Landscape Studies Initiative

**ISLAND**

The Landscape Studies Initiative (LSI) is a three-year-old initiative of the UVA School of Architecture’s Center for Cultural Landscapes. We are creating a unique open source digital humanities platform, ISLAND (Interactive Studies in Landscape Architecture iNterface And Database), that transforms how the history of designed landscapes is taught and researched. ISLAND integrates a narrative historical text with ongoing archival research and fieldwork undertaken by UVA students and faculty. The resulting platform transcends the linear history of individual designers and their “works” by revealing patterns, exchanges and networks between sites and across scales. ISLAND chronicles the global history of designed landscapes and locates landscape studies at the intersection of design history, the environmental humanities, historical geography, historical anthropology, critical race studies and the history of science and technology. ISLAND’s narrative structure, immersive environment and customizable format appeals to students and scholars across the University and beyond, reflecting our transdisciplinary approach that links design history and landscape studies to concerns and approaches in the humanities.

In 2017, Professor Elizabeth K. Meyer, Associate Professor Michael Lee and Associate Professor Worthy Martin launched the LSI with a planning grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and additional support from UVA’s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, the UVA Alumni Associations’ Jefferson Trust, the University’s Provost and the Dean of the School of Architecture. This initiative has established connections to, and collaborations between, UVA Libraries, UVA School of Data Science, numerous departments within the UVA College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Richmond Digital Scholarship Lab, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, The Foundation for Landscape Studies, New York Botanical Gardens Mertz Library’s Humanities Institute, Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Park Muskau and the Central Park Conservancy.

**Funding Need Statement:** We seek funding to transform ISLAND, a proof of concept multi-media digital humanities interface, into an open source cultural landscape resource and reference. This effort will continue to include UVA student engagement through the addition of guided fieldwork, new course development, and new pilot projects. Funding will sustain interactive research tool creation, user interface development, data management system refinement, scholarly collaboration protocols establishment, user testing sessions, and media database expansion.

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**FUNDRAISING NEEDS:** 2020-2025

Individual donor support will support:

- > Summer research assistants, 3 per summer $8000/student/yr
- > Academic year part-time research assistants, 4 per year $5000/student/yr
- > Travel expenses for student fieldwork $25,000/yr
- > New undergraduate and graduate cultural landscape course development $10,000/yr
- > 2 multi-year research projects, the Racialized Topography of Charlottesville, and Providence Island, Monrovia, Liberia $40,000/yr
- > Student archival research and rare document scanning $5,000/yr
- > Continuation of the digital humanities platform through digital visualization and mapping prototypes $75,000/post/doc+RA/yr
- > Annual Operating expenses of LSI ISLAND project, $179,000
- > ½ of LSI Project Manager salary $50,000

Individual donor support will support:
Impact and Accomplishments

**Digital humanities platform, proof of concept:** After three years of metadata tagging, field documentation, archival research, bibliographic expansion, user interface design, and user testing, we have created a digital prototype ready for development. We anticipate this project will immediately be of value to landscape architecture faculty and their students as well as historians of garden and landscapes, and landscape architectural practitioners working on historic cultural landscapes. In addition, we anticipate that ISLAND will attract architects, anthropologists, cultural geographers, and researchers who are interested in landscape studies, the history of science and technology, the environmental humanities and art history. ISLAND’s digital image collection will be open source, so that the rich database is accessible and downloadable to all. ISLAND’s data visualizations will serve as models for other research projects, demonstrating possibilities for similar studies of the same scope on cultural landscapes around the world.

**Partnerships and student engagement:** In addition to creating new interdisciplinary partnerships across UVA Grounds and beyond, the LSI project brings education enrichment to many students. The ISLAND project team has trained 12 research assistants in archival research, fieldwork and user interface design and development. Meyer and Lee have introduced over 60 UVA students to cultural landscape archival research through a series of field trips, new courses, research opportunities and pilot projects. These pilot projects relate to two sites in ISLAND’s core text, Elizabeth Barlow Roger’s Landscape Design: Park Muskau, Germany and Central Park. Research gathered and data collected through these fieldwork at these two sites are the focus of the ISLAND prototype chapters. They form the basis for ISLAND’s expansion of Landscape Design’s narrative.

**Background**

ISLAND’s historical scaffold is Elizabeth Barlow Rogers’ *Landscape Design. A Cultural and Architectural History*, a significant book broadly referenced in landscape architecture programs throughout the country. ISLAND is designed to be more than an updated digital text of a well-respected book. Donor supported funding will allow us to continue expanding the *Landscape Design* digitized text through links to thousands of additional historical resources—drawings, prints, paintings, photographs, maps and archival texts—as well as contemporary essays, expanded bibliographies, interactive research tools, interpretative diagrams and timelines. By expanding the scope and methods of *Landscape Design*, ISLAND will afford users new ways to navigate and interpret designed landscapes in relationship to: the people who experienced them as well as designed them; the places where they are located; and the broader global networks of material, people and discourses that informed the specific designs.

Donor support will continue the LSI’s ISLAND platform development, student fieldwork, pilot projects, and expansion of Landscape Design and ISLAND’s digital archive of images, texts, and experiential site research.
ISLAND is a digital teaching and discovery platform that provides structure and encourages exploration for the college-level instructor and their students as well as scholars and public historians who are interested in landscape as an active agent in the narration of social and environmental histories. Our publicly accessible database conveys local lived experience and cross-scale socio-ecological relationships that are manifested through landscape design, a topic that is frequently missing from scholarly conversations in the humanities. ISLAND’s capacity to visualize and make tangible these effects and flows promises to contribute to the environmental humanities’ loftiest aspirations—to alter human consciousness about, and actions towards, our dynamic entanglements with the other-than-human world.

Donor support will enrich the ISLAND platform through the creation of new interactive research tools including the development of data visualizations that support the four analytical lenses. The four analytical lenses-- Social encounters and networks, scientific discourse and technological innovations, thick sites, and spatial sequence and sensorial experience-- function as varied portals to the digital platform. Each one is connected to new historical approaches to landscape studies encouraging use by different audiences and their research questions. ISLAND has the capacity to create a new transdisciplinary community through its flexible and customizable online platform.

**FUNDRAISING NEEDS:**
**2020-2025**

> ISLAND platform development
$209,000/yr
Innovative field research and its incorporation into landscape studies is key to providing experiential and spatial understandings of cultural landscapes. LSI funded research and fieldwork enriches the classroom experience by affording students opportunities for integrating what is learned through primary source material in the archive/library, experiential learning on site, relational connections gleaned through digital analysis, and spatial experiences mediated through digital visualization.

The design of our lectures, workshops, seminars and digital resource includes extensive site interpretation that employs analog and digital field documentation methods ranging from traditional site surveys to composite collections of audio, video, and data to LIDAR technology and point cloud mapping. This student work is incorporated into the ISLAND platform through experiential visualizations, interactive research tools, and a rich image database. To date, the LSI has funded 29 UVA undergraduate and graduate students to travel to Park Muskau in Germany (Summer 2018) and Central Park (Fall 2019). Donor support will continue to provide field research experiences that will enrich the ISLAND platform, funding site research and student travel to future pilot projects in the United States and abroad.

**Fieldwork**

Student fieldwork at Central Park.

**FUNDRAISING NEEDS: 2020-2025**

> Fieldwork $124,000/year
ISLAND’s pilot projects expand *Landscape Design* in several ways. First, they add new resources to sites already in the book and our digital platform (e.g., Central Park and Park Muskau). Second, they analyze and interpret a designed landscape relative to other designed landscapes within larger geographic territories. Donor sponsorship will support the launch of three additional pilot projects that do this. The first, the Racialized Topography of Charlottesville VA, centers around significant cultural landscapes including two designed by Thomas Jefferson—Monticello, and the University of Virginia, and sites such as Morven and Montpelier, the Blue Ridge Parkway and Shenandoah National Park, and the Halprin Downtown Mall. Professor Elizabeth K. Meyer will lead a research workshop and seminar to launch this project in Spring 2021. The next pilot project, The Cultural Landscape of Vicenza, Italy, has strong historical connections to the Central Virginia Piedmont given Palladio’s influence on Jefferson’s architecture and continuing to the present with the late 20th century transference of wine-production techniques from the Veneto rural cultural landscape to Albemarle County, VA. Donor support will allow our colleagues, Associate Professor Andrew Johnston (Director of UVA’s Historic Preservation program) and Worthy Martin, Director of IATH, to contribute their resources to ISLAND. The fifth pilot project, Providence Island, Monrovia, Liberia (on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List) is one of the first places freed slaves landed on January 1, 1822. This was the second group of African American slaves who willingly or forcibly resettled by the Virginia American Colonization Society in 1820 and who subsequently established the nation of Liberia. LSI Project Manager Allison James is the Project Lead in the preservation of the cultural landscape for the World Monuments Fund. James will lead a UVA historic preservation seminar on the project in collaboration with the University of Liberia in Spring 2021.

**FUNDRAISING NEEDS: 2020-2025**

- 1 multi-year pilot project $74,500/yr
- 2 multi-year pilot projects $149,000/yr

*Student fieldwork and site analysis during Park Muskau pilot project field trip.*
Archival Research and Database Expansion

Close readings of archival materials - primary texts, photographs, maps, drawings, plans, diagrams, etc – enhance the study of designed and vernacular landscapes, revealing tactile linkages between historical actors and contemporary sites. ISLAND brings this experiential learning into the classroom and encourages students to be active learners finding new connections and glean new insights by navigating between word and image, map and manuscript.

Over the next five years, in partnership with other scholars around the globe, we will expand Elizabeth Roger’s Landscape Design through links to thousands of documents and images collected by LSI research assistants during their archival research. They will collaborate with our partners include UVA Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections, the Reuben Rainey Collection, Dumbarton Oak Research Library and Collection, Oak Spring Garden Library, and the New York Botanical Garden Mertz Library among others.

ISLAND will transcend the limits of a physical textbook by creating an accessible, growing resource for students and researchers. ISLAND will integrate separate images and text into a globally comprehensive network of linked designed and vernacular landscapes. In addition to connecting archival materials to landscapes through metadata, LSI examines their material and cultural relationships to related designed and vernacular sites, intellectual genealogies and time periods.

FUNDRAISING NEEDS: 2020-2025

Archival Research and Database Expansion $109,000/yr
Center for Cultural Landscapes

Founded in 2015, The Center for Cultural Landscapes (CCL) is an interdisciplinary group of academics and designers who are connected to, and collaborate with, a larger group of associated professionals and organizations to achieve this mission. The CCL focuses on increasing awareness of the historical, ecological, and social value of cultural landscapes through innovative scholarly research, site documentation and fieldwork, planning, preservation, management, and design.

The Center seeks funding for a Program Director who will write and oversee grants, fundraising, budgets, operations, events, projects and research assistants as well as two students to assist with projects and events.

LSI ISLAND
ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET & FUNDRAISING NEEDS:
2020-2025

> Program Director (½ salary) $50,000/yr
> Student program assistant $5,000/yr
> Student events assistant $5,000/yr
> Annual Operating Budget: $100,000

Annual Operating Budget of the LSI ISLAND: $249,000
Annual funding from Sara Shallenberger Brown Cultural Landscapes Endowment: $40,000/yr
Total Funding Needs: $209,000/yr

Cultural Landscapes projects tackle difficult issues including exploring how space and place are shaped by both shared and contested practices (photo: Eze Amos).