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Institution Davidson College

Name of project/event The Memory Group: A New Interdisciplinary Mechanism for Discourse and Curricular Development at Davidson College

Date(s) of Project 01 August 2008 to 31 July 2009

Amount Awarded \$4,000

1. Original Goals and Objectives

- To develop a new, upper-level multidisciplinary team-taught course (“How We Know: Memory”)
- To launch and sustain a discussion series
- To invite a prominent memory scholar for a public lecture
- To explore the possibility of hosting a multidisciplinary conference on Memory at Davidson
- To travel to experimental and cultural memory sites (Duke University fMRI lab; Washington, DC; Birmingham Civil Rights District; Creation Museum in Kentucky)

2. Revised Goals and Objectives

We included the public lecture as the keynote to the discussion series.

To accommodate our \$4,000 budget (request was \$8,000),

- we dropped our proposed travel from four trips to two trips.
- we postponed exploration of hosting a multidisciplinary memory conference.

3. How Our Goals and Objectives Were Met

Course Development The foundations of this course were laid by the ACS funding; we have made great progress in the development of the course. We have

(a) **attended the play** *I Am My Own Wife* (von Mahlsdorf, 2004; Wright, 2004) about how history is remembered and represented,

(b) **read and discussed books** that we are considering for the course [*Still Alive* (Kluger, 2001), *Can't Remember What I Forgot* (Halpern, 2008), *History Lesson* (Lefkowitz, 2008), *Man in the Holocene* (Frisch, 1979), and *My Stroke of Insight* (Taylor, 2006)],

(c) **sat in on one another's courses** to learn more about each other's teaching styles, and

(d) used the ACS Faculty Renewal grant-supported activities as the basis of a **Course, Curriculum, and Laboratory Improvement (CCLI) grant proposal that we submitted to the National Science Foundation (NSF)** at the end of May 2009.

In developing the CCLI grant proposal that we submitted to NSF, (e) we **secured the college's commitment** to supporting our ability to staff the *How We Know* course for three successive years.

Finally, (f) **our travel** described below will contribute to this course.

Memory & . . . Discussion Series / Hosting a Public Lecture by a Prominent Memory Scholar We established the series by organizing two discussions per semester, involving 12 Davidson faculty members from ten different departments (Anthropology, Biology, Education, English, German, History, Music, Psychology, Religion, and Sociology). **Our topics were:** *Memory & Tradition in African-American Culture, Memory & Narrative, Memory & Self, and Memory & Evolution*. The **keynote speaker** for this series was Dr. William Hirst (New School for Social Research), a cognitive scientist and expert in collective memory, to anchor the series. His keynote address was entitled, *Finding a Place for Psychology in the Study of Collective Memory*.

The evidence of our sustaining the series is that the college's Public Lectures Committee has already funded a **second year of the series** (details under Evaluation/Assessment).

Travel to Experimental and Cultural Memory Sites As stated in our revised goals, we focused our travel on two locations.

(a) First we visited Drs. Dave Madden and Michele Diaz at **Duke University** in summer 2008 to learn about how functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) is used to explore a range of scientific questions, including exploration of the biological basis of memory (www.geri.duke.edu/cogpsych/index.htm). We viewed experiments in progress and had informative conversations with the investigators, laying the groundwork for a potential field trip for undergraduates in our future course.

(b) In May 2009 the four PIs traveled together to **Washington, DC** to visit sites of cultural memory such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Vietnam Veterans War Memorial, as well as the Society for Neuroscience headquarters where works by artist Greg Dunn and the Cajal mural by architects Envision Design represent in prominent public spaces important scientific data on the structure of the nervous system.

4. Evaluation/Assessment

Course Development There are two signs that this aspect of our project was successful. First, we made enough progress in developing the course to allow us to write a detailed CCLI grant proposal to NSF to support three successive years of offering the course. Second, as stated above, we secured the college's commitment to support our ability to staff this new course without detracting from existing course offerings.

Memory & . . . Discussion Series / Hosting a Public Lecture by a Prominent Memory Scholar

There are four concrete measures of the success of these events:

(a) Attendance The audiences at the discussion series averaged around 25 faculty, students, staff, and community members (including 74 different individuals representing 22 departments or programs and two college offices); the audience at the public lecture by Dr. Hirst numbered over 100 people, including a significant number of undergraduates.

(b) Scholarly Collaborations Developed The faculty who were part of the *Memory & African American Traditions* panel (Nancy Fairley, Anthropology; Hilton Kelly, Education; Anne Wills, Religion) organized another panel presentation that was accepted at the National Association for African American Studies conference in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The title of the panel was *Grandma Told My Father, He Told Me, and I Remember: Vicarious Memories and African American Familial, Educational, and Religious Traditions*. In addition, they have been working on an edited volume that will be submitted to publishers August 1. This collaboration would not have occurred without the *Memory & . . .* discussion series.

(c) Funding for Second Year The college's Public Lectures Committee has already approved funding for a 2009-10 *Memory & . . .* series. The new topics will include *Memory & The Body*, *Memory & Madness*, and *Memory & The Archive*; the keynote speaker next year will be sociologist Dr. Jeffrey Olick (University of Virginia, author of *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*).

(d) Campus Recognition The lecture series was cited in the college's strategic plan as an example of successful multidisciplinary work that the college hopes to expand.

Travel to Experimental and Cultural Memory Sites

There are three concrete measures of the success of the trips:

(a) We learned that Duke University staff are accustomed to giving tours of the fMRI facility. This familiarity with explaining the science of their work to relatively naïve audiences provided a very successful test-run of a possible course field trip.

(b) One measure of our success of the Washington, DC, trip is **the number of locations we visited and are considering for a possible course field trip** (13): the Holocaust Memorial Museum; the site for the future Martin Luther King, Jr., memorial; the FDR memorial; the Jefferson memorial; the art and architecture in the Society for Neuroscience building; the National Portrait gallery; the U.S. Navy memorial; the Korean War memorial, the Lincoln memorial; the Vietnam memorials (all 3); and the World War II memorial. As a group, we can reflect on our common experiences and use the photographs we took, the pamphlets we collected, and the books we purchased to plan a meaningful course field trip, should there be resources to take one.

(c) A final measure of success of the travel, perhaps the most important, was that it enabled **focused time together**. On the day-trip to Duke and on our two-day trip to Washington, DC, the four of us were focused on Memory Group planning and on getting to know one another better. Given the difficulty in scheduling such quality time together on campus amongst our many competing time demands, the trips were a particularly valuable use of time and resources.

5. If you were to redesign your project, what would you do differently and why?

We would make few changes to our project as we were pleased with our ability to achieve our goals. The main lesson learned is that scheduling times when four busy faculty members are all free can be more complicated than expected. Using tools like Outlook calendar and sharing cell phone numbers is particularly helpful.

One possibility, that we may explore in the future, is to have a keynote address for a *Memory & . . .* series involve two or three scholars “think aloud” and have a conversation with debate across disciplines. We note this not with any concerns about how our keynote went, simply with an awareness that additional models could be considered.

6. How did your project impact other faculty on your campus?

In addition to what is listed in our answer to #4:

- Neil Lerner, a music professor on our *Memory & Evolution* panel, found a quote from Darwin to open a book he is writing about music in horror movies.
- Michael Johnson, a visiting professor in classics, used our discussion series model to answer a job interview question about interdisciplinary dialogues, and he feels that answer helped him earn an on-campus interview
- Ann Wills, a religion professor, presented her new work on memory and the African American tradition at the American Academy of Religion. This work is being revised to be a book chapter and has been favorably received by her colleagues.

7. How did the project impact the institution as a whole?

In addition to what is listed in our answer to #4, particularly 4a and 4d:

- The Committee on Curriculum Development floated an interdisciplinary course in Memory as part of the faculty's evaluation of our current curriculum and as a mechanism to examine the possibility of creating a new, multidisciplinary first-year seminar course for all students.
- Ruth Beeston (Chemistry), Sophia Sarafova (Biology), and Ann Fox (English) suggested we keep the *Memory & . . .* format, but change the topic to *Color & . . .* next year. Thus our series has the potential to expand multidisciplinary into additional areas in the future, limited only by faculty imagination (and time constraints!)—our model is on the minds of the faculty.
- One of our panelists shared the following in an e-mail to the Memory Group: “You've established a model for a low-stress, high-reward way for faculty and students to discuss topics of interest, one that I hope we'll be able to continue in the coming years.”

8. If students were involved, what was the impact on them?

As noted in our answer to #4, students attended the *Memory & . . .* series. Informal comments from students is that they would like to see more talks like our discussion series in which experts in different disciplines come together around a topic of mutual interest.

9. How have you shared the results with ACS colleagues and beyond ACS? What are your plans for dissemination?

As mentioned earlier, three participants in the Memory & panel series will submit an edited volume book project to publishers on August 1.

Two of the PIs (KM and BL) have participated in ACS efforts to obtain funding from the Teagle Foundation to apply what is learned by cognitive scientists and neuroscientists in the classroom. In those conversations, we have shared aspects of the *Memory & . . .* discussion series as we brainstormed way to bring faculty on a campus together. One PI (BL), on the staff of the ACS Summer Teaching and Learning Workshop, discussed the Memory Project informally with several ACS colleagues at the Workshop.

We have submitted a poster presentation about our discussion series to this fall's annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience (abstract below)

Based on the comments received from the Society for Neuroscience poster presentation, we hope to expand the abstract and poster into a manuscript describing our approaches and experiences for submission to a peer-reviewed journal such as the *Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education [JUNE]*, *College Teaching*, etc.

An important part of the CCLI grant submitted to NSF involves dissemination of our experiences with the course we are developing.

10. Did any publications result from this project? If yes, list here.

The abstract that will be published in the program of the Society for Neuroscience meeting this fall is:

Memory matters: Multidisciplinary dialogs about memory at Davidson College

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Abstract: Many neuroscientists concentrate their research on the physiological and cognitive mechanisms underlying memory. The processes, limitations, and functions of human memory are also examined by scholars in fields that extend well beyond the natural and social sciences. To highlight how arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences all contribute to an understanding of human memory we initiated a series of public events in which faculty from different fields dialogue about how memory matters to their scholarship and teaching. In a series titled, "Memory & . . ." twelve Davidson faculty members representing Biology, Psychology, Education, Anthropology, Religion, English, Music, History, German, and Sociology gathered on four occasions to discuss Memory & Tradition in African-American Culture, Memory & Narrative, Memory & Self, and Memory & Evolution. Dialogues featured three faculty panelists from different disciplines who each explained how memory was a part of their scholarly pursuits, followed by questions and discussion from an audience of students, staff, faculty, and community members. We also hosted as keynote speaker William Hirst, a cognitive scientist and expert in collective memory, to anchor the series. The rich dialogue and strong attendance demonstrated that these events met our goal of creating new discussions of memory that crossed disciplinary boundaries in our community. Additional benefits of the Memory & . . . dialogue series included the formation of new research partnerships, an enhanced interest in scholarship on our campus, and a strong foundation for designing a new interdisciplinary course on memory. The Memory & . . . dialog series was so well received that it will continue in the coming academic year to address topics that intersect with memory such as Memory & Color, "Memory & Madness," "Memory & Sports" and "Memory & Molecules"; the keynote speaker next year will be historian and sociologist Jeffrey Olick. We found that our multidisciplinary dialogs on

new approaches and thinking in memory studies stimulated new questions in our own research. In addition, we hope that our experiences can serve as a useful model for initiating similar multidisciplinary dialogues at other institutions on topics where neuroscience intersects with a broad variety of disciplines. More information is available at: www3.davidson.edu/cms/x35366.xml

11. What are the next steps (follow-up) in your project?

We have already taken two important next steps:

- (a) We have set up the second year of the *Memory & . . .* discussion series.
- (b) We have already submitted the CCLI proposal to NSF. If we are funded, that is the next step. If we are not funded, revising and submitting the grant is the next step.

12. The complete financial statement, showing original budget (the breakdown of the amount awarded) and expenditures is attached.

13. Please include a summary of your work that may be included on the ACS Faculty Renewal website.

Four faculty from four different departments and across all ranks worked together to (a) develop an interdisciplinary course, *How We Know: Memory*, (b) create a new model for interdisciplinary discussion series events, and (c) travel to experimental and cultural memory sites to explore possible field trip opportunities for the course under development. The progress made on course development was the foundation of a Course, Curriculum, and Laboratory Instrumentation (CCLI) grant proposal submitted to the National Science Foundation (NSF). The discussion series format involves three faculty from three different disciplines speaking on a common topic (*Memory and the African American Tradition, Memory & Narrative, Memory & Self, Memory & Evolution*), followed by discussion with one another and the audience. The series included a keynote address by a prominent memory scholar, William Hirst. We will present a poster about this discussion series at the fall 2009 meeting of the Society for Neuroscience.