



NEH awards \$100,000 Humanities Access Grant to SIUE and MJCHF

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE — The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and the Mannie Jackson Center for

the Humanities a two-year \$100,000 Humanities Access Grant. The National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation.

“The MJCHF is excited to work with the SIUE IRIS Center and the Madison County Regional Superintendent on this important initiative, and we are thankful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for their support of our efforts and the ability to expand our Conversation Toward a Brighter Future program. The project will be an extension of the MJCHF Conversation Toward a Brighter Future initiative and will continue our support of Madison County schools by increasing access to technology and engaging in the humanities,” said Dr. Ed Hightower, Director of the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities.

Dr. Jessica DeSpain, PhD, and Kristine Hildebrandt, co-directors of SIUE’s IRIS Center, will lead this project in collaboration with the Regional Superintendent’s Office and Madison County school district leaders to develop the curriculum for this project. The [Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics Scholarship \(IRIS\) Center](#) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is invested in connecting to, working with, and helping to document, the people, places, practices and histories of the region as well as a broader international community.

“This project’s digital storytelling studios will provide students the opportunity to investigate and examine generational differences while mastering valuable digital skills, thus empowering them to lead the conversation and reach audiences far beyond those found within the confines of the traditional classroom. SIUE’s IRIS Center is proud to partner with the MJCHF and Regional Office of Education (ROE). Together, we can make meaningful connections with local schools and reach underserved students. The MJCHF’s humanities mission is an ideal fit for the SIUE IRIS Center’s digital community engagement mission,” said Dr. DeSpain.

The program will feature two main components: in-school curriculum and after-school digital storytelling studios. A teacher in each district will act as an on-site coordinator who will lead the project for student participants. Digital storytelling brings together a variety of activities surrounding a central theme, including blogging, web design, podcasts, oral histories, video production and digital visualization. In the after-school studios, students will work with primary documents and archives, learn about digital ethics, and practice web development and other digitally embedded skills. They will also participate in field trips to interview people at universities, workplaces and retirement facilities.

Madison County school student leaders are scheduled for their second summit on January 9, 2018 from 9:30 to 11:00 am at the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities, 1210 N. Main St., Edwardsville. All Madison County high schools and middle schools are participating in a two-year project focusing on respect, dignity, understanding, and forgiveness. Student leaders identify issues facing their schools and communities and develop positive solutions. Each school is provided a \$5,000 scholarship for their two-year project. Student leaders will provide a status report on their project and use this time to collaborate with other school leaders from across Madison County.

“We are looking forward to meeting with the students on January 9, and receiving an update on their projects in their schools. Conversation Toward a Brighter Future is about positive communication, collaboration, and finding solutions to the problems we face as a society. Who better to lead these discussions than our future young leaders and we hope the public will stop by the MJCHF and listen to these discussions,” said Dr. Ed Hightower.

To learn more about activities and programs at the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities, we encourage you to visit www.mjchf.org.