

RE: Proposal for New Funding for ICS Clusters

Date: February 28, 2018

Over the course of more than a decade, ICS clusters have proved to be a fertile ground for faculty collaboration and productivity, in terms of research, teaching, community engagement, and grant-writing. An ICS Cluster is a group of faculty from multiple units across campus who are committed to interdisciplinary research, teaching, and/or programming. Every ICS cluster is process-driven, which means that groups may focus on ongoing support for interdisciplinary research, teaching, or programming. Some cluster activities stay the same from year to year, while others vary – such as with a one-time symposium, followed by regular publication workshops. Clusters can coalesce around any interdisciplinary topic, providing there is adequate faculty interest from multiple units across campus.

For example, in 2016, members of the new Migration Cluster, led by Vibha Bhalla and Christina Guenther, applied for and were awarded a \$100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop new undergraduate curriculum. Then, in Fall 2017, they hosted the “Immigrant Ohio” symposium devoted to refugee issues. As another example, over the course of many years, members of the Latin American and Latino/a Studies cluster have hosted workshoped publications-in-progress, hosted annual conferences, and supported student work at the Latino/a/x Issues Conference.

In order to encourage this kind of innovative, collaborative work, ICS, with the support of the College of Arts and Sciences, seeks to provide meaningful funding and clear and transparent processes. The following proposal would provide annual funding to ICS clusters of up to **\$6,000**.

ICS Clusters:

- Are entitled to administrative support to reserve meeting rooms on campus, and to help promote cluster events and activities.
- After one year of demonstrated activity (as documented in an end-of-year report), each cluster will be entitled to the following annual support for their programming;
 - o \$500 to each cluster to support ongoing interdisciplinary activity in areas of scholarship and/or teaching, consistent with the cluster’s goals.
 - Cluster funds can be used for speaker/consultant fees, workshops, training, travel reimbursement, or other approved expenses.
 - For example, a cluster might apply their funds toward books for a reading group, or to bring in a regional scholar to lead a workshop related to their cluster topic.
 - This support will renewable for up to 2 additional years, without any additional major proposals. If, after three years of basic activity, the cluster proposes a new, major initiative, support may be continued, contingent on availability of funds.
 - o An additional \$500 (for a maximum of \$1000 per year) may be available to support the efforts of clusters who propose innovative, new programming designed to support

interdisciplinary teaching or that reaches wider audiences. The Executive Board will develop an application form and process (with publicized deadlines) to evaluate these proposals. For example:

- A cluster might propose bringing in an external speaker for a public lecture on a topic of wide interest.
 - A cluster might host an off-site weekend retreat for the purpose of developing a major interdisciplinary curriculum proposal, such as a multidisciplinary component (MDC) in the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Funds will be disbursed by June 30th each year, in accordance with all university policies. Clusters that do not use their funds in one year may not roll over their funds to the next year (although they may still be eligible for their annual funding allotment).

In exchange for this funding, Cluster members accept the following responsibilities:

- Clusters are expected to meet at least four times per semester.
- Clusters must submit an external grant application within one calendar year of formal recognition, and every year thereafter. Grant applications may be relatively modest (such as for \$4,000 from Ohio Humanities) or more ambitious (such as a \$100,000 NEH grant). We encourage every cluster to research potential funding sources and meet with the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research for suggestions and to help with the grant application process.
- Clusters are responsible for presenting ONCE per academic year at a community engagement event/activity coordinated by (or in conjunction with) the ICS staff. This talk/presentation/workshop can take many forms, but is designed for the cluster to share their interdisciplinary work with the wider community, whether on campus or off. Options include presenting as part of the ICS Culture and Society Forum, developing an event/activity with another campus organization (such as the CFE, CCCE, University Libraries, Women's Center, etc.), or creating an event with/for a community organization relevant to the Cluster. All activities should be communicated with the Director of ICS, who will work to provide administrative support.
- At the end of each academic year, clusters must submit a report to the Director, outlining the participants, their activities, and the group's outcomes over the course of the year.

Process:

- New clusters can be formed at any time by completing the ICS Cluster Proposal form (below) to the Director, who will bring it to the Executive Board for approval.
 - o Proposals should:
 - indicate all initial participating faculty members, and their home units;
 - demonstrate meaningful involvement from faculty from at least three units;
 - clearly identify the thematic or conceptual basis for the group;
 - define and/or theorize the particular forms of interdisciplinarity being developed;
 - outline the specific outcomes the group will be working toward (for example, workshopping articles; reading current scholarship in the field; writing a grant; reimagining undergraduate curricula, etc.)
 - identify the estimated frequency of meetings and the proposed meeting day/time;

- Faculty members at earlier stages of the process are welcome to consult with the Director at any time to discuss ideas for new clusters. The Director will work with the Executive Board to identify potential group members, with the hope of encouraging new proposals (per the process above).
- ICS will support up to six clusters each year. In the event that there are more clusters than available funding, the Executive Board will evaluate proposals, giving priority to new clusters with wide faculty interest and existing clusters with a record of sustained activity. Deadlines and application guidelines will be posted to the ICS website at least one month prior to the application deadline.

Application questions:

1. List all initial participating faculty members, and their home units. (ICS clusters should demonstrate meaningful involvement from faculty from at least three distinct units).

First Name	Last Name	Department/Program
Michaela	Walsh	Ethnic Studies
Phil	Welch	Public & Allied Health
Ellen	Gorsevski	Communication
Clayton	Rosati	Media Production & Studies
Andy	Schocket	History, American Culture Studies
Carrie	Hamady	Nutrition and Dietetics
Sara	Khorshidifard	Architecture & Environmental Design
Amilcar	Challu	History
Kelly	Balistreri	Sociology
Steve	Demuth	Sociology
Abhishek	Bhati	Political Science
Tom	Mascaro	Media and Communication
Max	Hayward	Philosophy
Ray	Swisher	Sociology
Carolyn	Tompsett	Psychology
Karen	Johnson-Webb	Geography
Justin	Rex	Political Science, Center for Regional Development
Russ	Mills	Political Science, Center for Regional Development

2. In plain language, describe the thematic or conceptual basis for the proposed cluster. What common issues or concerns unite all the members? (approximately 250 words)

The proposed cluster is united around the problem of poverty in the United States. Historically, the official US Census Bureau poverty measure defines poverty with reference to income thresholds relative to the cost of a basic food diet. Based on this definition, in 2016, 12.7% of the population lived in poverty or 43.1 million Americans. Reflecting the dated nature of this definition that was developed in the 1960s and has not been updated, researches developed the supplemental definition of poverty to incorporate government tax transfers and an updated bundle of consumer goods and household expenditures. According to the supplemental measure, 14% of Americans lived in poverty in 2016. Increasingly, leading US and international poverty scholars advocate for a more robust definition of poverty beyond income, a definition that incorporates the basic capabilities all individuals should have in order to live a meaningful life, which includes not only material well being like having adequate food, shelter, transportation, and health, but also the capability to enjoy recreation, nature, and a connection to others and have adequate educational opportunity to critically reflect on what it is to lead a meaningful life (Rank, 2016; Sen 1999; Nussbaum 1993). This broader understanding of poverty unites the research cluster and serves as a stimulus for interdisciplinary collaboration (as discussed in the next section). Cluster participants have individually published on poverty related issues ranging

from food insecurity, bail, affordable housing, eviction, neighborhood poverty, architectural design for revitalizing impoverished neighborhoods, free health clinics, and the rhetoric and representation of the poor and marginalized groups in media.

3. Define and/or theorize the particular forms of interdisciplinarity being developed in this cluster. What is to be gained by approaching this topic from these particular disciplines? How will the cluster's work transform or rethink these particular disciplines? (250 words)

Scholars note two broad models for interdisciplinary research: 1) research that furthers, or creates new, knowledge in existing academic disciplines and 2) research that is problem focused, which tackles an important social problem with policy relevance while pragmatically using pertinent disciplinary knowledge with less concern for its effect on existing disciplines (Bruce et al., 2004). In the short term, the proposed cluster's interdisciplinary approach is problem focused on poverty in NW Ohio. As discussed in more detail in the next section, the group's initial focus will be on writing a needs assessment of poverty and poverty-related issues in the region.

This needs assessment will incorporate a capabilities approach to understanding poverty, which also pushes us toward interdisciplinary study. As Amartya Sen notes, "poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty (1999: 87). According to Nussbaum (1993, 83-85) these capabilities include being able to "live to the end of a human life of normal length, have good health, adequate nutrition, adequate shelter, opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in reproduction, mobility, have the educational opportunities necessary to realize these capacities" among others. Given the broad range of capabilities scholars identify that are necessary for a life free from poverty, determining ways to measure and achieve these capabilities will require interdisciplinary understanding. Doing so will push us toward the ideal of interdisciplinary study: "a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession . . . and draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective" (Klein and Newell, 1997).

Long term, the cluster intends to use the needs assessment as a platform to conduct interdisciplinary research that is relevant to academic disciplines that study poverty. Poverty is a "wicked problem" because of its persistence and stakeholder contestation over its definition, causes, solutions, and the ultimate goals of policy remedies (Weber and Khademian 2008). This intractability has driven scholars from a variety of disciplines to tackle the problem, but often at cross purposes and without speaking to each other. Poverty scholars note that poverty research is "fractured and fragmented" and "segregat[ed] across disciplines...into academic silos that rarely engage in conversations with each other" (Brady and Burton 1-2). And scholarship and public policy debate about poverty has been dominated by the discipline of economics (Katz 2013, O'Connor 2009), so there is a need to promote and amplify other disciplinary perspectives. At a basic level, this group's existence, and representation of faculty from a variety of disciplines, will facilitate the type of cross-disciplinary conversations poverty researchers are only just beginning to have. Previous research, though limited, that has incorporated scholars from multiple disciplines has made important advances in our understanding of poverty, which this groups hopes to replicate (Brady and Burnton 6). For example, one emerging area the group could contribute to is the interdisciplinary concept of syndemic

problems, which are distinct, but interrelated, health problems that tend to cluster together, such as poverty, depression, and diabetes.

4. Outline the specific outcomes the group will be working toward (for example, workshopping articles; reading current scholarship in the field; writing an NEH public humanities grant; developing a Multidisciplinary Component to the undergraduate curriculum, etc.)

The first outcome is to conduct an initial needs assessment of poverty and poverty related issues in Wood County and the surrounding NW Ohio region. In addition to being place-based research, the group hopes to make the needs assessment community based research conducted in partnership with area stakeholders. Members from the cluster are currently discussing the possibility of conducting the assessment with the help and input of the United Way.

Second, the needs assessment will be used to inform future research directions and grant seeking opportunities, based on the needs of the region.

5. Identify the estimated frequency of meetings and the proposed meeting day/time (if set);

The group plans to meet once monthly during the academic year. A day and time and not yet been selected.

6. Proposed community engagement activity for cluster, including audience being sought (100 words max)

The cluster proposes to engage the public through presentations of previous or ongoing poverty related research by cluster members as well as initial findings from the needs assessment. These presentations will be combined with the Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE) BGSU will be hosting during the 2019 spring semester. The COPE is a simulation in which participants are given characters living in poverty. Participants experience a month of their lives by making decisions about how to meet their needs under the obstacles and constraints these individuals face. The "characters" lives are based on real stories of individuals living in the region. The COPE is organized by the United Way and is being offered in conjunction with the newly developed course POLS 4310/5310 Politics, Policy, and Poverty to be offered in Spring 2019 being taught by cluster member Justin Rex. The event can be run for groups up to 100 in size, so students in the class as well as others around the university or members of the broader community can participate. This event would be an opportunity to promote awareness for both the struggles of individuals living in poverty in the region as well as highlight research of BGSU faculty.

7. Will the cluster have potential for curricular development? If so, explain.

Potentially, though the group decided to pursue a research rather than a pedagogical focus to begin. If there is interest, we could develop a general education multidisciplinary component around poverty as the group develops. During the course approval process for POLS 4310/5310, the undergraduate curriculum committee suggested this possibility, given extant courses related to poverty in other departments.

8. What external grant(s) will the cluster likely be applying for?

The cluster will pursue potential funding through the United Way or other area stakeholders that may contribute to the needs assessment. These discussions are ongoing over the summer,

American Electric Power considers grant proposals above \$15,000 for applicants in their 11 state service area and on topics including education and basic service provision in the areas of housing and hunger. <https://www.aep.com/community/ourgiving/aepfoundation/>

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation offers grants of varying amounts for a variety of topics related to poverty. "LJAF makes strategic investments in criminal justice, education, evidence-based policy and innovation, sustainable public finance, and research integrity. In addition to these core areas of focus, we identify and pursue other high-leverage opportunities through our New Initiatives division." <http://www.arnoldfoundation.org/grants/>

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