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Jury Project Proposal
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HAPLUK (The HIV and AIDS Project for Lexington and the University of Kentucky)

Background:

Until two years ago, had you made an HIV or AIDS joke in front of me, I probably would have laughed. Until two years ago, I had no idea what the difference between HIV and AIDS was, if there even existed one. Until two years ago, I was not concerned with HIV or AIDS because I did not think it would ever affect me. Until two years ago, I did not know anyone who had been diagnosed with HIV or AIDS. Now I am dating someone who is living with HIV. Now my entire perspective has changed.

I have always had a certain sense of compassion for people who have to work against the odds to succeed in life. I grew up as a morbidly obese, closeted gay male, so it is not difficult to understand how I developed such a dogma. From the beginning I knew that I wanted to incorporate this idea into my project. The first time I “went public” with the project I used the term “invisible people” to describe the scope of it. I wanted to create something that would help put people who have been ignored by or brushed aside from society onto, or back onto, the map.

“Invisible people” incorporates an enormous percent of the population of Lexington, however, and with only 45 hours dedicated to the project it seemed more than a bit improbable that I would be able to pull off something so impressive. Immediately I thought of working on a project to improve the living conditions of racial minorities, who are often sectioned off from the rest of the cities in which they live (and Lexington is no exception to this rule). Another idea was to create a fund for the impoverished and homeless people living in Lexington, but I quickly realized that gathering enough money to “make a difference” would be a task I was not sure I could succeed at. I wanted to do something that would really benefit a large portion of the community, and I wanted to do it well.

After discussing various options with the associate director of the Gaines Fellowship, Lisa Broome-Price, and my senior mentor, Corinne Keel, I finally decided to focus specifically on helping HIV/AIDS patients by creating a website that would enable them to form a community of their own within the greater community of Lexington, in an attempt to eliminate some of the social difficulties that can arise from being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

Proposed Project:

In a nutshell, I want to create a website that generates a community within a community for people living with HIV/AIDS in Lexington and at UK. This website will offer a place for people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS to communicate with other individuals in Lexington who may also be living with HIV/AIDS, and do so in an anonymous manner (if they so choose) that will keep their identities confidential.

From personal experiences, and common sense, I recognize that an individual’s HIV+ status is not something he wants to run around wearing on the front of his t-shirt for the whole world to see. While Lexington offers a great website for informing people living with

HIV/AIDS on how they can receive proper medical care, along with offering places where an individual can go to get tested for HIV, there is no option to readily discuss the abundant issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in an anonymous manner—unless, of course, if you have the money, time, and/or guts to go see a counselor (which is too often eschewed) or want to go to support group meetings (which aren't available at 3:00 am in the morning, and aren't really that anonymous).

The website will also feature various sections that will hopefully serve to educate people in Lexington and at UK, both those living with HIV/AIDS and those without (perhaps family members, friends, or simply curious individuals), by informing them of the history of the virus, where it stands today, and what research solutions are being proposed to help amend its influence in the future. I can only hope that this will destroy some of the stigma that is currently associated with HIV/AIDS, which would assist in re-inspiring people who are diagnosed with the virus that they are still worthy of the love and attention every human deserves.

Schedule:

Right now I am familiarizing myself with website-creating software so that I will be fairly well-versed in the framing of websites by winter break, which is when I plan to spend a lot of my free time putting together the website. I am also starting volunteer work at AVOL, which will help me get involved with the community that is my target demographic for this website. Hopefully it will give me some insights as to what things I need to consider in the framing of the site, along with some recommendations for things that should or should not be included. Finally, I hope that this will enable me to network with each of the 72 counties AVOL outsources to, along with county health departments, colleges of medicine, libraries, and so on, so that there is a large web of support stemming from this website.

Along the way I will want to maintain deadlines, spaced roughly one or two weeks apart, for having certain sections of the website done. A preliminary idea of what this will look like can be seen below:

By the middle of November have the website's basic layout created. By late November have the links pertaining to particular information created, including "The History of HIV," "HIV and You," "Medical Advances," and "The Psychology of HIV." By the middle of December have the forums put onto the website (but perhaps not fully functional at this point). By the end of December have the forums fully functional. By mid-January have the links to "Library Resources," "Receiving Support," "What About Insurance," "Where to Go Get Tested," and "Web Links" created. And by the end of January, have any finishing touches that need to be taken care of, taken care of, along with having all administrator positions filled, so that the website will be up and running a few weeks in advance of the informational night that will be taking place in mid-February.

Budget:

Funding for this project does not seem to be too much of an issue. Initially, I will be out a decent sum of cash, probably less than \$30.00, for the software that will be needed to generate a suitable website (along with the *Web-Design for Dummies* book that I will no-doubt end up requiring). Following this the project should remain expense-free until the website is finished and I need to determine a place where it can be hosted. I may attempt to have it posted onto an

area of the Bluegrass Care Clinic's already existing site, which would help to alleviate some of the issues concerning costs, but this will have to be taken up with them at a later date.

In addition, during the informational night it will be necessary to provide food and drinks, along with the basic eating and drinking utensils, which will again not be too pricey of an expenditure, but it is something that needs to be considered. I have already spoken with members of AVOL and I may be able to receive some help from their office in order to fund this project, as well as from other LGBT groups in Lexington.

Jurors:

- Angel of AVOL, my "Lexington person"
- Katy Read of the Bluegrass Care Clinic, my "UK person"
- Corinne Keel, my "senior mentor"

Sources:

Currently my only "true" sources have been other websites, based either in Lexington, KY or nationally based HIV/AIDS resources. The two most prominent of which have been <http://www.avolky.org/> (AVOL's official website), and <http://www.thebody.com/> ("The Complete HIV/AIDS Resource"). Various articles pertaining to HIV/AIDS that I have pulled from a few editions of Lexington's Herald Leader have served as sources as well. I hope to expand these sources to include health departments, medical colleges, offices and libraries in Lexington and on UK's campus, as well as the websites of other HIV/AIDS support forums, so that I can set the framework for as large of a potential community as possible.