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**Center for Innovative Pedagogy &
The Essentials: Renewing General Education within the Curriculum**

A Proposal to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Submitted by
Kenyon College
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Kenyon College is grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for the invitation to explore its proposal for innovative pedagogy in greater detail. The proposal below complements, directly and indirectly, several of the Foundation's interests as stated in its letter of August 2010: initiatives to extend the intellectual breadth and coherence of the liberal arts education through the junior and senior years; initiatives that promote the engagement of all disciplines with the arts; and seminars for faculty from multiple departments that deal with major topics of broad curricular significance. Most directly, the programs we propose reflect the Foundation's program area of Curricular Development and Educational Effectiveness: addressing ongoing needs to revise or enhance the curriculum. As outlined in the pages that follow, the College respectfully requests a grant of \$750,000 over three years to create thoughtful pedagogical innovations and transform Kenyon's approach to general education skills.

Introduction

The Essential Kenyon is a theme woven throughout the College's publications—from its viewbook for prospective students to the prospectus paper delivered by President Georgia Nugent that launched our current comprehensive campaign. It served as a discussion point that kicked off Kenyon's recent self-study, inviting the entire campus to answer the question, what is essentially Kenyon? More than half of the nearly 300 respondents cited Kenyon's most enduring quality as that of "community." Everything about Kenyon comes back to this sense of belonging. Its long Middle Path, stretching from the northern reaches of the campus to the Gothic towers in the south, is a metaphor for the community. It is where we run into friends and colleagues, discover art projects and bake sales, hear poetry amid the pealing bells of the Church of the Holy Spirit. We cross it, as do the Amish with their horse and buggy, on foot and by car every day. We walk along its worn edges knowing that decades ago others did too. It is our true north, our magnetic center, our sense of place on the map, our community.

If community is the essential quality of Kenyon, so too is the academic mission that emerges from the intellectual spirit that comprises the community. Distilling the essential academic principles from the College's larger mission statement, you come to this: "Kenyon seeks to develop capacities, skills, and talents which time has shown to be most valuable: to be able to speak and write clearly so as to advance thoughts and arguments cogently; to be able to discriminate between the essential and the trivial; to arrive at well-informed value judgments; to be able to work independently and with others; to be able to comprehend our culture as well as other cultures."

Over the past two years, the College has spent considerable time and energy preparing for its reaccreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The process involved an extensive self-study that expertly highlighted areas in which Kenyon excels, as well as areas in need of improvement. Additionally, Kenyon's Provost issued a call last spring to begin a conversation and working papers on the liberal arts at the College. In response to conclusions from both, Kenyon held a faculty retreat last summer to

imagine successful innovations across campus emerging from working papers on a variety of subjects, from interdisciplinarity to integrating academics and student life.

One area that generated significant interest and dovetailed with a variety of needs was a teaching and learning center—a place where faculty can engage in ongoing discussions and workshops about pedagogy, create initiatives like first-year seminars, and design innovations in teaching. As one faculty member observed, “(It is) odd that we spend so little time reading/learning about pedagogy—(teaching is) what we do, and as academics we believe in the value of experts and research.” Another commented that “this kind of...institutionalized and sustainable kind of pedagogy training is mission critical to Kenyon—it contributes directly to faculty success in teaching students.”

The challenge for many faculty members at higher education institutions is to interact with peers outside their departments, but this is especially true for small liberal arts colleges, which often do not have the space or resources to devote to teaching centers. Although the first teaching and learning (TL) centers appeared on university campuses in the 1950s, it has only been within the last two decades that these centers emerged within liberal arts colleges. Liberal arts colleges have since come to the TL table seeking a variety of solutions to their unique challenges: managing interdisciplinary curricula, fostering teamwork, strengthening core competencies among their students, and deepening their scholarship, among others.

For Kenyon, it is, indeed, about community. In 2006, for example, the College’s Resource Allocation and Assessment Subcommittee (RAAS) noted that isolation resulting from departmental autonomy prevented faculty from sharing common interests and concerns about student performance (writing, research skills, integration, and retention), as well as creative pedagogical practices, across disciplinary divisions. In recent years, Kenyon has managed to carve out its own niche in innovative programs that inspire faculty in their pedagogy and scholarship through guest lecturers, fellowships to pursue research abroad, partnerships with students to perform research, and grants that benefit the entire campus. Among the most successful of these efforts has been the Mellon-supported Teachers Teaching Teachers program that encourages faculty to investigate cross-disciplinary connections and teach each other in the process. While the College has implemented these programs without the aid of a dedicated TL center, we find that the time is now ripe to gather our resources under one location. Several factors contribute to this propitious timing: anticipated personnel adjustments among information services staff; freeing of space within the Kenyon libraries; the recent reaccreditation self-study that called for refinements to the general education curriculum; and the faculty retreat, mentioned above, that highlighted the need for greater faculty sharing and learning.

The Essentials: Renewing General Education within the Curriculum

With support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the establishment of the CIP provides Kenyon with the timely opportunity to follow up on the recommendations from our recent faculty retreat. We intend to establish a framework for moving forward, rethinking what it means to provide a liberal arts education and fashioning a distinctive model of general education that is essentially Kenyon. While most general education programs focus on delivering skills at the introductory level unconnected across disciplines, Kenyon proposes to integrate “the

essentials” vertically and horizontally—intentionally linking them across disciplines and progressively through the college career.

Like faculty at other liberal arts colleges, Kenyon faculty members have discussed the merits of isolating a core skill, such as writing, and creating pedagogical strategies to infuse it across the curriculum. While this approach certainly does have merits, its narrow focus does not address the broader general education expectations we have for our students. Instead of addressing each desired skill individually over time, which will likely lead to a rigid checklist of requirements,

The Essentials

Writing across disciplines;

Quantitative reasoning and evaluation;

Visual literacy and new media;

Geography and interpretation of spatial phenomena;

Oral expression and presentation;

Languages and cultural engagement

Note: Critical and creative thinking, being the core of Kenyon’s liberal arts education, are immanent in the very teaching and practice of the essentials above.

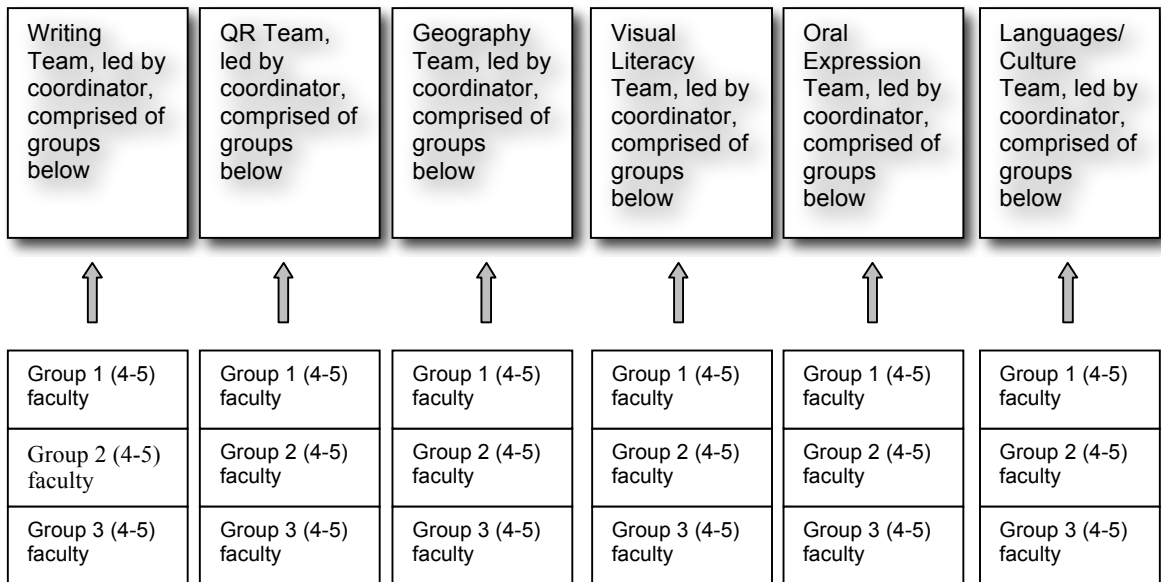
and instead of assuming that these skills will be met without an infusion across disciplines, we seek a model that is intentional and explicit, one that capitalizes on the College’s strength as a community, involving all faculty. The exploration of this model does not require the development of a new curriculum, but rather the rethinking and integration of content and pedagogy. It further overcomes disciplinary boundaries in education across the curriculum, synthesizing learning experiences.

We propose to undertake this initiative in three stages over three years, with advising from Kenyon’s faculty governance committees in consultation with the Provost’s Office. The CIP director will manage the day-to-day business of event planning that will be required for a smooth, successful process. It should be noted that the broad participation of faculty in each phase outlined here is also critical to “The Essentials.” With it, we will take the theoretical to the practical, putting words into action, empowering faculty to a sense of ownership and investment in outcomes. While the principal stages are outlined below, we hope to maintain a level of flexibility that frees the Provost and faculty to make adjustments to the process as needed.

Phase One: Conceptualizing Essential Skills. During the summer of 2012, six teams of ten faculty members representing different disciplines—with each team focusing on one of the essential skills outlined above—will meet for one-week planning sessions to consider what each skill means to Kenyon and how we want to define it. (For example, ten professors from art history, biology, philosophy, and other disciplines will meet for a week to discuss visual literacy, while another team of ten professors will address geography.) The conversation will be framed along vertical and horizontal lines—across the disciplines, progressing throughout a student’s four years. Each team will be led by a coordinator who will be responsible for preparing in advance of the workshop, moderating the discussion, and summarizing the team’s recommendations and submitting them to the Curricular Policy Committee (CPC).

Phase Two: Connecting the Essentials. In the 2012-13 academic year, the CPC will be primarily responsible for reviewing and adopting the recommendations and setting the stage for Phase Two, continuing to work with the team coordinators to establish an agenda and expected outcomes. The CIP staff will assist in the logistical plans for Phase Two, providing space, resources, and technical support as needed. Also during the year, faculty will be encouraged to experiment with pedagogical innovations, through TTT and other grants awarded from the CIP, addressing the essential skills as defined by the CPC.

During the summer of 2013, strategy teams will be expanded significantly to include the majority of Kenyon’s faculty. Each of the essential skills will be investigated more thoroughly by one team each. Within each team, three-to-four groups of four-to-five faculty members across the campus will further drill down to the core questions that arise in talking about these skills. To illustrate, here is an organizational chart:



If each team is comprised of three faculty groups, and each faculty group is comprised of 4-5 faculty members, we will average a total participation of 81 faculty members: 6 teams x 3 groups x 4.5 faculty = 81. Ultimately, this broad representation will ensure ownership of the process.

The purpose of the small group discussions is to identify ways to link pedagogies across disciplines and throughout the college career. For example, the team focusing on quantitative reasoning (QR) will divide into three groups of five faculty members who represent different departments. They begin to discuss pedagogies relating to QR: What do we want in year one? What do we want them to understand and apply in year two?

How do we connect these skills across our fields? A math professor might be asking a political scientist about how what occurs in a first-year statistics class can help in a sophomore political science course. These conversations will become the basis for the creation of integrated pedagogical strategies to advance student learning in QR.

The groups within each team will then convene a day-long session to put their recommendations, led by the team coordinator, into a proposal for review by the CPC. Although it would be premature to specify how the integration of the essentials will materialize, we can theorize what it may look like. For example, one outcome might be that those courses that feature writing assignments at the sophomore level could have a common set of guidelines to follow to ensure that certain writing types (such as, expository writing) are featured in the syllabi. Or professors who employ geography in the first year may agree to explain to students how their geography knowledge can be used in classes across the curriculum, so that students are more mindful of retaining this information. Another outcome may be that specific courses are identified as contributing to the development of a skill or skills—i.e., a theatre class might carry with it codes, like OP or W, to let students (and faculty) know that they will be honing their oral presentation and writing talents in the class.

Phase Three: Integrating the Essential Skills. The final phase of the initiative will take the theoretical to the practical. Faculty will be invited to work together in teams and propose innovative pedagogical projects to strengthen essential skills as appropriate to their classes. For example, one team of faculty might be interested in seeing how each other grades assignments that involve visual literacy. The grant would be designed to investigate methods of grading visual literacy across disciplines that can be shared with other faculty through the CIP. The FAC will be responsible for reviewing these proposals and awarding 20 grants in the spring of 2014, while the CIP will manage the grant administration. For practical purposes, it should be noted that the results of these grants may not be available until 2015, especially as many will involve implementation in classes during the 2014 fall semester.

At the conclusion of the grant period, Kenyon will undertake an independent evaluation of “The Essentials” initiative to measure its success, identify areas in need of improvement, and create a benchmark for future initiatives. The evaluation will feature a self-study component in which faculty are asked to reflect on what they learned during the three-year project, as well as an analysis of how well skills are being integrated. We request support for this evaluation as part of the grant, which will also contribute to the final report.