Exec committee
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FELIX DIGITAL ARCHIVE

A Paper by the Felix Editor Jovan Nedić

The purpose of the Grant

Felix would like to ask for £10,000 to go towards the digitisation of the Felix Archive. Felix was founded in 1949 and a copy of every single issue is currently held in the back room of the office. As the older issues are slowly starting to deteriorate it is important to find a long-term preservation method; digitization is an ideal solution.

The past 1400 issues of *felix*, which are bound in a series of 35 books, provide a comprehensive history of Imperial College and its students from the point of view of the student body. They will contain a history of many of the clubs and societies within Imperial College Union, as well as notable historical changes, such as the redevelopment of Beit and information on new rectors.

With the help of Ms. Anne Barrett, College Archivist & Corporate Records Manager, we have been in touch with several companies for the project and have decided to go ahead with the University of London Computer Centre [ULCC] who have an excellent track record with digitization, especially in the higher education sector. After negotiations with the representatives from ULCC, we were able to obtain two quotes for the project, both of which include optical character recognition [OCR] however to varying accuracy. The first quote is for around 80% accuracy whilst the second one is for 99% accuracy.

In addition to having ULCC digitize the archive, we are also intending to create a web based user interface that will allow users to search the archive. The final product will allow the user to search for keywords, as well as issues and even refine their search to specific dates. A story has been published in *felix* and *Imperial Matters* on the whole project, which has increased awareness of the archive. The archive will be open to anyone, which means that past and present students, including members of clubs and societies, will be able to search through the archive.

The archive will be stored on the Imperial College Union Server, which will have a daily back up, with a copy also sent to the British Library. The original books will be sent to the Imperial College London Archives for safekeeping.

The purpose of the grant would be to ensure that the lower quote from ULCC is definitely met and then the surplus will go towards the higher quote.

Cost of the Project

A copy of the quotes provided by ULCC is attached with this application for your reference. As already mentioned, the cost of the digitization is effectively split into two sections/targets:

Target 1: £10,040.00 – 80% digital accuracy
Target 2: £25,740.00 ~ 99% digital accuracy

Other sources of funding

Felix has submitted an application to the IC Trust for £6,000 which has already been approved; the grant provided by the IC Trust will be paid over three years at £2,000 a year.

Felix itself is also willing to put money into the project as a sign of its dedication to it. There is a concern that any money spent on the creation of an archive is likely to detract from the quality of the newspaper for the upcoming years, however, as the project is of such a great importance to us, *felix* will be willing to devote £3,000.00 towards the project. To minimize the affect the payment of the project will have, we will also be paying this in yearly installments of £1,000 a year.

I am also hoping to set up a meeting with the Imperial College Alumni Department to ask for £2,000.00 as the benefit to the alumni department would be a positive one.

I have also spoken to Ms. Anne Barrett in the hope of getting a small contribution for the project from the Imperial College Archives Department.

Together with ULCC, we have put in a bid the Joint Information Systems Committee [JISC] for £30,000 which will go towards the creation of a repository. This is set up as an exemplar project for the digitisation and online repository for student journals throughout HE institutions in the UK. This is a fantastic opportunity for Imperial College Union and *felix* to take the lead in a national project. Then main work in this will be undertaken by the ULCC and the contribution by *felix* is mainly in kind not cash. Unfortunately, we received word that that this application was unsuccessful in the final round, however, we will try again.

Benefits to College and the Union

As already mentioned, the archive will provide a comprehensive history of Imperial College London from the students' point of view. Staff members and students alike will be able to look back and search for events in the past, such as royal visits or even Barmaid of the Year competitions.

Felix is becoming more successful every year, with the aim consistently being to win the Guardian Student Media Award as well as produce a publication that the student body can be proud of. Student participation is constantly increasing and a strong push will be made by myself as well as the rest of the team to increase it further. My main target this year has been to increase the contribution from the School of Medicine, especially from their clubs and societies. Felix really is the best source of information on the history of clubs and societies at Imperial and the creation of a searchable, digitized archive will ensure that the history of every club will be preserved.

With around 200,000 graduates since 1949, there is clearly an audience for this archive.

Together with the College Archive Department and ULCC, we have looked into other institutions that have done a similar project and have found that currently there is no higher education institution in the United Kingdom that has done this type of project. As such, upon completion of the project, *felix*, Imperial College Union and Imperial College will be the first to do one and will act as an exemplar for other institutions to follow. The project has already received a letter of support from King College, London as well as signs that organizations such as University College London and the Royal College of Arts may be keen to digitize similar material in the hope of making it accessible and searchable – hence the likelihood of interest in the outcomes of this project.

During the research, it was found that although no higher education institutions in the UK have done the project, there are a few in the United States that have. Institutions such as Harvard, Yale and Cornell have dedicated substantial time and money into digitizing their student papers and the results have been very successful.

The benefits of having the digital archive at these institutions have been vast, with an increase in user traffic to the college website from alumni. A similar result has already been seen at Imperial ever since the article about the project was printed in the Imperial Alumni Magazine, *Imperial Matters*. I have been receiving emails from alumni and the alumni office asking about the progress of the archive as there is a lot of interest from the alumni.

Since there is clearly an audience for this project, and since it is the first of its kind in the UK, it would be wise to do this project to a high standard. The benefits to the Union will include: prestige of being the first Students' Union in the country to have a digital archive, increased traffic to the website since it will be hosted on the Union server, increased service to it Clubs & Societies by providing a searchable history.

Conclusion

The £10,000 asked for will ensure that we have enough money to pay for the very basic output of the archive, with the additional support from IC Trust and *felix* going towards reaching the higher quote (Target 2). This will mean that we will at least have a starting point from which we can work with and hopefully, with additional funding being sought from other departments within the College, we will eventually reach the final quote.

Upon completion, the project will be the first of its kind in the country and will act as an exemplar for other institutions in the UK. The benefits for the Union are vast and far reaching and I hope that together we can set up a unique opportunity or our students, past, present and future.