Archiving Digital and Multimedia Content: The ELL's *Rebooting Electronic Literature* Scalar Book

Applicant: (student)

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<u>Narrative Description of Project Proposal:</u>

I propose to spend this next summer working remotely with the Electronic Literature Lab (ELL) based at Washington State University at Vancouver (WSUV) on the compilation, writing, and coding of an online Scalar book about electronic literature in the 1980s and 1990s. My thesis, which I will complete at the end of this academic year and present to the English department at Reed, is about electronic literature and the ways in which experimental writers working in the 1990s understood the place of the reader and the role of interactivity in their work. Digital textuality has been an academic and artistic interest of mine for a while, and the chance to pursue it further—and continue working on the questions that I've encountered in my thesis—would serve me both professionally and personally.

I came about this opportunity through my thesis. Stuck in a rut with my research and in need of new insight, I emailed academics and artists involved in the electronic literature community to ask for Zoom interviews. Everybody I contacted was receptive, open, and extremely friendly. One of the people I reached out to was Dene Grigar, Professor and Director of WSUV's Creative Media and Digital Culture Program (who would be the outside sponsor for this project) and we got to talking about her work cataloguing, archiving, and restoring pieces of electronic literature. Often, electronic texts are actually more fragile than paper texts due to how quickly hardware and software become outmoded, and Dr. Grigar's work focuses on restoring and making these works widely available both to the public and to researchers. In addition to describing her work as a preservationist, Dr. Grigar told me more about the history of the movement and state of scholarship about it. The topic of my summer plans came up, and Dr. Grigar indicated that it would be possible for me to work with the ELL and get closely involved with some of their activities and with the community of students, post-baccs, and post-grads working there. The ELL is a major hub for electronic literature studies, and its work is central to that field. Getting to know the people working there would offer me a chance to receive important mentorship and guidance.

The project I would work on with Dr. Grigar and her team is a Scalar book, entitled *Rebooting Electronic Literature.* The book will document and provide critical commentary on seven hypertext novels and pieces of long-form poetry that are no longer accessible due to obsolete hardware and software. The Electronic Literature Lab has published four Scalar books like this before on various topics within the field, and they are all available for free online (here is an example: https://scalar.usc.edu/works/rebooting-electronic-literature-volume-3/index). The work involved in the composition of the Scalar book involves archival research in both digital and physical files, ekphrastic and interpretive writing about pieces of electronic literature, copywriting, editing, and work with multimedia content (video, audio, photo). Each Scalar book produced by the ELO includes original critical writing as well as essays and interviews contextualizing the pieces examined and discussed. The Scalar books are meant to be an authoritative record of a work, its background, and its reception. They are used extensively in

the field and have seen over 60,000 visitors to their pages. My job would be to conduct research, write commentary, and assist Grigar and her team in all aspects of the book's production.

In the course of this research experience, I would get the chance to interact with hardware and software from the Web 1.0 period, since Grigar's lab consists of 61 vintage computers and accompanying software. I would also develop my coding skills, my video and audio production skills, and hone my overall research practice through conducting archival research in the many collections held in Grigar's lab. Some of the other skills I would learn as part of the lab's daily processes include teamwork and collaboration, workflow strategies, communicating via Slack and Zoom, and managing data via naming conventions and file storage practices.

Most importantly, however, working with the ELL would give me substantive experience in the practice of digital preservation and multimedia archiving. As more and more of the world's records, culture, and creative work move online, these practices will become foundational to the work that anybody in the humanities does. Developing responsible, equitable, and contextual practices for preserving and interpreting born-digital and multimedia content is crucial if we want to understand what is happening in our world today. The task of understanding and preserving the internet is deeply important to me, and I would love to take part in that work.

<u>Covid-19 Protocol:</u>

This project proposal involves no travel — the work will be remote.