FY13 Funded Proposal: The University of Iowa Museum of Art Mapping Project: Art and Life in Africa

FY13 Innovations in Teaching with Technology Awards

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Proposal Title:</th>
<th>The University of Iowa Museum of Art Mapping Project: Art and Life in Africa</th>
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<tr>
<td>Investigators:</td>
<td>Catherine Hale, Christopher Roy</td>
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<td>Org Unit:</td>
<td>College of Liberal Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department(s):</td>
<td>Museum of Art, School of Art &amp; Art History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Awarded:</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
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As the custodians of The University of Iowa's world-class collections, one of our key priorities at the Museum of Art (UIMA) is to determine how we can best serve the research, teaching and learning objectives of the faculty and students across the university. In our current configuration (without a physical building) we are unable to make large numbers of objects available for viewing and study; however, we want to ensure that students and professors can continue to work with our extensive collections in ways that enhance their studies and open up new paths of inquiry and interdisciplinary exchange.

We are seeking funding to support the development of the University of Iowa Museum of Art Mapping Project, which will be a digital map that integrates the objects in our collections with a wide range of historical, cultural, environmental and other kinds of data. This online, publicly accessible map promises to be a rich research resource and teaching tool for faculty across the university and beyond. Since the 2008 flood, professors from disciplines such as History, Literature, Theatre Arts, Francophone Studies, Studio Arts and Art History have been bringing their students to the UIMA@IMU Visual Classroom to work with primary source material and explore the wider socio-political and historical contexts of their subject areas.

The UIMA Mapping Project is designed to support and enrich these aims by situating our objects relative to larger local and global themes that are addressed in various undergraduate curricula. Professors will be able to use our map in their lectures and, similarly, students will be able to use it as a vehicle for academic investigation (in the classroom, on their own time, or alongside the objects on display in our UIMA@IMU Visual Classroom space).

Specifically, the UIMA will use the WorldMap platform developed at Harvard University to geo-reference, or digitally "pin," the objects in our collections to their
What do you intend to do?

points of origin on a global map. We will then add a variety of “layers” of information that will make it possible to investigate individual objects in more depth as well as consider the relationships between them and their associated data. The data or “layers” will include such information as ethnolinguistic groupings, trade routes, healthcare, water bodies, population rates, religious sites, images and links to YouTube videos and Wikipedia entries.

We currently have a demo map showing the possibilities of this project available for viewing at the Harvard WorldMap website.

We anticipate this project’s development to take place over the next 5 years. Each phase of the project will focus on a different geographic area of our collection (ex. Phase I: Africa, Phase II: North America) and priorities will be determined in consultation with interested faculty and students at the University of Iowa.

We are currently requesting funding to support Phase I of the Mapping Project, which will be executed between July 2013 and June 2014 and will focus on our African collections. This phase of the project is conceived in partnership with Prof. Christopher Roy in the School of Art and Art History. Prof. Roy has been a pioneer in making scholarly resources (including articles, photographs and videos from across the African continent) available to a wide public through his Art and Life in Africa Project. Over the course of the 2013-2014 period we propose to create “layers” of the objects in the African collections at the UIMA as well as the content from Prof. Roy’s Art and Life in Africa Project for our map. These layers will be presented alongside supporting data from other sources (ex. Population statistics from the World Census, period maps from the McEvedy Atlas of African History) to create a comprehensive research resource for Prof. Roy, his students, and other members of the University community who are engaged in African studies.

Prof. Roy currently uses the collections of the UIMA and content from his Art and Life in Africa Project to teach his undergraduate survey course, The Arts of Africa, which has the highest enrollment of any course in the School of Art and Art History (currently 233 students). The idea that art and material culture from across the African continent needs to be understood within its larger social, political, environmental and historical contexts is fundamental to Prof. Roy’s teaching. The UIMA Mapping Project will make it possible for him to communicate these intersections in a way that is visually and conceptually accessible to students, both in lectures and in their research projects. One of Prof. Roy’s core assignments is to have students undertake a focused study of an object in the UIMA collections. Working with the Mapping Project would open up their investigations by helping them explore and identify a wide variety of factors impacting their object of study. In other words, the Mapping Project does not necessarily offer the “answers;” instead,
it encourages students to push their thinking and ask questions about integral relationships, which they can pursue through further study. An example of this would be a student who, by adding different layers of information to the map, observes that her object was made in the early 20th century on the border between present day Sierra Leone and Liberia, which was controlled at that time by the British. With these historical factors visible in relation to one another, she begins to see the mask’s formal parallels with British Coronation symbolism as a potentially significant avenue of inquiry.

To illustrate the potential of this project for student learning in another discipline, picture the following scenario: A professor in the English department is teaching Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958). That professor will be able to customize the UIMA map to address her topic by adding and removing various layers (simply by checking and unchecking the boxes of the data we have made available). For example, she could add a layer of ethnolinguistic data to show where the Igbo peoples live in Nigeria, a “period map” layer showing who controlled the area in the late 19th century (the British), a layer detailing Christian missionary activities in that same time period, and a layer showing slave trade routes. By adding an additional layer of UIMA objects, the mask of a Maiden Spirit, of which the author makes much reference, would appear in connection with these wider themes. The opacity of each layer is adjustable so students can readily see the interconnections between this complex historical data and, in turn, the sophisticated backdrop of Achebe’s novel. The map could also function as a helpful tool for a student wishing to learn more about the “Ibo” (as written in the novel). By adding a layer of ethnolinguistic data from 1959 (one year after the book was published) the student would be able to perform a search and locate “Ibo” on the map. He could then add a layer of ethnolinguistic groups from 2001 and see that the same peoples are referred to as “Igbo” in more contemporary scholarship and therefore begin locating a wider swath of resources on his topic.

The assessment strategy for the UIMA Mapping Project will be both quantitative and qualitative. The WorldMap platform has built-in tool that will report how often the map is viewed and by how many different users. Because the map will be presented through our website, we will also be able to make use of Google Analytics, which reports on the geographic locations of users, the pathways used to reach our map, and operating systems (and relatedly, devices), in addition to the frequency of visits. The success of the UIMA Mapping Project will also be evaluated through student and professor feedback. We will invite the students in Prof. Roy’s class and other users to report on usability of the site, whether they find it supports and enhances their studies and suggestions for improvement.

Demo map: [http://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/uima](http://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/uima)
The WorldMap platform we intend to work with is open access, so we are able to use it free of charge. I have been in touch with the Chair of the Steering Committee for WorldMap, Dr. Suzanne Blier, who indicated she anticipates it continuing to develop and be available for several years to come. While the WorldMap platform is presently most suited to meet the needs of the UIMA Mapping Project, GIS technology is constantly building and changing. To ensure that we are able to take full advantage of any platform, at any time, we will be building and storing all of our content for the UIMA Mapping Project on our own servers at the University of Iowa. To meet this need, we will require funds to cover the cost of extra storage space for high-resolution images, videos, and other content.

While we already possess high-resolution images of many of the objects in our collections, we do not have a comprehensive inventory. We will require the services of a photographer (casual, contract basis) to provide us with any images we do not currently possess.

To integrate the mapping project with our existing website will require some redesign. We will work with IMU Marketing and Design, with whom we have an ongoing relationship, to adapt our website. We will need to pay them an hourly rate for their work.

The most essential need for bringing this project to completion is a Graduate Assistant. Under the supervision of Catherine Hale, the Graduate Assistant will compile all of the content for the UIMA Mapping Project and create the layers. He or she will liaise with faculty around the university to identify their objectives and priorities and get feedback as the project develops. He or she will also be responsible for monitoring the statistical data associated with the Mapping Project and providing reports to the rest of the museum staff. We will not have the personnel available to complete this project without hiring a Graduate Assistant.

We are currently fundraising through the museum to acquire private support for the project. We anticipate access to about $5,000 through this channel.

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<td>Rough estimate of costs</td>
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- $1,500 for additional storage space for high res images and videos through ITS (fee for 1 Terabyte of space for 1 year)
- $5,000 for additional high resolution digital photography
- $3,500 for redesign of our UIMA website (based on cost of our most recent web redesign)
- $35,000 for graduate research assistant
- We are seeking $40,000 from the Innovations in Teaching with Technology Award.