

LITRE Grant Progress Report

After speaking with Ms. Geetanjali Soni in May, we decided that I would submit a progress report and an amended plan to complete my LITRE project. My initial plan was to test the virtual reality objects during the Fall 2006 semester. One target group was to have been a group of students enrolled in an Honors 101 class co-sponsored by the Museum. However, scheduling conflicts prevented the inclusion of my virtual reality objects in the class for that semester as initially planned and I was told that I would be able to test the objects on a similar class in the Fall 2007 semester.

Further delays stemmed from technological problems associated with incompatibility issues between key technologies held up my project somewhat, delaying the availability of samples to use for general, website-based testing purposes. The initial samples constructed with the VR Worx software would not play on machines with versions of Quick Time newer than version 6. By this point, version 7 was in widespread use on computers. It took quite a bit of time for me to figure out that I needed to revert to an old version of Quick Time in order to use the software I was using to create the objects and then convert the final objects using yet another piece of software. I have since mitigated these issues by employing a combination of new, updated software solutions. I have been able to create the fully accessible objects as planned.

Through limited availability of the objects on the website, I have been able to gather some feedback on the virtual reality objects. However, the information is incomplete and insufficient to draw any real conclusions about the use of the objects in an academic environment. My project thus requires a little more time for proper testing to draw any valid conclusions. I am requesting an additional semester to bring the project to completion and propose the following.

While the expected Gregg Museum-related section of the HON101 class was postponed for the Fall 2007 semester, there are a number of other suitable classes that use the Gregg Museum's resources. I plan to utilize these classes for testing purposes. I will ask the students in these classes to interact with the objects and report on their impressions using the survey initially drafted with Dr. Carrie Zelna for this project. Furthermore, I plan to conduct some formal usability testing at the Digital Media Lab's Usability Testing facility to assess effectiveness of the objects. The objects and survey will again be made available for students on the Museum's website, with better promotion and increased usability via a now-in-development, improved interface.

I also plan to use the objects as a part of an upcoming social networking initiative involving the tagging of objects in a museum environment. The objects will form the basis of a collection of objects that accompany a tagging utility similar to those encountered on popular sites such as del.icio.us and Flickr. Users will be asked to describe the objects as seen on the screen, using their own language. I am currently in the process of redesigning the Gregg Museum's website. On the new site, the virtual reality objects and exhibitions created for this project, along with the tagging

mechanism will provide the basis for much improved student access to the virtual reality objects and exhibitions, resulting in more access to observe the potential utility of these technologies in the classroom.

I propose the following timeline to bring my LITRE project to completion and hope that this is agreeable to all parties:

Mid-August 2007: have the newly redesigned website available with virtual reality objects available for student interaction.

Fall Semester 2007: collect data

November 2007: perform usability testing

December 2007: analysis of the collected data

January 15, 2007: submit final report and findings to the LITRE committee.