



2017 FALL PLANNING LETTER

COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, we in the College of Arts & Letters have remained focused on advancing our commitment to [cultivating practices of inclusion as a matter of institutional habit](#) as we pursue three imperatives that support the scholarly productivity and pedagogical effectiveness of our faculty, elevate scholarship, and enhance student success. These imperatives require us to orient our activities toward:

1. Recruiting and retaining world-class faculty
2. Enhancing graduate education
3. Enriching the undergraduate experience

Our imperatives and the five top priorities through which they are advanced have not changed since our last planning letter, although two of them are moving into a phase of sustainable performance excellence that should allow us to introduce two new top-tier priorities next year. Our current priorities remain: [Critical Diversity in a Digital Age](#) (faculty cluster hire); [School of Language Sciences, Literatures, and Cultures](#); [Center for Interdisciplinarity \(C4I\)](#); [Citizen Scholars Program](#); [The Excel Network](#).

As we emphasized in this year's [Dean's Report](#), a broad liberal arts education has been at the heart of the University since its inception. When I began my tenure as Dean of the College of Arts & Letters, we sought to weave our liberal arts scholarship, pedagogy, and creative activities more tightly into the fabric of the research and teaching mission of the University. The priorities we have outlined above provide us with a basis from which to accomplish this, but this year, we hope to advance this commitment by aligning our work more intentionally with the priorities of Michigan State University. The initiatives through which we plan to do this will be the focus of this planning letter.

1. FOOD@MSU

The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR), the College of Communication Arts and Sciences (ComArtSci), and the College of Arts & Letters (CAL) are collaborating to advance the research profile of Michigan State University in the holistic study of food. Lead by three signature research centers, the Center for Regional Food Systems (CANR), the Health & Risk Communication Center (ComArtSci), the Center for Interdisciplinarity (CAL), this innovative partnership is advancing a vision of engaged, participatory research rooted in the deepest commitments of the land-grant mission.

Interdisciplinary Food Research Grants

Beginning with public conversations about food through the [Our Table initiative](#), the three colleges will establish an **Interdisciplinary Food Research Grant** program in which we will award three to five small grants focused on food-related topics to faculty teams that include members from all three colleges. Two elements differentiate this from other food-focused research around the country. First, our holistic approach brings strengths from across three colleges in food science, food communication, and food ethics to bear on pressing public concerns about food. Second, our collaboration takes its cue from the public itself, allowing the conversations around Our Table to shape the research agenda of the faculty. Ours is a deep, structural collaboration that demonstrates a new level of strategic coordination across the liberal arts and scientific mission of the University.

For the first year, this program will be open to faculty from CANR, ComArtSci, and CAL. In years 2 and 3, we envision extending the program to other colleges, and we've had preliminary conversations with the College of Business and College of Nursing.

Postdoctoral Exchange in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Equity (SAFSE)

Our commitment to interdisciplinarity with respect to food research will also be advanced through a postdoc exchange program between two centers at MSU: the Center for Interdisciplinarity (C4I) and the Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS), and two institutes at Ohio State: the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Humanities Institute. Topic areas for this program align with the interests of OSU's Initiative for Food and AgriCultural Transformation (InFACT) and the Food@MSU program. This postdoctoral exchange program will award two two-year postdoctoral positions: one for an MSU individual in the humanities to work at OSU and one for an OSU individual in the social sciences to work at MSU. Seed funding and in-kind contributions for this postdoctoral program will come from CANR, CAL, and ComArtSci. Postdocs will participate in the Food@MSU project through training in science communication and requirements to create sharable content based on their postdoctoral work. The C4I will provide mentoring in interdisciplinary careers.

Collaborative Philanthropy

CANR, CCAS, and CAL are committed to developing coordinated and strategic fundraising efforts around the Food@MSU initiative. As our shared research agenda develops and is refined through ongoing engagement with the wider community, we will be well positioned to establish a coherent collaborative fundraising strategy, including specific goals related to building the research capacity for the initiative through endowed faculty positions, graduate fellowships, and endowed postdocs. We hope in this way to pilot a new model of philanthropy for the next capital campaign at MSU.

2. THE WRITING INITIATIVE: TRANSFORMING THE WRITING PROGRAM INTO A RESEARCH LABORATORY

The Student Success initiative at MSU is focused on increasing graduation rates and on closing opportunity gaps with specific student populations. The initiative is broad-based, starting with the development of the neighborhood concept, moving to proactive advising, and now including a careful, long-term effort to improve student learning experiences in the curriculum. Not surprisingly, the **core undergraduate experience—Math, Writing, and Integrative Studies—represents a tremendous opportunity for innovation and creativity. This section describes a Writing Initiative intended to be transformative and visionary.**

The College of Arts & Letters and the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Culture (WRAC) are committed to advancing a transformative and visionary writing initiative that creates an experience for learning writing at scale that aligns course learning goals with course-based outcomes and the goals of the student success initiative. Significantly, this effort builds on a decade of transformation in the Department of Writing,

Rhetoric, and American Cultures (WRAC) and a recent complete revision of our writing curriculum. Accordingly, the Writing Initiative will have the following **characteristics**:

1. It will **transform the first-year writing program into a research program**, thereby explicitly connecting classroom practices with ongoing research into a range of relevant issues: pedagogy, assessment, learning, and identity.
2. It will develop, institutionalize, and share a set of **shared teaching practices** that are evidence-based and informed by disciplinary knowledge in writing. The resulting learning community can support ongoing professional development **and coherence in the student experience** around some of the most vexing issues in delivering quality writing instruction, including the challenges of sustaining a learning environment that provides high-quality feedback to students at scale.
3. It will **eliminate the need for Preparation for College Writing (WRA 1004)** by testing and implementing a way to meet the need of these learners in the course that meets MSU's writing requirement (WRA 101). This aligns writing with parallel efforts well underway in Math.
4. The **first phase of the Writing Initiative will be time-limited**. It will have three years to meet specific objectives related to items 1-3, and specific outcomes will be identified and measured in years one and two to understand progress. Subsequent phases of the Writing Initiative might critically engage with aligning placement of students into FYW with the University's student success initiatives more effectively or investigating Tier 2 writing as a critical component of student success at MSU.

WRAC has many of the underpinnings necessary for this Writing Initiative, but more resources are required if we are going to transform this into a signature initiative capable of elevating the quality of student learning and the reputation of the University as a leader in Higher Ed writing. Specifically, our 2018 spring budget request will include support of this initiative in the form of a senior tenure stream hire and increased non-recurring funds to stand up research programs and address needs in professional development. The senior hire will need to be a visionary scholar with a strong track record to lead the writing program in this bold new direction, to provide research energy and expertise, and to empower a group of faculty to focus their efforts on the work of the Writing Initiative.

3. INCREASING OUR DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH CAPACITY

In collaboration with the MSU Libraries and the College of Social Science, we are moving toward the grand opening of the Digital Scholarship Lab (DSL) in January 2018. The DSL will be a leading-edge laboratory for digital scholarship across disciplines. Building on our long-standing strengths in digital humanities, the DSL was collaboratively designed to be a catalyst of collaboration that will further elevate the reputation of the University as an international leader in digital scholarship by providing facilities, staffing, and equipment not previously available on a broad scale at MSU. For example, the DSL will have the only Igloo Vision 360° visualization system at a university in the country.

Digital Humanities at MSU (DH@MSU) is an area of strength jointly advanced by the College of Arts & Letters and the College of Social Science. With one of the oldest digital humanities centers in the country, [Matrix: Center for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences](#), we are drawing on our long-established excellence in digital community building and cultural preservation as we develop emerging strengths in digital scholarly communication. Working through the [Domain of One's Own initiative](#) and in collaboration with the Academic Advancement Network, Communications and Brand Strategy, as well as the Colleges of Education, College of Natural Science, and the Graduate School, our digital presence and public scholarship initiative supports faculty as they establish professional websites and seek to engage a broad public through their scholarship.

Several projects seeking to transform the ways that scholars produce and disseminate their work have recently been funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, including the [Public Philosophy Journal](#) (\$1M in total funding), which is experimenting with forms of community-oriented peer review; [HuMetricsHSS](#) (\$309K), a pilot grant to develop more meaningful approaches to measuring and understanding scholarly impact; [Humanities Commons](#) (\$309K), which enables a growing network of scholars and practitioners to collaborate with colleagues and share their work with the world. Funding for these three projects demonstrate that MSU is the recognized leader of research into new forms of digital scholarly communication in the humanities and social sciences. When this funding is put into a broader context that includes two other significant Mellon-funded projects, the [Big 10 Academic Alliance Less Commonly Taught Languages Partnership](#) grant (\$1.2M), and Matrix's anticipated [Enslaved](#) linked open data grant (\$1.47M), it becomes clear that we need to invest in our digital scholarship research infrastructure to ensure the successful completion of these projects and to position us to further advance our reputation in these areas.

In order to support these projects, which have already garnered more than \$4M from the Mellon Foundation, and to build toward future success, the College of Arts & Letters and the College of Social Science seek to establish a cluster of programmers that would be shared across projects to increase our capacity to seed and sustain digital projects on a broader scale. Together we will explore a partnership with the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies and the Office of the Provost to fund a cluster of programmers here in East Lansing that will give us a competitive advantage as we seek further funding in these areas.

4. RE-ESTABLISHING LEADERSHIP IN BIO-ETHICS AND MEDICAL HUMANITIES

As the Center for Ethics in the College of Human Medicine develops its new strategic plan, the Department of Philosophy is exploring ways to integrate our distinctive brand of "Engaged Philosophy" into the mission of the Center so that we can re-establish an international leadership position in bio-ethics and medical humanities. Our vision of "engaged philosophy," a practice that brings philosophical methods and resources into reciprocal dialogue with communities to help redress practical issues of concern to society at large, dovetails well with the community-based medicine that has long been practiced by the College of Human Medicine. Initial conversations between the colleges suggest that a coordinated and targeted hiring strategy would elevate the academic reputations of the Center for Ethics and the Department of Philosophy. Identifying

a leader for the Center who could advance our commitments to community-based participatory research in the ethics of genomics and precision health, and a senior member of the Philosophy Department whose research focus is on complementary feminist approaches to bio-ethics would provide synergistic strengths that would enable us to re-establish our leadership in bio-ethics and medical humanities.

5. ARTS INTEGRATED INTO THE MSU RESEARCH MISSION

In anticipation of and in conjunction with the University Arts & Culture strategy process, we have undertaken an intentional and exciting re-visioning and restructuring process in the Department of Art, Art History, and Design (AAHD). Our efforts are inspired by a passage from the [2008 Harvard Task Force on the Arts report](#), which recognized that a 21st century research university should:

“... make the arts an integral part of the cognitive life of the university: for along with the sciences and the humanities, the arts—as they are both experienced and practiced—are irreplaceable instruments of knowledge.”

To this end, after completing a phase of learning and exploration, we have charged the AAHD Action Committee to shape a vision that will establish itself as a catalyst of creativity and collaboration within and beyond MSU capable of fully integrating the artistic work of the faculty and its students into the research mission of the University. We envision the arts at MSU enriching and being enriched by the sciences, the social sciences, humanities, and professional schools of Michigan State University.

6. NURTURING GLOBAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The [Citizen Scholars Program](#) and [The Excel Network](#) are coordinating with the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH) as it leads the creation of the Network for Global Civic Engagement, a multi-college initiative that will create more reciprocal and sustainable community engagement programs through greater collaboration across the University and with community partners. Our collaboration with the RCAH led network focuses on enhancing experiential learning for our undergraduates in local and global contexts. Our collaborative efforts will increase opportunities for faculty to develop innovative engaged teaching practices and provide our students with transformative learning opportunities in curricular and co-curricular contexts.

We continue to advance our efforts to develop an MSU Globally Engaged Citizen micro-credentialing (digital badging) infrastructure in collaboration with the International Studies Program, James Madison College, the College of Business, and the Office of Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education. The MSU Globally Engaged Citizen badge is designed to help students develop and demonstrate core competencies of global citizenship by empowering them to shape their co-curricular experiences in substantive and coherent ways. With the help of an advisor/mentor, the micro-credentialing infrastructure enables students to chart meaningful pathways through the wide diversity of global learning experiences available to them at MSU. This program is designed to augment the formal studies of our students and afford them opportunities to reflect on and craft evidence of learning and competence in the area of global civic engagement.

REDUCTIONS AND EFFICIENCIES

Our internal Fall Planning process has asked each unit to consider how it might reduce costs and gain efficiencies to help us meet our anticipated additional 0.5% budget reduction and the goal of reducing the non-academic staff by 10% over five years.

To reduce costs, units are considering ways to more efficiently deliver our curriculum by aligning scheduling efforts with student success initiatives and relying more heavily on our tenure-stream faculty to teach in the core of the curriculum. We continue to work to establish the right balance between reductions taken at the unit versus the College level so our efforts to reduce costs remain strategic and shared.

The College of Arts & Letters has the highest faculty-to-staff ratio in the University (6.7 faculty for every non-academic staff member). Our non-academic staff counts are down 12.1% over 8 years, down 5.2% last year. In order to advance our leadership position in this area, we will continue to identify ways to share responsibilities across units, as we have done with our pod system in which multiple units share staff to accomplish core responsibilities.

PRACTICING INCLUSION AS A MATTER OF INSTITUTIONAL HABIT

In our ongoing attempts to put our commitments to diversity and inclusion into practice, we have established ambitious goals for hiring faculty from traditionally underrepresented groups, initiated reforms designed to diversify our curriculum to attract and retain a more diverse student body, and supported faculty initiatives that focus on building and supporting our faculty of color. A critical aspect of our holistic approach to advance the University's core value of inclusiveness involves a committed effort to rebuild and restructure our African American and African Studies (AAAS) graduate program.

African American and African Studies

We are now well positioned to rebuild a AAAS program with a broad humanistic approach to African American and African Studies that focuses on the global African Diaspora. This vision draws on the strengths of our current faculty whose work focuses on Africa, the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean through the lenses of Feminisms, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Critical Knowledge Production, History, Languages, Literatures, and Cultures.

As we work to reestablish AAAS to be competitive with the best graduate programs in the country, we invited Professors Carole Boyce Davies (Cornell University) and Clarence Lang (University of Kansas) to review the program. During their visit, they emphasized the degree to which a successful AAAS graduate program enhances three of the top-tier priorities outlined in the College of Arts & Letters strategic plan. Recruiting a new cohort of top AAAS graduate students will advance our attempts to develop and deliver graduate education through the Center for Interdisciplinarity. Our new School of Language Sciences, Literatures, and Cultures will be enriched by an influx of graduate students studying African languages and cultures; and our Critical Diversity in a Digital Age initiative will benefit from students doing digital humanities and social science scholarship in this area.

AAAS has long been a signature interdisciplinary program in the College of Arts & Letters, and it is our top priority to provide the structural and institutional support to ensure its competitive success.

WEAVING THE LIBERAL ARTS INTO THE 21ST CENTURY MSU MISSION

What differentiates the College of Arts & Letters at Michigan State University from other liberal arts colleges at R1 universities is the manner in which we integrate the core strengths of a liberal arts education into the research and teaching mission of the University through a sophisticated understanding of emerging modes of scholarship, communication, and creative activity in a digital age.

Attracting, retaining, and cultivating talent remains the most important means by which we will move the College from a position of national prominence to one of national leadership. The specific strategies articulated in this plan demonstrate the concrete ways we will weave the values of a liberal arts education into the life of the University so that we are able to educate a new generation of citizen scholars capable of solving the world's most challenging social, cultural, and ethical problems.