

Mellon Grant Executive Summary October 2021

General

The goal of this Mellon Foundation grant was to realize the power of building capacity in faculty to consider, discuss, develop, and implement curricular change that grounds foundational, humanities-focused outcomes and pedagogies within General Education at PLU. This work began with an invitation from the Foundation in Spring 2015 to then-President Krise for a \$100,000 grant to focus on a revision of General Education that maintained a robust liberal arts foundation with a strong Humanities influence. A second invitation, to expand the “Cornerstones General Education Program” pilot, came during the 2016-17 academic year, and was realized to begin in Fall 2017. These generous funds supported a wide range of faculty-led curricular design innovations over six years.

Despite occurring in an unprecedented time of tumultuous change, the generous support of the Mellon Foundation has had tangible impact on our teaching and learning community. More importantly, it has planted the seeds for further growth across the university. These impacts include:

- **Approximately 80 faculty participated in a wide range of pedagogically-focused workshops.** The majority of these faculty “live” in the Humanities division—enough to say that around seventy-five percent participated in at least one, and many in multiple, of the offered workshops. Faculty in Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Music, Art & Design, Communication, Education, and Nursing also participated in what were integrated, interdisciplinary conversations about teaching, learning, and curricular design. Overall, this represents about 40% of PLU’s faculty.
- **Twenty new courses were designed.** In most cases, these courses have the flexibility to be altered in ways that allow them to be taught to meet interdisciplinary program outcomes or traditional disciplinary learning outcomes.
- **Forty-five courses were revised.** These revisions represent a range of focus, from General Education foundational courses (e.g., FYEP and IHON), to the development of courses within (and sometimes across) a proposed interdisciplinary minor required as part of the Mellon-supported Cornerstones General Education Pilot.
- **Effective teaching strategies based in the Digital Humanities** modeled through a range of workshops and resources allowed faculty to further embrace the role of technology in effective teaching, both in person and online.
- **Student-centered design change processes were implemented in successful ways.** Mellon funding has helped us develop a model strategy for engaging faculty in intentional and productive curricular development. The use of design teams that not only reflect representation, but expertise in student learning, curricular design and assessment, and an understanding of current student profiles and needs, were critical to Mellon-funded initiatives. And, critical to any future revisions, those faculty who participated in multiple Mellon-funded activities have been central to ongoing curricular revisions in general education and disciplinary contexts.

- **Faculty support for a culture of assessment and for a variety of assessment approaches was significantly expanded as a result of participation in Mellon projects.**

The culture of assessment that PLU had been working to develop, expand, and celebrate was invigorated and widely expanded as a result of the Mellon grants. In this area, faculty across the curriculum developed assessment capacities that they will carry into many different facets of education at PLU. Approximately forty faculty, across the duration of the two grants, participated in the assessment of the many aspects of both the Cornerstones pilot and the extension activities – including assessment of individual courses, course sequences, and a range of student assignment types, such as timed essays, semester long web-friendly projects, group projects, and more. Further, faculty participated in the assessment of the program as a whole based on student self-reporting and the evaluation of student artifacts, as well as multiple forms of reflective assessment. Many of these assessment strategies took advantage of innovative digital technologies. These assessments went on repeatedly throughout the life of the two grants, but especially developed over the first four years making them foundational to work supported by the expansion grant.

Building on the curriculum proposed in the Cornerstones General Education pilot, the extension grant outlined ways to build capacity in the signature components of the pilot: a robust and foundational First-Year Experience, a focused core of liberal arts requirements, and interdisciplinary options for a required complimentary minor. Briefly, our continuing goals include:

- Experiences for first-year students. One focus from the Mellon grants expanded best practices in supporting the success of first year students. The First-Year Experience Program provided a foundation for General Education in the Cornerstones pilot program, and followed up with opportunities to continue program development. Valuable, student-centered design lessons include:
 - The potential for large-capacity classes. The grant offered opportunities to explore the possibilities of larger classes, especially during J-term. We learned that first-year students benefit more from smaller courses in J-term, while continuing students are better able to handle the independence required to benefit from an experience in a large-capacity course.
 - Expanding study away opportunities. Another strategy supported by the grant focused on designing study away experiences appropriate for first-year students. Several locally-focused courses were developed with grant funds and as resources and staffing permit, continue to be offered, including a Geosciences course focused on National Parks in the Southwest, and a course focused on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Eastern Washington.
 - The integration of Diversity, Justice, and Sustainability (DJS). The First-Year Experience Program faculty developed a framework for a revised second course (to replace 190) that will serve as a common introduction to PLU's focus on DJS. The grant funded a design team and working group to codify elements of this framework in the general education curriculum. Their work is ongoing.

- Impact on General Education Requirements. For the long-term, the core curriculum committee/FYEP are re-engaging the faculty in a discussion about general education in a changing world (new students with new expectations, post-reduction-in-force via the Faculty Joint Committee (FJC), post-restructure). These discussions will be deeply shaped by the lessons learned from the Cornerstones program. The Religion Department used funds to draft a range of alternatives for a Religion requirement; the IHON faculty revised the curriculum to be more inclusive and representative of diversity. Requiring a minor as part of general education was shown to be workable and popular with students and remains in consideration for future general education revision priorities.
- Development of Minors. Two of the minors developed through the Mellon Foundation grant are well into implementation. Gender, Sexuality and Race Studies and Latino Studies were approved as the pandemic shut down became a reality; these programs continue to develop their curriculum and recruitment. The Global Film and Media Studies minor will likely see a postponement of full implementation, though courses that meet program learning outcomes are already being offered.

At this time in higher education, the ability to consider a student-centered, outcome-based, student responsive curriculum is imperative. The Mellon funding, over these past seven years, has provided PLU faculty with an opportunity to engage in on-going conversations around curricula, to both frame the Humanities in broad and meaningful ways *and* to reflect on what students need for a 21st century education. Our reflective assessment sees us moving toward a new generation of higher education models that embrace, rather than deny, strategic and student-centered change.