads from the site, determining how much use eBlackCU has engendered from a quantitative point-of-view.

        In conclusion, this proposal aims to digitize materials related to the African-American experiences in Champaign-Urbana by partnering with local cultural heritage institutions. Both drawing upon and deepening the University of Illinois's history of public engagement, the project team will develop a participatory portal of African-American culture and history in Champaign-Urbana. Furthermore, a considerable amount of time and energy will be spent working with community members to ensure their commitment, trust and comfort with the tool. Given the collaborative nature of this effort, public involvement will be critical to the successful implementation of every stage in this project. The best practices developed during this project will inform the development of eBlack Illinois, which will scale this project up to the entire state.

II. Letters of Commitment (attached)

1) Anke Voss, Director, Champaign County Historical Archives
2) Cheryl Kennedy, Director, Early American Museum (Doris K. Wylie Hoskins Archive for Cultural Diversity)
3) Alexis Jones (Program Coordinator, American History Teachers Collaborative, Urbana School District)
4) Michael Pollock (Social studies teacher, Urbana High School)

III. Budget

I. Salaries	Funding requested from grant	Funding from other sources
Graduate hourly employee	$12490 ($16.97/hour * 736 hours)	
Cnsulting from Community Informatics Initiative staff		$1670 ($32.11/hour * 52 hours) – donated by Community Informatics Initiative
Primary Investigator Salary		Primary investigator will donate 35% of his time (14 hours/week), as part of his Certificate of Advanced Study final project.
Abdul Alkalimat, Professor, GSLIS and Afro-Am Studies		0% time consultant
II. Travel		
Travel to-and-from Mahomet and travel costs for setting up public workshops	$510 for gasoline and zipcars (where applicable)	
III. Supplies		
Materials to advertise and carryout various public workshops using eBlackCU at various community sites (schools, churches, libraries, etc.). Specific supplies needed include snacks, newspaper advertisements, radio, postcards, mailers and funding for room reservation (if needed).	$6000 (25 public meetings at $240 per workshop)	$1000 from Assistant Professor Ann Bishop, GSLIS, University Scholar Account
Materials to adveritse eBlackCU on-campus and to carry-out a symposium on its development	$1000 for snacks and advertisements	
Borrowed Digitzation Supplies (scanners, cameras, laptops, computers, server space)		$5000 ($2,500 in-kind contributions from Early American Museum and $2,500 in-kind contribution from Champaign County Historical Archives)
TOTALS:	**$20,000**	**$7,670**

IV. Timeline

January-February-March:
1) Advertise for and hire graduate hourly assistant, with consultation of project team and CII staff.
2) Begin construction of eBlackCU prototype by installing and mounting Omeka onto server. Insert a small amount of already digitized content from the Early American Museum and Champaign County Historical Archives into this prototype to begin testing.
3) Project staff and community partners set up five to ten public meetings (to be held in March and April) with primary/secondary school educators and African-American citizens from various parts of Champaign Urbana, and advertise events.
4) Project staff work with community partners to begin the preliminary identification of types of material to be digitized from cultural heritage repositories.
5) Assistant begins scouring the Internet for publicly accessible material on the African-American experience in Champaign County to be incorporated into portal (continues throughout year).

March-April:
1) Hold public meetings with educators and African-American citizens and groups to test eBlackCU prototype and to gather contact information of individuals interested in participating throughout the creation of project. Use information from meetings to guide the creation of portal.
2) Community partners and project staff begin digitization of content based on identified needs (to continue throughout summer).

May-August:
1) Research assistant and project staff continue testing eBlackCU through meeting with public partners and by holding public meetings, drawing on contacts established during earlier public meetings.
2) Hold workshops at community sites to educate on the use of the database and to encourage community annotation and tagging of digitized resources, as well as the uploading of community members' own resources.

September-October:
1) Conclude the digitization of content and the creation of the portal.
2) Set-up and begin advertising the official, public launch of the portal by organizing and holding workshops at various community sites, at the sites of our public partners, and on-campus.

November:
1) Transfer the database to the eBlack Illinois server (http://eblackillinois.net/) and begin the process of applying for grants to support this scaled-up project.
2) Commence project evaluation by analyzing data collected during public workshops.

December:
1) Complete write-up of project evaluation, with the input of all public partners, and submit to the Office of Public Engagement by December 15, 2010.