UC SANTA BARBARA

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Big-Time Support

The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) has awarded UC Santa Barbara scholars Laila Shereen Sakr and Rachael Scarborough King its Digital Extension Grant Awards. The grants support digitally based research projects that advance inclusive scholarship in the humanities and interpretive social sciences.

Sakr, an assistant professor in the Department of Film & Media Studies, was awarded just under $150,000 for her project, "Arab Data Bodies: Social Media in Mixed Reality." She shares the grant with her co-principal investigator, Susana Ruiz of UC Santa Cruz.

"It is thrilling to receive ACLS funding to collaborate on this project with Professor Ruiz," said Sakr, who for years has been immersed in building a virtual reality experience from billions of social media posts.

King, an associate professor of English, also received a little less than $150,000 for her project, "Hidden Archives: Race, Gender, and Religion in University of California, Santa Barbara's Ballitore Collection." She shares the award with Emily Kugler of Howard University and Danielle Spratt of Cal State Northridge. Earlier this year, the project also received a Humanities Initiatives at Hispanic-Serving Institutions grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"I'm thrilled to be able to continue the Ballitore Project with funding from ACLS and NEH," she said. "These grants will allow us to expand the project's collaborative partnerships to include both Howard University and Cal State Northridge, bringing

more students into archival research and the digital humanities. This project addresses structural racism in these fields in terms of both the content of UCSB's Ballitore Collection and the makeup of the diverse research team."

The Digital Extension Grant program supports collaborative, team-based humanities and interpretive social sciences projects that advance inclusive scholarly practices and promote greater understanding of diverse human experiences through digital research.

"The highly competitive awards that professors King and Shereen Sakr received will enable them to make important, original contributions to digital humanities," said Mary Hancock, acting dean of humanities and fine arts. "Our campus has been a leader in this interdisciplinary area and their work carries this legacy forward while advancing our commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence."

Sakr's data-driven project builds upon nearly the original collection of 100 million social media posts in 30 languages (from Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and other popular sites) harvested by the R-Shief media system she began developing in 2008. Through a collaboration with Ruiz at UC Santa Cruz, "Arab Data Bodies" extends the representation of R-Shief's historical, eleven-year-old archive from two-dimensional data visualizations and adapts it into a mixed reality (MX) documentary reenacting Tahrir Square in 2011 — downtown Cairo's main public circle that became a focal point during the uprisings.

"The project addresses how the logics of programming technology influenced and shaped twenty-first century social movements," Sakr said.

King's project grew out of her work in the UC-HBCU Initiative, which paired scholars from Historically Black Colleges and Universities with University of California faculty for tailored research and mentorship. For the initiative she led a group of five Howard University students for an archival project with the 18th-century Ballitore Collection at UCSB Library's Special Research Collections.

The Ballitore Collection features more than 2,500 documents related to the Irish Quaker community of Ballitore, Ireland, including letters, journals, notebooks and dream accounts.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.