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RBML Innovation Funding application
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PROJECT

Reference services are a crucial component of RBML's work and mission, and the proportion of queries that arrive remotely has risen yearly. At the same time, beginning in Fall 2014, RBML has significantly increased its social media campaign in order to reach new audiences and raise awareness of its collections, events, and services. This proposal will take advantage of this momentum by developing and implementing a series of videos entitled "The Mailbag," in which RBML staff will answer selected reference questions in short videos that will be posted online. In recognition of a growing number of users who interact with libraries and other information resources almost exclusively through multiple online platforms, where they expect regularly updated content, this project is an innovative approach to reach, serve, and facilitate dialogue with these users.

Reference questions will be selected based on their potential to be interesting and educational to a wider audience. For example, a patron recently asked whether the illustrations in a book she owned, and which the RBML also holds, were plates. Questions like these provide excellent opportunities to use RBML's world-renowned collections to teach viewers about using primary sources, the artifactual value of books and manuscripts, and the history of communication, as well as for RBML to learn more about our audience's interests and needs. We would, of course, first ask patrons for permission to use their questions in a publicly available video, and maintain submitters' anonymity. With web accessibility in mind, we would also provide appropriate alternative text for our videos.

The video series will also build on two self-contained videography projects already underway which showcase RBML's staff, collections, and services, and which are currently being developed using the services and equipment of a professional videographer from Public Affairs at the University of Illinois. We anticipate applying knowledge gained from these projects towards this proposed video series, which, while more modest, is internally sustainable and would promote RBML's resources on a regular and reoccurring basis.

As a way to generate initial awareness of the video series, we also propose a small advertising campaign consisting of digital ads around campus to ensure that this new service is visible to our own students, faculty, staff, and local community.

OBJECTIVES: WHAT PROBLEM(S) WILL IT SOLVE

The aim of this project is threefold: 1) to increase access to and awareness of RBML's collections and services through innovative platforms; 2) to educate the public about rare book and special collections libraries and book and manuscript history; and 3) to solicit feedback and user-generated content in order to learn more about our audiences so that we may improve the services we provide to them.

As more users seek access to information resources online, libraries are deploying emerging technologies to reach existing audiences and connect with new ones, including those who might not otherwise encounter their collections. The special collections community increasingly recognizes this kind of online engagement with their holdings as an important form not only of public relations but also of use.

This kind of digital outreach is particularly effective for special collections libraries like RBML because it increases access to rare, valuable, and fragile holdings without compromising the preservation and security of the materials. Moreover, it demonstrates our commitment to sharing our collections with a wide variety of users, and contributes to the university's mission to serve society through a broad dissemination of knowledge.

Finally, an important component of social media for special collections libraries is the integration it offers with other special collections libraries' social media campaigns. Increased social media activity will enable RBML to participate in conversations and initiate partnerships with our social-media-integrated peers at other institutions.

HOW IT FITS WITH EXISTING ACTIVITIES IN THE LIBRARY

The project would support RBML's existing reference services; be integrated with our existing social media campaign; and build on two video projects in which RBML is currently engaged. Furthermore, it would contribute to RBML's educational mission, both in expanding our extensive program of onsite instruction using our holdings and in training the next generation of special collections librarians through assistantships, internships, and practica. The video series extends this work beyond the university and the local community to nurture an understanding of and passion for rare books and manuscripts in a wide and diverse audience. More broadly, the project advances the Library's commitment to improving user access to, and discovery of, library content and collections, which in turn supports the University's goal to ensure unfettered access to information.

RESOURCES NEEDED

We request funding for the following:

1) 288 graduate hours to hire two graduate students to assist with the development, production, and editing of 3 videos, and to integrate them into and enhance RBML's social media campaign. This is based on two students working 12 hours a week for 24 weeks. 288 hours at a rate of \$20.02 equals a total of \$5765.76.

2) \$650 to advertise in the following places, in addition to the Library:

Digital screens in all 25 undergraduate dining halls for 1 week: \$50

Digital screens in ARC for 1 month: \$200

All MTD digital kiosks for 30 days: \$400

Total: \$6415.76

RBML will work with Media Commons for this project's equipment needs.

SUSTAINABILITY

This project will include the development of attendant guidelines, procedures, and workflows, and we envision this project as the first of several video series that will establish and expand our social media and online presence. RBML regularly sponsors student internships and GSLIS practica as part of our commitment to professional training. Using this documentation, this project will be incorporated into future internships and practica to generate more episodes to add to this video series, and to develop other related series.

TIMELINE

March 2015: hire 2 graduate students; select 3 reference queries to answer; begin developing storyboards for each 2-minute video

April 2015: finish developing storyboards; shoot first video

May 2015: edit first video; shoot second video

June 2015: edit second video; shoot third video

July 2015: edit third video; finalize editing of all videos; release first video

August 2015: advertise through library, campus, and community digital signage; release second and third videos; finalize documentation of guidelines, procedures, and workflows

Throughout: maintain a vigorous social media presence to support the videos by posting regularly to and continuing to develop RBML's Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and other social media accounts

HOW TO MEASURE BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT AND DETERMINE THE PROJECT'S SUCCESS

We plan to release the videos on YouTube, the popular video-sharing website, in order to reach the widest potential audience. YouTube's detailed analytics will enable us to track views, comments, and other user behaviors; meanwhile, we will also track any potential correlations in the number of onsite visits and reference questions. Equally valuably, these numbers will enable us to learn more about our audience: Who is interested in our materials? What content interests them? How do they prefer to engage with RBML? The answers to these questions will allow us to deliver our services more effectively not only via future videos, but also through our other public services and outreach activities.