The Digital Humanities Exchange: A Multimedia Trading Post for Game-Based Learning in the Humanities

2007 CAH Interdisciplinary Research Proposal, Grant/Contracts Category
Final Report

Submitted July 10, 2008

SECTION 1: Project Results

Overview

Our interdisciplinary team (McDaniel and Underberg from Digital Media, Kitalong from English, Fiore from Philosophy/IST, and Tripp from English/Philosophy) proposed to build upon our existing work in creating usable game-based technologies in the humanities to allow for an innovative, exchange-based approach to information management. Although our project team has now built or is currently building several humanities learning games, we did not aim to build another game through this proposal. Instead, our goal was to create an exchange mechanism to connect pioneers hoping to use virtual worlds with their own specialized content or with preexisting assets uploaded by other subject matter experts. Using the funds from the CAH Interdisciplinary Research Award, we began the construction of a trading post for scholars interested in using game-based learning for the humanities. Our ultimate goal is to disseminate knowledge about how to build educational computer games - even on a shoestring budget and with minimal technical resources or experience. From this, our objective is to position the College of Arts and Humanities as a leader in working with emerging technologies for humanities applications and provide exposure for the innovative work being done in this domain.

Project Results: Technical Results

The majority of our work on this project was completing late in the spring semester and early in the summer semester (through June 30). Working with CAH technical support and budgetary administrative staff, we were able to accomplish the following technical results:

- The ordering of a high-capacity Dell PowerEdge server to house the Digital Humanities Exchange
- Setup and installation of this new server
- Programming and development of a prototype Web-based system to serve as the initial test phase for our Digital Humanities Exchange portal (available at http://www.digitalhumanities.uchicago.edu/index.php).

We are continuing to work on this using student OPS funding from outside sources through the end of the summer and expect to have a "beta" version ready to launch in December, 2008.

Project Results: Scholarly Results

In addition to these achieved technical goals, our team also managed to accomplish several scholarly goals related to the publication, presentation, and continued funding of our project. These results are listed here:
Related Journal Articles Submitted


Related Conference Papers, Posters, and Presentations

SECTION 2: Outside Funding

Our primary outside funding source for this project is the National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-Up grant program. We submitted our proposal (a follow up from a rejected but favorably reviewed earlier proposal) on April 2, 2008. We will hear back from this submission in September.

Review comments from our earlier proposal submitted in 2007 (sought using last year’s interdisciplinary grant award funds) were very encouraging (and we are happy to send these along upon request). Using these comments as a starting point for this year’s submission, we submitted what we believe to be a substantially improved proposal.

In addition to the NEH grant, we also submitted two other related grants (one to the NEH workshop division and another to the MacArthur foundation). These grants, unfortunately, were not funded, but we continue to have high hopes for the NEH start up program.

Grant Submissions

SECTION 3: Budget Report

Initial Budget

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<tr>
<td>OPS Technical Support @ $10/hour * 100 hours</td>
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<td>OPS Web Programmer @ $14/hour * 300 hours</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dell PowerEdge 2950 Server, 3 Year Warranty, 3.5Tb Storage</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Travel/Conferencing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Game Conference for Marketing / Exposure (1 person)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit to Grant Agencies (1 person)</td>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
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<th>Consultant Stipend</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Subject Matter Expert Consultant (Mundy)</td>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
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| Total                                  | $13,200.00 |

The following table shows our initial requested budget. Although our technical expenditures were slightly higher than initially projected, we were able to stay fairly close to our submitted categories. Fortunately, our server was less expensive than we predicted, so this helped to mitigate our slightly increased production costs. Also, as Dr. Jane Aiken from the NEH attended UCF for a campus visit on February 28, 2008 (and several of our project members were able to attend this meeting), this helped to free up the funds allocated for a visit to the NEH to be used for production.

Below is the final breakdown of our project costs through June 30, 2008 (we managed to come in slightly under our initial projected budget):

Final Budget Breakdown

- Consultant fee (Carol Mundy – April, 2008): $1000.00
- Technical support fee (CAH technical support – May, 2008): $1000.00
- Server and equipment costs (including warranty – March, 2008): $3637.04
- Additional game development software costs (June, 2008): $511.95
- Conference airfare and registration fees (April, 2008): $815.00
- OPS student costs for design and programming work (March – June, 2008): $5860.50

Total: $12,824.49
SECTION 4: Collateral Material

The following pages show screen captures and wireframes that we developed to send along to the National Endowment for the Humanities as appendices for our proposal.

Sample Interface (Generic)

Figure 1 shows an interface design idea for the Digital Humanities Exchange. This screen capture shows the inner content page that will be displayed once a project has been selected from the home page.

Figure 1: Generic Interface Design
Sample Interface (Underground Railroad Game)

Figure 2 is similar to Figure 1, but in this case an actual example project is displayed in the interface. Note the integration of threaded discussion (both scholarly and technical topics) as well as the list of game reference assets and in-game assets. Recognizable icons will be used to indicate the file types of included assets. This project also includes links to associated archives such as the Dickinson College NEH Workshop Archive and the PBS Resource Bank site devoted to the Underground Railroad.
Figure 3 shows the layout for the Digital Humanities Exchange home page. The main page will list a small number of projects (six or so) and will allow visitors to access subpages using the navigation bar shown on the left-hand side of the page. Users can browse (look for existing projects and assets), contribute (create new projects and upload assets), discuss (use the embedded discussion forums), search (search for projects or assets by social group, historical period, topic, or keywords), or contact the DHE staff.

Figure 3: Home Page
Figure 4 shows a wireframe outline for the inner content page once a project has been selected from the home page (shown in Figure 3). Figures 1 and 2 show sample graphical interface ideas for this wireframe.

Figure 4: Wireframe, Inside Page

Figure 5 and Figure 6 show two functional mockups of Web forms that will be used to collect information about projects and their associated assets from contributing authors. These mockups are intended to show functionality only; their final designs would be compatible with the design ideas shown in Figures 1-2. Numerous “Add” links shown in both figures allow visitors to add additional selection options to default categories. Moderation for this functionality can be enabled if duplicitous or erroneous entries become a problem.

The options shown in these figures are not intended to be representative of the entire classification scheme used by the DHE. These are provided to illustrate sample items in each category. Time will be allocated in the scheduled work plan to research and/or develop comprehensive listings of historical periods, geographical periods, social groups, and humanities topics and subject areas.