

## **Research Grant Proposal**

**2000-2001 Academic Year**

**Proposed by: Lynn Hill, Assistant Professor, Art Department**

**Campus Box 141, extension 3551**

### **Virtual Artists' Community**

I. Project Summary: This project would involve the creation of an online artist's community. The artists involved would be those using digital and art and technology-based media. This virtual community would serve as a meeting place for like-minded creative people with similar interests and concerns.

Although the hardware, design team (EC students), and technical support (EC students) would be located here at Elmhurst, this community would bring together faculty and students from institutions that would otherwise not easily interact with each other due to geographical distance. As with any community, there would be a variety of activities being carried on simultaneously.

Students would have a discussion area wherein there could be wide-ranging discussion regarding digital media. A student curated and student run gallery would be one part of the community. Through the creation of the gallery, students would be exposed to each other's work. The student curators would gain experience with jurying work for exhibition, and students would also have responsibility for the initial creation of and the updating of the gallery.

The community would also offer the possibility of collaborative work between students at different institutions, as well as inter-institution critiques.

Faculty would have a discussion forum wherein information could be shared regarding the unique situation of teaching art courses that rely almost entirely on computer technology. It is likely that subjects such as funding for equipment, software choices, and other unique pedagogical issues would be included. Faculty members would also have individual pages wherein their work would be exhibited, providing an indication to students that their instructors are also productive artists dealing with challenges of the media.

In addition, the community would include a calendar of workshops, exhibits, internship opportunities, etc. that would serve to connect us to a still greater community. Ideally, at least a portion of the community would

also occasionally be able to meet face to face for workshops, exhibits, and other activities.

## II. Narrative:

### 1. Current Situation:

Reliable sources estimate that 10,000 kilometers of cable are installed per hour, resulting in the fact that network connectivity is growing at a rate twice that of computing in general. Clearly, these computer networks have great potential for influencing the ways in which groups of people interact. In the book *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, Ray Kurzweil writes of Metcalf's Law, which seeks to explain the value of a computer network to the humans who use it. The three characteristics that offer the greatest opportunity, according to Metcalf, are diversity, ubiquity, and interconnectedness. It is those possibilities that this proposed project is designed to exploit.

Whether or not to include technology into coursework is not a discussion for faculty teaching technology-based studio art courses. For us, technology is the course. It logically follows that we also use technology as a means to connect our use of technology....

Currently the EC Art Department has a vibrant program of study in the digital multimedia concentration. Due to the introduction of three new courses in Fall term 2000, and the reconfiguring of existing, courses, students have access to digital art courses designed to cover many aspects of the media. An introductory course serves to offer a broad base of experience, thereby allowing students to sample a variety of directions along which they might progress. A new 400 level course allows advanced students the capability to work on sophisticated projects of their own design. The multimedia concentration has been very successful and it is anticipated that it will continue to grow since student interest is very high.

Even with the expansion of the courses here at EC, we are still a small concentration in a small department at a small liberal arts college. As an instructor of the digital courses and a practicing digital artist, I am the only person on campus doing what I do. Fortunately, I have relationships with several colleagues who teach similar courses. But that contact is limited in light of everyone's hectic schedules. They have all expressed to me their similar feelings of the isolation of both themselves and their students.

## 2.The Project Plan:

The value of this project to the students here at EC would be:

- Interconnectivity with like-minded students regardless of physical / geographical proximity. If a student is able to discuss work with a student or instructor at another school, or even create pieces of collaborative work with a student at another school, barriers have been removed, thereby redefining the concept of "classroom". A classroom would no longer be confined and defined by four walls. A classroom would be a group of people discussing similar interests and solving similar creative problems collectively.
- Real world experience with digital design. The virtual community would be based at EC, therefore, the web site would be designed and maintained by EC students.
- Experience with critical analysis of works in their field as EC students serve as the curators of the online gallery, and thereby choose work to be displayed.
- Experience with collaborative artmaking, which is a scenario unique to digital artists, especially those working with interactive multimedia and web-based projects.
- EC students would be paid an hourly rate for their creative work on the web site.

The value of this project to Elmhurst College would be:

- Having a Virtual Artists' Community based at EC would be a clear indication of the college's commitment to innovative uses of technology.
- Realization of this project would demonstrate the college's support of the visual arts.
- Possible participation in the project could be of interest to prospective students, thereby becoming a tool for recruiting.
- Although this project would have a major impact both for the instructors and students involved with it, it requires no additional physical space since it would exist in virtual space. This is application of technology at its best.
- Although the anticipated participants are from institutions of higher learning, it is not impossible to consider the inclusion of instructors and students in digital art courses in high schools. Such students could become aware of and interested in enrolling in courses at EC when time comes to choose a college.

The value of this project to the instructor(s):

- More frequent interaction with a community of digital artists / educators. Discussions would include course content, software, hardware, funding, and the variety of decisions instructors face when operating computer art labs.
- Interaction as artist-to-artist with other instructors. Feedback and critique of work is an ongoing necessity that is often difficult to obtain. The possibility of collaborative projects also exists.

## 2. Faculty Expertise:

I hold an M.F. A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Art and Technology Department where my emphasis was digital imaging and multimedia. I am a practicing digital artist working in digital collage and multimedia, with a current particular interest in non-linear navigation. As a teacher, I teach courses in web design, digital illustration, digital imaging, electronic publication, and all levels of multimedia. I have written 4 new digital art courses and reconfigured the digital art courses into a multimedia concentration. This proposal is a logical progression of those expanded offerings for our students.

## 1. Plans for Evaluation and Dissemination:

The community will be seen to be successful if the following occur:

- There is genuine interaction among students and faculty in the form of discussion and collaboration.
- Other members want to join the "pioneers" of the community.
- It is not unreasonable to anticipate that the virtual community of our creation would be presented at a forum such as SIGGRAPH ( a computer graphics organization) or I.S.E.A. (the International Society of Electronic Arts.)

## III. Timeline:

- Immediately: Identify participants.

This has already been done. The following faculty members have committed themselves and their students to this venture:

- Joan Truckenbrod, Telecommunication Arts, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Art and Technology Dept.

- Mary Bookwalter, Web Design and Digital Illustration, & Paul Schranz, Digital Imaging and Photography, Governors State University.
- Sherri McElroy, Media Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University.
- Terre Rosner, Graphic Design, College of St. Francis.
- Carol Weber, Computer Graphics, South Suburban College.
- Marsha Palazzolo, Photography, & Lynn Hill, Multimedia, Elmhurst College.

Immediately: Make initial inquiries to determine which EC students would be the designers of the site.

Summer term, 2001: Purchase and configure server.

Fall term, 2001: EC students design site. Correspond with participants at their institutions.

Jan. 2001: Community site online.

Feb. 2001: Interaction and collaboration begins via the site.

Ongoing: EC student designers continue to upgrade and maintain the site, including rotation of images in online gallery.

#### IV. Budget:

Entire project: \$3500 to be divided as follows:

\$1700 for a server (hardware). The community would be based on a web site that would be housed on this server. It is impossible for the site to be housed on the college server for a number of reasons, including huge storage space needed by the community's graphics files and student access necessary for updating the site.

The remaining funds would be spent on software to configure the server and stipends to the EC students who designed and maintained the community's web site.

#### V. Current and Previous Grants:

- Faculty Development Grant for Curriculum and Pedagogy
- Technology Grant
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#### Creative Work\*

Over the past 3 years I have had work represented in the following venues: Tallgrass Arts Association (2 exhibits, one presentation), Vogt Visual Art Center ( 3 exhibits), Living Artist Gallery (online gallery, 2 exhibits), UTURN

gallery( online gallery, All Chicago Exhibition), Gallery 2, Mole Gallery online gallery, Photo Four Gallery, slide presentation at Faculty Women's Caucus Scholarship Symposium, 2000, video presentation at Faculty Women's Caucus Scholarship Symposium, 2001. Current exhibitions: Tallgrass Arts Center, and Photo-Four Gallery. Exhibitions pending: Vogt Visual Arts Center, Prairie Artists Gallery.

\*Please note that in my discipline the evidence of scholarship is categorized as *Creative Work* and not "Publications" as listed on the proposal guidelines.