

DIGITAL HUMANITIES INITIATIVE (DHi) ANNOUNCEMENT

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded Hamilton College \$800,000 in support of the Digital Humanities Initiative (DHi), a research and teaching collaboration where new media and computing technologies are used to promote humanities-based research, scholarship and teaching across the liberal arts. This grant, among the largest humanities grants ever received by Hamilton College, will be co-directed by both a member of the faculty, Angel David Nieves, and a member of the administration, Janet Simons. According to co-director, Associate Professor of Africana Studies Angel David Nieves, DHi is “a new model of collaboration in the humanities at Hamilton ... it is a multi-institutional project, a sustainable model to bring multiple faculties together to share in their research and to link departments that traditionally do not work together.”

“I am confident that the DHi will transform the ways in which humanities scholarship and teaching are practiced not only at Hamilton, but also, through collaborations, among our peers across the liberal arts,” wrote President Joan Hinde Stewart in the DHi grant application. “To remain relevant to new generations of students and faculty, the humanities must embrace the tools of technology to enhance scholarship, create knowledge, and inform curricula. Hamilton’s DHi will make these digital tools available to faculty and their student partners, teach them how to employ these tools to create new knowledge and interactive collections of artifacts, and help them integrate their discoveries into the classroom and beyond.”

“This is a collaboration among several academic departments and Information Technology Services (ITS),” said co-director Janet Simons, associate director of instructional technology services. “And it evolved in parallel with the establishment of the Cinema and New Media Studies minor,” Nieves added.

DHi will be notable among small liberal arts colleges because of its unique leadership. Among digital humanists in the liberal arts, Nieves is one of the few scholars in the field of Africana Studies, to head up such an ambitious initiative. Simons, trained as an evolutionary ecologist, has over six years experience teaching biology and nearly ten years experience integrating technology into the curriculum at Hamilton College. Between them, the co-directors have experience with a wide range of research approaches and methods and are dedicated to supporting interdisciplinary research and its translation into the undergraduate curriculum.

Curricular support for rich media projects in digital humanities began germinating more than a decade ago with the formation of the HILLgroup (Hamilton Information & Learning Liaisons) created by ITS and the library to support faculty in the identification, selection, and use of technologies and content applicable to their teaching needs. The group has emphasized assignment structures that elucidate the relationships among course content, knowledge assimilation/production, and media forms. HILLgroup support of learning has scaled to about 22 courses on average per semester, impacting over 25% of the student body.

DHi will build on the significant strengths of Hamilton College by emphasizing the inter-disciplinary nature of humanities research and incorporating students as scholarly partners on significant, original research projects. Over the next three years, DHi will develop a prototype infrastructure that makes available shared collections, provides tools to manipulate and analyze rich media objects in these collections, and provides access to turn-key digital publication of scholarship resulting from these activities. Prior to applying to the Mellon Foundation, several Hamilton faculty members developed proposals that are examples of the collection of rich media resources and opportunities for collaborative research on which the DHi is focused. For example, Professor of History Thomas Wilson has created a project titled *The Autumnal Rites to Confucius and Beyond* that includes footage of annual sacrificial rites that venerate Confucius in a Taiwanese temple. These rites were no longer performed after the fall of the imperial court in 1911, but were revived again by local authorities as early as the 1920s and were formally adopted in Taiwan by the Republic of China in the 1960s. A student researcher has produced a DVD including subtitles of Wilson's translations of the existing video. Future steps in this project will include an enhanced website with interactive links providing detailed background on the rite, annotated illustrations from ritual manuals, notes on key changes in the rite in imperial times, a bibliography of sources, and photographs and links to other web sites of similar temples. The development of a virtual Confucius temple, allowing avatars to enter a temple to explore the sights and sounds, is also a future piece of the project. A conference attended by specialists on this and similar rituals, to discuss development of an international digital humanities consortium on religious rituals may follow.

Patricia O'Neill, the Edmund A. LeFevre Professor of English, is beginning work on a site that focuses on the life and work of the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali, who died in 2001. According to O'Neill, "Shahid was a beloved teacher of creative writing at Hamilton in the late 80s and early 90s, he was nominated for the National Book Award in 2000, and lines from his poetry are quoted by almost every writer in the world who thinks about the sub-continent and its woes ... On November 5, Hena Ahmad, Shahid's sister, will come to campus to talk about her work on literature and feminism but she will also meet with us in the digital humanities group to discuss how we might be able to digitalize Shahid's papers and correspondence and create a virtual research archive where readers and scholars might exchange ideas related to Shahid's poetry and the ongoing troubles in Kashmir."

Professor Nieves' own project, *Soweto '76: A Living Digital Archive*, represents six years of work researching, collecting, and organizing audio and video interviews to be repurposed and made available to students in their own research and writing. Nieves received national recognition for his work during the 2009 Nebraska Digital Workshop at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center for Digital Research in the Humanities (CDRH).

Describing the benefits of the DHi, Simons explained, "Research projects we support will develop rich media collections around which course assignments can be developed. HILLgroup will help translate

use of these collections into courses and will instruct students how to collect and manipulate rich media information. We will also promote the significance of sharing multimedia collections. ... DHi is about making resources accessible and working collaboratively, annotating, searching for additional sources." Nieves added, "Working with other institutions, across the U.S. and abroad, [faculty and students] will be harvesting relevant research and developing tools to do so. DHi is a lab for collaboration in the humanities."

The goal for the first three years of the DHi is to launch ten sustainable projects in collaboration with faculty and students across various programs and departments at the college. Other projects currently planned include the following:

- **Randy Ericson**, Couper Librarian - *Experiencing Shaker Communities*
- **Martine Guyot-Bender**, Professor of French - *The French Film Documentary Digital Repository*
- **Angel David Nieves**, Associate Professor of Africana Studies - *Mapping Soweto*
- **Vincent Odamtten**, Professor of English - *A Multimedia Approach to Ghanaian Culture and Literature/Africana Studies*
- **Kyoko Omori**, Associate Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures - *Comparative Japanese Film Archive*
- **James Wells**, Visiting Assistant Professor of Classical Studies - *A Digital Museum of Classical Reception*

In the future, the DHi plans to sponsor a wide range of activities including faculty development workshops, media literacy programs, scholarly conferences and symposia, undergraduate seminars, a fellows program for Hamilton College students and faculty, and humanities programs designed for the public-at-large. Ultimately the directors hope the DHi will lead to the creation of a "cohort of faculty well-trained in the digital humanities who can assist in outreach, mentor colleagues, and enhance faculty development."

Summarizing the project, Nieves said, "DHi represents a confluence of energies.... We would ideally like to see faculty creating classes around this initiative. ...In this program, no question is too big. And the technology will allow people to take ownership of their stories, it will allow people to become scholars through technology."