

SIU Sustainability Council Project
Final Report

September 13, 2013

Project title: **The Antarctica - Imagined Geographies Initiative**
Project I.D. #: **206601**
Award date: April 22, 2012
Completion date: May 31, 2013.

Brief write up of project/project experience (not to exceed 250 words):

From March 19 - May 4, 2012, a multidisciplinary collaboration took place at SIU Carbondale and throughout the region – the *Antarctica: Imagined Geographies Initiative* [AIGI]. Nearly 1000 persons participated in the 30 events we facilitated over the six weeks of the project, and thousands more enjoyed our colorful brochure, publicity, and newspaper reports.

The centerpiece and inspiration for AIGI was the Antarctica photographic-sound installation of Gary Kolb & Jay Needham, displayed in the Morris Library rotunda on the SIU Carbondale campus. Radiating out, symbolically, from this space were the 22 on- and off-campus events (Carbondale, Marion, & Harrisburg), and another eight meetings with special audiences (children, various grad students groups, GLBT community). These events enabled members of the SIU community and greater Southern Illinois region to meet artists, authors, composers, filmmakers and photographers who shared their music, films, fiction, and non-fiction created in Antarctica; learn about polar research of climatologists, biologists, geologists, and geographers – much of which was related to climate change issues; consider the precedent of shared global Antarctica governance as a model for governing the world and outer space.

One question continuously asked and addressed throughout AIGI events was how does Antarctica relate to our lives in Southern Illinois? This question, along with the enthusiasm for continuing our vision of an arts-directed, interdisciplinary initiative, led us to extend our project to focus on Southern Illinois for the foreseeable future, through our revised title – *Imagining Geographies*. [237 words]

Best things learned/produced from project:

The success of AIGI far exceeded our expectations. Even prior to launch in March 2012, members of the SIU higher administration, as well as faculty members across the university complimented us for addressing the need for interdisciplinary efforts that enable faculty and students to extend their purview beyond their specific areas of research and study. Throughout the six weeks, many such persons began to speak with us about next steps, and this led to our proposing, and ultimately deciding, to shift our efforts to focus on Southern Illinois for the foreseeable future. Other outcomes of AIGI include (1) the wide range and mix of campus units and community groups involved in planning and hosting events; extensive use of multiple media platforms; and (3) the invitation issued by the Vice-Chancellor for Research to four members of the AIGI management team to be among the founding members of his Task Force on Interdisciplinary Research Enhancement (Scott Ishman, Geology; Gary Kolb, retired MCMA Dean, Cinema & Photography; Peter Lemish, Journalism; & Jay Needham, Radio, Television, and Digital Media). Peter Lemish served as the facilitator of this Task Force from July 2012 – July 2013.

What do you see as the next step for the project?

The AIGI Management Team realized that a number of matters could be improved in future efforts [cited below], and we sought to do so in our Spring 2013 program – The Land, Lives, and Arts of Southern Illinois.

- Revise the name of the project since Antarctica was not to be our ongoing focus; Imagining Geographies [IG] is the name we adopted.
- Focus on Southern Illinois in order to serve the university's regional mission and create immediate relevancy of our initiatives.
- Seek to identify and create projects that will enable researchers and students to participate in interdisciplinary efforts that focus on regional challenges.
- Develop a multi-year approach in order to grow initiatives and programs - as opposed to one-time events, including partnerships with as wide a variety as possible of campus units, faculty, other researchers and artists in the region, as well as community groups.
- Use multiple media platforms: Continue with highly praised brochure; improve website (Green Fund helped here significantly); extend use and management of social media; seek pre-event coverage through advancing stories on upcoming events; consider advisability & cost involved in use posters and fliers; seek alternative ways to inform

residents of region unable to attend events; e.g. newspaper-type publication created for Spring 2013 IG.

- Find ways to generate greater undergraduate participation as well as to serve graduate students through advanced announcement of events so that faculty can include topics/events in course syllabi; develop special opportunities for students to meet campus guests.
- Seek to partner with and support university-wide theme; 2012-13 – Sustainability; 2013-14 –Water.

How do you define sustainability? Has this changed over the course of your project? If so, how?

Our understandings of the potentialities for AIGI, and now IG, to contribute to members of the SIU community and residents of the region in regard to sustainability is expanding in ways unimagined when we began this project. Of course we understood that Antarctic-related programs would enlighten us about the science of studying all the dimensions of the Antarctic, including climate change and environmental sustainability. However, through the governance discussion we found a living precedent seemingly lost in the morass of lack of cooperation in regard to finding ways to cooperate globally to sustain our Earth.

A second major surprise created by NASA scientist Claire Parkinson led to our advancing a major initiative – The Imagining Geography Sustainability and Environmental Science, Policy and Communication Series. Dr. Parkinson insisted on speaking at a meeting of the Global Media Research Center about the problems scientists confront when speaking with policymakers, journalists, other media makers, and the public-at-large. These problems are related to today through new areas of discourse known as ‘boundary science’, knowledge mobilization, and civic communication. Attended by 28 faculty and grad students, many involved in environmental studies and sustainability, there was strong consensus that Dr Parkinson raised an important area that needs to be explored here, and thus we are planning four events this year, including presentations by one of the leading US experts in boundary science – Professor David Feldman (UC Irvine).

Other events developed in our second year of operation will be discussed in our 2013 report, but suffice to note here initiatives such as – Greening Carbondale via a Food Forest, the

map exhibit in Morris rotunda, The Compass residency & field trips, the Community of Scholars meeting to discuss interdisciplinary research all relate directly to advancing conventional discourse on sustainability. However, as further evidence of our ever-growing understanding of sustainability, I submit that our Voices of Southern Illinois Project, that initiated our efforts to create an archive of civil rights history of Southern Illinois, starting with Carbondale, is directly related to the need for achieving human rights in order to create a sustainable society.

In summary, we feel that Imagining Geographies has grown through the AIGI experience to be a major contributor and innovator in advancing sustainability – related matters at SIU and in the region.