

To Include is To Excel

A Proposal Submitted to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

January 13, 2017

Proposal Summary

St. Olaf College requests \$800,000 over four years to enhance faculty expertise and seed curricular and pedagogical innovation. Under the auspices of “*To Include is To Excel*,” deep knowledge about teaching and learning will serve new and diverse generations of St. Olaf students. Drawing on this knowledge, St. Olaf faculty will examine and improve curricular offerings and modes of teaching. “*To Include is To Excel*” will also shape practices by which academic programs are reviewed and student learning is assessed. Convinced that a diversity of viewpoints and a spirit of collaboration will enhance these efforts, we will invite partners, from institutions like our own and unlike us, to join our exploration of student learning and curricular and pedagogical innovation.

Our Proposal

We propose four categories of activities that will help St. Olaf and collaborating institutions in the task of building the relational bridges needed to excel. In doing so, we believe St. Olaf can contribute to the national discussion of how higher education can best serve this generation of diverse, global, and digitally-connected students. We propose to:

1. Develop a deep understanding of our students’ learning experience in both general education and majors, and disseminate this information and what we and others already know about best practices in teaching;
2. Invite members of the faculty and academic staff to pilot and assess new approaches in teaching;
3. Apply what we learn about the student learning experience and students’ hopes and needs regarding their college education to curriculum reform at the program level; and
4. Engage colleagues at collaborating institutions in all three of these activities to broadly disseminate what we learn about traditional-age students and the best ways to engage students in all aspects of college education.

Joining a faculty Project Director of “*To Include is To Excel*,” additional personnel will assist in data collection and analysis and expand the capacity of St. Olaf’s Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts, our teaching and learning center.

1. *Building Upon Deep Knowledge About Students, Programs and Learning Outcomes*

The demographic and attitudinal shifts described above create the need for deep knowledge about our students, their inclinations toward and capacities for learning, and their orientations

to the world beyond the campus. This knowledge is pivotal to both faculty development and curricular innovation. The membership of the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education, the professional association of faculty development scholars and practitioners, also identifies this as a key imperative.¹

As a leader in learning outcomes assessment, St. Olaf generates and reports on a wealth of knowledge about its students. Its cycle of robust learning assessment utilizes “homegrown” methods and national assessment tools, including the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (and CLA+) and the HEDS alumni survey. Faculty members who serve on the assessment subcommittee of the St. Olaf Curriculum Committee analyze and draw conclusions from this evidence. They report their findings to the entire faculty and to the Academic Affairs Committee of the college’s governing board. We propose to draw on this rich body of information to pose questions for additional, targeted investigation of student success and student experiences.

“To Include is To Excel” will also draw on and inform the reviews of St. Olaf departments and academic programs scheduled during the grant period. These self-studies and external reviews enable departments and programs to conceive their futures and frame plans to grow stronger. Review findings and future plans are shared with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents. On average, five programs are reviewed annually. Between 2017-18 and 2019-2020, we expect to review the departments of Art and Art History, Biology, Dance, English, Nursing, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, and Women’s and Gender Studies, and programs in Computer Science, Film Studies, Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum, Great Conversation, Latin American Studies, Middle East Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies, and Science Conversation.

In addition to the regular assessment of learning outcomes and program reviews, we have recently undertaken pilot studies regarding which students gravitate to particular majors and how, and whether, they progress. For instance, we have analyzed student trajectories and persistence in Chemistry and Statistics, two fine programs with strong national reputations. We learned in one case that there is a negative correlation between a student’s financial need and the likelihood of completing the program. To understand fully what is holding some students back, we must next investigate learning outcomes as students move from introductory courses to advanced study, with the aim of developing teaching strategies to improve student engagement and of redesigning curriculum to ensure that students under-represented in the major have an equal chance to thrive.

Our goal is to think beyond patterns that have served a relatively narrow cross section of students. Indeed, some departments and programs are already taking steps to change those

¹ Mary Deane Sorcinelli, “Faculty Development: The Challenge Going Forward,” *Peer Review*, Fall 2007, Vol. 9, No. 4.

patterns. Earlier this fall, the faculty approved changes to the Music curriculum that provide additional learning opportunities for non-majors and updated the Music major to serve an expanded range of student interests. We will track the results of these changes in the upcoming academic year. For departments and programs already on the path to addressing the changing needs of an increasingly diverse student body, *“To Include is To Excel”* will support initial tasks of curricular and pedagogical reform. The project also expands the circle of programs engaged in our endeavor.

We will combine what we know through our on-going cycle of assessment and review with a focused investigation of the student experience and persistence. As with our studies of student participation in the Statistics and Chemistry programs, we will gather qualitative as well as quantitative information. We expect *“To Include is To Excel”* will lead to refinements of our assessment and program review process, as we deepen understanding of our students and their trajectories through various majors and programs. The insights we gain will elicit broad discussions among St. Olaf faculty and those who support student learning. *“To Include is To Excel,”* will identify ways academic programs can benefit a wide range of students.

In Year One of the project, we anticipate selecting and compiling existing information regarding students and their learning outcomes at St. Olaf. This “common reading” will augment the knowledge faculty members accumulate about the students they instruct. The primer will be revised in each year of the project, highlighting how the student body is changing. It will also serve as a launching point for focused investigations regarding St. Olaf students, teaching and curriculum. As faculty members encounter this knowledge in multiple instances, we believe the questions they pose and the answers they derive will grow increasingly sophisticated. For example, we will augment current assessment practice by examining “curricular trajectories,” the paths students follow to complete majors. The aim is to identify features of current curricula that shape the choice of a major and facilitate progress through programs of study.

We envision an iterative process by which these investigations and the remaining three categories of activities mutually inform each other. Knowledge gained about students and their curricular trajectories will inform pedagogy and the evolution of general education and major curricula that serve future students. *“To Include is To Excel”* circulates this knowledge through the “bloodstream” of the college, the existing deliberative processes by which the academic program has always evolved.

2. *Faculty Development: Pedagogy*

To lay the groundwork for faculty development, the college’s teaching and learning “Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts” (CILA) will sponsor three annual “Teaching Summits” that seed and sustain collaborations among St. Olaf faculty and with partner institutions. These day-long gatherings intend to attract a large, diverse audience. They provide a venue to learn about

national trends and the kinds of information described above, to showcase successful strategies individuals and programs have developed, and to challenge others to consider what might be applicable to their own courses and programs. The Project Director of *“To Include is To Excel”* and the Co-Director of CILA will select topics and identify national and local experts, including those on campus. One Teaching Summit may spotlight innovations in conjunction with program reviews or general education deliberations. Another may demonstrate emerging pedagogies. We can also imagine a Teaching Summit partly orchestrated by students whose films or live artistry deepen faculty appreciation of their experiences, abilities, and priorities. In addition, seven workshops will support collaboration among 5-6 faculty members on projects seeded by the Summits. Coordinated through *“To Include is To Excel,”* the workshops will promote bridging relationships among St. Olaf faculty and connect them to ACM peers at Carleton and Macalester Colleges and to colleagues at Augsburg College, Minneapolis Community and Technical College, and the University of Minnesota.

Summits and workshops prepare faculty to experiment with teaching strategies and assignments that enhance student learning and engagement. A Co-Director of CILA, appointed in support of this project, will devise activities that sustain and direct momentum gained through the Teaching Summits.

Drawing on shared knowledge of how this generation of students learns best, what captures their imagination and connects them with the world upon graduation, teams of faculty members will pilot pedagogies, assess their impact, and report on findings. Teams composed of faculty members from St. Olaf and other institutions will test the transferability and scalability of these teaching innovations. At St. Olaf, matching funds from the Provost’s Academic Innovation Fund will help support the development of these pilots.

Other activities acknowledge the particular insights and experiences that new and newly-tenured St. Olaf faculty members bring to the project. While faculty “generations” have a longer cycle than those of students, St. Olaf is also experiencing a relatively rapid change in the make-up and perspectives of its faculty. On the advice of President David Anderson, the college’s governing board featured faculty diversity in St. Olaf’s strategic plan. Since 2013, the college has achieved the goal that 30% of newly hired faculty be domestically diverse. Indeed, 57% of tenure track faculty members who joined the college in 2016 are domestically diverse. As a large cohort of senior faculty approaches retirement, St. Olaf is positioned to attract new faculty colleagues with a broad array of backgrounds and perspectives, and diverse academic training and scholarly interests.

We contend that all faculty bear responsibility to fulfill the college’s mission. Effective and widespread improvements in curriculum and pedagogy require professors at all ranks to engage and insist upon excellence. We recognize, however, that new assistant professors are crucial participants in crafting a liberal arts experience that engages and serves today’s and

tomorrow's students. We must draw upon the capacities of new and newly-tenured faculty members in ways that do not compromise their growth as scholars. We are also aware that the environment for new members of St. Olaf's faculty must itself support and celebrate the diversity and new perspectives that they bring. "*To Include is To Excel*" will provide additional support to early career faculty members who undertake projects commissioned by the Project Director, such as co-leading a workshop with a senior colleague.

3. *Curricular Innovation*

Curricular innovation during the grant period will be informed by our regular cycle of learning outcomes assessment and program review and by targeted inquiry to develop "deep knowledge" about our students and their learning experiences. With the additional resources and time provided by "*To Include is To Excel*," we imagine moving beyond incremental change to launch concerted and sustainable curricular change.

We propose to provide opportunities for faculty teams to identify a major curricular project that addresses diversity and changing student needs and strengths outlined earlier in the proposal. Course releases will allow teams to concentrate their efforts on investigating and implementing curricular revisions. The process for inviting and making these awards will be administered by the Project Director in conjunction with the Co-Director of CILA, the Provost or her designee, and one or more members of the Curriculum Committee. We imagine supporting up to five such projects over the period of the grant. The teams may be based at St. Olaf, but we also seek to involve faculty members from other institutions either in curricular innovation and experimentation.

St. Olaf approaches a prime moment to align faculty development and curricular innovation under "*To Include is To Excel*." In October of 2016, St. Olaf faculty voted to examine current general education offerings and requirements. This undertaking builds upon the most recent cycle of learning outcomes assessment in the general education curriculum, which commenced in 2015-16 and continues into this academic year. Support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for "*To Include is to Excel*" will help the college prepare to serve our future as well as present-day students.

At this relatively early stage, exactly how these curricular projects evolve remains to be seen, and it is premature to describe exact processes or outcomes. We are certain, however, that the deep knowledge generated about students and learning outcomes will anchor the deliberations about general education. The examination of "curricular trajectories" through the general education program will also be key. Departments and programs undergoing review during the grant period are likely candidates for grant-supported curricular innovation. Those anticipating review after or near the end of the grant period can undertake work that will be benchmarked in their review year. In a variety of ways, faculty development and curricular innovation will advance these programs as they undergo review.

Program reviews supported by the initiative will rely on deep knowledge about the students we educate. Evidence of past outcomes can serve as the platform to conceive future success, benefitting the broad range of St. Olaf students. As they deliberate, departments and program faculty will consider how best (or whether) to pivot from current practice. We will not limit opportunities for curricular innovation to programs undergoing review, however. Departments and programs wishing to engage in intensive work on their curriculum so as to improve accessibility and address trends in student interests and abilities will be invited to submit proposals. College matching funds dedicated to providing up to four course replacements (.67 FTE) annually will enable piloting of new courses or transition to a new set of curricular requirements.

4. Bridging Relationships with Other Institutions and Disseminating Findings

St. Olaf has much to contribute to national discussions about educating current and future students. There is much, too, for us to learn from others. Previous collaborations with Carleton and Macalester Colleges incline us to include their faculty members in Teaching Summits and in joint pedagogical and curricular projects. The chief academic officer of each college has indicated a willingness to partner with St. Olaf in this way. We also look forward to sharing our findings through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest.

Convinced that the best solutions are informed by multiple perspectives and diverse experiences, we also propose to expand the collaboration to include Augsburg College, the University of Minnesota, and Minneapolis Community and Technical College. Faculty members from these institutions will be invited to participate in the Teaching Summits and workshops, serve as featured speakers, and collaborate in pedagogical development. Collaboration with Augsburg College is particularly timely, as it is currently revising its general education. Its chief academic officer reports that it is exploring some of the questions that St. Olaf seeks to investigate. Augsburg shares cultural and academic traditions with St. Olaf, but its urban identity and diverse student body can serve as a vital link between our familiar partners and those we now approach.

We have also completed preliminary conversations with officials in the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, especially in the Office for Diversity in Graduate Education. The Graduate School serves 1,600 students completing graduate degrees in the College of Liberal Arts. We have explored the benefits and logistics of teaming graduate students with St. Olaf faculty to examine pedagogy and curricula across a range of fields.

Finally, we are also in discussion with colleagues at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC), a public two-year college located in downtown Minneapolis. MCTC enrolls nearly 13,000 students and is an active partner in initiatives to strengthen the social, economic and cultural vitality of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Nearly 60% of MCTC students are

ethnically diverse and 27% are first generation college students. The college's Academy of Liberal Arts equips students to enter and succeed in bachelor degree programs at state universities in Minnesota and at Augsburg College.

"To Include is To Excel" will also engage St. Olaf in the national dialogue about these issues. Conferences, workshops (such as those offered through the American Conference of Academic Deans), webinars, and electronic publication of our results are likely venues for dissemination of our findings. One task of the Project Director will be to collect and electronically publish information about best practices at St. Olaf and its partner institutions and results from grant-supported projects. Throughout, we will remain alert to opportunities to share what we have learned with a national audience.

Major Activities

Summarizing the major activities of the *"To Include is To Excel"* project, we propose to:

1. Organize Teaching Summits and workshops,
2. Compile and study deep knowledge of St. Olaf students and their counterparts on other campuses,
3. Complete "curricular trajectory" studies for selected majors/programs,
4. Invite and fund proposals from programs and departments for faculty development and curricular innovation,
5. Undertake faculty development and curricular innovation through funded projects
6. Assess and share outcomes of pedagogical and curricular innovation, and seed further innovation through exchanges and collaboration with colleagues at Augsburg, Carleton and Macalester Colleges, and
7. Assess and share outcomes and seed innovation through exchanges and collaboration with colleagues at the University of Minnesota and at Minneapolis Community and Technical College.

An award committee composed of one or more members of the Dean's Council (Provost, Associate Provost, Registrar, and Associate Deans), the chair of the Assessment sub-committee of the Curriculum Committee, another member of the Curriculum Committee, the Director or Co-Director of the teaching and learning "Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts," and the Project Director of the *"To Include is To Excel"* grant will select faculty proposals for grant support.

How St. Olaf Will Sustain *"To Include is To Excel"*

We envision *"To Include is To Excel"* as a kind of quantum leap in regard to how St. Olaf will serve our increasingly diverse students. We believe these efforts will generate momentum that can be sustained beyond the grant period without the same level of investment requested here. We will, quite simply, be operating at a different level at the conclusion of the grant than where

we started.

Changes in major and general education curricula will carry forward the lessons learned through the development of “deep knowledge” about our students and their educational pathways. Broad dissemination of best practices in teaching will provide faculty members with the tools they need to educate a new generation of learners. Thanks to a nuanced exploration of how our students are engaging—or failing to engage—in particular disciplines or other educational opportunities, we will refine the questions we will ask of ourselves in the regular cycle of learning outcomes assessment and program reviews. In these ways, the outlooks and practices initiated by “*To Include is To Excel*” will be built into the ways in which we monitor and modify what and how we teach going forward.

During the grant period, St. Olaf will maintain current faculty development budgets and processes, both to seed scholarly enterprise and curricular developments that don’t align closely with “*To Include is To Excel.*” St. Olaf will contribute resources to the proposed grant activities as outlined above.