



## EfS Small Grant – 2017/2018 Impact Report

### ***PROJECT: Electric Athenaeum: A New Digital Magazine Exploring Sustainability in Science Fiction***

On completion of your project, please complete an impact report referencing the below points by no later than 5pm on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

Please also be aware that alongside this report you are also required to submit a copy of the following:

- A copy of the receipts from all of your expenses
- Internal transfer form (also to be sent to Kate Fisher in the FST resources team)

- 1) Title
- 2) Overview and purpose of event
- 3) Impact on students' knowledge and understanding of sustainability (please include quotes/written feedback from students as and where possible)
- 4) Impact on students' understandings of the links between sustainability and their course
- 5) Longer term impacts on course development

1) TITLE - Electric Athenaeum: A New Digital Magazine Exploring Sustainability in Science Fiction

#### 2) Overview and purpose of event

Electric Athenaeum is a digital magazine hosted on a dedicated website ([www.electrithenaeum.com](http://www.electrithenaeum.com)). The first issue's theme, For Future Generations, was chosen to raise questions and discussion of sustainability, both directly (through nonfiction) and indirectly (through fiction). Three pieces of nonfiction, nine pieces of fiction, and three poems were selected from a three-month open-submission period and organized to prompt thought and discussion regarding sustainability. The magazine was accompanied by a hosted Twitter chat, as well as further indirect discussions on various social media platforms. Sustainability in processes (print vs digital, etc.) was also examined in early stages at a meeting involving PhD and MA students.

3) Impact on students' knowledge and understanding of sustainability (please include quotes/written feedback from students as and where possible)

Over the course of the magazine's six-week dissemination of content and discussion period, the website saw 578 unique readers. Each individual piece featured a dedicated hashtag for discussion on social media, as did the hosted Twitter chat. Combined, these hashtags were used over 200 times and prompted over 400 measurable engagements with a positive response rate of around 91.2%. The estimated social media reach of this activity was in excess of 57,500 individuals. Participants in the chat also frequently provided links to more in-depth sources of information for those interested in further exploring the issues raised.

Questions answered by experts participating in the chat included:

Question: How do you speak with or engage individuals who do not agree with you (in regards to the facts of climate change or other issues) either from a fictional standpoint or in conversation/nonfiction writing?

Quote Answer: Unfortunately, it is very difficult to engage with people that disregard basic science. The best way, I think (and I might be wrong) is completely bypassing them and actually engaging people that have no strong opinions and make the case to them.

Quote Answer: Basically, you assess if they're someone who is willing to learn, or if you're arguing performatively for the benefit of others.

Question: So, assuming humanity is generating some really good ideas, both in SFF and in current scientific research, how do we go about putting theory into practice, in terms of science and/or fictional solutions to the real-problems facing the world?

Quote Answer: Science isn't a thing divorced from people or politics, and climate change is very much a social justice issue. Act locally where you have the most power and keep going from there. But don't leave people behind!

Quote Answer: Science can't do it alone. We MUST take into account social implications as well. What we are seeing today with private data manipulation is a clear example that technology can not be made available with blind optimism. Technology is power and power corrupts.

Question: In terms of challenges humanity will have to meet to build a better future, which one do you find yourself thinking about most often?

Quote Answer: I think about climate change the most, which has a lot of attendant parts—sea level rise, changing weather patterns, shifting climate zones, desertification, ocean acidification, and others I haven't named. Adjacently, I think a lot about fresh water issues.

Quote Answer: For me it's either how are we going to mitigate the effects of global warming or how to defeat antibiotic resistance. These are the two big challenges of the 21st century.

Quote Answer: Seems small, but I think about my yard a lot: how it's not insular—part of a watershed (both upstream and downstream of other yards, other people). I think about our green-grass aesthetic—what that's come to mean for the natural world around us and how it has to change

#### Student Quotes

I began working on this project with a view to enhancing my editorial skills to aid employment; however, becoming more aware of the sustainability issue has changed certain aspects of my life. I now follow a meat-free diet after learning of the meat industry's impact on the environment and this is directly related to my work on Electric Athenaeum. I am working towards maintaining a self-sufficient lifestyle that has as little impact on the environment as possible with the hope that I can do my part to preserve the planet for future generations.

-Marc Weal, MA in Publishing

#### 4) Impact on students' understandings of the links between sustainability and their course

The initial organization meeting included a discussion on sustainable magazine production, as well as an examination of the debate around precisely how green digital products really are. The production of the magazine itself offers an ongoing example of how sustainable methods can be incorporated into creative practices, and Issue #1 (as posted online) is an evergreen collection of both fiction and nonfiction examples of incorporating sustainable thinking into writing. The hosted Twitter chat allowed students from all courses to take part in a wide-ranging discussion around issues of sustainability, one which also provided creative writing students with practical advice from published authors on incorporating sustainability and science into their own writing. These links most directly benefit students on publishing and creative writing courses, but will also be of interest to science students who are interested in communicating their research.

#### 5) Longer term impacts on course development

Electric Athenaeum can now function as an ongoing example of sustainability and communication, as well as stand as a potential platform for future writing on other topics of interest. At its core, the magazine fosters conversation and can be used to encourage inter-disciplinary links between courses. For example, writing students could interview science students and help shape ideas for dissemination. The magazine and the story of its development are also an example to future publishing students of the practice of publishing a magazine of this type; the steps taken and decisions made can all be studied from the inside by publishing students—and other students—who often aren't privy to the development of these sorts of publishing projects. Future publishing classes in the Publishing MA (Creativity & Content, Production Processes, The Business of Publishing, and Legal Rights and Data Issues) can use EA as a specific example to teach students about copyright, design, working with authors, marketing, digital publishing, sustainability issues in publishing products, and other elements.