

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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November 6, 2014

Dr. Helen Cullyer
Program Officer
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
140 East 62nd Street
New York, New York 10065-8124

Re: Central Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane — Applying digital technology to issues of access, privacy, race, costs, and retention of historically significant state mental health records and documents.

Dear Helen:

The School of Information at The University of Texas at Austin has submitted a proposal to the Mellon Foundation that seeks to determine how the applications of critical policy analysis, contemporary digital technology, and archival preservation methods combine to assist state mental health systems update their traditional approaches to competing policy issues of access, privacy, and retention of historically significant mental health records and documents. This proposal and project have my full endorsement.

For the past several years, the Provost and I provided support funds to Dr. King Davis and his co-investigators to complete digitizing close to 95% of the historical records and documents from the Central Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane. When first apprised of this project, we wanted to make sure that our University supported it as much as possible, given its importance.

The principal investigators are proposing a project that builds on their findings from their previous research on the historical records and documents from this first mental hospital for African Americans. The research team recognizes that practically all state mental health systems are faced with the necessity of creating policies and laws that manage access, privacy, and retention of mental health records and documents. At the same time, the research team notes that many states are not taking full advantage of the rapid advances in information technology that could meet both the need to lower retention costs while increasing access to documents while maintaining privacy. Historically, states have been unclear about how to respond to queries from family advocates and scholars wanting access to mental health records and documents. The project will examine these complex issues and propose solutions.

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This project will add to the knowledge base in three related ways. First, it will compare and contrast the existing policies in the state and at the federal level that govern access, privacy, and retention of mental health records and documents. Second, it will create a digital library model that balances access and privacy issues. Third, it will demonstrate a goodness of fit with the data gathered from Central State Hospital. This knowledge will be of value to other state mental health systems.

The project will cost \$763,000 over a three-year period (2015-2018) and provide a series of findings, approaches to information technology, and policy recommendations for states to consider.

Dr. Davis has extensive experience in the field of mental health policy, and he has assembled a very knowledgeable team of research faculty and post-doctoral students from our campus.

Thank you for giving this proposal your close consideration, and for everything the Mellon Foundation does strengthen and promote the arts and the humanities and the positive influence they have on society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W Powers", written over the word "Sincerely,".

William Powers, Jr.
President

WP/dwd