

Proposal to the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation

From the Associated Colleges of the South

New Models of Cooperation in Challenged and Critical Areas

I. The Request

The Associated Colleges of the South, a consortium of sixteen liberal arts institutions in twelve southern states, requests funding in the amount of \$585,000, from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation. These funds will be used over a three-year period as seed money to address three challenging and critical program and curricular areas: Interdisciplinary Programs, Undergraduate Research and Engagement, and Diversity.

These areas have been identified by ACS Presidents and the chief academic officers as being pivotal in fulfilling the missions of our member institutions to provide a quality liberal arts education to their students, and -- through ACS -- cooperation has been deemed a vital and a cost efficient mechanism to respond to these needs. Attached are letters from six ACS presidents testifying to the importance of this special program and its impact on their campuses.

II. About Associated Colleges of the South (ACS)

The ACS consortium has become an extremely creative and innovative organization, incubating and implementing ideas and plans that assist its member institutions as well as other postsecondary institutions and consortia through this country and overseas. ACS demonstrates and models the value of cooperation and collaboration. And these models of cooperation can be and are being adapted by individual institutions and other consortia. In doing this, ACS enlarges and magnifies the impact of what it accomplishes for students, faculty, staff, and administrators on its member campuses. ACS has a proven track record in bringing people together, instilling a high degree of confidence in working collaboratively, and taking a creative approach in addressing campus challenges that have become consortial priorities.

The ACS is particularly grateful to the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation for the support we have received in the past. The Foundation's support has strengthened academic programs through the new and imaginative use of technology; boosted our cost containment efforts through administrative benchmarking, joint purchasing and other collaborative efforts; and has assisted the consortium in other important ways. With the Foundation's continued support, ACS will be able to creatively address these three critical and challenged areas and expand cost containment practices to academic ventures.

III. Background for the Proposal (See the appendix for a detailed consideration of key issues)

This new initiative is a critical one for the well-being of our institutions and imperative for a well-rounded liberal arts education for our students.

While individual institutions are making efforts in these areas, there are considerable advantages to be gained from working in close collaboration with one another. Working together, they can strengthen their programs further while taking advantage of administrative efficiencies and cost containment practices to move their programs to a much higher level. For example, expertise in a specific area of women's/gender studies that is found at one institution can be shared with the other member institutions, via technology and/or the circuit rider program, thus reducing or eliminating the need for other institutions to hire a faculty member or an outside consultant in this area.

The seed money requested will stimulate the institutions to test and to experiment with new ways of attacking and funding these areas. The best approaches and practices identified can be incorporated into regular institutional programs and sustained over time. Three years will give them the time to make sure that the testing process is an exhaustive one and that promising ideas can be effectively adapted to individual institutional circumstances and needs. The results will not produce institutions that look alike – they are too distinctive and independent for this. Instead, they will be strengthened as they share resources, avoid mistakes made on other campuses, and utilize the experiences and lessons learned from others to re-fashion programs in their own context.

It also is expected that long-term cooperative linkages can be forged in the three challenged areas. New joint interdisciplinary courses, consortium-wide forums for undergraduate research and combined diversity training opportunities for faculty and staff are a few good examples of what can be accomplished and how cost containment efforts can be realized in academic endeavors. We are confident that these cooperative initiatives will serve as models for other institutions and consortia, thereby broadening the range and impact of this initiative.

The stakes are very high. This innovative thrust can make a significant difference in the member colleges and universities and in the future of the consortium. ACS presidents underscore the value of these programs in the letters attached to this proposal. They feel strongly about the concrete potential benefits to their campuses.

IV. The Specific Proposal: Looking Forward and Addressing Challenging and Critical Areas

The consortium has identified three critical and challenged areas for its attention as it asks and answers the question, “How do we provide the education needed by our students?”:

- Interdisciplinary Opportunities
- Undergraduate Research and Engagement

- Diversity

The ACS has identified the following objectives as it moves forward to address these areas. The consortium seeks to:

- Enhance student learning.
- Support and promote the practices that distinguish the liberal arts education from other types of learning.
- Stimulate faculty, student, staff, and administrative dialogue about and cooperation in the three critical and challenged areas.
- Assist member institutions in developing campus climates that are conducive to and promote diversity, undergraduate research and engagement, and interdisciplinary opportunities.
- Seek creative and meaningful solutions to issues.
- Develop new models to address the three critical and challenged areas.
- Identify and share best practices and resources in these areas.
- Infuse sound pedagogy throughout curricular offerings.
- Increase the intentional development and inclusion of statements about diversity in strategic campus documents.
- Share the results of the consortial efforts with all member institutions as well as beyond ACS.
- Model cost efficiencies and effectiveness in academic areas.

While interdisciplinary opportunities, undergraduate research and engagement, and diversity are interconnected and profoundly influence each other, they are separated here for ease of presentation.

A. Interdisciplinary Opportunities

In considering the question, “How do we provide the education that students need to be responsible and productive global citizens,” two external realities exist that make interdisciplinary opportunities both critical and challenging in a liberal arts education. First, ours is a rapidly changing world, where international vision, a mature understanding of human experience, access to extensive knowledge, and the ability to look at issues from multiple perspectives are essential skills. Second, research of all types, be it casual or formal, is becoming more and more interdisciplinary in nature. Preparing students for these two realities calls for a breadth of understanding of multiple disciplines and how they relate to each other, as well as the ability to find, to evaluate, to integrate and to synthesize information that will inform decisions, policies, and practices in every phase of one’s social and business life.

While some interdisciplinary opportunities already exist in ACS institutions, the consortium keenly sees the value of refining and enhancing existing programs and developing new interdisciplinary opportunities. One of the challenges in doing this is to design opportunities that help students understand the mutual relationship of the disciplines and have a breadth of understanding that will stand them in good stead in all of their future interactions.

In order to do this effectively, and to foster innovative practices, it is critical to promote a faculty culture that moves from specialization to cross-disciplinary dialogue. This means that departments and faculty need encouragement (structured opportunities and rewards) to work together to help students recognize and experience disciplinary relationships, even in non- interdisciplinary courses. This kind of dialogue must take place if effective curricular changes are to be made. However, changing the culture is not solely a faculty or a curricular issue. It also must extend to extracurricular spheres, including advising, counseling and special programs. Thinking in interdisciplinary ways and helping students understand the connections among disciplines and what these connections mean in the real world are campus-wide responsibilities.

Given the critical importance of interdisciplinary efforts, we will:

- Offer an educational program to undergraduates not in separate channels or silos – for example, economics separate from political science and other disciplines.
- Stimulate more interdisciplinary efforts. For example, environmental studies and issues involve more than science; economics, political science, sociology and other areas also come into play (even the humanities in relation to environmental ethics and justice).
- Address the critical needs and opportunities that face us in numerous interdisciplinary areas such as international studies, women's/gender studies, fine arts, environmental studies, general education, the first-year experience and capstone courses.
- Demonstrate to students the need to bring together different disciplines in their studies as they deal with the problems of the real world and seek the potential solutions to those problems.
- Take the following actions:
 - Develop new courses
 - Prepare new materials and modules for classes
 - Bring different specialists together in the classroom and in joint projects
 - Make innovative use of technology to assist interdisciplinary efforts
 - Provide training opportunities for faculty, linking the different areas and perspectives together (e.g., through workshops and conferences)
 - Identify and share best practices in interdisciplinary areas
 - Provide circuit riders – experts in interdisciplinary programs who will travel to other campuses and share experiences and provide advice
 - Prepare guidebooks and an expanded website for the exchange of helpful information

II. Undergraduate Research and Engagement

While undergraduate research experiences do exist within ACS institutions, the goals here are to enhance and expand existing offerings, to develop more opportunities, and to provide avenues where the research can be shared with peers both within and

outside of ACS. Meaningful undergraduate research accomplishes a number of objectives, including:

- Active student engagement (hands-on learning) with ideas and concepts that opens doors to creativity and inquiry.
- Collaborative/mentoring relationships with faculty that involve discovery and development.
- Learning new skills and extension of classroom learning beyond the campus, as in service learning where performing community service or conducting community-related research is part of course requirements.
- Providing experiences necessary to excel in graduate school and in professional lives.
- Exposure to the culture and issues of research, including ethical issues, planning experiments, gathering data, the difference between observational/cross-sectional data and experimental data, developing and testing hypotheses, drawing conclusions, writing up and presenting results, managing time, thinking like a professional, learning how to use evidence and question what is read/heard/seen.
- Development of skills in critical and logical thinking.
- Experience in being both student and teacher.
- Development and enhancement of skills in the evidence-based way of thinking, which is used to make decisions and resolve controversies.
- Opportunities for faculty to enhance their teaching and contributions to society by remaining active in and involving undergraduates in research.

Methods by which these objectives will be met include but are not limited to: faculty development, pilot programs, faculty mini-grants to redesign courses to include undergraduate research, identification and sharing of best practices in undergraduate research, workshops, an ACS Undergraduate Research Conference where students from all disciplines would be invited to present their research, student travel grants to the Research Conference, opportunities to mentor faculty on successful faculty/student research collaboration, and consultations by and with outside experts.

To deal with the need for special efforts in undergraduate research and engagement, we will:

- Break students out of the regular, predictable lecture mode in the classroom and engage students as more active and dynamic partners with faculty in the education experience. As a consequence, students will be better prepared for graduate and professional school and their careers following graduation.
- Expose students to the culture and issues of research, including gathering data, planning experiments, developing and testing hypotheses, and drawing conclusions from experience and evidence.
- Provide opportunities for students to present and to defend their research results in academic forums and conferences where they also can learn from one another.
- Provide materials, both in print form and on the web, informing students about the publication process.

- Offer new opportunities for publication.
- Establish mentoring relationships through which faculty can guide students in their process of discovery.
- Foster faculty-student collaboration in research, thereby forging a new teaching role for faculty -- and giving students the benefit of close interaction and mentoring opportunities with faculty through which they can learn how effective research is conducted.
- Create engagement and projects with the local community, to enhance the students' educational experience and to prepare them better for their chosen careers.
- Link student interaction with the community to their academic program, strengthening that program in the process.
- Pave the way to productive internships and job opportunities, so that through such service learning opportunities institutions will equip students with the preparation and skills necessary to be successful in the outside world.
- Employ various mechanisms for change, including symposia and pilot research projects, workshops, consultations, community pilot programs, courses and module development.

III. Diversity

There is no one-shot program or solution for diversity. Diversity in higher education should not even be viewed as a problem that is in need of a solution. Indeed, it is apparent that engaging diversity provides a wonderful opportunity to attend to many issues which have long needed attention - teaching and learning, curricular coherence, assessment, campus-community connections, climate, student success, and advising, among others. Diversity on campus impels us to prepare students and our institutions for a future in which the diversity of our communities and institutions is widely recognized as a powerful resource.

Daryl G. Smith, et al. 1997. *Diversity Works: The Emerging Picture of How Students Benefit*. Washington, D.C.: AAC&U, 49

Creating safe campus climates that welcome, respect, and celebrate diversity is a high priority for the consortium. And learning to better manage diversity and to tap its potential to the fullest, while being fiscally responsible, is a major challenge before the consortium and the individual institutions. The focus must be on sustainability and quality, rather than quantity, in the pursuit of inclusiveness, equity, educational excellence, and cost containment.

In planning its course of action, ACS looks to the *Diversity Blueprint: A planning Manual for Colleges and Universities*, produced through the collaboration of AAC&U and The University of Maryland, College Park (1998). Through this collaboration and research, five planning principles have been identified as essential in creating a successfully diverse campus environment as well as successful diversity programs:

- accountability - determining how and who will monitor responsibility for meeting campus needs through program development and implementation.

- inclusiveness - including faculty, staff, students representing all dimensions of diversity in programs, on committees, and in the curriculum.
- shared responsibility – the belief and expectation that every campus unit and every member of the campus community is responsible for making the campus a welcoming place for all people. Diversity is the responsibility of everyone, not just of one specific office or staff member.
- evaluation - continuous feedback on whether or not a program is working and fulfilling its purpose, if it needs refinement to meet emerging needs, if the financial/staff resources are adequate, and if the results justify the expenditures.
- institutionalization - the permanent incorporation of diversity efforts into the college/university structure.

Successful implementation of these five principles will involve strategic planning, strong leaders at multiple levels who are open to the possibilities and can encourage grass roots efforts to engage the issues and solutions, commitment of institutional resources, identification of and addressing internal resistance, the crafting and implementation of appropriate policies and practices, the awareness of and preparation for legal difficulties, and the inclusion of statements about diversity in strategic publications (e.g., mission statements, admission documents, strategic plans, faculty and student handbooks).

Keeping in mind the powerful value of diversity on our campuses, we will:

- Initiate programs – not just conversation – bringing various constituent groups closer together on the campus. A major objective is for individuals and groups to increase their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of individuals and groups with different backgrounds.
- Offer Diversity Leadership Education and prejudice reduction training as important components of the initiative.
- Establish a “train-the-trainers” program in which selected individuals will come together, learn key lessons about prejudice reduction and return to the campuses to train others to lead the new efforts to be undertaken.
- Identify and gather academic and co-curricular examples from around the country and adapt them for use on ACS campuses.
- Develop program models and case studies that can be shared with other institutions in the region and elsewhere.
- Assemble extensive website contacts and experiences, providing immediate access to broader contacts and useful materials.
- Design and conduct faculty and staff development training programs in order to strengthen their central leadership roles.
- Evaluate consortial and campus diversity initiatives, with continual feedback to improve and strengthen these efforts.
- The process of achieving the above objectives will include workshops, conferences, mini-grants, pilot programs and consultations.

A Word About Cost Containment (This is a completely new page)

The ACS and its member institutions are committed to continuing their cost containment endeavors in administrative practices and policies while expanding these efforts to academic policies and practices. In this proposal, the consortium is focused on the three critical areas of Interdisciplinary Studies, Undergraduate Research and Engagement, and Diversity. Indeed, ACS already has made a few inroads into this area through the creation of two virtual departments (Music and Classics), multiple on-line courses, and several technology programs that allow faculty to share resources across the consortium. These ventures have saved member institutions hundreds of thousands of dollars, as faculty expertise and valuable resources have been made accessible to all sixteen institutions.

Having validated the premise that cost containment practices can be just as successful in academic areas as they have been in administrative ones, it seems appropriate to expand the consortial cost containment efforts to include the three critical academic areas that are the focus of this proposal. Indeed, one of the sub-questions to “How do we provide the education that students need to be responsible and productive global citizens?” is “How will we effectively and efficiently fund the needed and desired courses, experiences, faculty, staff, and other resources that are needed to fulfill our goals?”

In a very important and real sense, every time the ACS holds a workshop or a conference, offers training opportunities, utilizes the Circuit Rider Program, creates and offers an on-line course, develops and shares resources, etc., it practices and promotes cost effectiveness and efficiencies. One event or one publication replaces sixteen separate efforts. One consultant visiting one or more campuses, and one who addresses specific needs, is far more cost effective than multiple persons from one or more campuses paying multiple registration fees to attend a workshop or a conference that may not speak directly to their campus issues.

Furthermore, the results of collaboration save time and money. Once a problem has been solved, a resource developed, and/or best practices identified, the results or the product can be adapted for individual campus use. For example, one electronic journal in undergraduate research, for all sixteen member campuses and possible non-ACS institutions, offers a tremendous saving over 16 individual campus journals or publications. Adaptation is far more cost efficient and effective than reinventing the wheel from scratch. Likewise, training opportunities for faculty and staff prepare a core of leaders who are available to all ACS campuses, as well as to non-ACS postsecondary institutions. And, of course, faculty expertise at one institution can be shared with other institutions, often in creative ways that make it possible for an institution to tap into a valuable resource without having to hire an additional expert in that field.

The ACS believes that Interdisciplinary Studies, Undergraduate Research, and Diversity are excellent areas in which to develop and to apply cost containment practices and policies, and that funding from the Robert W. Woodruff will enable the consortium to find creative and technologically savvy ways to accomplish this.

Summary

The Associated Colleges of the South wants to respond to the principal needs and missions of our member institutions. In focusing on the three critical and challenged areas of Interdisciplinary Programs, Undergraduate Research and Engagement, and Diversity, ACS can have a profound impact on the individuals and institutions involved and also demonstrate to colleges, universities and other consortia that cooperation, collaboration, and cost containment can produce significant benefits. With support once again from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation, we can accomplish our goals and address critical needs.

APPENDIX I

The Nature of the Issues/Challenges

Because of their primary mission to prepare students to be responsible global citizens, liberal arts colleges find themselves continually revisiting two questions, (1) “Given a rapidly changing world, what kind of education is required to fulfill this mission?” and (2) “How do we go about providing the education needed?” Answers to the first question spring out of five practices that generally are accepted to be the types of learning and skills that distinguish a liberal arts education from other types of learning:

1. Commitment to Life-long Learning that is characterized by a sustained intellectual curiosity.
2. Critical Thinking that is characterized by the ability to identify assumptions, to test logic, to evaluate evidence, to reason correctly, and to take responsibility for the actions that result.
3. Encounters with Difference that promote the understanding of others, as well as self-understanding, and the appreciation and mutual respect of diverse perspectives and cultures.
4. Free, Principled, and Civil Exchanges of Ideas that are characterized by open-mindedness and mutual respect.
5. Ethical frameworks that serves as the basis for decisions and actions in all personal, social and business relationships.

While answers to the second question, “How do we provide the education needed,” are more difficult to formulate and agree upon, they must be based upon a number of factors, including campus history, institutional culture, current student culture, and resources. Additionally, the answers must take into consideration that curricular and extra-curricular experiences and campus practices and policies need to be designed intentionally to facilitate the desired educational experience. Fulfilling the institutional mission and achieving a coherent student experience requires the inclusion of faculty, staff, administrators, and students in the search for answers.

Historically, the very structure of colleges and the universities, regardless of size, hinders the kind of dialogue that is needed. Traditionally, knowledge is divided into disciplines, which creates a “sociology of specialization” within postsecondary institutions. The primary if not the sole intellectual reference group of most faculty members tends to be their own disciplinary departments. By their very nature, these disciplinary communities do not reach out to foster ongoing, interdisciplinary conversations. This means that the very structure of the educational system itself creates an incongruence with the institution’s mission to prepare students to be responsible global citizens. The real world is not divided into neat categories. Rather, history, politics, economics, religion, literature, the arts, chemistry, psychology, physics, and geography, for example, co-mingle and impact every aspect of life. There is a need to help faculty members think beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, so they, in turn, can help students do the same, even in non-interdisciplinary courses.

Not all of the challenges are embedded in the institutional organization and structure. Current research reveals that today's students and those who will be in college for the next 10-15 years, known as Millennial Learners, differ in significant ways from students who attended college just a few years ago. For example, in the 1970s, students exhibited what researchers call a "producer mentality," meaning that these students knew that a satisfactory grade was received only when quality work was produced. This is in contrast to many of today's Millennial Learners who come to the higher education experience with what is described as a consumer attitude. Generally, this means that the Millennial Learner is more concerned with the product of the higher education experience (the degree) than they are concerned with the process of earning the degree. The value of obtaining a broad-based liberal arts education is not as important as "buying" what they consider to be the "brass ring" of economic success.

Nor do Millennial Learners, often referred to as "bottom-line" learners, typically exhibit the "love of learning" that generally characterized students of 30 years ago. Many of today's students do not seem all that taken with the thrill of discovery. Furthermore, unlike the majority of students in earlier decades, a significant number of current students, even in smaller liberal arts colleges, have multiple jobs that compete with study time. And, as products of an "instant age," Millennial Learners tend to prefer "heat and eat" packages of knowledge that they can take with them to their next activity or job. Technological advances, particularly with regard to internet access, feed many Millennial Learners' beliefs that information, research, and a degree can be acquired in very short order with the push of a button or click of a mouse. Additional characteristics of the Millennial Learners that tend to affect their attitudes and expectations about the higher education experience and acquisition of a degree include (1) impatience; (2) social habits that lead to missed classes and falling behind in coursework; (3) deficiencies in study skills, comprehension and retention of reading material; and (4) mental disengagement with material that bores them or they see as unnecessary. It appears that engagement of the learner is more critical than it has ever been before to student learning, retention, and fulfillment of the liberal arts mission.

Given a rapidly expanding knowledge base, a rapidly changing and highly volatile world, and changing characteristics of college students, current research provides insights into the elements that are critical in assuring student and institutional success in the higher education setting in general. Key findings include the following:

- Student interaction with faculty and peers, the student culture, and the role of faculty in student learning are critical in the student's educational experience.
- Students value research opportunities that allow them to work with faculty on topics in which they (the students) are interested and the chance to learn something they may not otherwise have an opportunity to learn.
- Many college seniors say interdisciplinary classes are the ones that mean the most to them, and they prefer faculty who are both experts in their disciplines and who are able to put their disciplines into a broader perspective. They want more of these experiences.

- Research and interdisciplinary opportunities lend themselves to creativity in teaching and make a profound difference in students' lives.
- More and more students are pursuing double majors.
- Interdisciplinary conversations are critical in nurturing and shaping faculty and student cultures.
- Commitment to ongoing faculty and staff development is crucial to changing the campus culture.
- Students need intellectual community (just as faculty do) and integration among courses they take.
- Students are more engaged when quality, hands-on learning and service opportunities are incorporated into coursework and into campus life.
- In terms of race, ethnicity, cultural differences, underrepresented populations, lifestyles, and age, higher education is more diverse than it has ever been, and diversity will only continue to increase in the years ahead.
- Comprehensive diversity initiatives improve access and retention for underrepresented groups and engender positive results in satisfaction, academic success, and cognitive development for most students.
- Diversity affects the entire campus climate. If persons do not feel safe and respected, whether they are teachers, students, staff, or administrators, learning, socialization, and retention are difficult at best.

These findings are particularly relevant to the smaller liberal arts colleges, like those that are members of the ACS, and support the identified need of the ACS member institutions to address issues of interdisciplinary opportunities, engagement and research, and diversity. Because of their mission and consortial relationship, the ACS liberal arts colleges are in a unique position to design the higher education experience in such a way as to showcase the interconnectedness of disciplines and craft learning opportunities that produce well rounded individuals who understand disciplinary interrelationships, who know how to find and use information, who can think critically, who respect differences, and who are capable of sharing intellectual leadership.

Furthermore, the ACS recognizes that if these crucial areas are to be addressed effectively, there is a need for purposeful creativity that brings together many different persons into the collaborative work of answering the question, "How do we provide the kind of education needed to fulfill the mission and purpose of the liberal arts education?"