SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL
DISSERTATION PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP
SPRING 2010 WORKSHOP AGENDA

VIRTUAL WORLDS
https://workspace.ssrc.org/dpdf/Pages/DPDF

Research Director: Tom Boellstorff [tboellst@uci.edu]
Research Director: Douglas Thomas [douglast@usc.edu]

Hilton San Diego, Gaslamp Quarter, San Diego, CA
Wednesday June 2-6, 2010

This is the first of two workshops designed to help students prepare cogent and fundable dissertation proposals in their chosen field. The two goals of the first workshop are 1) to map the research field with respect to contributing disciplines, methods, sources, and area knowledge; and 2) to help prepare fellows for their pre-dissertation summer research. (The goal of the second workshop will be to focus on the mechanics and methods of writing a dissertation proposal). The two goals stand in close relation to each other: through a sustained and structured discussion of student proposals and their component parts, we hope to contribute to the mapping of the research field itself.

Of particular importance will be identifying non-traditional or problematic areas where proposals may need special attention or translation to more traditional disciplines. Because research in virtual worlds provides unique challenges for research, we will spend time addressing issues related to doing research in a deeply interdisciplinary environment as well as how to translate that research to the student's home discipline.

Workshop Readings and Resources

Research Field resources will be placed on the relevant Workspace websites. Students will receive separate explanations and detailed instructions about the access and use of the DPDF digital platform.

Workshop Assignments

- **[For June 2nd] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** 1 page revised abstract of proposal submitted with DPDF application. Fellows should be prepared to present, comment and evaluate the proposal they submit during one of the workshop sessions.
- **[June 3rd] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** Fellows will upload a one page descriptive bibliography discussing three or four scholarly texts that have particularly influenced their research.
- **[June 5th] Due on DPDF Workspace site:** Fellows will upload a 1 page summary of their research proposal, following workshop discussions on their proposal.

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

ARRIVAL, Wednesday, June 2.

Wednesday Evening: *Reception, 7-9pm.*

DAY 1—Thursday

Session 1: Introduction
(Thursday, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM)

General overview of the schedule, goals of the seminar, and discussion of objectives. Each student will present their project to the group (15 minutes) as well as discuss any unique challenges they feel they face in their research. Presentations may also raise questions of research support, faculty connections and disciplines.

Session 2: Mapping Fields, Asking Questions
(Thursday, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM)

This session with begin with an overview by the research directors of what the current state of virtual world research looks like and the key questions that are emerging in this nascent field of research. In doing so, they will address both theoretical and methodological issues that form the basis for current investigations of virtual worlds and other online venues of sociality, particularly addressing how the "non-traditional" nature of research projects addressing virtual worlds and other online venues of sociality requires us to adapt their research questions.

The second half of the session will provide time for each student to present and receive feedback on their research questions and bibliographies.

DAY 2—Friday

Session 3: Understanding Virtual Worlds and other Online Venues of Sociality
(Friday, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM)

This section will focus on the history of virtual worlds and other online venues of sociality, including the history of research on them. Because virtual worlds and other online venues of sociality are still so novel, it is important to obtain a sound historical footing. This session will lean heavily on discussing materials from the workshop bibliography and examine many of the technologies which served as predecessors to graphical virtual worlds and other online venues of sociality.

Session 4: Exploring Online: Second Life and other Online Venues of Sociality
(Friday, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM)

This session will introduce our innovative use of a virtual world as a means to help define the research field. In this session, we will introduce participating graduate students to the virtual world Second Life. We will log into Second Life together and visit several sites inworld, experimenting with how one might use a range of methodologies in online research, such as participant observation and interviewing. Participating graduate students whose projects involve other online venues of sociality that are not virtual worlds per se will have the opportunity to do a brief "show and tell" about their online fieldsites, and we will engage in a comparative methodological discussion regarding similarities and differences in methods for a range of online venues of sociality.

DAY 3—Saturday

Session 5: Strategies and Analysis for Research Design
(Saturday, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM)

This session will allow students to reflect on their inworld experiences to discuss how they might use, study, and reflect on the possibilities of virtual worlds for

their projects. We will discuss the specific methodological and theoretical challenges of studying virtual worlds, online games, websites, social networking sites, and other online venues of sociality, as well as the challenges of studying multiple sites and also relationships between online and offline socialities. We will discuss the challenges of Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance for online research projects as well.

Session 6: From the Field to the Proposal
(Saturday, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM)

For this session, each participant will write a one-page research summary of their proposed project, without looking at the summary they wrote on the first day. Comparing this research summary with the original one would help participants summarize what they have learned during the workshop and the new directions their research might now take. We will end with a discussion regarding how to turn this research summary into a program for summer research.

DAY 4—Sunday

Session 7: Looking Forward
(Sunday, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM**)**

This will be a planning session in which we discuss ideas for the September workshop, and also go over communication strategies, deadlines, and assignments due over the summer, particularly the use of Second Life. Students will be given their summer readings lists and assignments, with a specific assignment for the beginning of the fall workshop.

VIRTUAL WORLDS
https://workspace.ssrc.org/dpdf/virtualworlds/default.aspx

Research Directors: Tom Boellstorff and Douglas Thomas

Radisson Plaza—Warwick Hotel, Philadelphia
Wednesday, September 15–Sunday, September 19

This is the second of two annual DPDF workshops designed to help graduate student fellows prepare cogent and fundable dissertation proposals in their chosen field. The two goals of the second workshop are 1) to help fellows synthesize their summer research; and 2) to draft proposals for dissertation funding. The fall workshop focuses on the mechanics and the philosophy of proposal writing. The workshop also aims to challenge fellows to reflect on their summer research in ways that link meaningfully to their research field. In this, the goals of the fall workshop are closely related to the project of mapping a research field that was started during the spring workshop in San Diego.

Fellows will come out of the second workshop with supportive networks, consisting of both mentors and cohorts of new scholars carrying out research in their fields, as well as intellectually mature dissertation proposals.

Because the study of Virtual Worlds is a relatively new domain for academic inquiry, students will be focused both on the individual research projects as well as discussing how they fit into a larger field of virtual world studies.

Workshop Readings and Resources

Should there be any new resources, they will be placed on the relevant Workspace websites.

Workshop Assignments

- **Monday, September 6—Due on DPDF Workspace site:** Fellows are asked to upload a draft dissertation proposal to be examined during the workshop.
- **Due on DPDF Workspace site, Sept 15th:** Fellows are asked to work together as a team to present their research fields during the last plenary session on Sunday. Each fellow will focus on presenting their research by discussing the contribution it makes both to the study of virtual worlds, as well as to a larger disciplinary or interdisciplinary conversation.

ARRIVAL, Wednesday, September 15th: Registration packets will be distributed at check-in.

Thursday, September 16th

Session 1: Plenary Session – The Dissertation Proposal: Strategies and Funding Sources
(Thursday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

- Welcome and Introductions
- Dissertation Funder Presentations

Sessions 2-7: Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday

These sessions will focus on student proposals, which have been (roughly) grouped in thematic/methodological clusters.

Proposal discussions with take the form of a 15 minute presentation, followed by 15 minutes of group discussion.

Session 2:
(Thursday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

First half: Proposal discussions (three students).

Second half: Small group workshop, focusing on (1) researching funders and (2) the
        literature review.

Session 3:
(Friday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

First half: Proposal discussions (three students).
Second half: Small group workshop, focusing on (1) methods and timeline and (2) budget.

Session 4:
(Friday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

First half: Proposal discussions (three students).
Second half: Small group workshop, focusing on (1) ethics and IRBs and (2) writing and
        revising.

Session 5:
(Saturday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

First half: Proposal discussions (three students).
Second half: Small group workshop, focusing on (1) details and (2) final preparations.

Session 6: Joint session with the "Spaces of Inquiry" group
(Saturday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

In most cases, your proposal will be read by scholars who do not share your topical focus of inquiry, and in many cases will not share your disciplinary background as well. Particularly because virtual worlds and other online sites of sociality are relatively novel domains of research, it is crucial that your proposal explain the research project and its significance in a manner that is broadly compelling. In this session, we will work in small groups with members of the "Spaces of Inquiry" group to provide "fresh eyes" for each others' proposals. To an "outsider," what appears most interesting, and most confusing, about your proposal?

Session 7: Wrap-up and future collaborations.
(Sunday, 9 AM – 12:30 PM)