Access for All: Fostering Inclusive Excellence

At the very first Sigma Xi presentation of this fall semester, I posed a question to launch planning for our next Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) grant proposal: what can we do as a community to build institutional capacity that benefits access to the sciences for all our students?

Throughout the fall, so many of you responded to this important question by sharing feedback, reviewing ideas and drafts in Science Planning Committee meetings, attending monthly Teaching Circles made possible by the generous support of the Sherrerd Center, and finding space for conversations in department and program meetings. We reflected and challenged and questioned and built upon one another thoughts, over and again, as we reflected on the most promising practices in our community for advancing inclusive excellence.

Like good science, the proposal’s ideas benefited from iteration, peer review, and public discussion. On December 1st, we submitted our final version and it outlines our vision for inclusive excellence, informed by our earlier HHMI grant work as well as the sciences strategic plan, Vision for the Future, 2015. In the end, we agreed that fostering science skills and competencies while building community and identity was essential to our students’ success (see sidebar for the pre-proposal’s abstract).

I was profoundly grateful for the generosity, dedication, and sharp thinking of our community during this process. Regardless of HHMI’s eventual decision about the proposal (over 600 institutions submitted an intent to apply; this May, we will hear whether our pre-proposal is one of the 100 invited to the final round), I am buoyed by the good work that we are already doing (and are willing to take on) on behalf of all of our students.

As the largest women’s college in the nation, with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence, we are well positioned to undertake the work of this grant. I hope that HHMI agrees. As we wait, I look forward to continuing my collaborations with you as we thoughtfully engage with the vibrant ideas that have emerged from our grant planning.

--Patty DiBartolo
Faculty Director of the Sciences
A hallmark of a science education at Smith is students’ hands-on use of sophisticated state-of-the-art scientific instrumentation. Last spring, the Science Center Directors, in consultation with the Equipment and Science Planning Committees, authored a detailed memo sent to administration that outlined the budgetary pressures related to our assets, noting the need for a strategic reinvestment strategy for their long-term renewal and replacement.

Working closely with the Provost’s Office as well as the Office of Finance and Administration, we have launched a capital planning process that will allow us to engage in prospective and thoughtful planning for equipment renewal and replacement. This fall, we were pleased to receive a significant sum from the College (over $220K) to help with the backlog of our most urgent identified equipment needs. Simultaneously, we launched a long-range capital planning process that will guide strategic investment efforts from the College. This plan relies on a careful inventory of our assets and thoughtful development of a multi-year spending plan (projects already underway, led by Margaret Lamb) and will be made possible through transparent oversight by a revamped Equipment Committee.

This spring, we will pilot new budget procedures that help make transparent current and future equipment requests so that Equipment Committee can engage in responsible fiscal planning. Science Planning and Equipment Committee will both work with the Science Center Directors as well as the Provost’s and Finance and Administration offices to address our critical science equipment needs. We will keep the Div III community apprised of this planning.

FACULTY-STUDENT RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

● Sarah Moore’s EGR 100 students awarded a $100,000 Gate Foundation grant ● ES&P and CEEDS’ permeable pavement project ● And come visit the Fall 2015 Research Symposium poster sessions for intermediate and upper-level science courses, McConnell Foyer (December 7th – 15th)

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS:

December 15th 2015  Last day of classes
December 18th 2015  Clark Science Center Holiday Party, 3:30-5 pm, Seasons Room, Ford Hall
December 23rd 2015  College closes (reopens January 4th 2016)
February 15th 2016  SURF applications due (chemistry SURF pre-application due February 2nd; faculty SURF recommendations due February 26th)

CONTACT US: PATRICIA DI BARTOLO (pdibarto@smith.edu); MARGARET LAMB (mlamb@smith.edu)