

## **Digital Community Engagement Pathway**

**Project Rationale:** Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) and Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC) are requesting funds to support the planning of a Digital Community Engagement Pathway that will challenge the traditional boundaries of the classroom. Fellows, who may be incoming freshman at SIUE or at LCCC who plan to transfer to SIUE, will be selected during admissions. The research teams will integrate digital humanities and social sciences methods to serve broader public needs and foster a rewarding relationship between the community and the University. The humanities are often excluded from discussions of global problems despite the importance of studying culture to understand systemic social and geopolitical issues. This Digital Community Engagement Pathway will demonstrate the linkages between the social sciences and the humanities, and students will experience firsthand the applicability of their majors for a world beyond the University. This program will provide meaningful learning experiences for underrepresented and first-generation students and foster better campus retention rates while increasing the number of humanities majors.

During their course of study, fellows will work in research teams with faculty and community partners to address major social problems, such as nutrition and food access, the challenges of intergenerational communication, and poverty's manifestations across rural and urban environments. The Pathway will culminate in senior capstone projects and fulfill general education requirements in the humanities, communication, social sciences, and interdisciplinary studies for a total of approximately fifteen credit hours. The level of difficulty the research teams undertake will grow with students, and the curriculum will be intentionally organic, transforming each year based on student and faculty interest and community need. The full integration of humanities and social sciences methods will be essential to the team's work. They will apply the

tools of digital research, including data mining, mapping, storytelling, networking, and cultural analytics. Students and faculty will work together to structure a series of readings from diverse fields such as history, literature, anthropology, and sociology that supports their work, and they will meet twice weekly to study their problem using a blend of critical thinking, writing, and qualitative research methods. A team tasked with addressing food sustainability in the region might, for example, read philosophical essays from Wendell Berry's *Bringing it to the Table* and bell hooks's *Belonging* alongside historiographies like William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* and novels like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. These readings will deepen their understanding of the social and cultural implications of their problem. A food sustainability team might use their readings to support the informed creation of an interactive visualization about the encroachment of housing and development on farmland in the region along with digital stories about its cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts.

Located in Edwardsville, Illinois, SIUE is 20 miles northeast of St. Louis, Missouri. SIUE has experienced considerable growth in recent years with a total student headcount of 14,265. More than 60% of SIUE's enrollees are first-generation college students. The University has a higher education campus in East St. Louis, Illinois, which includes a Head Start program, a charter high school, and Upward Bound. East St. Louis is 98% African American, and more than 98% of students are on free or reduced lunch. The University provides programming from pre-K through high school and would like East St. Louis students to have a direct pipeline to a college education at SIUE. As a master's comprehensive regional university, SIUE is one of the few institutions of its type with a successful digital humanities and social sciences center, the Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics Scholarship Center (IRIS), which has received over 2.5 million dollars in grants from federal sources for its community-engaged digital projects.

The Pathway will be planned and executed with Lewis and Clark Community College. LCCC freshmen who plan to transfer to the University through the SIUE/LCCC 2+2 agreement may participate in research teams while completing their associates' degrees. The Pathway will be tied to LCCC's newly formed Honors College, which was designed to support those who are not traditionally thought of as honors students due to their GPAs or test scores. LCCC is a two-year institution with multiple campuses, a river research center, and community education centers located throughout the 220,439-person college district. LCCC serves approximately 8,000 credit students annually, nearly 40% of whom are first-generation college students.

The planning process will include a committee with three directors who will: 1) complete an environmental study to assess resources and needs, 2) develop a recruitment and financial aid plan to reach underserved students, 3) create a curricular integration for the research teams, and 4) determine project sustainability through a series of focus groups at both institutions.

**Intellectual Content:** The concept for the Digital Community Engagement Pathway draws upon research and practice in the digital humanities and social sciences. Two of the committee directors, Jessica DeSpain and Kristine Hildebrandt, have been using a team model in the IRIS Center since 2009, wherein students collaborate with faculty on the planning and execution of research. As a part of SIUE's Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities program, these students have completed fieldwork abroad, studied rare books, and served as near-peer mentors for digital humanities clubs at secondary schools. The digital humanities and social sciences focus of IRIS has given undergraduates a powerful combination of community and digital learning experiences and greater clarity on the value of their majors. They learn transferrable skills like writing for the web, project management, web development, and data visualization. Speaking of her work with DeSpain, one student noted, "Having one-on-one time with a faculty

member was one of the most rewarding aspects of my time as SIUE.... It was the first time that the work I was doing and the decisions I was making would have an impact on future researchers. This project shaped who I was as a student, and it gave me the courage I needed to add my voice in collaborations.” The research team model involves students in questions that matter to them and provides them with an audience beyond the University. By integrating research teams into the curriculum, the Pathway will provide underserved students sustained exposure to the benefits of experiential learning.

Models bringing together the digital humanities and social sciences with community engagement are at the forefront of current research. As Cathy N. Davidson’s recently released book *The New Education* indicates, the most innovative pedagogy designed to expose students to the experiences needed for the twenty-first century workplace is happening on the periphery of higher education. The Pathway will move digital community engagement from the periphery to the center through a full curricular integration. Though there are yet no models that use digital humanities and social sciences research teams to replace general education requirements, the planning committee will visit two programs doing similar work: Georgia Tech’s Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center (DILAC) and Digital Bridges for Humanistic Inquiry, a partnership between the University of Iowa and Grinnell College. DILAC combines the digital humanities with digital civics to provide a space in which faculty and students work together. Digital Bridges will serve as a useful model of cross-institutional collaboration.

SIUE has a track record for implementing what the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) calls High Impact Practices (HIPs), including undergraduate research, community-based learning, and capstones. In HIPs, students work with faculty on signature work “related to a question or problem that is important to the student and important to

society” (“Why Students Need Capstones and Signature Work”). SIUE has an undergraduate research program, an honors college, an award-winning capstone experience, and a host of service-learning opportunities. According to Tia Brown McNair, Vice President of AAC&U’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Student Success, participation in HIPs offers gains in personal and social development and increases deep learning, practical competence, and speaking and writing ability by more than 50%.

The Digital Community Engagement Pathway arose out of an initiative spearheaded by Provost Denise Cobb, who has written a letter of support for this application. Cobb wanted to reach the University’s underserved students while newly empowering faculty in the humanities and social sciences at the institution. As a part of this initiative, Cobb invited Dr. McNair to visit the University in Spring 2017 to consider issues of equity. During McNair’s visit, faculty and administration examined how underserved student populations were less likely to engage in the campus’s most successful HIPs. Underserved students often do not test high enough for participation in honors curricula and do not have time for extra-curricular opportunities. Increasing retention and graduation rates through access to HIPs is one of SIUE’s top priorities. The University's retention rate for returning sophomores is 74.3%, more than five points below the national average of 80.8%. The six-year graduation rate is 49.3%, ten points below the national average of 59.4% (national statistics are derived from a 2017 National Center for Education Statistics report, “The Condition of Education.” SIUE’s Fact Book includes the University’s retention and graduation rates). The Pathway will increase equity on campus by opening opportunities for students to work with faculty on community-driven research questions.

In line with SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke’s dedication to meaningful community outreach, Pathway fellows will take their education beyond the walls of the classroom. The third

planning committee director, Connie Frey Spurlock, is the Faculty Director of the University's Successful Communities Collaborative, a cross-disciplinary program that supports one-year partnerships between the University and communities as a part of the national EPIC Network, an award-winning program for fostering university/community partnerships. Building on Frey Spurlock's work, the Pathway will strengthen the University's commitment to the region. St. Louis's Metro East is a nexus of racial, ethnic, regional, socioeconomic, and generational diversity, and a microcosm of national trends. Although cities like Edwardsville are among the wealthiest in the St. Louis metropolitan area, Madison and St. Clair counties also include East St. Louis, Granite City, and Alton—cities characteristic of the rust belt that have been negatively impacted by declining industries and falling populations. Hamel and New Douglas are sparsely populated rural farming communities with predominantly white populations, whereas more than 90% of the residents in Madison and Venice are African American. The Pathway will attempt to bridge the urban rural divide by focusing on broad problems in their specific regional context. The program will foster a reciprocal relationship with community partners and create more positive public perceptions of the humanities and social sciences as fields of study.

**Planning Committee:** The planning committee includes faculty in the humanities and social sciences who have experience with digital research and community engagement. Because this committee will study the feasibility of integrating the Pathway into the curriculum, stakeholders in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs will attend select meetings and consult as necessary.

Drs. Jessica DeSpain, Connie Frey Spurlock, and Kristine Hildebrandt will be the directors and researchers for the committee. DeSpain is Associate Professor of English at SIUE and the co-founder and co-director of IRIS. DeSpain has used a research team model for the past seven years with students, and she designed the curriculum for SIUE's Digital Humanities and

Social Sciences minor. She is Co-PI and curriculum director for *Digital East St. Louis*, an \$890,000 grant funded by the National Science Foundation. The project tests a place-based model that uses the digital humanities to increase student interest in STEM fields. DeSpain teaches several courses with experiential and service learning components.

Frey Spurlock is an Associate Professor of Sociology and was the first SIUE Sustainability Faculty Fellow. Her research interests include recycling behaviors, sustainability literacy, and pedagogy for sustainability. Frey Spurlock co-founded the Mississippi Project at SIUE, a faculty development workshop designed to facilitate curricular transformation. Now in its seventh year, the workshop is recognized as one of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's thirteen curriculum centers. Her teaching incorporates applied community projects and service learning. She is active in the St. Louis Higher Education Sustainability Consortium, and directs the SIUE Successful Communities Collaborative.

Hildebrandt is Associate Professor of Linguistics at SIUE and co-director of IRIS. Her research centers on endangered Sino-Tibetan languages in Nepal. She uses research teams with students on the Manang Languages Project, which was awarded a National Science Foundation Career Grant of \$408,520. The project documents and archives the phonetics/phonology, lexicon, and discourse patterns of four languages spoken in Manang District using a multimedia atlas. She also leads the NSF-sponsored Nepal Earthquake Narratives Project that documents survivor experiences and feelings about the 2015 earthquakes. Hildebrandt frequently brings students with her into the field, and she is offers a global perspective on the planning committee's consideration of large-scale social problems.

Katie Knowles is the IRIS Project Manager. Knowles has an MA from the University of Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute at Stratford-upon-Avon. In her role with IRIS, Knowles has

worked one-on-one with faculty and students to design digital projects, develop sustainability plans, and collect and assess outcomes. She has also collaborated with the area's Regional Office of Education and several community organizations through her role in IRIS.

In addition to the directors and researchers, three other faculty will attend monthly meetings and consult on project development and feasibility: Howard Ramsby, Jill Lane, and Jennifer Cline. Ramsby is Full Professor of English at SIUE. His research interests include modern African American literature, race representation and technology, and textual scholarship. He collaborates with DeSpain on Digital East St. Louis and has coordinated an online reading group with over 100 students since 2009. He has facilitated public conversations at NEH Summer Institutes on African American poetry and conducted reading discussions in East St. Louis and at SIUE as part of "The Langston Hughes National Poetry Project." Ramsby has cultivated a strong, longstanding relationship with African American communities in East St. Louis and will be integral to establishing effective recruitment strategies and curricular design.

Jill Lane is the Dean of Transfer Programs at LCCC. Prior to her appointment, she was an Assistant Professor of Speech. Lane also served as the Director of Governmental Relations at the Illinois Community College Board where she lobbied the Illinois Legislature on behalf of Illinois's community college system. She has been instrumental in the formation of LCCC's Honors College and will be an ideal institutional partner for designing the Pathway.

Jennifer Cline is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at LCCC. She designed and now coordinates their Honors College, which is an interdisciplinary program primarily incorporating the humanities and social sciences. She has experience developing honors interdisciplinary courses related to social problems including racial and ethnic relations. She has continued her academic training by taking courses focused on innovative teaching methods and service



learning. She is also Vice President of the Alton Main Street Executive Board. Cline will be particularly effective for imagining what shape the Pathway project will take at LCCC.

As directors, DeSpain, Hildebrandt, and Frey Spurlock will create surveys, conduct research, finalize materials, and promote the project. Knowles will manage the planning process, administer assessments, and collect and analyze results. The full planning committee will provide feedback, complete portions of the environmental study, and lead focus groups.

Other stakeholders will attend planning committee meetings bi-monthly. SIUE's Assistant Director of Civic Engagement, Sarah Laux, will help develop a network of community partners. Kevin Thomas, the Director of Student Retention and Success, will provide research into student outcomes and consult on assessment. Provost and Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Denise Cobb will serve ex-officio and attend planning meetings as needed. Leaders in community organizations, including Emily Morrison from the Goshen Market Foundation, will help develop a reciprocal, sustainable plan for involvement of community partners.

**Planning Process:** Phase 1 will focus on research and data collection. In May of 2018, Knowles will welcome the planning committee and make them aware of their responsibilities. The directors will develop a faculty survey, plan an environmental study of resources and needs, and develop a research plan. During June and July, directors will begin their research by visiting Georgia Tech and the University of Iowa. They will meet with Provost Cobb to discuss integrating the Pathway into general education requirements. In August, Knowles will distribute the faculty survey and analyze results. The committee will meet to discuss research outcomes.

During Phase 2, the committee will work on curricular and community planning. In September and October, the directors will design course materials with a draft completed by the end of October. The committee will hold focus groups with community stakeholders to discuss

how to set up a reciprocal relationship for all parties. They will also meet with Financial Aid, Research and Projects, and the SIUE Foundation to research funding options for fellows.

In Phase 3, the committee will focus on curricular revisions and recruitment. In November, members of the full committee will conduct focus groups at both institutions to share course materials, determine faculty interest, and consider needed training. The committee will adjust curricular materials based on feedback. Committee meetings in December and January will be devoted to developing a recruitment plan that targets underserved populations. The result will be a specialized admissions process for fellows by month's end.

During Phase 4, the committee will share outcomes and assess feasibility. In February and March, the directors will finalize the curricular, community, and recruitment plans along with the proposal for a pilot study. All materials will be shared on a website for University-wide review and commentary through April. The committee will present results at all-faculty meetings and to the boards of select community organizations. During a final meeting, the committee will discuss the feasibility of and plans for pilot implementation.

### **Summary Assessment**

Assessment of the planning process will include a university-wide faculty survey at the beginning and end of the project and qualitative feedback from faculty and community focus groups. The assessment of the project's feasibility will consider: 1) whether enough faculty are engaged in the research teams model and the curricular plans to participate in the pilot, 2) whether the plans for recruitment and financial aid are supported by administration and have enough financial backing, 3) whether the program will recruit and retain enough incoming students, and 4) whether community organizations are willing to participate in the program. If the planning period is successful, the committee hopes to implement a pilot in September 2019.

## **Work Plan**

### **Phase 1: Research and Data Collection**

#### **May 2018**

Knowles will develop information packets for the committee that will include a calendar of project meetings, an outline of goals and objectives, and existing research related to the Digital Community Engagement Pathway. Throughout the month, directors DeSpain, Frey Spurlock, and Hildebrandt will develop a faculty survey to record the attitudes of teaching faculty in the humanities and social sciences toward digital projects, service learning, and underserved students at SIUE and LCCC. The directors will also finalize their research plan by drawing on relevant readings and programs listed in this appendix. At their first meeting, the committee will design an environmental study for both campuses. They will share the work of investigating existing curricular structure, financial aid, recruitment practices, and retention efforts to ascertain how to develop a sustainable program that builds on current infrastructure.

#### **June 2018**

The directors will plan the itinerary for their visits to comparable programs at Georgia Tech, Grinnell College, and the University of Iowa where they will meet with students and faculty. During these visits, they will document how students and faculty work together in interdisciplinary teams, how they integrate community partnerships into their programs, and how they share the workload and data of digital projects cross-institutionally. When they return, the directors will create a report with highlights from their visit to present at the committee meeting. Throughout the remainder of the month, they will continue research by reviewing relevant literature and reaching out to other programs.

#### **July 2018**

The directors will continue research while taking steps to complete the environmental study. Along with committee members, they will conduct interviews of staff in Admissions, General Advising, the Office of Retention and Student Success, Financial Aid, Research and Projects, and the SIUE Foundation. Cline and Lane will conduct these same interviews at LCCC. After reviewing the results of the environmental study at the July meeting, the directors and Lane will meet with Provost Cobb to discuss integrating the Pathway into established general education requirements and other aspects of the University's infrastructure. The meeting will particularly focus on how to form a strong collaboration with LCCC so that students transferring from the community college can fully participate in the program through the 2+2 agreement.

#### **August 2018**

During the first week, Knowles will distribute the faculty survey and compile the results into a report to present to the committee. The committee will discuss the conversation with Cobb and consider the implications of the survey data with a focus on faculty interest and training needs. At this assessment-based meeting, they will revisit the goals and objectives to determine how to adjust the project trajectory based on the summer's findings and how they should move forward into the next phase of curricular planning and community outreach.

## **Phase 2: Curricular and Community Planning**

### **September 2018**

Using their results from summer research, directors will begin designing a curriculum that integrates weekly team meetings, monthly cross-disciplinary collaborations, and yearly colloquiums. The directors will be tasked with creating a set of materials that allows for adaptability while still providing enough structure for student and faculty participation. The planning committee will work with the SIUE Successful Communities Collaborative, directed by Frey Spurlock, to review applications from community organizations that have applied to partner with students and faculty in searching for solutions to local environmental, social, and economic issues. The committee will also review SSCC's guidelines for expectations for both the community and the students involved in experiential learning and adapt them for the Pathway. At the September meeting, directors will present a first draft of the curriculum for further revisions.

### **October 2018**

Committee members will reach out to select community organizations to attend focus groups in which they'll discuss their potential participation and the best methods for ensuring a reciprocal, sustainable relationship between the community and the program. The committee will also meet with Financial Aid, Research and Projects, and the SIUE Foundation a second time to begin exploring funding options for admitted students. They will discuss sources of funding and additional fundraising, grant writing, and outreach that should take place. The directors will finalize the first draft of course materials. At the October meeting, the committee will begin to outline best practices for community involvement to be included in the Pathway's website where all final materials from the planning process will be shared.

## **Phase 3: Curricular Revisions and Recruitment**

### **November 2018**

Members of the planning committee will meet with faculty focus groups at both SIUE and LCCC who will have time to review drafts of the Pathway curriculum in advance of the meeting. The committee will identify faculty who are willing to participate and begin to develop the necessary training in digital projects and service-learning to prepare these faculty members to conduct the research teams. The directors will present the results of the focus groups at the November meeting and begin to revise the curricula based on feedback.

### **December 2018**

The committee will collaborate with Admissions to develop a recruitment plan that targets underserved populations and first-generation college students. They will identify area high schools to visit, needed promotional materials, and best recruitment strategies.

### **January 2019**

The committee will continue to work with Admissions as they design a program application. They will define admissions requirements and develop a plan for selecting which applicants will be extended fellowships through the program. The full recruitment plan will be finalized through discussions at the January meeting.

## **Phase 4: Sharing Outcomes and Assessing Feasibility**

### **February 2019**

The planning committee will finalize the curricular, community, and recruitment plans. Additionally, they will develop the framework for a pilot study, determining its size, possible faculty participants, and community partners. They will combine all materials on a Pathway website, open to public comment at SIUE and LCCC through April.

### **March 2019**

Knowles will complete the Pathway's website along with the online survey and begin to process feedback. The directors will craft presentations to share the planning process results with both institutions and the public. The committee will discuss needed revisions to the draft at the March meeting.

### **April 2019**

The committee will present their proposal for the Pathway during all-faculty meetings at SIUE and LCCC. They will also present the program to the boards of select community organizations. The committee will review feedback gathered through the online survey, paper surveys collected at presentations, and public commentary. They will discuss the feasibility of pilot implementation, and determine the next steps to be taken. A final report and pilot plan will be provided to Provost Cobb for consideration.

## Relevant Readings and Comparable Programs

This list covers selected literature that will be instructive while developing the Digital Community Engagement Pathway. There are currently no examples of digital community engagement research teams that replace elements of the core general education curriculum. As such, the research required during the planning stage covers several fields that will require further synthesis by the committee directors. These include readings on campus community engagement, cross-disciplinary work in the humanities and social sciences, service learning, the use of research team models with students, and recruitment and retention efforts for underrepresented students (though there is a wealth of research in this last category for STEM fields, it is relatively limited in the humanities and social sciences). In addition, the directors will visit two sites that will provide insight into similar cross-institutional, community-engaged programs and reach out to several others; a list of these is provided at the end of this section. Resources marked with an asterisk are cited in the narrative.

### Community-Engaged Digital Humanities and Social Sciences

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### **Comparable Programs**

The following program examples are an amalgamation of digital community engagement, cross-disciplinary research teams, collaboration between multiple academic institutions, and the use of High Impact Practices. While none fully encompass all the elements to be found in the Digital Community Engagement Pathway, they provide a learning opportunity to see how individual parts function successfully. Programs marked with an asterisk will be visited by the committee directors.

#### [Bonner Program](#)

The Bonner Foundation makes use of High Impact Practices to engage underrepresented students in institutions of higher education as well as the community through service-learning.

#### [Digital Bridges for Humanistic Inquiry](#) at Grinnell College and the University of Iowa\*

This project exemplifies how two higher education institutions with different strengths and student bodies can collaborate on digital projects to increase cross-institutional research opportunities for undergraduate students.

#### [Digital Humanities and Social Engagement Cluster](#) at Dartmouth College

One of several interdisciplinary research teams at Dartmouth, this cluster explores social and ethical considerations of living in an era of increasingly evolved complex technologies.

#### \*[The Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center \(DILAC\)](#) at Georgia Tech

Faculty and students collaborate on digital projects that investigate the practical applications of the way new technologies impact public life. DILAC is not currently integrated into the curriculum at Georgia Tech.

#### [EPIC-Network](#)

EPIC develops partnerships between institutions of higher education and communities that allow students to seek solutions to societal problems providing them with real-world context for what they learn in their coursework.

#### [HASTAC](#)

This is a collaborative, interdisciplinary community where scholars can share their born digital scholarship as well as tools, news, and research related to the digital humanities.

### [Story Center](#)

As an organization about allowing people agency in telling their stories, Story Center provide excellent examples of maintaining ethical integrity when developing digital projects with community members.