

The Human Experience

Mead Dream Idea 2020-2021

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Motivation

It has been my experience during my lifetime that there exists a myriad of reasons to keep people separated and the exorbitant focus on them is only detrimental. Being a student and interacting with students as a faculty in the multicultural US environment over the past nine years, has only exacerbated this observation and the human desire to connect with others around us.

Creation

Working in the field of Human-Computer Interaction over the past 25 years, I came to realize the immense potential of interactive technologies to improve the human condition. I also find **creativity** as a better means for modeling the world we want to live in, than simply finding solutions to existing problems. The former can have a lasting impact to the lives of the creators and the people their creation affects, while the latter is often a temporary patch.

Proposal

It is my vision to bring students together to create a digital “exhibit” that captures the human experience. My *dream idea* involves creating an online repository where people post their **values** and a brief **story** about themselves. Values—as emotional states we want to live life by—and life stories are far more important about what matters to each one of us, compared to race, ethnic origin, politics, religion, and everything else imposed to us externally. The project will bring together a dozen students not just from engineering but from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education, and media studies to understand how to use *value-based design* to engage a global audience to this worthwhile endeavor.

This online repository, most probably a website, will then be used to visualize the information gathered in limitless ways that will emerge through group discussions and community engagement. An initial idea is to depict virtual communities based on these values (e.g., the *Love* city or the *Justice* town), which will help everyone realize the diversity of people living by these values. Mead funding will be used mainly for travel funding to conduct *contextual inquiry* and *system prototype evaluation* in diverse communities in and around Charlottesville (e.g., the Harrisonburg refugee community). The added benefit would be to expose students directly to the human experience of a diverse population and open them up both as individuals but also in terms of generating ideas that will enhance the system’s potential. The overarching goal is to **excite students about creating and modeling the world they want to live in!**



Example visualization

*Creating is no problem -
problem solving is not
creating.*

*In the creative process you
do not make choices about
what you do not want.*

*You make choices about
what you do want.*

Robert Fritz, *The Path of
Least Resistance*

*Don't ask what the world
needs. Ask what makes you
come alive, and go do it.
Because what the world
needs is people who have
come alive.*

Howard Thurman,
*African-American author,
philosopher, and educator*