Teaching Innovation Grants
Call for Proposals and Program Guidelines
2016

I. Overview and Program Description

The Morgan Teaching and Learning Center, the Educational Development Council (EDC), and the Academic Technology Center (ATC) aim to enrich learning experiences for WPI students and foster a climate of teaching innovation by supporting faculty to seed bold new initiatives in undergraduate and graduate education. A total of $75,000 in funds from the Morgan endowment, Information Technology division, and the Educational Development Council is available for distribution. The proposal deadline is February 1, 2016, and awards will be announced in D-term.

We particularly encourage proposals that are aligned with the goals of the WPI Strategic Plan (2015-2018): extending the success of our distinctive undergraduate education, experimenting with competency-based education, and building the WPI PhD Plan. Applicants interested in strategic plan initiatives may propose to join a thematic Faculty Learning Community (FLC) or pursue their own project independently.

*Proposals for independent projects and FLCs in areas outside the Strategic Plan are also welcome.*

II. Eligibility

All tenured and tenure-track faculty and full-time non-tenure track faculty are eligible to apply. Full-time professional staff with significant educational roles are eligible for FLCs and may be part of an independent project group if it includes one or more full-time faculty members. Part-time adjunct faculty are also eligible for both types of grants, but full-time faculty will be given priority. The PI of independent projects must be a full-time faculty member. There are no restrictions or limits on the number of proposals that an individual may submit.

III. Faculty Learning Community Grants

A Faculty Learning Community (FLC) is a group of faculty (or a mix of faculty, staff, and students) from multiple disciplines engaging in collegial inquiry and action around a central theme. (More information about FLCs can be found [here.](#) Faculty and staff members apply as individuals, and the awardees become members of the FLC. Each participant in a FLC plans, implements, and assesses his or her own project, with regular peer review, feedback, and support from the group.

A. Potential Themes

Following are goals of the WPI Strategic Plan (2015-2018) that may serve as the theme of a Faculty Learning Community in this grant cycle. Example projects under each theme are given but are not intended to be prescriptive:
1. **Major and a Mission: Global competency.** This group could investigate definitions of global competency and propose an undergraduate learning outcome that can be taught, measured, and assessed in the WPI context.

2. **Major and a Mission: Reflecting on and connecting curricular and co-curricular experiences.** FLC members could pilot and assess a variety of approaches for engaging undergraduate students in reflecting on and connecting their curricular and co-curricular experiences (e.g., e-portfolios, co-curricular transcripts).

3. **Project Based Learning.** To build a knowledge base for the Center for Project-Based Learning, participants in this FLC could conduct inquiry into project-based learning (e.g., action research, scholarship of teaching and learning), propose and implement mechanisms for identifying best practices, or develop a curriculum for faculty who are new to project advising.

4. **Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Returning to the Roots of The Plan.** Participants could pilot the conversion of courses to online or blended CBE for undergraduates, or experiment with other technology-enabled mechanisms for the student-driven, individualized education that was at the heart of the WPI Plan in its early years.

5. **PhD Plan.** Participants could test and assess activities and mechanisms related to the building of the WPI PhD Plan, which may include Individual Development Plans, off-campus experiences for PhD students (global, industrial, or other), and/or building core competencies in communication, ethics, teaching, and leadership.

**B. Commitment and Expectations of FLC Members**

A FLC requires a one year commitment, from May 15, 2016 to May 15, 2017. FLC members will be expected to:

- prepare for, attend, and actively participate in monthly meetings (those at off-campus project centers are expected to participate virtually if at all possible)
- conduct an initiative that is aligned with the FLC topic
- submit a brief reflective summary of their FLC initiative by June 1, 2017
- share their work with a larger audience, by giving a presentation on their work, by providing resource materials on the topic of the FLC for the larger teaching community, by publishing the findings of their work, or through some other means

Midway through the year and at the end of the project, FLC members will be invited to complete a short survey providing feedback about their experience in the FLC.

**C. Funding for FLC Members**

Each faculty member in a FLC will be granted $7,500 in two stages. The first half will be awarded at the end of August 2016, and the remainder will be awarded at the end of May 2017 when the collective work of the FLC is complete. Funds will be awarded as faculty compensation, in a lump-sum payment rather than as salary, such that benefits will not be charged. In special circumstances, some of the award funds may be directed to equipment or specific professional development activities necessary for the project.

Exempt professional staff with 12 month appointments may not receive additional compensation. Staff who wish to apply to a FLC should discuss with their supervisor how their work activities will be adjusted during the grant period. Up to $2,500 will be available for staff members to utilize toward publications, a conference, workshop, or other type of professional development experience that will enable or enrich their project.
General transfer of funds to Professional Development Accounts is not allowed for either faculty or staff members of FLCs.

D. Two-Stage Application Process for Faculty Learning Communities

Since not all strategic plan themes can be funded by this program and since a critical mass of participants is necessary for FLCs, a two stage process will be used to identify the funded FLC themes and select participants:

1. **Statement of interest**: Potential applicants should indicate their interest in a particular FLC theme using this brief [online form](#). A statement consists of just a few sentences or a short paragraph and should be submitted by December 10. *The review committee will use this information to assess the level and substance of interest in each theme and decide which to offer as a FLC.* Submitting a statement does not constitute a commitment to submit a full proposal. By December 20 the selection committee will announce one or more themes for which full FLC applications will be accepted. Anyone who wishes to apply to a particular FLC should then submit an application. *People who have strong interest in a theme that is not selected for a FLC will be encouraged to submit an “independent project” proposal instead.*

2. **Application**: Applications to FLCs are due by February 1 and will be open to all, regardless of whether they submitted an initial statement of interest. The [application form](#) (docx file) requests responses to just three questions. Applicants must also solicit and submit a brief letter of support from their department head or supervisor.

The review committee will use the following criteria to select FLC participants: level of interest and insight into this year’s theme; originality of initial ideas; commitment and potential contributions to the collaborative nature of the FLC; and the desire for a diverse, multi-disciplinary group.

IV. Independent Project Grants

This grant mechanism is intended for applicants, either individuals or small groups, whose project does not fit with a FLC theme and for those who cannot or do not wish to commit to the regular interaction of a FLC. In general, these grants aim to promote innovative, evidence-based pedagogy and curricula that enhance student learning, provide seed money for pilot projects that will strengthen proposals for external funding, support evaluation of ongoing or proposed innovations aimed at publication, and support professional development or external partnerships related to teaching and learning. In addition, grants may assist faculty in designing their instructional approaches using technology to achieve enhanced learning, take advantage of efficiencies that can be realized through the use of emerging technologies for teaching, and evaluate the impact of new instructional approaches.

This program does not fund routine updating or renewal of courses, curricula, or teaching methods.

A. Funding Levels, Allowable Costs, and Instructions for Budget Justification

Applicants propose their own budget. Grants have usually ranged from $3,000 to $10,000 in recent years. Evidence of cost-sharing from the program or department, or from other sources, often strengthens a proposal but is not essential. Following are instructions about allowable costs and budget justification:

*Faculty compensation*. Faculty compensation is appropriate only for those who have less than
12 month appointments and for activity that extends beyond normal expectations for teaching renewal and improvement; applicants are advised to address this latter point in their budget justification. Faculty compensation may be used either for summer support or academic year release time (pending approval of department head). Compensation is granted as lump-sum payment rather than salary, such that benefits will not be charged.

Exempt professional staff with 12 month appointments may not receive additional compensation. Staff who wish to participate in a grant-supported project should discuss with their supervisor how their work activities will be adjusted during the grant period.

**Student wages.** Applicants are encouraged to hire undergraduate or graduate students for project activities whenever appropriate. The budget justification must describe the student(s’) responsibilities, specify the hourly wage, and estimate the number of hours. Student tuition cannot be supported by this grant program.

**Fees for an assessment or evaluation consultant.** Working with an evaluation consultant is encouraged, as early as the proposal development stage. Contact Chrys Demetry for names of consultants who have worked with WPI faculty members in the past.

**Supplies, software, and equipment.** Software or equipment necessary for enabling a pedagogical experiment that will be assessed is suitable for funding. *This grants program does not provide funding for software and equipment for routine education of WPI students or to bolster relatively new interdisciplinary programs, since that type of support normally should come from department capital or IT budgets.*

**Travel and professional development related to the project.** General transfer of funds to Professional Development Accounts, for either professional staff or faculty, is not allowed, but specific professional development activity will be supported. Explain how a specific conference, workshop, or other type of professional development experience will enable or enrich the proposed work, and estimate expenses including registration, travel, lodging, and food.

**Other types of costs may well be appropriate to a particular project.** Please consult with Chrys Demetry if you have questions.

**B. Application Procedures**

Proposals must contain the following:

1. **Cover Page and Budget with Justification** (.docx file)
2. **Project Description:** This narrative should not exceed three single-spaced typewritten pages with 11 point or larger font. Use of headings is recommended. The narrative should discuss:
   
   (a) **Need for the project:** scope of the problem or opportunity to be addressed, relevant background (e.g., current literature, current practices and resources);
   
   (b) **Approach:** project objectives, methods or procedures to be used, a plan for assessing and evaluating project results, innovative elements;
   
   (c) **Outcomes:** anticipated impacts on WPI students and the institution; further directions that the project might take; a plan for dissemination and/or future funding.
   
   (d) **Project timeline**
The proposal deadline is February 1, 2016. Proposals should be sent as an email attachment to morgan-center@wpi.edu and should consist of a single pdf document (title page with signatures, budget with justification, and project description).

The review committee will evaluate proposals based on the following criteria: 1) educational soundness of the approach and likelihood of success; 2) potential scope of impact; 3) presence of innovative and distinctive elements; and 4) cost effectiveness. Applicants will be notified in D-term whether or not their proposal has been accepted.

C. Reporting Requirements and Grant Conditions

Grantees are responsible for consulting with WPI’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to determine if the project involves human subjects and constitutes exempt or non-exempt activity.

The PI is responsible for budget oversight and must approve any disbursement of funds. All funds unexpended by the deadline reporting date will be returned to the EDC or IT Division for redistribution the following year. Extensions must be requested in writing.

At the conclusion of the funded project, the PI must submit a brief written report that documents the outcomes of the project.

V. Contacts

Prospective applicants are invited to contact any member of the EDC (Joe Beck, Chrys Demetry, Lauren Mathews, Johnny Ross, Jeanine Skorinko) or the ATC (Kate Beverage, Mary Beth Harrity) with questions prior to submission. With sufficient advance notice, Chrys Demetry (cdemetry@wpi.edu) and Kate Beverage (kwrigley@wpi.edu) may be able to provide feedback on proposal drafts.