FWI Funding Statement

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Faculty/Area: Science – Geography and Earth Science
Project title: Geographers Without Borders’: A Skills Incubator

Please summarize how the FWI funds have been spent:
A summary by broad category is sufficient, line by line accounting of individual expenditures is not required unless specifically requested. Alternatively, please provide a copy of your FAS for the accounts that have been used for the FWI funds
Hack-A-Thon Support - $1,000
CherryPic Development - $4,000

Balance remaining: $0 remaining
Please indicate how the balance will be spent and when you anticipate that the funds will be exhausted.
Summary Report

Limited opportunities exist for McMaster University geography students to break out of the academic enclave and give back to our community. While engineering, medical, and business oriented community groups exist and are well known (Doctors Without Borders etc.) geographers do yet have this same opportunity to advertise our expertise and give back to the community. In January of this year eleven graduate students, in the department of geography, came together to found McMaster University’s Geographers Without Borders’ (GWB) in order to solve this problem. GWB’s primary mandate is twofold: first to connect students with the greater community to generate mutually-beneficial partnerships between community organizations and McMaster geography students, and second to support our members in their socially oriented entrepreneurial endeavors.

We have identified that it is also challenging for students to break out of their geography of the academic enclave. It is often noted in our community that students are believed to be living within the McMaster bubble and lack exposure to great experiences the City of Hamilton.

Project Overview

The first project that was supported by the skills incubator was a collaboration between our group and Hack-It-Mac, which produced a multidisciplinary group. Three projects were selected to be entered into a hack-a-thon, which included:

1. The initial development of a collaborative Mapping System with the potential to support projects and teaching across the globe. This project resulted in significant challenges, but provided foundational learning to our team and those who were involved during the hack.
2. Development of a library program for Start the Cycle to aid in the management of resources when the program was implemented into schools. The project was successfully created by modifying existing open source software. This tool provided the Not-for-profit organization STC with a tool they can use to increase their value proposition when they try to open bike libraries.
3. The final and largest project that was supported during the hack-a-thon was an event discovery app. During the hack-a-thon many people worked on portions of this project and it showed significant potential. It is now known as CherryPic.

CherryPic – Discovering a Sense of Place

After we conducted an analysis of all three initial projects we identified that the third project, CherryPic, had the highest potential for success and we decided to focus the efforts of all project members to this project.

CherryPic is a crowdsourced discovery tool for events, activities, and anything interesting in a place. Using Hamilton as a study area, we intended to build a tool that could be utilized to determine if the sharing of digital information can improve people’s sense of place, which we define as authentic human attachment and belonging.

Over the past year we have engaged students at McMaster to begin thinking about how the field of Geography can be used to generate social capital. We consulted undergraduates, graduates, faculty and staff, not only in our department but in others (engineering, computer science, communications); along with industry professionals from Google and ESRI to bring knowledge together to craft a social incubator.
Why a new tool?

Current social media networks limit users who are new, to be able to, gain a sense of place from others as they lack the local social connections. We suspect our crowdsourcing approach can expedite and increase a person’s sense of place, particularly when they are new to a region. If this research is successful it may help to reduce anxiety for students during their transition to a new area.

How is your app different from Instagram?

We see several key differentiators between Instagram and CherryPic. First, Instagram's tagline is "Capture and share the world's moments", and the key difference between Instagram and CherryPic is that moments are by definition in the past. Our app allows you to discover what is going on around you in the present or future, and these events can, in turn, become the moments that then end up on Instagram.

Second, unlike Instagram our app is location-based. What is presented on the app are local activities, places, events, and general things to do in your vicinity. Instagram, like Facebook, allows you to keep in touch with friends around the world, few of which may be local. In the future, with a successful launch in Hamilton, we hope to improve the app's location based functionality by using your phone's geolocation. This would provide all of our users a way to connect to opportunities instantly wherever you take your phone. This may be around the corner or stepping off a plane in Rio. Wherever you are you will never feel lost. Where Instagram is a photo album, CherryPic is your friend and tour guide in Hamilton now and tomorrow, potentially beyond.

Finally, another key difference is that with CherryPic there are no user accounts, and therefore no friends to add. Anyone can join and anyone can post. We chose this format because from both an upstream and downstream perspective we can crowdsource the discovery of the world around you. Where on Instagram you may have one friend that day who discovered a great new place in your local area to eat, entertain, or visit; on CherryPic that one friend is the entire local community, or at least the entire CherryPic community. For a new student that has never been to Hamilton for example, if you download our app today you will instantly have hundreds of friends from all sorts of backgrounds discovering the world around you and filling you in on what they have found, and likewise you can do the same.

Sense of being

The initial discussions with users was a consensus that the core social essence of Geography as a discipline is the idea that understanding the world around you, can create a sense of place, which translates to a sense of belonging.

We live in the age of connection through our phones and the web, the skills incubator set out to build a tool with the goal of acclimatizing a community, our community, to their surroundings simply by browsing through pictures and information on their phone. After all we figured that the largest social contributions to the way our modern society functions is via companies like Google, Facebook, and Twitter; we would take their cues and provide our own social contribution for the field of Geography.

Our primary challenge was to remove the need for a google search to let users know of what to do, where to go, what to eat, who to meet...things that can only be found in detail if first you already know (at least enough to enter a search term or follow a friend) that they exist. A discovery app is more than a social media platform. Although it runs on pictures, the images are used to transmit
information, much different from the Facebook and Instagram pictures used for aesthetics and self-promotion.

The result of our FWI project is CherryPic, which seamlessly allows for a connection between pictures and web information to be browsed passively (as opposed to an active search) to generate discovery. Best of all these discoveries are crowdsourced. Anyone from McMaster and the surrounding Hamilton community can upload a photo and connect it to the web instantly through our unique process, allowing for one person to have the knowledge of thousands about their surroundings.

We launched the app on the App Store for any Apple device and on the Google Play Store for any Android device. It is available for you to download now. We have begun promoting it during welcome week and have nearly 100 users in just a few days, most of them new McMaster students. We hope this is helping them feel more at home. Our long term goal with the tool is to turn it into a research project asking the big questions about technology and sense of place. For starters, can technology even create a sense of place? Can you acclimatize to an area faster through simply browsing pictures and connecting to information on your mobile phone. Or does a sense of place mean much more?

The application was created for both iOS and Android. The app was available on Apple iTunes and the Google Play Store. Between the two stores we have seen ~1,000 downloads, which is excellent considering the limited budget and resources for this app.

Additional funding is required for sustainment of the project. User acceptance testing was conducted prior to, and during the initial launch of the app. The results from the testing identified a number of changes modifications to the app. The changes identified range in complexity, all which require additional funding in order to implement.

**Challenges**

- Difficulty in communicating with the department manager who was responsible for our funds.
- Budgeting, the FWI funding was supplemented with additional funds from SPICES and money from the individuals who are running this project.
- Identifying sources of funding for continued support.
- We initially worked with a group of students to try and develop the app, they lacked skills and eventually had to be replaced by a professional firm.
- To align with the connection to the community we had difficulty finding a professional development firm in Hamilton.