

THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

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April 24, 2014

Kent John Chabotar
President
Guilford College
5800 West Friendly Avenue
Greensboro, NC 27410

Dear President Chabotar:

I trust that you are well and that you and your colleagues will soon be participating in the rituals and celebrations that mark the end of a successful academic year. My colleagues at the Mellon Foundation, especially President Earl Lewis and Vice Presidents Mariët Westermann and Philip E. Lewis, join me in thanking you for your contributions to your students and to the communities they will serve following graduation. This letter provides some news and an invitation.

As you know from experience, less than half the degrees awarded by the nation's approximately 2,500 four-year colleges are awarded in the liberal arts. Between 1986-87 and 2007-08, as Victor Ferrall, Jr., notes in *Liberal Arts at the Brink* (2011), the percentage of graduates who majored in vocational disciplines at 225 liberal arts colleges rose from 10.6 percent to 27.8 percent. It is not surprising that the shrinking demand for a liberal arts education has forced many colleges to introduce more vocational and pre-professional programs. If such initiatives attract students and help maintain financial equilibrium, they represent a salutary presence and may be the difference between survival, merger, or closure. The challenge for all liberal arts colleges is to keep the liberal arts, and especially the humanities, at the heart of the enterprise. This is no easy task.

As one of the few remaining national foundations that vigorously supports liberal education, we are committed to preserving the core attributes of liberal arts colleges: an emphasis on critical thinking; oral and written communication; curricular breadth; digital and quantitative literacy; close intellectual relationships between students and faculty, including opportunities for undergraduate research; and the personal interaction and shared responsibility that are a vital part of living in a residential community. In recent years, we have become increasingly concerned with the economic segmentation that characterizes the liberal arts college sector. A small number of privileged, well-endowed colleges will continue to attract exemplary students from affluent and low-income families whose primary objective is to attend graduate and professional school. However, even these elite institutions risk becoming marginalized if the sector's identity as the provider of a residential liberal education continues to diminish. We recognize that this vulnerability is a growing concern for the sector at large and that most of its institutions, including many that the Foundation has not previously supported, need to be contemplating changes designed to provide for their future viability.

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We have, moreover, a particular concern that responds to years of public discourse emphasizing the STEM fields and courses of study that lead to gainful employment. Institutions like yours make valuable social, cultural, and economic contributions to their communities and regions. Your retention and graduation rates reflect high levels of full-time faculty and small classes and are consistently stronger than those of neighboring comprehensive state-supported colleges and universities with whom you compete. While the vast majority of independent colleges will survive as nominal proponents of the liberal arts, we are keenly interested in ensuring that the percentage of your students who graduate with liberal arts degrees remains high; hence, this invitation.

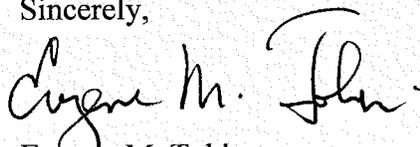
We invite you to apply for a grant of \$100,000 that would enable you to explore the ways and means of preserving the centrality of liberal education on your campus. Since Mellon is a humanities-centered foundation, we are primarily interested in supporting academic programs, including general education curricula, which strengthen the arts, humanities, and humanities-focused social sciences. We are also interested in considering support for programs that strengthen student writing, critical thinking, digital literacy, undergraduate research, and language acquisition.

The invitation to submit a request for support represents Mellon's interest in reaching a broader array of liberal arts colleges. In light of the Foundation's continuing commitments and increasing demands on our resources, these grants for planning or for piloting curricular or pedagogical experiments should not be construed as opportunities for additional support. If you are interested in exploring this initiative, please contact me at your earliest convenience at emt@mellon.org or at 212-500-2474.

The deadline for submission of proposals is Thursday, May 15, 2014. The Foundation's grantmaking guidelines and templates can be accessed at http://www.mellon.org/grant_programs/grantmaking-guidelines-procedures. Please feel free to send queries or concept papers to my attention by email. If you would like to set up a call to discuss your ideas, please contact Sharon Blackwell (scb@mellon.org), and if you have questions regarding the submission of proposals, Mary Bates (mcb@mellon.org) will be pleased to assist you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Eugene M. Tobin
Program Officer for Higher Education

cc: Adrienne Israel
Mike Poston

EMT/mcb

We understand that you are in a presidential transition but will be pleased to move ahead if the timing is convenient.