

Proposal to the 2006 – 2007 Strategic Academic Initiatives Grant Solicitation

Project Title Pilot Online Student Research Symposium

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Additional project team members are being solicited throughout the arts and sciences disciplines during AY 2006 – 2007. The College's Online Advisory Committee will also provide feedback into this project. In addition to those listed above, this Committee includes:

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Proposal for a Pilot Online Student Research Symposium

Project Outline

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences ("LAS") proposes the development of a pilot Web-based undergraduate student research Symposium to be conducted during the spring semester of 2008. The preliminary Project Team anticipates that this Symposium will provide a much needed vehicle for distant students and invited others to present selected academic research in a scholarly setting, and will further offer the University of Illinois at Springfield ("UIS") the opportunity to lead in the development of standards in student research and creative activity in an online learning environment. While the initial intent of the Project Team is that this symposium will be delivered primarily via Web-based conferencing, we may consider including a small number of complimentary campus-based activities to facilitate the participation of a range of undergraduate students and faculty members throughout the liberal arts and sciences disciplines. The initial audience targeted for involvement includes undergraduate students however, based on pilot outcomes and Symposium evaluation annual participation could be extended to include graduate students, further promoting the goals of affiliation, collaboration, and interaction.

Project objectives include to:

1. Establish UIS as a leader in the generation of Web-based student scholarship and research.
2. Provide a venue for scholarship for distant students.
3. Strengthen mentoring and collaborative relationships between faculty and students.
4. Showcase the quality of student and faculty scholarship, research, and service.
5. Strengthen the affiliation and collaboration between online students and the University.
6. Promote recruitment and enrollment in liberal arts and sciences disciplines (and online majors).
7. Plan for the development of an annual online journal based on Symposium presentations as a conference outcome.
8. Utilize pilot outcomes to investigate offering the Symposium on an annual basis, and to extend participation.

The initial organization for this initiative has already begun; the Proposal Team seeks funding from the Provost's Office to continue development that will invite broad participation from both students learning and faculty members teaching in those programs offering the online enrollment option.

Project Scope and Opportunities for Collaboration

A project such as this requires strong support of and participation by a range of University personnel; establishing a broad based Symposium Advisory Committee to include faculty members, academic support personnel, and technologists will be critical to the success of this project. Such a Committee will include representation from the Offices of Information and Technical Services, the Office of Disability Services, and the Center for Teaching and Learning, as well as involvement by the Library personnel and the LAS Online

Program Coordinators. Representatives from the Project Team will solicit collaboration from a range of participants by making ongoing presentations to the LAS academic and University support departments; these presentations will describe project concept and scope, and identify roles for ongoing participation. Moreover, these presentations will enable the Project Team to gauge departmental support for the initiative, as well as to recruit additional involvement. Specific direction will be invited from the College's standing administrative entities, the LAS Executive Committee and the LAS Online Advisory Committee. Finally, advice will specifically be solicited from those faculty and staff members who have so successfully delivered the College's annual Science Symposium and the Capital Scholars Honors Symposium related to scope, operations and quality benchmarks.

In addition to internal partnerships, the Project Team will seek to collaborate with external partners who have established success with moderately scaled Web-based conferences. The Project Team is pursuing partnership relationships with established conference organizers/entities to provide models for replication and the cultivation of best practices, as well as important sources for information and networking. For example, the Illinois Online Conference, which annually provides a well-established and recognized model for technological organization and Web-based conference programming, has already been contacted by the Project's Director, their Coordinator's input requested in the planning stages of this project. As a second example, the Conference Organizers for the international "Teaching, College and Community Conference" generated by The University of Hawai'i Kapi'olani Community College, The University of Hawai'i at Manoa and Osaka Gakuin University of Japan will be approached to further assist in the conceptual development of this initiative.

While the Project Team has intentionally resisted making decisions about the conference format and content until the Symposium Advisory Committee members are selected and initial funding has been secured, we have identified the following preliminary structure on which to continue development:

1. The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will solicit faculty participation on the Symposium Advisory Committee from the College's academic programs currently offering online enrollment options: these include Computer Science, English, History, Liberal Studies, Mathematics and Philosophy.
2. The Symposium Advisory Committee will encourage the submission of student research proposals representing broad academic categories within the liberal arts and sciences (the Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences), as well as those submissions representing interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary focuses (for example, focusing on a topic raised in a Public Affairs or Liberal Studies Colloquia).
3. Presentations developed in a wide range of delivery media will be welcomed.

Web-based presentations can be presented on a synchronous or asynchronous basis; synchronous conference components (for example, those utilizing conferencing platforms such as Eluminate™) will be coordinated according to a published schedule.

Faculty members will set benchmarks for participation and select research projects for participation based on these criteria. They will identify general topical categories for research presentations, provide mentoring advice to student presenters, and facilitate discussions within Symposium conferencing areas.

- 6. Research awards for students will be established for participating disciplines.
- 7. A small research fund will be established to facilitate the development of student projects.
- 8. A keynote speaker for the Symposium will be selected from the LAS faculty, enlisted to provide an overview of student research and scholarship, as well as a context for the conference; this keynote will be presented via a live presentation and will be Webcast to online participants.
- 9. As a primary outcome of the Symposium, student research presentations will form the basis of a new Web-based student research journal, spanning the liberal arts and sciences and providing a venue for showcasing undergraduate student research.
- 10. The Symposium Advisory Committee will begin identifying a focus, setting standards, and determining staffing and other operational requirements for the ongoing delivery of a Web-based undergraduate student research journal. This group, then, will launch the online journal as an outcome of the Symposium.

Benefits to Faculty, Students and the University Community

A range of stakeholders will recognize benefits from involvement in this initiative. Faculty members in will benefit from in the following ways:

- They will gain mentoring opportunities in research areas, often not widely available for undergraduate students, particularly for distant students.
- They will be able to guide what is most likely a student’s first attempt to share her/his research ideas with a wider audience. These mentoring opportunities will be especially valuable to online students who rarely have the opportunity to work one on one with their professors.
- The Symposium would provide a much needed opportunity for online students to connect with UIS faculty members and interact with the larger campus community.
- Faculty members will have opportunities to share their own research as models, demonstrating best practice approaches and methods.
- The Symposium will provide an outlet for faculty members to expand their roles as teacher-scholars via these mentoring, service, research, and scholarship opportunities.

The processes of developing and delivering a conference presentation can motivate students to become involved in research; they further provide opportunities for practical professional development experiences.

Students will benefit from their participation as follows:

The Symposium will provide a means for students to present their research topics in a scholarly setting. There are very few opportunities in Central Illinois for students, especially undergraduates, to participate in an academic conference, and this would meet this need.

- The flexibility of the conference format will enable the involvement of non-traditional students, as well as students studying via multiple media.
- Mentoring relationships will develop and be strengthened through collaboration between students and faculty members. We anticipate that this will be an especially important opportunity for distant students to develop a closer affiliation with the campus as they work one on one with their sponsoring faculty members and peers.

Finally, the larger University community will benefit from this initiative in the following ways:

- Symposium proceedings will be archived and made accessible to participants beyond the conference dates, enabling collaboration to continue on projects.
- The Symposium will contribute to UIS' reputation as a leader in the generation of Web-based student scholarship and research.

Supporting Strategic Plan Objectives

The UIS strategic plan, as well as those specific to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Division of Academic Affairs reinforced as a critical focus the generation of undergraduate scholarship and research as a means to promote engaged learning and teaching at all academic levels and across disciplines. The development of a Web-based Student Research Symposium will advance both College and University wide progress towards meeting such strategic goals for interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and student generated scholarship and research.

The Symposium will specifically further the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences strategic intent, which included an emphasis on the provision of "*...vibrant and valuable opportunities for student-faculty interaction, mentoring of student research and creative projects, and experiential learning through field placements*" prominently throughout its plan (para. 2, 2006). The College further emphasized that its instructional goals focus on "*...student-centered and active learning along multiple dimensions: undergraduate and graduate research/creative activities, service learning, global engagement and dialogue across difference in the classroom*" (para. 13, 2006). To this end, the College's strategic plan described a range of activities to both strengthen the academic experiences of distant students, as well as facilitate collaboration between online and on campus students.

Among the activities mentioned in the CLAS Strategic Plan was the development of a “model online campus,” that will utilize technologies to enable parallel academic and co-curricular experiences and further integrate support systems for online students. This symposium would directly support this strategic thrust by creating “global dialogues” between students and faculty and by “creat(ing) an online journal for student research.”(para. 1, 2006) A Symposium of this type would “enhance our reputation” and emphasize the quality of our online programs. (para. 6, 2006)

Additionally, the Division of Academic Affairs’ Strategic Plan included targeted activities related to instruction, research and technology that will be reinforced by the collaborative processes required to develop and deliver the Web-based Symposium. For example, The Division identified as its strategic intent to “...Develop... a strong and widespread program of support for undergraduate student research” (para. 10, 2006). This plan further noted the primacy of “...Provid[ing] an environment that encourages the use of technology to facilitate and enhance learning” (para. 24, 2006). Moreover, the use of electronic media to deliver the Symposium will further the Division’s goal of “...Enhanc[ing] communication and coordination among online programs and between online programs and various campus units” (para. 20, 2006). Finally, the Symposium will “...Help majors offer the highest quality education to students,” its ultimate goal (para 17, 2006), seeking to contribute to the development of ongoing venues for undergraduate research, particularly as they assist online majors to exhibit their scholarly works.

Continuous Project Evaluation

The Project Team will prioritize the implementation of both formative and cumulative assessment methods throughout planning, delivery and evaluation processes; this type of ongoing evaluation will allow for program modifications and the integration of evolving participant feedback and best practice techniques. Evaluative feedback will continue to be solicited and participating faculty members and students will have access to results on an ongoing basis. Participants will be asked to evaluate all aspects of the Symposium, including the format, content, leadership, and technical assistance provided them through this project. Additionally, to prepare for the successful replication of the Symposium, an evaluation summary will be written and made widely available to Symposium planners and participants.

Conclusion

This proposal seeks to integrate important instructional approaches throughout the liberal arts and sciences curriculum, making opportunities available for not only interdisciplinary teaching, but also promoting student collaboration across instructional delivery media. The Web-based Undergraduate Student Research Symposium will promote the development of representative activities such as: creating opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration among both students and faculty members; promoting the integration of online students into formalized undergraduate research activities; facilitating faculty participation through mentoring of research projects; and, launching an online student research journal as one of the Symposium outcomes.

References

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Retrieved 15 October 2006 from:

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The University of Illinois at Springfield. (2006). *Executive summary*. Retrieved 15 October 2006 from:

<http://www.uis.edu/strategicplan/plan/summary.html>

Project Timeline

The projected timeline for this initiative is as follows:

1. Fall 2006: Present concepts to academic departments to solicit involvement
Develop planning/advisory committee
Solicit funding from both internal and external sources; secure funding for both the Symposium as well as the Web-based journal developed as an outcome
Gather "best practice" data related to similar projects
2. Spring 2007: Develop technological interface to support conference
Develop conference program and structure
Identify project support staff
Begin to confirm faculty and staff participants
3. Summer 2007: Confirm faculty and staff participants and conference program
4. Fall 2007: Test technological infrastructure
Generate Request for Proposals ("RFP")
Solicit student participation via the RFP
Identify format for Web-based journal to showcase student research & scholarship
5. Spring 2008: Deliver Web-based Student-Faculty Research Symposium
Perform project evaluation and publish and circulate results
Solicit Advisory Committee membership to launch Web-based undergraduate student journal. Identify standards and projects that will be published in the Web-based journal. Select name for the journal. Identify requirements needed to compile, edit, and prepare to electronically publish the journal.
6. Fall 2008: Assuming resources are secured, prepare to publish the newly developed Web-based student research journal
Review Symposium evaluation results
Begin planning the next research Symposium for AY 2008 – 2009
Solicit Advisory Committee membership to launch second Symposium

Project Budget

Expenditures	SAIG	Unit Contribution	Total
a. 1 graduate student worker, 25 hours for 12 weeks @ \$8/hour (\$2,400)	\$2,400		\$2,400
b. 1 undergraduate student worker/conference technical support, 25 hours for 12 weeks @ \$7/hour (\$2,100)		\$2,100	\$2,100
c. 1 keynote speaker honorarium @ \$250	\$100	\$150	\$250
d. 4 outstanding student research awards, @200 each, total \$800	\$800		\$800
e. student research fund		\$2,500	\$2,500
f. podcasting/webcasting costs	\$1,000		\$1,000
g. symposium supplies (e.g., participant materials)	\$700		\$700
	\$5,000	\$4,750	\$9,750