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Personal Statement
The Ralph Stair Prize in Innovative Education

I am honored to be nominated for the Ralph Stair Prize in Innovative Education for my work with the FSU Card Archive (located at http://english3.fsu.edu/mnealomeka/). The archive is a physical and digital collection of postcards and stereocards that we have been collecting and curating for research purposes. The archive has revolutionized my teaching, especially in reimagining the roles that students play working in and with the artifacts in these spaces. The digital component of the archive contains approximately 1000 cards entered with another 2000 purchased that we will curate in subsequent semesters. When we process cards, we also number, protect, and file the original card, which can be accessed by researchers who need the physical cards for their projects. In the process of entering each card, we record discrete metadata categories that become searchable in the archive (e.g., title, photographer, date, publishing company, postmark, written texts, visual texts, etc.). For example, because of the metadata categories, students could search the archive for all images of bridges in Florida cards or images of African Americans between the 1920-40s. This search-ability aids researchers and allows them to see relationships between the different modalities and functions of the cards. To my great delight, students has been very engaged and involved with this archiving and research process from its inception. I will explain the rationale for the archive and my work with students in the following sections.

Why a Postcard Archive?

The Rhetoric and Composition Program in the English Department originally started collecting and archiving postcards to support faculty and student research projects. While postcards are ubiquitous culturally, they are a complex illustration of multimedia rhetoric that dates back to the late 19th and flourished well into the 20th centuries. As such postcards provide us ready access to artifacts of "everyday writing" that embody relationships between people, writing, images, circulation, culture, and time. While we can't anticipate every interest or research project with which people will come to the archive, we're curating it in such a way as to accommodate a broad spectrum of interests including social and cultural history, visual rhetoric, multimodality, textual production, and media. By entering the cards into a digital archive using metadata, the cards become searchable and accessible to readers in a number of ways.

One of our core goals for the site is to invite the participation of its users/viewers in order that it will continue to grow and expand based on the interests and expertise of those who use the site. We welcome any researcher who uses the site—students, faculty, and the public—to make meaning in the site and then to leave some of what they discover behind for others to see and read. This can be in the form of tagging cards, adding annotations, or creating exhibits for others to view and read. So not only are doing research within the site, they are creating content for future users of the site. This small-scale crowd sourcing project illustrate to students a value of social media—something we teach in the program—but it importantly situates them as creators of knowledge and participants in

meaning making, not just passive consumers. This shift, in my opinion, is the most significant pedagogical development of the past several decades and is key to education moving forward productively in the 21st century.

Connections to Undergraduate Courses and Research

In my undergraduate Visual Rhetoric course—part of the Editing, Writing, and Media track in the English major—students analyze and produce texts in relationship to rhetorical contexts and awareness. The postcard archive provides us a window into a variety of audiences, purposes, and situations for writing and visual media. Since many of the postcards date back to the first half of the 20th century, they tend to be more "visible" to students—they notice characteristics about them that they might overlook in more contemporary texts—and yet postcards are not so distant from students' experience with contemporary texts such as email, tweets, or updates. Either way, postcards provide an opportunity to explore a number of connections to topics we cover in class on issues such as:

- authenticity and universality (Sue Hum)
- constructing social positions with images (Chris Carter)
- governing gazes and Cartesian Perspecitivalism (Kris Fleckenstein)
- relationships between and among modalities (Gunther Kress)

The postcard assignment in Visual Rhetoric has opened new doors of engagement and publication for the students in the class. I'm impressed by the kinds of questions and research projects they develop around the site, and I've regularly gotten positive feedback from students about their work in this venue.

One of the primary projects students engage in with the archive is the production of exhibits, which are selected groupings of cards that can be saved and searched for future use. In an electronic landscape, cards can be used and grouped in numerous ways simultaneously. The exhibits also allow students to upload their own research, analysis, and reflections that become a part of the searchable archive (with their permission, of course). In this way the archive is never complete or stagnant. It is ever growing, and with each assignment, students demonstrate what and how they see the materials in the archive.

Examples of student-authored exhibits can be found at:
http://english3.fsu.edu/mnealomeka/exhibits

Undergraduate student interns have also been involved in creating the archive by reading the cards and entering them as metadata into the OMEKA archive system. In creating the metadata they ensure that the archive will be searchable and accessible for future researchers. They enter metadata in several layers, starting by using the Dublin Core (which are prescribed categories used by many archivists) and then moving to metadata that is specific for postcards, including such items as hand-written text on the cards, the card's genre, its material, information about circulation such as postmark, address, stamps, etc. They also upload scanned images of the cards' front and back (many online archives

only include the front as if the writing and printed text on the back don't matter) and enter the location of the image on the front of the card onto a map. I have a dozen interns working with me this semester on other types of archive-related projects including usability testing, marketing and connecting the site with other stakeholders, developing the language for the metadata categories, and creating permanent exhibits. These internships give students hands-on experience with developing sites for research and they allow students the opportunity to shape their own interests in relationship to the larger goals of the site.

I'll conclude with an example of one student, Victoria, who has been working with me in the archive as part of her undergraduate research experience within the honors program. In fact she will be presenting her work in a poster session next week to the university community. Victoria is an Art History major with the Museum Studies minor who sought out our archive because of the historical and visual elements of the postcards. Her initial project was on depictions of Native Americans on postcards, focusing on stereotypical tropes (located at http://english3.fsu.edu/mnealomeka/exhibits/show/nastereotypes). In the project she learned how the site worked and how to create her own exhibit. It was her second project, however, that really impressed me. Building off of her first project, she started asking questions about why the cards were produced and what their purposes might have been. From these questions she tracked down one of the producers and distributors of the cards, Fred Harvey, and the Detroit Publishing Co. where they were printed. Her findings are interesting: she connects the cards to a series of "tourist traps" along the railroad going west where travelers could see "authentic Indians" and buy their artifacts (located at http://english3.fsu.edu/mnealomeka/exhibits/show/tourism). Besides the results of the research, I was impressed with the level of thinking and research that this project entails. It's a much more sophisticated project, and she got there through her own curiosity and the joy of discovery within the archive space.

This kind of student engagement is what sets this card archive apart from many other assignments, readings, and projects, and it makes me proud of the role I have been able to play bringing together undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty in order to develop this innovation in teaching and research.