

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



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



NATIONAL
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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: *Reinvigorating Humanities Teaching and Learning through a Comparative Approach to World Literature*

Institution: Kentucky State University

Project Director: George Weick

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

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SUMMARY

This proposal seeks NEH funding to support a project that will expose faculty teaching in Kentucky State University's Integrative Studies (IGS) Program and other Humanities departments to an "Improvisational Field-Theoretic Approach to World Literature," an innovative approach, developed by Dr. Theophus ("Thee") Smith of Emory University, pairing texts drawn from the traditional Western canon with those from African and African-American cultures. The project's primary goal is to reinvigorate the IGS curriculum by helping faculty discover new ways of connecting humanities texts from different cultures and thereby improve both faculty teaching and student learning in the humanities. The Integrative Studies Program, the centerpiece of KSU's liberal studies/general education program, is a 12-semester-hour block of interdisciplinary courses, required of virtually all students seeking the baccalaureate degree and organized chronologically, beginning with the ancient world and ending with modern times. Readings are drawn from a wide array of primary sources in literature, philosophy, history, political theory, history of science, and other humanities fields. In the spring 2006 semester, a committee was formed by the Integrative Studies Program Steering Committee, the program's oversight committee, to review and propose revisions to the IGS curriculum. That committee committed itself to seek funds to support activities that would provide support for the curriculum review and revision efforts. This grant proposal grew out of that context.

A meeting of all participants and Dr. Smith via videoconferencing in spring 2007 would initiate the project. A Blackboard shell would be created for the project, which would provide participants and Dr. Smith opportunities to communicate, share ideas, brainstorm, and preserve their thoughts for the duration of the project and beyond. During the course of the project, participants will meet to discuss texts drawn from world literature in light of Dr. Smith's approach. Dr. Smith will join some of these conversations via videoconferencing. In addition Dr. Smith will visit KSU on two occasions to meet with participants to conduct workshops. KSU's own Center of Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African-Americans would contribute relevant archival literary materials about and by Kentucky African-Americans to provide a local and regional perspective on the issues and ideas raised in the meetings and workshops.

Since the NEH project participants are also members of a committee charged with examining and proposing revision of the current IGS curriculum, one important outcome of the project will involve curricular changes that will affect a significant number of faculty and virtually all baccalaureate-degree-seeking students at KSU. As part of the project's dissemination strategy, a resource manual will be prepared, providing a detailed account of the project's activities and the ideas emerging from meetings and workshops. This manual will be posted on Blackboard and on the university's web site as a reference tool for faculty members and students of the humanities at KSU and other institutions. Participants will be encouraged to prepare papers on selected issues and ideas emerging from the project for presentation at the annual meetings of the Association of Core Texts and Programs, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Association of General and Liberal Studies, and the Association of Integrative Studies. In addition, each participant will be required to keep a journal of reflections upon the project's impact on their own knowledge of world literature and their perspectives on teaching and learning in the humanities. Edited versions of these journals will be published at the end of the project on Blackboard.

INTELLECTUAL RATIONALE

As part of its response to the adoption of its new mission in 1982 as “the state’s unique, small, liberal studies institution,” Kentucky State University, one of the nation’s historically black institutions of higher education, created the Integrative Studies Program, consisting of a sequence of four interdisciplinary courses, designed to promote intellectual integration of ideas and cultural perspectives, by building conceptual bridges across the disciplines, as the centerpiece of KSU’s general education core requirements (See Appendix A for KSU’s Mission Statement and brief institutional profile). The IGS Program began offering courses in 1983-4. The first three courses in the sequence (IGS 200, 201 and 300) were originally based on reading, analysis, and discussion, in a seminar setting, of primary texts in the Western tradition. The fourth course, then and now, is selected by students from a menu of four “non-Western” offerings in Oriental, African, Latin-American, and African-American cultures. IGS has no full-time faculty of its own. It relies upon faculty “borrowed” from academic units around campus, making faculty development opportunities of special importance. The 12-semester-credit-hour IGS course requirement forms the single largest block of required courses in KSU’s 53-semester-credit-hour liberal studies/general education core requirements. The only group of students at KSU not required to take IGS courses are the approximately 60 students (out of a total enrollment of about 2,500 students) who participate in the Whitney Young Honors Program and who take an alternative core curriculum originally based on the St. John’s Great Books model. IGS is administered by a coordinator who is assisted by an “IGS Steering Committee,” consisting of a group of 10 faculty members, from a variety of academic units and disciplinary backgrounds, who have been “borrowed” over the years to teach in the program and have a strong commitment to it. In addition to members of the Steering Committee, IGS staffing needs are met by borrowing other faculty from around the university to teach in the program and by a limited use of adjunct faculty.

From the mid-1980s to 1998, the IGS Steering Committee revised IGS 200, 201, and 300 to

include a more culturally diverse representation of readings and completed a project of publishing its own set of three readers, one for each of the first three IGS courses. The readers average more than 500 pages, are published by Copley Press in Acton, MA, and are used in conjunction with other selected texts. Copies of the current IGS 200, 201, and 300 syllabi and table of content pages of the three readers are included in Appendix B. In the spring 2006 semester, a committee was formed by the Integrative Studies Program Steering Committee, the program's oversight committee, to review and propose revisions to the IGS curriculum. That committee committed itself to seek funds to support activities that would provide support for the curriculum review and revision efforts. This grant proposal grew out of that context.

However, without much opportunity for significant faculty development opportunities in the humanities, and with turnover bringing new faces into IGS teaching virtually every year, many faculty have experienced difficulties in discovering "deep-level" connections between works in the Western tradition and the works drawn from other cultural traditions, and in helping students understand those connections. Dr. Smith's approach will help stimulate the faculty's thinking about these connections, as well as about new ways to group texts and ways to help students engage the material more effectively.

As a faculty member whose educational background and teaching career has involved extensive experience in "great books" programs, such as that of St. John's College (from which Dr. Smith received his B.A. degree in 1975) and KSU's own Whitney Young Honors Program (in which Dr. Smith taught from 1983 to 1987) and as someone much interested in the African and African-American literature, Dr. Thee Smith began thinking of ways to combine his two primary teaching interests. His initial work in this direction resulted in a work titled "Improvisational Black Studies: a Field Theory Approach," designed to provide a conceptual framework, along with specific examples, for unifying his two areas of interest. His goal was to lay out the groundwork for a program of study that would allow, quoting from Dr. Smith, "for multiple and fluid correlations of black studies with other specialized cultural studies, and also with mainstream academic disciplines."

As Dr. Smith further explains:

Field theories attend not only to individual items--whether texts or artifacts, events or processes--but also to the intersecting fields within which they exist. In this instance, a field approach allows for multiple and fluid connections of black studies with other specialized cultural studies, and also with mainstream academic disciplines. On the one hand, the approach acknowledges the normative or “canonical” status of certain texts and literatures, disciplines and traditions. But it also “decenters” canonical formations--including the formation of canons in black studies--precisely by correlating competing canons as a *matter of course*, and also by addressing non-canonical materials and perspectives. . . . Moreover, a routine correlation of cognate and disparate fields allows us to develop the functional equivalent, in the academy, of the art of improvisation. As a method, correlation involves the interdependence of items within structured wholes, whereas the improvisational art keeps this method open and flexible.

Dr. Smith’s approach has proven effective in his classroom experiences and has promise for reinvigorating the teaching of world literature and other humanities texts at Kentucky State University, and, indeed, at other institutions whose faculty will have opportunities to learn about this project through the dissemination plan outlined below.

CONTENT AND DESIGN

As part of the preliminary activities, prior to the mid-term spring 2007 videoconference described below, the project Director will create a Blackboard shell for the project. This shell will be used throughout the project period to provide message boards, discussion threads, electronic resources, and other opportunities for asynchronous communication among participants. The shell will also provide opportunities for communication with Dr. Smith, who will be available through this mechanism to give guidance and make suggestions throughout the grant period. The electronic record of discussions and comments on Blackboard will become part of the project’s final report and resource manual.

Project activities would begin immediately after mid-term during the spring semester 2007 with a preliminary meeting of participants in one of KSU’s video-conferencing facilities, with Dr. Smith being present via audio-video link. At this meeting the detailed project agenda, with timetable, will be distributed to participants, along with the texts and other materials to be read during the project period. Dr.

Smith will explain his improvisational, field-theoretic approach to world literature and other humanities texts and provide an overview of the project readings. Participants will have the opportunity to engage Dr. Smith and each other in discussion of the approach. After the general conceptual framework is introduced by Dr. Smith, attention will turn to his example of inter-canon field correlations involving Africana and the Greek classics. This particular aspect of his proposal was selected because of its obvious connections to the current IGS 200 course content, which includes multicultural content in the forms of readings from various creation myths and other non-Western texts but which focuses primarily on the Greek classics. Dr. Smith's suggestions for pairing readings from African and African-American sources with appropriate Greek texts are of especial interest in terms of provoking thought among IGS faculty that might have immediate bearing on the reading list currently in use in IGS 200.

In mid-April 2007, a second videoconference would be held, including Dr. Smith, and involving all project participants. The first set of paired readings would be discussed at this conference: Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and Plato's *Crito* and *Apology*. Dr. Anne Butler, Director of the Center for Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African Americans, will also provide archival materials from the Center's extensive collection, to be scanned and uploaded to the Blackboard shell. These materials will give a local and regional perspective on the issues raised in discussion of the texts of King and Plato. Dr. Butler will continue to provide this kind of material throughout the course of the project.

In the week following KSU's graduation in May 2007, a three-day workshop for project participants would be held, with Dr. Smith in attendance for the first day. Meetings of participants would occur during the fall semester 2007 and the spring semester 2008, with a final three-day workshop, again with Dr. Smith in attendance, being held in May 2008.

First Videoconference, March 2007 (Thee Smith, KSU Participants)

Introduction to field theory approach (Thee Smith)

Preview of readings (Thee Smith)

Second Videoconference, April 2007 (Thee Smith, KSU Participants)

Discussion of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and Plato's *Crito* and *Apology*

First Workshop Day, May 2007 (Thee Smith, KSU Participants)

Discussion of Breuer & Telson, "The Gospel at Colonus" (extra-textual: oratorio and video) and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. (Thee Smith, leader)

Second Workshop Day, May 2007 (Thee Smith and Participants)

Discussion of W.E.B. Dubois *The Souls of Black Folk* and Aristotle's *De Anima*

Third Workshop Day, May 2007 (Participants)

Discussion of integrating material into IGS curriculum, led by Project Director; consideration of local/regional material (from Center for the Study of Kentucky African-Americans), led by Dr. Anne Butler

Fall Semester 2007, Meeting 1, Videoconference (Thee Smith and Participants)

Discussion of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Homer's *The Odyssey*

Fall Semester 2007, Meeting 2 (Participants)

Discussion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Euripides' *Medea*, Homeric Ode to Demeter, and selected Odes of Horace

Spring Semester 2008, Meeting 1, Videoconference (Thee Smith and Participants)

Discussion of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame* and Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*.

Spring Semester 2008, Meeting 2 (Participants)

Discussion of Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* and Euripides' *The Bacchae*.

First Workshop Day, May 2008 (Participants)

Discussion of integrating material into IGS curriculum, led by Project Director; consideration of local/regional material (from Center for the Study of Kentucky African-Americans), led by Dr. Anne Butler

Second Workshop Day, May 2008 (Thee Smith and Participants)

Discussion of Phyllis Wheatley, selected poems, and selections from Horace and Ovid

Third Workshop Day, May 2008 (Thee Smith and Participants)

Project review, wrap-up

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

As a historically black university with a liberal studies mission, Kentucky State University provides a supportive environment for interdisciplinary, multicultural education. The 1982 Mission

Statement was refined in 1993 to relate more emphatically its historic identity with its liberal studies mission. The refined statement reads in part: “Drawing upon its African-American heritage, the University will promote the values and methods of interdisciplinary and multicultural education in its liberal studies offerings.” KSU’s current student enrollment is approximately 2,500, of which more than half are minority students, mostly African-American (see Appendix A). Since its inception, the IGS program has undergone constant evolution involving personnel changes, increased student enrollment, and curriculum development and revision. Faculty members are adept at utilizing a variety of teaching strategies to engage students and at different approaches to interdisciplinary, multicultural humanities education. Their experience with and their enthusiasm for integrative studies provides a dynamic context for encountering Dr. Smith’s innovative field theory approach to black studies.

In addition, the IGS Steering Committee has commissioned a subcommittee, consisting of some members of the Steering Committee and some other members of the humanities faculty from other academic units, to begin the process of reviewing the current IGS curriculum and proposing changes, with a special emphasis on providing more emphatic curricular connections with the historic mission of the institution as an HBCU. The opportunity to involve Dr. Smith, as a nationally-recognized African-American scholar of literary and religious studies, through the auspices of a NEH grant-funded project is especially apt and timely. An important additional consideration in terms of institutional context is that Dr. Smith was, from 1983 to 1987, a Whitney M. Young faculty member, and, hence, has familiarity with the KSU collegial environment and with the Integrative Studies Program.

Another institutional resource that will significantly benefit the project is the Center of Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African-Americans (CESKAA). The Center contains much local and regional material that will be drawn upon to provide a local perspective on the issues raised throughout the project. Dr. Anne Butler, the Center’s Director, is a member of both the NEH grant project committee and the IGS curriculum review and revision committee.

STAFF AND PARTICIPANTS

Dr. George P. Weick, Professor in the Whitney Young School of Honors and Liberal Studies, Director of the Institute for Liberal Studies at KSU, and Coordinator of the IGS Program, will serve as project Director. Dr. Weick has served as Director of ILS and the Coordinator of the Integrative Studies Program since Fall 1992. He has taught since 1988 in the Integrative Studies Program and in the Whitney M. Young School of Honors and Liberal Studies, and has supervised all IGS curriculum revision efforts that have occurred since 1992. He served as editor of the first editions of the three IGS readers used in IGS 200 (*Foundations of Cultures*), IGS 201 (*Convergence of Cultures*), and IGS 300 (*Search for New Forms of Cultures*). He also edited the second edition of *Foundations of Cultures*, published in August 1995.

Dr. Theophus (Thee) Smith will serve as project consultant. Dr. Smith has taught in the Whitney Young program at KSU from 1983 to 1987, so he is familiar with KSU and the IGS program. His presentation (“Improvisational Black Studies: A Field Theory Approach”) at the Marquette University conference in the 1990s on “Integrating Black Studies into the Core Curriculum of a Catholic University” is the source work upon which his presentation to the IGS faculty under this current NEH proposal is based. He is a nationally recognized scholar of literature and religious studies at Emory University.

Dr. Anne Butler, Director of the Center of Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African-American (CESKAA), will provide archival assistance to the project by locating materials in CESKAA’s extensive collection that are relevant to the particular areas of interest identified throughout the course of the project, digitizing them, and making them available to project participants. Dr. Butler, herself, will also be a project participant.

Dr. Mark Shale, Professor in the Whitney Young School of Honors and Liberal Studies, Secretary to the IGS Steering Committee, and a long-time teacher of IGS classes, will serve as project secretary. He will be responsible for helping produce the project’s on-going reports and minutes of

meetings as well as the project's final documents, including the resource manual

EVALUATION

Project participants would be surveyed at the mid-point and at the conclusion of the project to determine how well participants feel the project is meeting its objectives. Dr. Smith would also write a brief mid-project report and final project report providing his perspective on how well the project is meeting its objectives. In addition, the IGS Steering Committee, which is charged with oversight responsibilities for the IGS program and which meets monthly, will review on a regular basis the progress of the project and provide an evaluation, to be included in the Steering Committee minutes, on both an on-going and a final-basis.

The benchmarks used to provide on-going project assessment would be: 1.) is the project proceeding according to plan logistically (that is, are meetings being held on schedule, are participants present as agreed, are materials ready on time and in adequate supply, are appropriately detailed records being maintained, etc.); 2.) is the project director performing up to expectations (does he provide assistance and guidance when needed and/or requesting, is he providing appropriate project leadership; is he motivating participants appropriately, etc.); 3.) is the project producing tangible proposals for improving both curricular content and pedagogy; and 4.) is there a plan in place to incorporate these proposals into the curriculum by Fall 2009 or earlier. The ultimate goal of the project is to improve faculty teaching and enhance student learning in the humanities.

FOLLOW-UP AND DISSEMINATION

The final report, along with other relevant materials developed during the course of the grant project, would be distributed to all faculty who teach IGS as well as to members of the IGS Steering Committee. The IGS Steering Committee is the entity authorized to make changes to the IGS curriculum. The proposed changes would be reviewed by the Steering Committee at the beginning of the Fall semester 2008. Changes that the Committee endorses would take effect in Fall 2009. The IGS teaching faculty

would meet monthly during the 2008-2009 academic year to discuss the changes and their implementation. Mini-classes, consisting of IGS teaching faculty, would be held to test the changes to the curriculum. The digital resource materials developed during the course of the project would be uploaded to Blackboard and made available to all IGS teachers and students. One important resource item would be a manual, consisting of a detailed summary of the ideas, suggestions, and approaches to the texts discussed during the project as well as consideration of how “improvisational” teaching strategies can enhance student performance in humanities classes, in particular in KSU’s Integrative Studies courses. Additionally, one of the project’s participants, Dr. Anne Butler, Director of the Center of Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African-Americans, housed at KSU, will make available literary materials and other documents from the Center’s extensive archives to help provide, throughout the project, an on-going, special “local” Kentucky perspective on the issues and ideas raised by participants and the consultant throughout the project period. These materials would be scanned and also made available on-line through Blackboard.

In addition, participants will be encouraged to prepare papers on selected issues and ideas emerging from the project for presentation at the annual meetings of the Association of Core Texts and Programs, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Association of General and Liberal Studies, and the Association of Integrative Studies. Finally, each participant will be required to keep a journal of reflections upon the project’s impact on their own knowledge of world literature and their perspectives on teaching and learning in the humanities. Edited versions of these journals will be published at the end of the project on Blackboard.