

Catalyst Fund Proposal

Proposal Title:	The Development of an ISpace at ODU
ID:	31
Institution:	Old Dominion University
Requestor:	George Fowler, University Librarian
Budget:	\$25,000
Goal (as pulled from the application):	“... To develop a prototype ISpace – a space designated for provoking intersubjective communication at a public research university. This project will ... address the society-wide inability to have critical debates, and will convene key constituents to discuss the need, the opportunity, and the way forward. This process will result in a white paper describing the necessary components to implement an ISpace at a public research university....”
Description:	<p>I propose to develop a prototype ISpace – a space designated for provoking intersubjective communication at a public research university. This project will take a concept conceived through my dissertation research to address the society-wide inability to have critical debates, and will convene key constituents to discuss the need, the opportunity, and the way forward. This process will result in a white paper describing the necessary components to implement an ISpace at a public research university and will lay the groundwork for a future ISpace installation or installations.</p> <p>The recent presidential election is responsible for highlighting a trend that has been decades, if not longer, in the making – the inability of people who disagree to be able to do so amicably while discussing the issue and coming to a shared understanding. To understand this another way, how long has it been taboo to discuss religion and politics at the dining room table? Why is this? Why does it seem to be getting worse, thereby precluding more discussions on more topics by more people? And, beyond simple conversations, this inability to discuss issues from multiple perspectives is hindering our abilities to pursue meaningful action at all levels and in all capacities.</p> <p>I argue that we, as a society, have diminished the teaching, promotion, and encouragement of intersubjective communication. We privilege objectivity and subjectivity, and are trained to support absolutes and binaries more than variations and multitudes. Instead of striving to understand other perspectives, we label, categorize, and dismiss or belittle any thought not aligned with our own. We promote “safe zones” as an endorsement of self-reinforcing belief bubbles instead of supporting a goal to pop those restrictive bubbles. What the ISpace can help do is help establish that one person’s perspective is their intrinsic right and, when connected to other perspectives intersubjectively, can be broadened into a shared reality.</p> <p>John Etchemendy, former Stanford Provost, spoke to Stanford’s Board of Trustees about “the threat from within,” which he describes as “a kind of intellectual intolerance” or “intellectual blindness”, where “we succumb to the all-purpose ad</p>

hominem because it is easier and more comforting than rational argument.” He describes several manifestations of this threat:

- in the intellectual monocultures that have taken over certain disciplines
- in the demands to disinvite speakers and outlaw groups whose views we find offensive
- in constant calls for the university itself to take political stands
- decrying certain news outlets as echo chambers, while we fail to notice the echo chamber we’ve built around ourselves. (<http://news.stanford.edu/2017/02/21/the-threat-from-within/>)

An individual who wants to change his or her worldview must first set aside this worldview (not permanently, but while initially being exposed to differing perspectives) and investigate the item of concern from as many perspectives as possible. If the issue is whether more money saved for retirement is wise, then intersubjectively communicating with other people, websites, books, and through internal reflection might be relatively easy. Now consider doing this regarding any aspect of religion, climate change, or the recent election. How easy would it be for the individual to ignore his or her worldview and to accept all other perspectives as equal?

The capability to provoke this intersubjective communication is the essence of the library at a public research university. At least that is what my research findings indicate (https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/efl_etds/23/). I did not study other types of libraries, so I cannot state that this is as applicable to them, but it is the *raison d'être* for libraries at public research universities. Anecdotally, while it may not be their essence, it appears a logical function of all libraries, if based solely on the universality of library values. Further, there are likely aspects of this that apply to archives and museums.

First, why a public research university? Altbach and Salmi (2011) listed several key differentiators of public research universities:

- Commitment to disinterested research—knowledge for its own sake—as well as to the more practical elements of research and its use in contemporary society
- The best and brightest students, who are committed to the institution’s ethos
- Allowing “time for reflection and critique and for a consideration of culture, religion, society, and values. The spirit of the research university is open to ideas and willing to challenge established orthodoxies.”
- Firm link to society
- Academic freedom and open inquiry (p.16).

Second, why the library?

- Open access to all information for all people
- Spaces where individuals are, and feel, safe and comfortable to challenge their and society’s knowledge and way of knowing
- Mandate/expectation/respect of entire community (students, faculty, administrators, staff, and others) to be neutral, aspirational, and servant leaders

- Active neutrality – not “playing favorites” not forwarding one idea over another unless it directly involves the library’s ability to perform its function
- Willingness of the library to fight to gain/preserve all requisite components
- Passion for the purpose of the library and the public research university.

I am unaware of any other space or agency that has all of these requisite characteristics. Therefore, it is imperative for these libraries to embrace this purpose – to “provoke intersubjective communication” in order for society to regain its ability to understand an issue from multiple perspectives, respect all perspectives, and take action based on this shared understanding. The library may be the heart of this endeavor, but it cannot succeed without engaged partners in the faculty, students, and administration.

This space would be a space reserved for engagement, and not for presentation. It would be open to students, faculty, and staff have the necessary environment and furnishings to provide a safe, comfortable, and engaging interaction. There would be simultaneous displays showing differing viewpoints or “variations on a theme” and be able to engage at the intellectual, as opposed to the emotional level, on any topic, and accommodate 30-50 people with flexible configurations possible. It would incorporate the information carefully cultivated through the library along with many other forms of information. An initial concept was developed by VMDO Architects: bit.ly/2kE0tqH.

During fall 2017 semester, use an external architect facilitator to:

1. Full-day workshop with key constituents (student representative(s), faculty, administration, local community member(s))

- o Discuss meaning of Intersubjective Communication
- o Develop a logic model for an ISpace, starting with outcomes or goals, and including inputs, activities, outputs, and measures
- o Develop a working list of objectives for an ISpace and what it might be expected to accommodate
- o Draft a list of possible event types and use scenarios
- o Working in small teams, design prototype ISpaces and present to group
- o Facilitator writes a summary report

2. Concept Design - 2 rounds of charrettes, incorporating feedback from user groups and focusing on refinement and development of a single design solution for an IS space that meets the needs/expectations established in the workshops

Estimated costs for this process is \$25,000.

Budget detail provided by follow-up email:

Here is a more-detailed breakdown of the \$25,000 cost. They normally don’t do this type of work for less than \$50,000, so I am getting a significant discount due to the novelty and potential of this concept and proposal.

PART 1 - PREPARATION \$5000

A kick-off meeting will be held via conference call to establish schedule and participants, and establish goals and requirements outlined by grant-making body
A period of discovery leading up to the workshop will be used to assemble information about: ODU, Perry Library, Intersubjective Communication, and possible design precedents
Materials will be designed (conceptually, graphically) and created to support the interactive workshops
A proposed schedule for the workshop will be drafted and shared with participants, along with a brief survey to introduce relevant concepts

PART 2 - WORKSHOP – on site at ODU, location TBD (break for lunch and 2 15 minute breaks) \$12,000

A. Introduction

The workshop facilitator(s) will introduce the concept of intersubjective communication, will describe the possible goals of the workshop and outline the itinerary of the day. A summary of the workshop process will provide a clear picture of the itinerary and will describe possible outcomes

B. 5 user-centered design exercises (45 minutes each) focusing on the following:

- Establish the guiding vision/spirit of a space dedicated to intersubjective communication with the use of an engaging/interactive exercise
- Start-Stop-Continue or Keep-Toss-Create exercises to establish those aspects of an academic library that contribute to or detract from the possibilities for an ISspace
- Dot Democracy exercise – allows participants to recommend – and then vote for – their preferred design objectives
- Mission Impossible exercise – an interactive forum that will help flush-out what the stakeholders see as impediments to success, and possible solutions to them.
- A Day In The Life – the final exercise asks participants to create various permutations for the use of the space to test the flexibility of the concept

C. Closing Remarks

- The facilitator(s) and participants will be given the opportunity to summarize the results of the five exercises and describe next steps.

PART 3 – REPORT and CONCEPT DESIGN \$8000

- A document will be created that captures the list below. It can be used for fundraising, the creation of an RFP (request for proposals) for future work, etc.
- o The genesis of the idea for a purpose-built space dedicated to intersubjective communication (rely heavily on Fowler dissertation)
 - o A timeline will be created that maps the process – from inception through workshop
 - o A graphic and narrative summary of the workshop will illustrate a variety of user-generated ideas about the functionality of the proposed project, and will include all relevant input from stakeholders
 - o An architectural plan will be developed that proposes a range of ideal locations/sizes
 - o An architectural “concept” using input from the workshop participants will be developed
 - o An architectural narrative will be drafted that describes the intent of the proposed space and its physical ramifications

	<p>After the process, I and the architect facilitator will write a white paper and otherwise promote the process undertaken and the results through a series of events/webinars/blogs aimed at sharing the new spatial typology pursue speaking engagements at ACRL, ALA, SCUP, etc.</p>
<p>Comments from Field Reviewers:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building on recent research, this proposal is thoroughly thought-out. The requestor has covered in details succinct knowledge for intersubjective communication. This is a great model for other institutions seeking this kind of space. I recommend funding at the budget requested. <li>2. I'm not able to say if the budget is appropriate to the project. The project also seems a little self-serving. <li>3. The creation of an ISpace has not been studied or implemented on a scholarly scale in the library community. While some libraries try to create these conversations, students do not always feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. This proposal is highly innovative because it addresses a unique problem for the first time and has an ample amount of research and evidence to prove its success as the result of the library director creating a dissertation on the subject. Also, creating these spaces in libraries is an excellent way to bring value to their institutions during a time when the nation is grappling between many political and social topics/issues. One of the basic goals of the library profession is to disseminate information and encourage society to use information to improve their lives. This proposal provides a well-thought space that can be adapted by all library fields (academic, public, museum, archives) because all other areas promote information sharing in different ways. This proposal is worthy of funding.