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## 'It's a game-changer': WKU grad student named first recipient of MIT fellowship

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Lamont “Jack” Pearley, a graduate student in Western Kentucky University’s folk studies program, was named the first recipient of the MIT OpenDocLab Kentucky-based fellowship.

Provided by WKU Innovation Campus

Western Kentucky University folk studies graduate student Lamont “Jack” Pearley was named the first recipient of the MIT OpenDocLab Kentucky-based fellowship last week.

“It’s a game-changer,” he said.

Lamont is an inductee in the New York Blues Hall of Fame and a collaborator with WKU's Innovation Campus. He was selected for the fellowship in order to amplify the folk history of roots music and communities of color, both his areas of work.

"I'm extremely appreciative, right? It's an honor, considering I started my body of work as an independent," Pearley said.

Illustrating that independent start, Pearley said his African American Folklorist magazine — "my pride and joy at this point in time" — began as a newspaper that he would design in his own bedroom.

"His groundbreaking work in the areas of blues, folklore and community engagement provides impactful insight into diverse communities," Potter College Dean Terrance Brown said in a release. "I am honored to have him represent WKU in this project."

According to a release, the MIT OpenDocLab will give Pearley access to a bevy of creators working on "non-traditional methods of documenting stories."

"Being able to contribute and be amongst some great minds, figuring out how to push these narratives through, it's tremendous," he said. "You get to collaborate with active folk in multiple arenas, multiple disciplines, which for me is great."

The fellowship was established thanks to a collaborative partnership between AccelerateKY, a non-profit housed within WKU's Innovation Campus, and MIT.



“From our first innovation tours to their partnership in establishing this Kentucky-based virtual fellowship with their lab, the MIT team’s work on the process of co-creating stories has helped significantly shape our efforts in supporting Kentucky’s innovation ecosystem,” AccelerateKY Board President Rusty Justice said in a release.

Pearley said he will have the chance to pitch projects during the fellowship, but was originally worried about aiming too high.

“I’m a humble and honest person, as much as I can be, but I usually have very lofty visions and ideas,” Pearley said. “So I was slightly apologetic and saying, ‘I don’t want to have too grandiose of a vision.’”

That was the case until a fellowship advisor told Pearley “this is the place to be grandiose.”

“That’s the kind of place it is, that’s the kind of fellowship (it is) and that’s what excites me,” he said.

Sarah Wolozin, MIT OpenDocLab director, said in a release that she couldn’t imagine a better inaugural recipient for the fellowship.

“His work across multiple media formats and with emerging technologies, and his commitment to co-creation approaches with the communities whose stories he’s documenting, is deeply aligned with our focus and work at MIT,” Wolozin said.

Pearley is a busy man, hosting a weekly African American Folklorist segment on WKU Public Radio, keeping up with his Jack Dappa Blues website and handling fatherhood.

“It’s hard work, but we’re chipping away one brick at a time,” he said.

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