The 2020-2021 academic year was an especially challenging one for everyone at Mason due to the Covid-19 pandemic. On March 15, 2020, the staff, faculty, and students at RRCHNM abandoned ship and shifted to 100% remote work. During the course of the past year we have found ways to make our remote existence work and to continue to advance the goals of our Center. We have some notable successes and some notable changes, all of which are discussed in detail below.

Research and Scholarship
Faculty members at RRCHNM are managing $3,521,536.76 in externally funded research spread across 24 grants and contracts with $1,454,133.22 remaining unspent as of June 30, 2021. Major funders include the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the ACLS, the Library of Congress, and the Department of Defense (via Ohio State University). New funding received in the 2020-2021 cycle was $889,894.00. We responded to the Covid crisis with a major collecting project, *Collecting These Times*, that focused on collecting the history of America’s Jewish communities during the times of Covid and also provided back-end logistical support to a major Covid collecting history project based at Arizona State University (*The Journal of a Plague Year*). We broke new funding ground for our Center with a $300,000 grant from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) via a sub-award from Ohio State University and have begun raising more and more funding from private foundations. Over the past two years we have found it increasingly difficult to obtain funds from the NEH, largely as the result of the substantial increase in the numbers of applications to the NEH and a corresponding drop in their acceptance rate (8% in some funding streams), and so are pleased to see the growing diversity of our funders in other sectors of the funding landscape. We submitted more than $2 million in funding requests/grant applications during the past year, representing a substantial amount of effort by our faculty.

A significant change in our business model happened in February 2021 when we ended our relationship with the Corporation for Digital Scholarship (CDS), a non-profit spun out of Mason in 2013 to manage the Zotero and Omeka projects. That
A relationship, while fruitful for many years, had become a significant drain on the intellectual and emotional health of our Center and so our senior staff decided that the time had come to end the relationship. This decision cost us five software developers, all of whom left to join CDS as full-time employees and has meant that we are largely out of the software development business, a line of work that helped sustain our Center for more than a decade. The two main reasons for this change were that there are no longer any faculty at RRCHNM engaged in software development, a fact that meant that the developers who ostensibly worked for RRCHNM, felt that they worked first for CDS and only then for Mason. Their priorities were no longer our priorities. Second, our former colleagues, now at CDS, saw their relationship with Mason first and foremost as an opportunity to rent access to the Mason benefits system and only secondarily as a way of supporting us (which was the original intent of creating CDS). This meant that they were placing increasing demands on us regarding the time they were purchasing from our staff, demands that no longer worked for us (or for CDS). By the fall of 2020 it had become clear that it was time to end the relationship between RRCHNM and CDS and that ending came on February 1, 2021. While we miss our former colleagues, we don’t miss the drain they represented on our intellectual capital. We are a stronger Center without them. Further, the loss of the CDS contract has not had a negative impact on our bottom line.

We continue to collaborate with former RRCHNM colleague Dr. Sean Takats (University of Luxembourg) on the Tropy software development project and in 2021 will submit a request to the Mellon Foundation for a new (and final) round of funding for Tropy.

During the 2020-2021 academic year we established a formal cooperative relationship with the Center for Digital History at the University of Luxembourg (C2DH). This cooperative relationship, funding by a grant from the National Research Foundation of Luxembourg, will send two RRCHNM faculty members to Luxembourg, will bring two UL faculty members to Mason, all for short stays, will send a Mason PhD student to Luxembourg in the spring 2022 semester and will bring one of their students to us, and will support an annual digital history summit between the two organizations. Progress on this collaboration has been hindered by Covid travel restrictions, but we hope to move forward in the coming year.

Among the awards received by RRCHNM faculty are the Gutenberg Teaching Award, given to RRCHNM Director Mills Kelly by the University of Mainz (Germany) and a prestigious Library of Congress fellowship given to Dr. Lincoln Mullen. Several of our PhD students have won student awards or fellowships for papers presented, or for digital projects they have created.

This summer (2021), Prof. Abigail Mullen hosted a digital military history institute funded by the NEH – an event delayed due to Covid. During the academic year
our postdoctoral fellow Dr. Deepthi Murali hosted a five-session webinar on the material cultures of the Indian Ocean World that drew just slightly more than 1,000 registrants.

We hosted our first faculty fellow, funded by the dean’s office, in the 2020-2021 academic year. Dr. Jennifer Ashley from the Global Affairs program spent the year with us, submitted a major grant application to the ACLS, and published an article about her work. Our new faculty fellow will be Dr. Samuel Hueneke (History), who will use the coming year to extend the digital project he began as last year’s Fenwick Fellow. We also hosted a postdoctoral fellow in collaboration with the German Historical Institute and have two Mason-funded postdocs at RRCHNM. Dr. Jessica Mack’s position is funded by the dean’s office and Dr. Murali’s position is funded from RRCHNM indirect and grants. Both of our Mason postdocs have recently submitted grants for external funding that will support their continued presence at our Center.

We have made the decision to invest heavily in historical podcasting. We believe that there is a significant opportunity in this area of endeavor and podcasting sits at the center of our mission to bring the best of historical scholarship to the widest possible public audience. Dr. Abigail Mullen launched the first podcast we have produced since 2015 – *Consolation Prize* – and Dr. Mills Kelly is leading the production of a second podcast, *The Green Tunnel*, that will debut in October 2021. We will submit a major grant to the Mellon Foundation in August 2021 to provide substantial support to our podcasting efforts. The other sector of the digital humanities world that we are having a growing impact on is in computational humanities, with Dr. Lincoln Mullen and Dr. Jessica Otis becoming increasingly prominent scholars in this field.

The single greatest impact of our work continues to be in history education and our educational projects account for around 75% of all traffic on our various websites. Dr. Nate Sleeter continues to lead these efforts and in the past year has secured several grants from the Library of Congress, the Shapell Manuscripts Foundation, and the Department of State to support our educational work.

**Educational Activities**
RRCHNM is equally a research center and an educational center. During the past year we had nine PhD students, two MA students, and seven undergraduate students working as GRAs on various digital projects. Their roles ranged from project managers to research assistants, and all were mentored closely by RRCHNM faculty, especially Dr. Lincoln Mullen and Dr. Nate Sleeter. Most of the PhD students are supported by their stipends, however, two were paid for out of our grant funding and all of the MA and undergraduate students were also paid for out of our grant funding (except one undergraduate who was an OSCAR research assistant).
With the support of the dean's office we were able to host a speakers series during the past year that included such important digital scholars as Dr. William Turkel (Western Ontario University), Dr. Jo Guldi (SMU), and Dr. Rob Nelson (University of Richmond). These speakers helped keep the intellectual life of the Center vibrant and challenging. Lacking continued funding for speakers we have discontinued this activity until we can find a new source of funding for speakers.

During the pandemic year we used Center funds to pay for our PhD students to attend (virtually) a number of academic conferences and workshops in the hope that by doing so we could help reduce the isolation and depression they were experiencing. Altogether eight of our nine GRAs took advantage of this opportunity and attended one or more conferences or workshops. Several presented papers and several presented research posters.

All Center faculty engage in formal and informal mentoring with students at all levels. We have also created two informal working groups – one on data in the digital humanities and one on digital public history – that convene PhD students, postdocs, faculty, and staff to discuss areas of common interest. While RRCHNM faculty convene these sessions, we do not lead them. Session topics are chosen by students and each session is led by a student. These working groups have been a great success. In the coming year we have extended “affiliate” status to all PhD students in the Department of History in hopes of growing our connections to students not formally assigned to the Center.

New Staff/Faculty
During the past year we hired a new web developer, Dr. Jason Heppler, who is an award-winning public historian and a talented web developer. We hired Ida Akiwumi on a temporary contract to help us with user experience testing and have now hired Susie Nguyen as a contract web designer for one of our grants. The Department of History and Art History hired Dr. Amanda Madden to be the first new faculty member at RRCHNM in several years and she begins her contract on August 23. Dr. Madden comes to us from the School of Computing at Georgia Tech University where she was a research scientist.

Fundraising
With the help of the CHSS development team we were able to raise additional funds to support our research and teaching efforts during the past year. The GMU Foundation seems unable to provide us with data on exactly how much we raised so we are estimating that the final tally was approximately $30,000, but this is only an estimate. Neither RRCHNM leadership nor CHSS development staff are able to get these data from the GMUF in a form that makes it possible to learn what happened without hand counting every single transaction in our accounts. We hope that one day the GMUF will be able to provide us with actionable data on our fundraising efforts.
With the help of CHSS development staff we re-established a fundraising board for the Center. This board met twice (virtually) during the past year. Two members of the board have made donations to the Center, but it is somewhat discouraging that the rest of the board members have not yet made even a small donation. We hope this will change in the coming year as board members become more engaged with the work and more committed to helping us with fundraising.

Financials
We remain financially healthy as a research center and have attached three spreadsheets to this report that help explain our foundation account balances, expenses, and grants. This past year we benefitted from a consultancy with the Nonprofit Finance Fund. One of their recommendations that we intend to follow is the building up of an operating cash reserve fund that will be sufficient to cover our soft-money expenses for up to four months to cushion from any shocks in the funding landscape. Of the just over $500,000 of spendable funds in our endowment accounts, just over $200,000 is committed to paying for staff and postdocs in the coming year.

Sustainability
One of the single greatest challenges faced by any digital humanities center is the ongoing sustainability of digital projects. As a specific example, the decision of the Drupal development group to cease supporting Drupal 7 and to force all Drupal-based projects into Drupal 9 is going to cost us between $65,000-$80,000 in the 2021-2022 academic year to keep our various educational projects up and running. Dr. Jessica Otis and our Systems Administrator, God’s Will Katchoua, have spearheaded an effort to shut down many of our low-traffic web projects and archive them in MARS at Fenwick Library. In the coming year we are going to have to make some hard decisions about taking additional projects offline because we simply cannot afford to continue to patch up their software code and no funder will pay the costs of such work. No one in the DH world has a good solution to this problem. We have endeavored to keep projects going as long as they have an audience, but we can no longer afford to pay for the upkeep of projects with small audiences or with code that breaks on a regular basis. The permanent deprecation of Flash in 2020, which broke a number of our projects, is just one example of the problems we face.

Conclusion
The future remains bright for RRCHNM. At the time of writing this report we are awaiting funding decisions from the Smithsonian (National Museum of African American History and Culture), the National Science Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation that, taken together, equal more than $1.5 million. We are very excited about our new hires and the energy and ideas they bring. And we are looking forward to actually being back in our offices together for first time in almost 18 months.
When we began the 2019-2020 academic year none of us could have imagined what lay ahead. The first case of Covid-19 was reported in the United States on January 20 and in less than eight weeks we had abandoned our offices at George Mason and shifted entirely to telework, taking our laptops, headsets, office supplies, and plants with us. The work we do in digital humanities is amenable to telework and we’ve been able to keep the work going and start new projects, but we also miss being face to face with our co-workers and friends on campus. Despite the pandemic, we’ve managed to stay well and have lots of exciting news to report.
When the pandemic took hold in North America, we began a series of efforts to apply our expertise to the historical dimensions of the crisis. In the spring we launched a new digital collecting project, *Pandemic Religion*. In the tradition of our *September 11 Digital Archive* and the *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, this project, led by senior scholar John Turner from the Department of Religious Studies, our new postdoctoral fellow Jessica Mack, and RRCHNM director Lincoln Mullen, documents the many ways that American religious communities have been challenged and reshaped by Covid-19. The *Jewish Standard* recently lauded this project’s mission to “democratize history for all of us”—an unprompted recognition of RRCHNM’s main mission. We also helped Arizona State University’s digital public history group launch a multi-institutional collecting project, *Journal of a Plague Year* (covid-19archive.org) and we continue to provide logistical support for this important effort.

In addition to our work on capturing the history of the Covid pandemic, we have done our best to help our community of K–12 and university educators find resources for their sudden shift to online teaching. Nate Sleeter, who directs all of our educational projects, has been tirelessly working with teachers around the country to help them make the best possible use of our many digital history resources. Our online courses *Hidden in Plain Sight* and *Virginia Studies* have enrolled more than 200 teachers since the pandemic began. Abigail Mullen has been running highly successful (and oversubscribed) workshops for graduate students who want to use our newest digital research tool, *Tropy*.

Like so many organizations forced to abandon ship in the spring, we’ve struggled at times to remain positive and to feel connected, but we’ve also learned a lot about what it means to be a team in remote mode. Some of those lessons we’ll carry forward into the future and expect that future to include a fair amount of remote work even after we’ve all been vaccinated and feel safe again. We’ve continued old traditions, like the RRCHNM speaker’s series (now via Zoom) and have created new ones like a remote bake off and a remote pumpkin carving contest. We’ve shared quarantine recipes, lists of movies we suspect no one else has seen, and our favorite comfort books. We’ve had some glitches (who hasn’t in this crazy year), but through it all, what has never wavered is our commitment to our mission of democratizing access to historical information.

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**New Funds**

Altogether we have received ten new grants and contracts totaling just over $1.1 million and over the past year we raised $52,000 from donors to help support our work. The funds we receive from donors are especially important because they help us continue to support the excellent work of our graduate students, pay for the American Historical Association/Roy Rosenzweig Prize, and give us unrestricted money to invest in moments of need, such as the start-up of the *Pandemic Religion* project. In short, we couldn’t do the work that we do without the support of people like you. Thank you.
We rejoined the podcasting universe with Consolation Prize (https://consolationprize.rchnm.org), a podcast that tells the stories of America's diplomatic consuls and their world. The Consolation Prize team, led by Abigail Mullen, has already dropped the first four episodes in what will be a multi-year production, and this podcast has afforded graduate students like Kris Stinson the chance to interview senior scholars in their field. A second new podcast, already in the first stages of production, will tell the history of the Appalachian Trail, America's oldest and most iconic long-distance hiking trail.

In education, Nate Sleeter has launched a new partnership with the Shapell Manuscript Foundation (Israel) to create four teaching modules for K-12 teachers using the Foundation's impressive collection of digitized historical manuscripts. We are also working with the State Department National Museum of American Diplomacy and National History Day to create three classroom simulations based on events in the history of diplomacy. The American Council of Learned Societies has awarded our former Director of Educational Projects Kelly Schrum and our Director of Public Projects Jessica Otis a digital extension grant to continue our work on World History Commons, an open access repository of primary sources and teaching modules in world history.

Our new department chair Matt Karush and our co-founder Mike O'Malley received an NEH grant for the project Hearing the Americas, a public digital history of the earliest days of recorded music in the Americas. The start of this project has seen the return of one of our most experienced graduate students, Jessica Dauterive, a historian of music and radio. This fall we are beginning a new and exciting multi-year collaboration with the National Museum of African American History and Culture that is focused on making visible the riches of the archival collections at America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We recently signed a cooperative agreement with the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH) that includes an exciting opportunity for our PhD students to spend time in Luxembourg and for students from C2DH to come to RCHNM. Finally, the NEH awarded Abigail Mullen funding for a summer institute in digital military history that we’ve had to put off to 2021 due to Covid.

The DataScribe and American Religious Ecologies teams, especially Jim Safliey and Kim Nguyen, continue to lead us into data analysis and visualization as a way to present history, making rapid progress on developing our software for transcribing historical datasets, and developing the Center’s infrastructure for data visualization. Our structured data transcription module, DataScribe, is just entering public beta testing and available for download at https://datascribe.tech.

This summer we joined a Mellon Foundation-funded cohort with five other digital humanities organizations aimed at building financial resiliency in the digital humanities. In 2021, we will be crafting a proposal to Mellon for change capital that will make it possible for us to move much more rapidly toward the goals we have identified in our strategic planning. The Center that will emerge from this effort more robust and forward-thinking.
Graduate Student ACHIEVEMENTS

Our eight graduate research assistants continue to develop from assistants to scholars and historians in their own right. Laura Brannan delivered a presentation at the annual meeting of the Association of African American Museums this past August. Brandon Buck received our Fishel Fellowship this year and used the funds to work with our faculty on analyzing Congressional votes to understand the history of isolationist politics. In spring 2019, three of our graduate students passed their dissertation prospectuses and advanced to candidacy: Laura Crossley, LaQuanda Walters Cooper, and Greta Swain. Two of them plan to incorporate digital elements into their dissertation research: Walters Cooper on the history of black industrial fairs after Reconstruction, and Swain on her spatial and networked history of the Mason family in early Virginia. Dan Howlett, who helps lead the Reddit community Ask Historians, continues to use his platform to advance his colleagues' work, helping four fellow graduate students (Caitie Gale, Janine Hubai, Laura Brannan, and Georigra Ferrell) give a session at an online conference on data analysis that they had created in one of our Clio classes, and inviting two of the Center's faculty to do "Ask Me Anything" sessions with large audiences about recent publications.

Two long-time former GRAs, Stephanie Seal Walters and Sara Collini, both defended their PhDs. Seal Walters is now the Digital Liaison in the Humanities at the University of Southern Mississippi and Collini is now a Postdoctoral Fellow in University History at Clemson University. Walters Cooper left us this past summer to become a program officer at the NEH.

New People

Despite the Covid crisis, our team has grown. This summer two postdoctoral fellows joined us (virtually) for two-year stints at the Center. Jessica Mack is a recent graduate of Princeton University who works on the history of college campuses in Latin America, and she is taking a lead role in the Pandemic Religion project. Deepthi Murali is a recent graduate of the University of Illinois—Chicago and is our first Art Historian at RRCHNM. Deepthi's work is focused on the decorative arts of South India in the 18th and 19th centuries. One of our very best recent graduates of the BA program in History, Alexis Frambes, is working on outreach for Pandemic Religion as well as Religious Ecologies. This fall we welcomed our first faculty fellow, a position generously funded by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Jennifer Ashley is a term Associate Professor in Mason's Global Affairs program and is using her fellowship to expand on her digital project on the Chilean plebiscite of 1988 and its resonances in the events in Chile in 2020.

In addition to our new faculty, we also have two new staff members—our new Systems Administrator God's Will Katchoua joined us in October 2019, and since arriving has imposed new discipline on our servers, has substantially upgraded our analytics, and spends hours each week repelling the seemingly endless attempts to hack into our systems. This summer Ida Akiwumi joined the team as a part-time user experience researcher. Ida has extensive experience with issues around the accessibility of digital content, an area of increased focus here at RRCHNM. And we have three new digital humanities fellows—Caroline Greer, Laura Brannan, and Janet Hammond. Finally, three graduate interns from the department's digital public humanities certificate program—Bridget Bukovich, Jessica Pritchard-Ritter, and Nashieli Marcano—are spending a year with us cycling through various projects, learning from the expertise of the center's staff but also bringing their own expertise in marketing and librarianship to bear on our work.
Educating graduate students in the theory and practice of digital history has been central to the mission of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media since we launched our PhD program in 2001. Over the past 20 years, more than 50 graduate students have worked on various projects here at RRCHNM, gaining new insights into digital history and new professional skills that they can take into the job market.

We are very proud of the success our students have had after they leave us for employment elsewhere. Over the years we've watched our students move into careers as faculty members, academic developers, library professionals, digital media creators, academic technologists, educational researchers, and many other fields.

Here are four examples drawn from some of our most recent students. The diversity of their post-RRCHNM experiences will give you a good sense for all the amazing things our students do once they leave us.

**SARA COLLINI | Postdoctoral Fellow in University History, Clemson University**

Sara Collini had what may have been the most difficult defense of a dissertation of any of the recent graduates of our PhD program. Not only was she the first of our students to defend their dissertation via Zoom due to Covid, but the weekend before her defense the house next door caught fire and was destroyed, forcing Sara to eventually evacuate. During the defense, that house was being torn down from the inside. Life is much easier for Sara now that she is Clemson University’s Postdoctoral Fellow in University History. Hired both because of her digital skills and because her dissertation, “Birthing A Nation: Enslaved Women and Midwifery in Early America, 1750-1820,” gives her the depth of knowledge she needs to carry out a very difficult assignment—researching the history of the African American Burial Ground located on Clemson’s campus. A recent study of the burial ground has recovered 667 unmarked graves, and it is Sara’s job to help build the digital infrastructure for the project and assist with the research in the records of the plantation that eventually became the campus and other archival and community sources. “My work at RRCHNM on projects like the Pilbara Strike website made me a lot more confident in my digital and project management skills,” she says of her time at the Center.

**CELESTE TU migli VY SHARPE | Assistant Professor, Normandale Community College**

When Celeste came to Mason as a graduate student, she had no idea that she would turn into a digital scholar. Instead, she decided to pursue a PhD in History because of a deep commitment to equity and access for young people. Having a PhD would give her a seat at the table for conversations about these critical issues. Her dissertation, “They Need You! Disability, Visual Culture, and the Poster Child, 1945-1980,” was a critical examination of the history of “poster children” in America whose images and life stories were used by various charitable organizations to raise funds for research on diseases like Muscular Dystrophy and Infantile Paralysis (polio). That dissertation was also our department’s first born-digital dissertation. After graduation, Celeste landed a job as an academic technologist at Carleton College (Minnesota) where she rose to the position of Interim Director of her department. This past summer, she took a new job as an assistant professor of history at Normandale Community College in the Twin Cities, a job change that allows her to work with her students in a sustained way over an entire semester. “Being at the community college has given me a way to connect to my own personal history,” she says of her new position, a history that includes her mother coming to the U.S. as a refugee in 1975. “Now I’m where I needed to be all along.”
None of these achievements would have been possible without the generous support of our many donors. Each year we are able to give two outstanding graduate students summer research fellowships that allow them to pursue their own research. Starting in the spring 2022 semester we will send our first exchange student to the University of Luxembourg for a semester of learning and project work at the digital history center there and will host one of their students at our Center. That exchange and the summer research fellowships are possible because of the generosity of our donors.

Thank you for all you do to support RRCHNM and especially what you do to support our excellent students.

AMANDA REGAN | Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University

When Mandy Regan came to Mason to pursue a PhD in history, she knew she wanted to study women’s history. That interest eventually coalesced into her dissertation, “Shaping Up: Physical Fitness Initiatives for Women, 1880-1965,” a fascinating examination of the ways that fitness initiatives aimed at women were used to manage women’s lives and their bodies. During her studies she worked as a graduate research assistant at our Center, where she worked on a wide variety of projects and eventually became the managing editor of DH Now. These days, Mandy is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Presidential History at SMU, where she is their first postdoc in digital history. Being first has meant that she has been able to set the agenda for digital history work at the CPH where, as Mandy says, the leadership knew they needed to grow their footprint in digital history but weren’t really sure how to get started. “The project management skills I learned at RRCHNM have been invaluable for my work here,” Mandy says. “I learned a lot about teamwork, about being equitable and collaborative.” Mandy’s experiences at RRCHNM also helped when she and another of our PhD students, Eric Gonzaba (now an assistant professor at California State University, Fullerton), created the digital history project, Mapping the Gay Guides. Mandy and Eric shared an office at RRCHNM and one day decided to spend a few hours drawing out their ideas on a whiteboard. That brief moment of inspired collaboration led to a project that has already won one international award for excellence.

JORDAN BRATT | Digital Scholarship Strategist, Ball State University

In January 2020, Jordan Bratt moved to Muncie, Indiana, to take up his new job as Digital Scholarship Strategist at Ball State University’s Library. Little did he know, because none of us knew, that Covid-19 would upend his first year in the new job. During the first few weeks in his new office he began plotting out all the ways that he would support students, faculty, and staff members who wanted to create digital humanities projects. Then Covid hit and he pivoted quickly to helping faculty members move their courses online, especially faculty who wanted to create databases of sources that they could use in their teaching. “Being part of project teams at RRCHNM rather than being siloed on particular projects has helped me a lot in my new position,” he says. “Getting to be a full participant in decisions, being treated like a peer, has been really important in my work with faculty.” During his time at the Center, Jordan became a real expert in digital mapping and is particularly proud of the work he did on the Mapping Early American Elections project. One of his goals in the new job is to help students at Ball State create the kinds of digital projects they can point to and talk about with pride. “I want them to feel like they were full contributors to the work of digital scholarship.” Jordan is continuing work on his dissertation this year and is looking forward to the day when he can return to those plans he made back in January 2020.