



Proposal Defense
Doctor of Philosophy in Information Science

“Playable Archives: Virtual worlds expanding access, participation, and conversation in the archive” by Pat Healy

Date: December 18, 2024

Time: 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Place: Room 828, Information Sciences Building, 135 N
Bellefield Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Committee:

- Dmitry Babichenko, Advisor, Clinical Professor, Department of Informatics and Networked Systems, School of Computing and Information
- Rosta Farzan, Professor, Department of Informatics and Networked Systems, School of Computing and Information
- Angela E.B. Stewart, Assistant Professor, Department of Informatics and Networked Systems, School of Computing and Information
- Kuo-Ting (Tim) Huang, Assistant Professor, Department of Information Culture and Data Stewardship, School of Computing and Information

Abstract:

The world of digital cultural heritage projects, particularly ones that engage with digital archives, are simultaneously celebrated for their supposed capacity to revolutionize preservation and plagued with an unending plethora of novel challenges. I explore the subjectivity of ease-of-use, social issues around productive multi-user communication, and ethical issues such as equitable dissemination and problematic modes of cultural value extraction. I theorize an approach to solving these problems through a virtual world system, built through community-engaged scholarship and participatory design, that looks to support asynchronous community through asynchronous spatial messaging, thoughtful exploration and celebration of identity through an identity-labeled communication system I derived from feminist theories of standpoint, and accessibility through a design-for-one paradigm, based both in accessible design literature and my own proposed critical theory: userism.

This work presents a novel system exemplifying those approaches named the Playable Archive. Deployment of the system with an existing digital archive (namely the Charles "Teenie" Harris archive) follows participatory design work to craft virtual exhibits and other design considerations intended to respect the needs and desires of the archive's subjects (namely the elderly residents of Pittsburgh's Hill District) as primary stakeholders. Evaluation of the system will assess the impact of key features, including asynchronous spatial messaging, design-for-one adaptive accommodation, and identity-labeled communication.