

CER Technology Fellowship Program –2008

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Project Title: Mapping Museums II: An Interactive Resource for Teaching and Study

Audience: In the fall of 2008, the Program in Museums and Society will debut the second of its two core courses, “Introduction to the Museum: Issues and Ideas,” open to all undergraduates and required for a Minor in the Program. This course will be offered every other year, in regular rotation with “Introduction to the Museum: Past and Present,” which was first taught in the fall of 2007. “Past and Present” made extensive use of a digital map of case study museums which was developed by with the support of a CER Technology Fellowship, and “Issues and Ideas” will be similarly structured. The audience is the students taking these core courses.

Pedagogical Issue: With voluminous and continuously changing artifacts and information linked to time and culture, museums present complex instructional challenges. “Introduction to the Museum: Issues and Ideas” is the second (following “Introduction to the Museum: Past and Present”) of two core courses in the Museum Studies minor. It covers topics such as how collections are organized in limited space, how collections change over time, and how exhibits should be evaluated within a broad social context. Lectures accompanied by slides can provide museum overviews, but they cannot convey the spatial relationships between collection content and the architecture of the museums that house them. Needed is an interactive, layered map environment that contains diagrams of museum layouts and collection placement, accompanied by descriptive and analytical text and bibliographic information.

Solution: “Introduction to the Museum: Past and Present” successfully adopted an interactive map software to present a clear display of spatial relationships in seven museums in Europe and the United States. The “Introduction to the Museum: Issues and Ideas” project builds upon the digital maps developed for the first core course and adds new museums and new narrative about museum content to supplement context. Three additional museums from outside the European tradition are folded into the map software through the second Technology Fellowship project, and new descriptive and analytical texts and new high-resolution photos supplement existing maps. The resulting museum maps are used not only in the core course Museum Studies minor, but also in the Advanced Academic Programs graduate Museum Studies Program. Assessment of the digital resources developed for this project is to be integrated into course evaluations annually.

Technologies Used: Interactive MapTool, Madison Digital Image Database

Project Abstract: “Mapping Museums II” is the continuation of a project begun with the support of a 2007 CER Technology Fellowship. The original grant funded the digital mapping of ten historically significant museums, maps which became guiding case studies in the fall 2007 course, “Introduction to the Museum: Past and Present.” Its pedagogical aims were two-fold: to use maps to convey the spatial

complexity of museums efficiently and effectively, and to use case studies to bring focus to a broad and complex topic, namely the history of museums. This proposal builds on those aims, but with three specific tasks. These include adding explanatory text to the existing maps; re-purposing and refining seven maps created by students in the 2007 course for inclusion on the map site; and developing three new maps that will give more attention to non-western cultures. At the conclusion of this granting period, the museum map site will contain twenty maps that range from a Renaissance “Cabinet of Wonders” to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D. C. Together, they will enhance instruction in a number of course, most fundamentally the fall 2007 course and its sequel, “Introduction to the Museum: Issues and Ideas,” to be offered in the fall of 2008. Requirements for a Minor in Museums and Society, these courses will be taught every year on a rotating basis, assuring that the museum maps are widely used in teaching and study. The flexibility and adaptability of this tool has already been demonstrated, as a template for successful student research projects and in its adoption in another, museum related course. The expansion and refinement proposed here will encourage the use of the maps by faculty and students for years to come.