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10 December 2009

## Researchers shed light on study of historical images

Academics from the Universities of Sheffield, Michigan and Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have been awarded £183,233 in research funding from the international "Digging into Data" grant competition to explore how best we can analyse early historical manuscripts, using modern electronic techniques.

The team, which includes Emeritus Professor Peter Ainsworth from the University of Sheffield's Department of French and, Dr Michael Meredith from the University's Humanities Research Institute, hopes that the tools and techniques developed during their 15-month project will revolutionise the ways in which people extract information from digital resources.

The Sheffield-Michigan-Illinois project will address three datasets: 15th-century illuminated manuscripts, 17th and 18th century maps, and 19th and 20th century quilts. Research questions to be explored include how visual and production styles of sources reflect regional tastes or historical moments, how traumatic historical events are manifested in cultural production, and how artefacts reflect and influence relationships between cultural groups.

The 'Digging into Data Challenge' competition is coordinated by four leading international research agencies: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), of Canada; the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), of the United States; the National Science Foundation (NSF), of the United States; and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), of the United Kingdom. The competition aims to promote innovative humanities and social science research using large-scale data analysis.

Just eight projects were chosen as winners from almost 150 applications. They will now go on to demonstrate how data mining (searching large-scale databases for patterns) and data analysis tools can improve research in the humanities and social sciences. It is anticipated that the more challenging data mining methodologies required for research in the humanities can then be applied across the sciences.

The Sheffield team will look at nine complete 15th century manuscripts of Froissart's Chronicles digitised at high resolution and comprising approximately 6,100



Professor Peter Ainsworth

images. The project will ask a number of questions, from where and by whom the manuscripts were created to how the manuscript reflects the tastes of the particular region and historical moment to which it belongs.

Professor Peter Ainsworth said: "This exciting project builds on productive relationships forged over several years with our American partners in art history and computer science, involving on-site and virtual seminars, and supported by small grants from the EPSRC, NSF, JISC/AHRC e-Science initiatives. We aim to use pattern recognition, data mining and other supercomputing techniques to bring fresh light to bear on areas of medieval scholarship that we believe can benefit significantly from the application of these new methodologies."

Notes for Editors: [SSHRC](#) is the federal agency that promotes and supports university-based research and training in the humanities and social sciences in Canada. Through its programs and policies the Council enables the highest levels of research excellence in Canada and facilitates knowledge-sharing and collaboration across research disciplines, universities and all sectors of society.

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the [NEH](#) supports learning in history, literature, philosophy and other areas of the humanities. NEH grants enrich classroom learning, create and preserve knowledge, and bring ideas to life through public television, radio, new technologies, museum exhibitions, and programs in libraries and other community places.

[NSF](#) is an independent federal agency that supports fundamental research and education across all fields of science and engineering, with an annual budget of \$6.06 billion. NSF funds reach all 50 states in the US through grants to over 1,900 universities and institutions. Each year, NSF receives about 45,000 competitive requests for funding, and makes over 11,500 new funding awards. NSF also awards more than \$400 million in professional and service contracts yearly.

[JISC](#) (Joint Information Systems Committee) is a joint committee of the UK further and higher education funding bodies and is responsible for supporting the innovative use of information and communication technology to support learning, teaching, and research. It is best known for providing a UK national infrastructure network, a range of support, content and advisory services, and a portfolio of high-quality resources.

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