



UR Hear

Community-based Learning Through Mobile Media

Project Proposal
Center for Digital Storytelling
March 2009



Background

In the last few years, the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) has seen the coming together of three strongly emerging trends, Community-based Service Learning (CBSL) in Higher Education, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) in Urban Planning and community-based story work, specifically Digital Storytelling (DS). In addition, we have seen the emergence of popular Geographic Information System (GIS) projects (ie. GoogleMaps and GoogleEarth) and mobile media projects have come together, such as Murmur in Canada and our own Storymapping.org project.

What ties these projects together is a growing sense that all efforts to enhance, improve, and build sustainable neighborhoods and communities come down to listening. Where traditional models of education and development stressed the wisdom and expertise of leaders, newer models stress the facilitation of the expertise that exists within any group of people, and the engagement of a balanced dialogue between those effecting change, and those affected by change. As service learning students increasingly found that their efforts to mentor and tutor students in local schools could not be divorced from the social factors surrounding the students, community planners have found that the effort to “re-develop” or “improve” communities could not be divorced from the sustaining of positive assets within a community. In the community of storyworkers, there was an equal realization that stories told by well-meaning journalists and “expert” communicators about communities described as “at risk,” often focused completely on the pathologies of failure in the community, rather than the assets of resilience, and that the stories community members tell each other, are much different than the stories told about them by outsiders.

At the cutting edge of service learning projects around the country is a desire to have students enter the exchange of service for learning with an awareness of community development issues. Several campuses that have developed partnerships with local community organizations have found themselves drawn to the positive approach of the Asset Based Community Development theorists and practitioners who seek to capture the details of individual and organizational capacities, instead of describe the gaps and failures within the communities, as the cornerstone of planning processes. A few practitioners have used Media and Information Communication Technologies as part of these efforts, turning their asset maps into blogs and dialogues with communities.

In our work in Digital Storytelling and Storymapping, we have seen an interest by institutions working with communities to look at DS as an excellent way to both engage community members in thinking about change in their neighborhoods, as well as capture stories that can be used in the dialogue and movement building around citizen-based planning processes. But we have only scratched the surface of the integration of all

these processes, making the stories immediately relevant to planners, and making the planning story-based as well as analytical.

It is time for a national project to attempt to prototype a curriculum in these areas. Not only are the trends creating natural alliances, but the national political situation demands innovative and far-reaching approaches to create cohesion and active citizenship in all our communities. With an economic environment that will stress our communities like never before, we feel this project can address a number of pressing issues.



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Description

The Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) seeks to create a program to engage a consortium of 8-10 University-based Service or Community-based Learning organizations from across the United States, working with their campus-based Information Technology support services, local schools and community organizations. The project would encourage college students to work with youth and elders within low-income communities to capture stories about the positive social assets within those communities. Each campus would create a mix of media products from interviews and digital stories generated through the field practice. The principal product would be a storymap of the stories to be used as a discussion point for civic planning and economic development – encouraging planners from within the communities and local government to consider the values of these positive stories as part of their development planning processes.

Goals and Objectives

- To engage youth in positive social change in communities
- To facilitate understanding about neighborhood histories
- To train youth and community members in the storymapping process
- To encourage multi-generational collaboration
- To document and catalog the stories of elders
- To create mobile technology-based story tours for general public
- To effect policy discussion about the issues of gentrification and urban renewal



Sample sign and placement

Implementation

CDS will develop a shared curriculum framework and training model for participating campuses. Each campus would host a week long residency to launch the project. The residency would begin with a small symposium with a field expert from the standpoint of Community Development, our CDS staff, and local campus experts. The symposium would be followed by a workshop in the form of a prototype project supervised by CDS staff with the prospective faculty/student peer project leaders. The project would be held together through a project website. We would also seek resources for a national gathering of the project participants, after a cycle of work, to summarize and reflect on the work.

Participating campuses can choose to implement the project in countless ways. Outcomes could include:

- DVD Compendium of Digital Stories for Kiosk or Distribution
- Walking podcast tours using the stories
- Public Signage with phone messages linked to stories
- Step-by-step project implementation guides for UR Hear projects
- New Quarter/Semester class curriculum

Budgeting for the project is expected to be \$12,500 for the initial 6 day symposium and training, \$12,500/year to participate in the national resource sharing network and to have five participants at the national network annual gatherings.

Potential Campuses

Ohio State University, University of Houston, Orange Free University, New Jersey, University of Colorado, Denver, Univ. of Maryland Baltimore County, Southern Illinois University, UC Berkeley, Tulane University, Simmons College, Swarthmore College, American University, Arizona State University, Univ of Wisconsin Madison.

Case studies and sites for viewing stories:

[Third Ward Storymapping](#)

In conjunction with Carroll Blue's The Dawn Project, CDS work with a group of residents of Houston's historical Third Ward community, from December of 2006 to June of 2007 to capture stories from a range of residents.



iWitness Stories, New Orleans

[iWitness New Orleans](#)

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast, a group of artists and educators began gathering stories about those affected by the disaster. In 2007-08, CDS joined with [MondoBizarro Theater](#) to collect stories from the Central City district, and in October of 2008, a walking tour was created of the stories.

[Placemeant Project](#)

In 2005-06, CDS worked with the Ukiah Players Theater to collect stories from throughout Mendocino County, leading to a stage production involving 20 members of the community, and a one-woman touring production featuring 18 of the 26 stories captured. The productions led to important dialogues about growth and sustainability within the region.

Research and Follow-up

CDS staff will continue research into the intersection of these different trends, toward further definition of the curriculum and project approach. We will also discuss in outline these ideas with our most immediate colleagues in Higher Education, to get their thoughts and feedback. Our goal would be to implement in the Fall semester of 2009 on at least 4-6 campuses.

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