

Narrative

Intellectual rationale: Indian River State College (IRSC) proposes *Infusing African American Culture into the Digital Learning Space*, a three-year project to expand the teaching of African American studies across humanities disciplines through the lens of Florida’s Treasure Coast (Martin County, Indian River County, St. Lucie County, and Okeechobee County) by creating an interactive website and instructional modules to engage students. Despite the rich culture and history of the area, access to local humanities resources is predominantly physical, and there are scant academic resources. For students enrolled in online courses in the humanities, this absence of asynchronous, place-based humanities content can compound what Ball and Lai refer to as academia’s “ethos of placelessness”; or the idea that traditional pedagogical practices in higher education often privilege the “boundless world of books and ideas” over locally created content¹. This ethos stands in direct opposition to the both the macro goal of the IRSC, which is to work in tandem with its community to foster an educated and prepared workforce; and IRSC’s micro goal of “improving the quality of life and promoting social interaction in our community by serving as a resource for cultural enrichment”². Research shows that a place-based approach to pedagogy increases student engagement and completion, and that “explicitly linking course content to place” can help students retain content and become lifelong learners³. This project is aimed at strengthening humanities content and instruction while transforming the engagement of the students, faculty, and local community.

In order expand the teaching of African American studies and provide greater access to the historical and cultural record of the Treasure Coast to the College’s significant online student

¹ Ball, E. L., & Lai, A. (2006). Place-based pedagogy for the arts and humanities. *Pedagogy*, 6(2), 261-287.

² Indian River State College. (n.d.). Mission statement & college goals. Retrieved from <https://irsc.smartcatalogiq.com/en/Current/Catalog/Mission-Statement-and-College-Goals>

³ Norman, E. S. Taking the frog’s eye view: how place--based education and talking circles foster student retention, academic achievement, and life--long learning. *Mellon Tribal College Research Journal*, 162.

population, collaborative teams of humanities and library faculty, virtual campus staff, face-to-face students, and community partners will create innovative digital humanities content. The content is aimed at strengthening humanities instruction, highlighting the rich history and culture of the Treasure Coast, and providing the opportunity for online students to engage with local history on their schedule. Projects will include (but are not limited to) humanities-based data visualization, 360° video tours, digitization of local historical resources, and GIS mapping. These projects will form the basis for eight instructional modules in anthropology, English, and history, with the potential of being infused into other disciplines. These modules will be available as a cohesive set through a new public facing website, and as individual modules to be incorporated into both online and in-person humanities courses. This NEH grant offers an opportunity to protect the Treasure Coast's African American History through the digitization of imperil cultural heritage materials and the creation of an interactive digital curriculum.

Infusing African American Culture into the Digital Learning Space's will develop eight modules around the Zora Neale Hurston Dust Tracks Heritage Trail, eight locations across St. Lucie County that chronicle the author's time in Fort Pierce, FL before and after her death. Zora Neale Hurston's work intersects and crosses a wide breadth of genres, topics, and aspects of the humanities. While she is most widely known for her novels, she was also an anthropologist, folklorist, and amateur singer. Hurston was able to genuinely grasp the true essence of the cultures she wrote about because of her anthropological research and keen ear for oral tradition. The story of Zora Neale Hurston is one of working with people of various backgrounds, and so it is a natural foundation for interdisciplinary work. The Dust Tracks Heritage Trail was created by a group of St. Lucie community members in 2004, and locations on the trail will serve as starting points to examine the history and culture of Fort Pierce. For example, one of the stops on the

Trail is the Backus House, the former home of Fort Pierce native A.E. "Bean" Backus, a Florida landscape artist. Backus maintained an open door to people of all backgrounds, despite the fact that Fort Pierce was segregated at that time, and frequently led Jazz 'jam sessions' that Hurston would attend. He also worked with Alfred Hair, the founder of the Highwayman arts movement, a group of 26 African American landscape artists in Florida. This marker provides a narrative window in which to explore Backus, the Florida Highwaymen, and the influence of their art on the local community, and then later on the national stage. This allows for the study of the cultural context of the Highwayman rather than art production and technique. Lincoln Park Academy, another stop on the Trail, provides an avenue for research into the segregated school system of the twentieth century. Founded in 1921, Lincoln Park Academy was the first four-year all black high school south of Palatka. This location was also the home of Lincoln Park Junior College in the early 60s, one of Florida's 'Magnificent Twelve' black junior colleges that later merged with the Indian River Junior College in 1965 and is now Indian River State College (IRSC). Each of these locations has the ability to provide a number of interdisciplinary, humanities viewpoints for research and the creation of numerous digital humanities projects.

The intended audience will consist of online and face-to-face students taking entry-level English Literature, anthropology and American History courses at IRSC. Enrollments in an academic year average approximately 1600 students within the sections that will participate in this project. The products created will be available to members of the community including K-12 public schools, public libraries, the College's Fielden Institute for Lifelong Learning, whose members are 50 years of age or older who share a common interest in exploring shared topics in a college atmosphere, the Zora Neale Hurston Foundation, and other Humanities scholars statewide who have an interest in using the project's products. The digitization of the

community's resources will be collected/conducted using some of the latest digital technologies such as a 360-degree camera and visualization software. These resources will be curated and placed into the Blackboard Learning Management System for students and faculty to use in their online, blended and face-to-face courses. Modules are independent of one another, allowing faculty to select only the modules that align with their subject matter. Please see Appendix A for a list of modules and the disciplines that are aligned with the content.

Although faculty and students at IRSC have been engaged in innovative service-learning projects and the preservation and digitization of local history for the past several years, these projects often take place in isolation, without an interdisciplinary focus, and lack visibility across campus. In addition to providing students with a vibrant collection of digital resources that highlight the history and culture of their community, this project seeks to create a *digital humanities community* on campus where faculty and students can collaborate and create digital humanities projects. Burdick et al. define digital humanities as a “conspicuously collaborative” field “born of the encounter between traditional humanities and computational methods,” where innovative research questions can be generated through new methods of “making, connecting, interpreting, and collaborating”⁴. During the mandatory quarterly meetings, the project teams will work across interdisciplinary lines as they make use of a variety of technological tools to create content, and can share best practices and work through problems. This will serve as the foundation for a collaborative working group of faculty working within the digital humanities. This project will provide students with hands-on experience using new and emerging technologies to create humanities content, and will answer the American Historical Association's

⁴ Burdick, A., Drucker, J., Lunenfeld, P., Presner, T., & Schnapp, J. (2012). *Digital_humanities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

call to demonstrate the relevance of the skills developed in history courses⁵. The goal is that the student will make a strong connection between their coursework and their learning through the digitization of Humanities artifacts.

Content and Activities - Phase One: Planning and Infrastructure (January – August 2020): During the first phase of the project, project teams will be formed for each module and will work to compile resources for the next two phases. The project team will hold a kickoff session in IRSC's Institute of Academic Excellence (IAE) for named faculty, librarians, and Virtual Campus staff at which time the working team member will be finalized. At this meeting, the group will finalize working teams. Each team will consist of humanities faculty members, students, virtual campus staff, librarians, and associated community partners. Each team will identify the digital tools they will incorporate in their modules and select software and/or hardware needed to complete their projects. Humanities faculty will select the courses in which they will embed their modules and finalize internship descriptions for the next two phases. Once the core teams have been created, there will be a kickoff meeting in February to solicit modules from other faculty members in related disciplines. It is our hope that faculty in other disciplines (such as health sciences) will partner with humanities faculty to create additional modules on either one of the stops on the Dust Trail.

Phase Two: Module Creation (August 2020 – December 2021): The second phase of the project will be devoted to module and content creation. Content for the modules will be highly dependent on the discipline entry point and the interests of the faculty members. For example, Mia Tignor and Dr. Michelle Carrigan will work with students enrolled in service-

⁵ Stearns, P.N. (1998). Why Study History? *American Historical Association*. Retrieved from [https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/why-study-history-\(1998\)](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/why-study-history-(1998))

learning courses to digitize local sources that discuss the integration of the local school district, while Dr. Brian Freeman will examine ways to visualize local business data of the same time period. During this time, the new public website will be completed. In addition to using the modules in humanities courses, all content will be available via a public website during the third phase of the project. This website will be maintained by the college after the grant period is over, and all materials will be licensed under a 'CC BY' Creative Commons license. Student interns will give presentations each semester to their peers about their work on the project to publicize and promote internship opportunities each semester. All project content and the website will be completed by the end of phase two.

Phase Three: Project Rollout (2022): In phase three, all content will be available on the new public facing website, and modules will run with the new content in selected courses in the Spring, Summer, and Fall semesters. Project staff will conduct student focus groups to evaluate newly created modules, Faculty focus groups will evaluate course content and make any necessary changes for subsequent semesters. During this year, project staff will promote the public content to a variety of community groups, including the public libraries and K-12 educators in the College's four county service area. Project staff will promote the content to the internal college community through sessions held in the IAE, and through modified courses for the College's Lifelong Learning curriculum. Finally, project staff will promote content at the state level through the Florida Digital Humanities Consortium and other state and regional conference presentations. Please see Appendix B for the Schedule of Activities and Readings.

Project personnel: Faculty: **Mia Tignor, Program Director, Emerging Technologies Librarian/Assistant Professor, Libraries** will manage project activities, including but not limited to, supervision of personnel; budget oversight; design and development of project

website; planning checkpoint meetings for each team; coordinating events during and after the grant period; and the submission of final reports. Since joining IRSC's faculty in 2012, Ms. Tignor has been part of the management team for several grant projects, most notably IRSC's National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Big Read for Edwidge Danticat's *Brother, I'm Dying* in 2017, and a 2013 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Sparks! Ignition Grant. Ms. Tignor holds an M.A. in Library and Information Science from the University of South Florida, and is a doctoral student in the Texts & Technology Program at the University of Central Florida, with a focus in Digital Humanities. **Dr. Kendall St. Hillaire**, Assistant Dean of IRSC Virtual Campus, Institutional, will support project faculty by acting as project lead for all technology and instructional design aspect of the project. **Dr. Michelle Carrigan**, Assistant Professor, Humanities, will serve as a faculty lead on the project, and will create at least one module. **Dr. Sarah Mallonee**, Professor, English/Communications/Modern Languages, will serve as a faculty lead on the project, and create at least one module. **Dr. Jodi Robson**, Professor, Director of the Institute for Academic Excellence, will serve as serve as a faculty lead on the project, and create at least one module. **Dr. J. Brian Freeman**, Assistant Professor, Humanities, will serve as a faculty lead for the project, and will create at least one module.

Virtual Campus: The Virtual Campus and faculty librarians will play a large role in supporting the work of the Humanities faculty. To assist the faculty and students in their efforts, the Virtual Campus Video Services team will use their expertise to record the oral histories provided by community members. The Video Team will record the historical locations using 360-degree video in order to provide a realistic view of the location for students. The resources used by the videographers, which include video editing software, cameras and microphones, will be funded by the grant. **Faculty librarians:** The faculty librarians will assist students and faculty with

using software for geographic mapping, and content creation software such as Adobe Creative Suite. Work created by students will be housed on a server maintained by the college, and will be part of IRSC's institutional repository. Grant funds will cover the costs of the geographic mapping software, and content creation software.

Institutional context: IRSC is committed to student success and the professional development of our faculty and staff. New faculty are required to participate in a yearlong New Faculty Orientation forum, which includes mentorship, training, and a two-day onboarding session to promote faculty success. The annual Professional Development Day for staff, faculty, and adjuncts offers workshops on instructional techniques, customer service, leadership, communication, and technology. The Institute for Academic Excellence serves as a center for the pursuit of excellence in teaching, learning, and professional development.

Indian River State College's Humanities courses draw from a number of disciplines and span across a number of departments. These courses encourage students to explore the human experience in a critical and compassionate manner. The college has placed an emphasis on this type of exploration, with all degree seeking students being required to take a minimum of two Humanities courses, and students pursuing the Associates of Arts degree being required to take a minimum of an additional two courses within these disciplines. The department has 11 full time faculty members and 40 adjunct faculty members. All degree seeking students are required to take a minimum of 1 philosophy course and 1 history course. In the 2018-2019 academic year, over 15,000 students took courses within the Humanities.

The resources available to IRSC faculty working on this project include the expertise of instructional designers, access to research librarians and the use of the video production studio and the expertise of the video production personnel. Instructional designers will assist the faculty

with the design of the modules and online courses. The research librarians will partner with faculty and students, providing assistance with researching materials and using interactive technology, such as geographical mapping software. The video production studio and personnel will capture and edit the videos and oral recordings collected during the project.

Over the past several years, humanities and library faculty at IRSC have worked to create innovative course content and interactive projects to engage students in humanities courses. In 2017, Dr. Michelle Carrigan and Mia Tignor started *IRSC and the Digital Archive: Digitizing Local History*, a service-learning project for students in American history courses where students digitize and describe materials of local and national historical significance. *IRSC and the Digital Archive* was recently named the 2019 Association of Florida College's Exemplary Practice in Library Services. Dr. Brian Freeman works with his students to digitize Fort Pierce business records in order to gain a greater understanding of the impact of segregation on the economic landscape of the area. Finally, Dr. Kyle Freund has introduced innovative interdisciplinary student learning opportunities through expansion of its artifact teaching collections.

Follow-up and dissemination: Anticipated long-term impact includes additional faculty involvement in the digitization of Humanities content, with the hope that faculty from other departments get interested in the work. By scaling the work done by the faculty involved in this project, more students will have the opportunity to benefit from digitized resources, creating a greater awareness of their community and how it relates to their lives. As more students use these resources and familiarize themselves with the technologies used in the field, they become more skilled and qualified for jobs in the Humanities. Once content has been created, resources will become available to members of the community, including public libraries and public schools to be used for enrichment purposes. Data will be collected on the number of community

groups using the resources, and visits to the website will be tallied to document unique visitors to the site.

Program Evaluation: Assessment will occur throughout the project in several ways. Surveys will be sent to all students involved in the work to gauge their satisfaction of the project, and focus groups will be conducted with faculty and students involved in the work to make any necessary changes for subsequent semesters. The department will analyze course success rates before and after the content is added to the course to determine if the use of the content has an influence on course success rates. The College will monitor traffic on the website pages created during this project, to measure how many people outside of the college community are accessing the resources. A final measure of assessment will be the percentage of consistent student participation during the performance period. It is understood that students who participate in the project and complete their assignments will demonstrate a high level of engagement in the project and an increased knowledge of humanities.

Instructional Evaluation: At each stage of the project, humanities faculty will evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional content. At the end of each semester in phase three, project teams will review the effectiveness of content and instructional methods, and make any necessary changes before the class begins again. In addition to internal evaluation and review, outside evaluation will be conducted using the Quality Matters review certification. Once the content has been created, it will be placed into online courses. The online courses at Indian River State College are designed using the Quality Matters instructional design rubric, which ensures that the online courses have all the necessary elements and required components. These courses are then reviewed for quality assurance, and receive the Quality Matters certification.