**Human agency towards digital inclusion: Implementing an international study of tech help networks / iConference Workshop Proposal / August 31 2018 Draft by Hui Yan and Kate Williams**

**Abstract.** This is a workshop to recruit people to and finalize an international study of technology helpsharing in the digital age. This help is crucial and ubiquitous among elites; what about ordinary people? By sharing a field manual and instrument among scholar with highly varies access to study populations, we expect to gather meaningful and surprising data. The 2019 iConference with its emphasis on “Including” and its own inclusion of many country’s schools and programs in this area is the best place from which to launch this three-year study.

**Audience.** We are planning the workshop with a core of committed participants from the organizers’ scholarly networks. At the same time,anyone interested in discovering and solving information problems in communities and among specific social groups will be welcomed. Those scholars and students in fields of community informatics, public libraries, human information behaviors, internet research are strongly recommended to join the workshop and gain hands-on global reciprocal research experiences.

**Goals or Outcomes.** We aim to emerge from the workshop with an expanded set of committed partner-researchers and detailed notes for a finalized field manual and instrument. The organizers will then be able to assemble those final documents and launch the study. The final goal is a three year coordinated research project resulting in peer reviewed publications and a higher profile for the field of Community Informatics, facilitating further support and research.

We propose a three-hour workshop for 20-30 participants falling under the iConference priority of “Including.” This workshop will discuss and finalize an international research study into technology help: How people access and even provide help with technology in their daily lives. Confirmed participants come from the US, China, <add other countries>, and we hope to attract others to learn about the study and join in.

The proposed study emerges from community informatics research in the US. This work has found that ordinary people seek out technology help intermittently and repeatedly throughout their lives, and this can be especially crucial for populations who are unable to access formal IT help organization through school, work, or the marketplace. The work aims to advance our understanding of digital inequality, emphasizing human agency. Four concepts drive this. One is the informatics moment, which is the episode of helpgetting that people often need to engage in to complete work or life tasks using digital technology. (Williams, 2012) Another is the informatics lifecourse, which is the unique pattern of informatics moments in a person’s life impacted by their life changes – job changes, household moves, and changes in social support networks. (Lenstra, 2016) A third concept is digital poverty, which is a composite measurement of a person’s access, use, awareness, and skills that enable productive use of these new tools. (Yan, 2013) And a fourth is social capital, as we have found that many people rely on their social networks to access and importantly to share tech help, rather than formal channels such as public agencies, workplaces, or the marketplace. (Williams, 2012)

The theory and subject of the workshop falls under the conference theme of Including, and so does the method. We have developed a method we call reciprocal research. (Lenstra and Williams, forthcoming) This entails providing a service along with gathering data. Most typically this means providing tech help along with each interview. It also entails combining research with teaching. This means activating LIS students to carry out one or more interviews and help sessions. They will learn basic social science field methods as well as seeing first hand how valued and feasible it is to help others with digital technology. They will gain a familiarity with the research that their future patrons will be engaged in, and they will overcome their own uncertainty regarding what it takes to provide tech help and model citizenship in the digital age. These tasks are chief among those that information professionals are increasingly asked to do at the reference desks and elsewhere in our information institutions. This aspect of the method can be summarized as turning the classroom from a site of knowledge consumption to a site of knowledge production.

Our method in the workshop is to conduct three sessions in the half day event: panel, breakout groups, and whole-group discussion. First, the proposers will present a rationale and review the draft field manual and interview instrument (9-9:50 am, if the workshop is scheduled in the morning). These documents will be available in advance of the workshop and that same day. Second, they will split up into smaller groups to hear and discuss the background work and ideas of the agreed and invited partner researches (10-10:50 am). Third, everyone will reconvene in a whole-group session to hear key points from the breakout groups, identify any outstanding issues, and recognize new partners (11-11:50 am).

This workshop is designed to appeal especially but not only to junior scholars (doctoral candidates and assistant professors) who are looking for research projects that complement their solo work and result in datasets and joint publications. The study design to be presented will include a field handbook and an instrument. The populations that each partner will study will vary widely, but we expect to focus on adults of various demographics with respect to age, gender, education, occupation, urban/rural, and country of residence. The driving ideas of the project from the workshop organizers will be augmented from those of the proposers to include other ideas from information behavior, human-computer interaction, library science, and internet research, depending on those who attend the workshop and join the project.

An additional objective of the workshop is to continue to expand the field of community informatics into China. This field developed first in the US, Canada and the UK. Scholars visiting the US discovered the work and introduced it into the ischools of China. Individual researchers have published literature reviews and empirical studies. This is an opportunity to undertake coordinated research that draws power from numbers and from an international span, acknowledging and connecting with the extensive English language literature in this a and related areas.

The study will span three years 2019-2021. Year one (calendar year 2019) will be recruiting researchers and fine tuning the research design. Year two (2020) will be field work. And year three (2021) will be data sharing and report out. We hope to see writeups by individual researchers and by the entire team, facilitated by sharing of data and by a second workshop at the iConference in year three.

The workshop room needs to have 30 chairs, tables for four breakout groups, sufficient power outlets, and a data projector and screen.

**Funding.** A grant from China’s National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences will cover translation and any incidentals for the workshop. The partners will pay for their own travel, data collection, and analysis. The approach of “classroom as site of production” will mean that data can be collected in one or two semesters by working with a course full of students.

**Organizers** (All organizers and confirmed participants will register for iConference)

1. Hui Yan, Associate Professor, School of Information Resource Management, Renmin University of China
2. Noah Lenstra, Assistant Professor, Department of Library and Information Studies, UNC Greensboro
3. Kate Williams, Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
4. Shenglong Han, Associate Professor, Department of Information Management, Peking University

**Participants**

1. Sufang Wang, Associate Professor, School of Public Administration, Zhejiang University
2. Ping Wang, Associate Professor, School of Information Management, Zhengzhou University
3. Zhenjia Fan, Assistant Professor, Business School, Nankai University
4. Jiqun Liu, Doctoral Student, School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University.
5. Pu Yan, Doctoral Student, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University
6. Xiudan Yang, Professor and Chair, Department of Information Management Engineering, Hebei University
7. Pengyi Zhang, Associate Professor, Department of Information Management, Peking University
8. Yimin Zhao, Research Librarian, University Library, Yunnan University
9. Wenjie Zhou, Professor and Associate Dean, Business School, Northwest Normal University
10. INVITED Andreas Vårheim, Professor, Department of Language and Culture, The Arctic University of Norway
11. INVITED Taku Sugimoto,Professor, Chiba Institute of Technology
12. INVITED Bo Xie, Professor, School of Nursing/School of Information, University of Texas at Austin
13. INVITED Wayne Buente, Associate Professor, School of Communications, University of Hawaii
14. INVITED Kyungwon Koh, Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign
15. INVITED Sujin Huggins, Associate Professor, iSchool at Dominican University
16. INVITED Tina Du, Senior Lecturer, School of Information Technology and Mathematical Sciences, University of South Australia
17. INVITED Kathryn Masten, Assistant Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Women’s University
18. INVITED Claudia Serbanuta, Public Libraries Specialist, Progress Foundation, Romania
19. INVITED Aiko Takazawa, Doctoral Candidate, iSchool at UIUC
20. INVITED Sunghwan Kim, Doctoral Student, iSchool at Rutgers University.

**Consultants**

1. Abdul Alkalimat, Professor Emeritus, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
2. Maosheng Lai, Professor Emeritus, Department of Information Management, Peking University

Need to know from each invitee:

1. Are you inclined to join this international project and conduct 30-45 minutes interviews/help sessions with 30-40 individuals whom you can readily access?
2. What population would you draw from for those 30-40 people (nationality, socioeconomics, recruitment setting)?
3. If you need to work in a language besides English or Mandarin Chinese, can you translate the instrument?
4. If this proposal is accepted, will you come to Washington D.C. for March 31, 2019 on travel funding you can obtain?
5. Can you collect your share of the data with your students or in some other way?
6. Are you interested in solo and joint publications from this work?
7. Do we have your title correct, for instance are you doctoral student or candidate?

**Works Cited**

To come.