This research project will assist completion of my current book project, *Peculiar Intimacies: Reading the Unspeakable in Historical Fictions of the Antebellum Age*. The primary goal will be dissecting readers’ squeamishness toward literary depictions of physical closeness and boundary transgressions (of race, class, sexuality, gender) endemic to American chattel slavery. I especially seek to understand critical resistance to analyzing these scenes in otherwise well-examined neoslave narratives such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, which cultural critic Sharon Holland attributes to “the American imaginary and its subconscious machinations to disremember a shared past.” I am eager to determine whether recent fictional representations of these encounters provoke a different kind of pushback from readers than that produced by similar, if veiled, accounts in well-known slave narratives. Using as case studies reviews and criticism of the primary *Peculiar Intimacies* texts aided by secondary sources on historiography, rhetorical and literary representation, and reader-response theories, my research collaborator and I will examine how fictional portrayals of historical boundary transgressions threaten modern-day readers. By interrogating selective resistance to history’s literary resurrection, this project builds off my previous work with public memory and postslavery texts.

While the research conducted in this project will inform various arguments throughout my manuscript, it will principally comprise the introductory chapter upon which submission of the manuscript to publishers depends. This incentive motivates expeditious completion of the chapter, which LARC collaboration and financial support will enable. I anticipate no other funding sources of this stage of the project. Working with faculty members from outside my field will engender valuable interdisciplinary feedback as will the assistance of my student research partner, Rory O’Brien, who will bring recent exposure to Women’s and Gender Studies theory to bear on the project. Rory’s limited literary coursework will be augmented by his exposure through our collaboration to much of the content of my “Peculiar Intimacies” course syllabus. I view our partnership, therefore, as a natural extension of my teaching commitment to the University. Moreover, my professional development will benefit from exposure to my senior colleagues to whose scholarly agendas my unique disciplinary focus will in turn contribute.

I anticipate engaging my research collaborators in discussions of narrative versus other types of documentation of traumatic experience. I will specifically ask Rory to assist me in establishing the critical discomfort with sexual boundary crossings or gender transgressions between same-sex participants, such as that practiced by slaveholding mistresses toward bondwomen or between indentured servants. We have begun discussing student paralysis in regard to the literary examples, which parallels the dearth of published criticism on similar scenes. Rory will begin investigating the available scholarship while studying abroad next semester. We will maintain our collaboration before his return to campus in July via email and Skype. Ultimately, Rory’s independent analysis of Toni Morrison’s last novel, *A Mercy*, will help shape my epilogue to *Peculiar Intimacies* on the same text.
Proposed Budget:
Research Materials (criticism and primary texts) + Copies            $500