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Depth of Digital Humanities Explored through Ames Library Grant

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — This summer Illinois Wesleyan University students explored the growing field of digital humanities, using unique tools for data research at The Ames Library through funding from the American Rescue Plan Act.

The Ames Library was selected as one of 200 libraries nationwide for the American Library Association's American Rescue Plan: Humanities Grants for Libraries, an emergency relief program to assist libraries that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ames Library launched its inaugural [Digital Humanities Fellowship](#) with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, along with funds from the Illinois Wesleyan Provost's Office, The Ames Library, The Cargill Foundation and the Faculty Development Committee.

Online Learning Librarian Abigail Mann, who is leading the inaugural program, described the digital humanities as a growing field that “harnesses the increased breadth and depth of data offered through digital applications to answer old questions in new ways, ask new questions of old objects of study and offer new ways to share information to new audiences.”

Students in the fellowship program developed their own research questions based on datasets provided by faculty mentors. Throughout the course of the program, they collected and analyzed relevant data from diverse sources and created a digital story to accompany their work.

“Students will come away having learned not only technical skills with digital humanities tools, but also students will gain valuable teamwork and collaboration experience, the ability to communicate their discoveries and a deeper understanding of how data comes in a variety of forms and can be used to extend our understanding of important issues,” said University Librarian Stephanie Davis-Kahl.

Faculty members will assist participating students on research subjects ranging from author Zora Neale Hurston to local health policy to international education. Students will present their findings in a symposium on Aug. 12, and again for a student research symposium during homecoming week.

Amanda Balaba '25, majoring in accounting and political science, is currently participating in the fellowship program. She said her favorite part about the experience is exploring the digital tools.

“I have loved learning about different functions and aspects of the WeVideo software because I am personally interested in digital storytelling through videos,” said Balaba. “This experience has not only equipped me with research and digital skills, but also motivated me to explore my creative freedom through different technologies.”

Mann said having a diverse range of subjects for students to study is important because it shows students “the different ways their own disciplines can approach the same data set, modeling the ways in which digital humanities can open up new paths and forms of analyses.”

The funds through this program sustain Illinois Wesleyan's liberal arts culture, added Mann, allowing students and faculty to “highlight the ways in which humanities research continues to evolve and to address pressing current issues while giving students the tools to do exactly that, hopefully throughout their academic and professional careers, as well as in their current projects.”



Students complete research on a diverse range of subjects in the digital humanities at The Ames Library.

By Maria Harmon '23