The award funds I received were used to cover attendance expenses for the Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching (HILT) conference at IUPUI in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 3-7, 2019. HILT participants enroll in week-long special-topics courses that meet each day for morning and afternoon sessions. At conference closing, representatives from each course present a summary of course topics and projects to the entire group of conference attendees.

I chose to enroll in the “Black Spatial Humanities” course taught by Dr. Kim Gallon of Purdue University. Dr. Gallon is an Assistant Professor of History and the founder and director of the Black Press Research Collective. Her co-instructor was Purdue GIS Instructional Coordinator Shirley Yi. The nineteen enrollees represented numerous fields, professional roles, and specializations. Course content centered on the multi-faceted nature of both spatial and racial aspects of Black lived experience, primarily in the United States. We covered a wide variety of projects and research—much of it interdisciplinary—in an effort to understand and define what characterizes Black Spatial Humanities work. We discussed pedagogies, technologies, and research methodologies and frameworks in terms of their usefulness (or lack thereof) to BSH.

The course moved quickly and consisted of the following main topic areas:

1. Introduction to Spatial Humanities
2. Black Spatial Humanities: Materials, Questions, and Provocations
3. Spatial Humanities Technologies (Yi)/Deep Mapping the Racial Dot Map
4. Spatial Data/Information in Africana/Black Studies
5. Transatlantic Slave Trade/Slavery/Segregation/Apartheid and BSH
6. Data Sources for Spatial Humanities/GIS Software (Yi)
7. Urbanization, Migration and Mobility; Agrarian Labor and Rural Life
8. Cartography and Visualization Strategies; Spatial Data Manipulation and Queries (Yi)
9. Transnational Networks; Cultural and Symbolic Space
10. Data Cleaning; Data Sets and Mapping (hands-on exercises) (Yi)

The instructors deftly wove together practical and technical content with larger philosophical and ethical questions. Participants discussed and critiqued many case studies, including online maps, data visualizations, and websites and other web content. Beyond becoming conversant with historical and present-day practices, participants were challenged to consider their complex socio-economic and political implications (e.g., the potential for greater visibility, but also surveillance, inherent in the mapping process, and the consequences of same for marginalized communities).
This course was a very rich and unique learning opportunity, thanks to the instructors and to my fellow participants. Much of the content will be immediately applicable to my work, especially in my role as Maps Assistant at Herman B Wells Library. Over the long term, I am certain the larger questions raised in the course will also deeply affect how I shape my own research, as well as how I engage with that of others. I am very grateful to INULA for this opportunity!