

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Humanities Initiatives at Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Institution: Mississippi Valley State University



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

1100 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., NW
ROOM 302
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506
EDUCATION@NEH.GOV
202/606-8380
WWW.NEH.GOV

National Endowment for the Humanities

Division of Education Programs

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

This sample of the narrative portion from a grant is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Division of Education Programs well before a grant deadline. This sample proposal does not include a budget, letters of commitment, or resumes.

Project Title: *Richard Wright: A Mississippi Writer*

Institution: Mississippi Valley State University

Project Director: Jianqing Zheng

Grant Program: Humanities Initiatives for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Narrative Description

A. Intellectual Rationale

The funds from this project will be utilized to support a three-day workshop with pre-planning session, devoted to the fiction, non-fiction and poetry of the Mississippi author Richard Wright. A complex individual with a wide variety of respected fiction and non-fiction, most notably *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Richard Wright was also a prolific poet. His authorship of some 4000 haiku poems is the least known and most fascinating facet of his work. The workshop will feature three noted scholars who have conducted research specializing in the study of Richard Wright and his work. The intent of this workshop is to provide a working knowledge for the teaching of this Mississippi native and his notable works. The information gathered will be used as the basis for development of a teaching supplement that can be utilized not only in the expansion of the University learning activities, but also in the humanities lesson planning and instruction of teachers in the surrounding school districts. Cultural enrichment is a core component of humanities instruction, and the lack of acknowledgement of Richard Wright and his work in classrooms in recent years speaks to the dearth of information available to students in the Delta.

B. Content and Design

The theme of the seminar will be *Richard Wright, a Mississippi Writer*. The suggested format would involve the use of three scholars, each presenting a different aspect of the life and works of Richard Wright. The suggested format is as follows:

- Richard Wright's Literary Imagination: Dr. Jerry Ward, Dillard University.
- The Cultural Politics of Richard Wright: Theorizing the African Diaspora: Dr. Floyd Hayes, Johns Hopkins University.
- Richard Wright's Haiku: His Other World: Dr. Jianqing Zheng, Mississippi Valley State University.

The content will be generic in scope to allow English faculty and secondary school English teachers to integrate this component into the university curriculum and the language arts framework. This project will challenge teachers to offer a wider scope of instruction that will meet the academic requirements of the

state and the local school districts. All Mississippi students must pass the courses and the subject areas tests in English, U.S. History, Biology, Math, and Science. This focus on testing and the accountability issues associated with No Child Left Behind have made the teaching of humanities a district by district elective teaching unit.

Project Activities

The funds from this project will be used over a one-year period to encompass the planning phase, pre-workshop, and the three-day summer workshop and involve the follow-up with teacher participants and faculty to determine the impact of the learning supplement and creative strategies being employed during the academic year. The workshop format will consist of individual daily presentations during the morning session followed by roundtable discussions during the afternoon of each day. The three-day workshop will conclude with a wrap-up and review of project activities as well as instructions in the use of the teaching supplement and syllabus.

A. Work Plan

Objective 1: To develop, plan and implement a workshop for faculty and area teachers focusing on the works of Richard Wright.

Objective 2: To design and disseminate a five-week teaching unit/supplement to enhance humanities studies in area school districts and to strengthen existing University humanities offerings.

Objective 3: To expand the Richard Wright collection within the James Herbert White Library on the MVSU campus.

This project will have an anticipated start date of January 2, 2007. Funding is being requested for a 12-month period ending on December 31, 2007. The project activities will focus on a pre-workshop seminar to be held six (6) weeks prior to the workshop and subsequently a three-day workshop to be held during the summer of 2006. Participants will be English faculty of MVSU and local secondary school English teachers. Their curricular concentration is in the area of English and some of the Advanced Placement courses that include humanities as part of their offerings such as Mississippi Writers and

African American Literature courses listed in the Mississippi Language Arts Framework. The project intends to serve a minimum of 25 participants, of whom 4 are English faculty from Mississippi Valley State University and 21 are English teachers from secondary schools. Dr. Annie M. Payton, Director of the James H. White Library at MVSU, will assist in establishing and maintaining the Richard Wright collection. Her letter of support is attached as Exhibit D. The purpose of the pre-workshop seminar is to provide textbooks, materials and information to participants in preparation for the full three-day workshop. All components are expected to involve interactive discussions along with the presentations. The project funds will be used to purchase books and resource materials for dissemination at that time. Each presenter will highlight different texts for presentation as outlined in the “Readings for the Project” section of this proposal.

Dr. Jerry Ward’s presentation will be designed to explore how Wright’s use of genres, literary devices, and philosophical ideas enabled him to express his imagination in distinctive ways. For example, the novel *The Outsider* is usually identified as existential in its treatment of human life. When we carefully analyze the images and metaphors in the text, however, we discover the representation of the main character’s consciousness is phenomenological. It is crucial to attend to Wright’s uses of language prior to describing what his works mean. Dr. Ward’s interactive presentation will focus on *The Outsider* and include his one-man portrayal of Richard Wright from his early beginnings in Roxie, MS through his troubled childhood and youth into his journey as one of the most insightful yet troubled African-American authors of this century. It will provide a creative and innovative approach to learning for teachers, especially those in the secondary/high school settings.

Dr. Floyd Hayes’s presentation will focus on how Richard Wright met the existential challenge of the creative intellectual to acquire self-confidence, discipline, and perseverance necessary for success without an undue reliance on the mainstream for approval and acceptance. He will discuss these challenges in the post-World War II period. Wright emerged as a black creative intellectual who was driven by the quest to define and defend black humanity against the cultural domination of white supremacist ideas and practices in America and the colonial world. However, he was in some sense

repelled by traditional African culture, especially religion, as he wrote in his travel book, *Black Power*.

Dr. Hayes will explore the way that Wright's writings shed light on the ambiguities that are inherent in theorizing the African Diaspora—ambiguities that constitute the discourse of the African Diaspora. The purpose of his presentation is that participants will develop an interpretation that accounts for Wright's philosophical, literary, and political commitments.

Dr. Jianqing Zheng, as Project Director, will represent Mississippi Valley State University during the workshop. His presentation will focus on *Haiku: His Other World*, a collection of Richard Wright's haiku. This late venture by Wright evolved during the last two years of his life when he was very ill and unable to write longer pieces of work or fiction. Through this minimal poetic form, Wright finds his best self and digs out his deepest yearnings for the harmonious relationship between nature and human beings. Dr. Zheng has researched widely on Wright's haiku and presented papers and given lectures in professional conferences, workshops, and high school classrooms. He intends for this workshop to benefit the participants as well as provide an instructional unit that can be infused into the existing curriculum of area schools. He has worked with ten students on their projects on Wright's haiku. One of them published her essay in the Richard Wright Newsletter in spring 2006.

B. Work Schedule

Objective	Task	2007				Staff Responsible	How Measured
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Start-up Project is fully staffed; financial and administrative systems are in place.	Hiring key staff	X				Project Director	Staff listed are working on the project; Planning begins: workshop curriculum is developed
	Begin Planning	X				Project Director, Senior Personnel	
	Develop a workshop curriculum	X				Project Director and key personnel	
Development	Develop and order workshop materials	X				Project Director Senior Personnel	Recruitment materials; number of teachers and faculty enrolled in the program
	Visit schools and recruit local teachers	X				Project Director	
	Identify and notify participants	X				Project Director	
Pre-Workshop Training	Develop assessment plan; Workshop survey	X				Project Director Senior Personnel Evaluator	Assessment plan; workshop survey
	Pre-Workshop	X					
	Assessment of participants		X				
Workshop	3-day workshop		X			Project Director Senior Personnel	Performance is measured based on workshop attendance and evaluation surveys
	Academic follow-up			X	X	Project Director	
	Assessment of Students			X	X	Project Director	
Evaluation and Phase-out	Select evaluator	X				Project Director Senior Personnel	Evaluator contracted; Evaluation annual: Final report submitted to NEH
	Evaluation		X		X	Project Director Evaluator	
	Phase-out preparation			X		Project Director Evaluator	
	Develop and submit final report				X	Project Director Evaluator	

The majority of costs will be incurred in the project in the first half of the year when the workshop occurs. In the second half of the year, maintenance and support of evaluation and follow-up activities will be performed by the Project Director, Senior Personnel, and the Evaluator. These follow-up activities will include visits to local public schools in the Delta and on-campus classrooms to assess the progress of the infusion of the resource material into daily instruction. The project will conclude with an assessment of project goals and objectives by the Project Director, Senior Personnel and the Evaluator and submission of a final evaluation report as well as completion of necessary financial and programmatic reporting documents.

C. Readings for the Project

As testing has become the infrastructure for the design and implementation of curricular activities during the academic year, the focus on cultural and heritage strengthening has been eliminated. Extracurricular offerings have been eliminated particularly in the areas of the arts and humanities in favor of core curricular offerings designed to meet testing standards. Several books will be provided to project participants in a pre-workshop seminar that will disseminate the materials necessary for productive participation and discussion.

Dr. Ward's pre-workshop reading is mainly *The Outsider*. He will use *Voice of a Native Son: The Poetics of Richard Wright* by Eugene E. Miller and *How to Do Things with Words* by J.L. Austin to analyze Wright's work. The book selected for Dr. Hayes's workshop session is *Black Power*. This book is intended to give participants the opportunity to reflect upon a range of thoughts on the writings and impact of Wright on the literary landscape. Dr. Zheng's pre-workshop reading is *Haiku: This Other World*. He will use Wright's haiku to present Richard Wright's true yearnings that reflect his sensibility to nature.

D. Intended Beneficiaries

The intended beneficiaries of project activities will be the students of teacher participants in the area schools as well as faculty employed by the University. In addition, the long-term benefits of understanding Wright's mindset and the development of his persona will enhance the capability of those

charged with teaching about his experiences. The Delta Research and Cultural Institute has the archival capability of storing the information and records of these activities. The use of modern technology to maintain a record of the workshop will allow it to be available for future use. The Delta, because of its lack of library and other resources, has few museums or collections honoring those who rose from its poverty to achieve national and international recognition. Though a well-known writer, Richard Wright is relatively ignored in humanities curriculums taught across the state. The reemphasis on the author and his historical significance to the literary world will allow for further study and discussion of the importance of his work. The English curriculum at Mississippi Valley State University includes courses on African-American Literature, Major Black Writers, Literature of the Harlem Renaissance, and Special Topics. The benefits of the Richard Wright workshop will strengthen the curriculum through an infusion of the detailed Richard Wright Study into all these courses. After the workshop, faculty at the University and English teachers from the local public schools will be able to function as a bridge between Wright and his readers. They will have a better understanding of Wright's role as a writer and poet and gain an aesthetic appreciation of his important works. We believe that when teachers benefit from the workshop, their student will too.

E. Institutional Context

Mississippi Valley State University has as its mission the education and cultural enrichment of all who utilize its resources. The University hosts many workshops, seminars, meetings and cultural activities. Faced with imminent closure twice in the late 90's MVSU is now considered one of the 40 best institutions in the South after experiencing a 40% increase in enrollment under the current leadership of Dr. Lester C. Newman. The majority of our students come from the eleven counties that comprise the Mississippi Delta; however, students come from states such as New York, Illinois, Tennessee, Florida, and California. Twenty international students are currently in attendance at the University. To sustain student interest and promote University programs, cultural events that address the humanities such as the annually held Fannie Lou Hamer Civil Rights Conference and the Spring and Fall Lecture Series are held. Some of the noted luminaries that have addressed our students over the past year included, Dr. Louis H.

Sullivan, former Secretary of Health and Human Services, J.L. King, noted author, and B.B. King who holds an annual concert and workshop at the University. Ernest Thomas (Rog of the TV series, What's Happening) has served as a visiting professor teaching acting during the last academic year.

F. Staff and Participants

Dr. Jianqing Zheng (vita attached) will serve as the Project Director for this proposal. His services to the grant will be as an in-kind contribution on behalf of the University. He currently serves as Chair of Department of English and Foreign Languages at Mississippi Valley State University. He has conducted extensive research on Richard Wright's haiku. Dr. Zheng also taught a special topic course titled *Richard Wright's Haiku and Black Boy* during the 2005 summer session.

Professor Betty Farmer will serve as a member of the planning and logistical committee that will provide oversight and direct the activities of this proposal. She is currently the Director of the MVSU Writing Project and has established a longtime, solid working relationship with public schools in the Delta . Professor Farmer will also serve as a facilitator during the Pre-Seminar phase of project activities.

Dr. Jerry Ward (vita attached) will serve as a visiting consultant on this project. He is Distinguished Professor of English and African World Studies at Dillard University in New Orleans and one of the founders of the Richard Wright Circle and co-editor of *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*. He will revisit the MVSU campus with his presentation and portrayal of Richard Wright with a focus on the Chautauqua character of Richard Wright.

Dr. Floyd Hayes (vita attached) will serve as a visiting consultant on this project. He currently serves as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Coordinator of Programs and Undergraduate Studies at the Center for Africana Studies, Johns Hopkins University and has done extensive research into the writings of Richard Wright. His perspective will be outlined during the workshop presentation and will be included in the portable module that will be disseminated at the outcome of the project.

Dr. Annie M. Payton will assist in the establishment and maintenance of the collection of Richard Wright Study within the library. She has served as director of the James Herbert White Library for five years.

G. Evaluation

The internal evaluation of the project will be conducted by Dr. Chukwuma Ahananou who will design the pre- and post survey instruments to be used to assess the effectiveness of the workshop. The follow-up activities by the Project Director will assess the impact on students at the University and those in the surrounding districts taught by teacher participants in the workshop. It is anticipated that at least 25 participants will attend the workshop and incorporate learning and reading into their instructional activities. All participants will receive a certificate for this workshop. A follow up visit quarterly by the Project Director or the facilitator to each school setting will provide not only technical assistance in the implementation of the teaching supplement but also a chance to measure the impact of the unit on the students who are exposed to this model. In addition, the expansion of the collection of the Richard Wright Study in the James H. White Library will provide teaching aids that can be checked out and used in the local instructional setting.

H. Follow-up and Dissemination

The projected long-term benefit of this project is to create a humanities teaching unit that can be integrated into the English curriculum. This unit will be created to be implemented by teachers on the secondary and University levels. Workshop presentations in audio-visual format will be available for professional development and educational support. All resources including multimedia presentations will be housed in and disseminated from the James H. White Library. Copies of the resources can be requested from the website link to the library.