

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Enduring Questions
Institution: McDaniel College



NATIONAL
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HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

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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, résumés, or evaluations.

Project Title: NEH Enduring Questions Course on “Why Be Educated?”

Institution: McDaniel College

Project Director: Peter Bradley

Grant Program: Enduring Questions

Why Be Educated?

Ever since Socrates' dictum, 'The unexamined life is not worth living,' we educators have assumed that education is an intrinsic good. Being educated is generally held to be, if not a moral imperative, morally preferable to being uneducated. But why?

I propose a class that addresses the enduring question: Why Be Educated? Is education an intrinsic good, or is it to be valued only in the context of some other good, such as the need for an informed electorate? Is an educated person a more moral or virtuous person than an uneducated person? Are the liberally educated somehow better people than the technically educated? Are those who grapple with the 'enduring questions' better equipped to adapt to the complexities of modern life than those with a technical, vocational education?

Students (15 maximum) will not only be challenged to grapple with these questions through discussion of work by some of the great thinkers, but will also be required to apply the these thinkers' views to understand and critique existing higher education curricula and to extend educational theory originally designed for primary and secondary education to post-secondary settings. Through interacting with educators in rural Gujarat, India, taxonomizing, analyzing and criticizing curricula from other colleges and universities, and developing and maintaining a course blog about their ideas, the students will develop a reflective, critical understanding of their opportunities in higher education and be ready to engage the wider community in discussion about the values embodied in McDaniel's structure.

Texts. The preliminary reading list enclosed covers classic and modern answers to the question 'Why Be Educated?' from a variety of perspectives. We will begin with *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, a contemporary book by Michael B Crawford, a Ph.D. in political philosophy who quit the academy to start a motorcycle shop in Northern Virginia. Our location in central Maryland

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affords us the opportunity to bring Dr. Crawford to campus (or, more fitting, for us to go to his shop).

Next, we will turn back to Plato and Aristotle to investigate the traditional identification of education with moral virtue and continue through the Middle Ages' conception of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* before addressing several theories of education that appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. W. E. B. DuBois' *The Souls of Blackfolk* (1903) identifies higher education as both a liberating and alienating force. John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) articulates the connection between mass education and democratic society, while his earlier *How We Think* (1910) defends the value of "training of thought." Robert Maynard Hutchins not only provides, in his *Education for Freedom* (1943), a viewpoint opposed to Dewey's dominance in educational theory but also is one of the few thinkers who has directly addressed the moral value of higher education. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909) contains a direct attack on the preference for 'letters' in education, openly questioning if Western education really leads to happiness for the Indian rural poor (chapter 18). Ferrer (1913), Illich (1971), and Neill (1960) offer radically different approaches to primary and secondary education, each of which rests upon their discussions of the primary reason for being educated. In their final paper, students will extrapolate their views to college education.

Predisciplinarity. The question 'Why Be Educated?' is logically prior to the question of discipline. Our students should, but probably rarely do, ask this question *before* they ask themselves which major they should choose, which career they should pursue, or even whether they should attend college. This course is designed to rectify that fault.

The course can be offered under two components of McDaniel's curriculum: the First Year Seminar (FYS) and our Honors Program. All FYS courses must be accessible to all students

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regardless of major, may not qualify for credit in a major, introduce students to basic collegiate life, and teach central skills such as textual analysis, public speaking, and critical thinking. This question provides an excellent opportunity to meet each of these educational objectives while focusing on an enduring question that is directly relevant to a first year student's life.

Second, this course may be taught under the College's Honors Program. During the current academic year (2009-2010) we are reformulating the Honors Program's general education requirements. This course is a prime candidate for fulfilling these requirements, but that decision ultimately rests with the community, not with me. I will, however, be deeply engaged in these discussions, as I will be Acting Director of the Honors Program from November 9, 2009 to August 5, 2010.

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, alongside the Honors Program, has started a tradition of holding open fora on the history and theory of liberal education. Each forum typically features four faculty members in a 'panel' discussion format. While the forum structure is not a new institution at McDaniel, my proposed course is. The students in the course will participate in the fora as audience members and ultimately as panelists. Therefore, even though the existing fora present the structure through which our critical discussion of the value of education is disseminated to the wider community, because that structure already exists on our campus, no funding for the fora is requested from this grant.

Envisioned course structure and complementary activities. The course will be offered as a 15-week seminar with three hours of in-class instruction each week. FYS courses such as this have access to a 4th hour for complementary activities, so as to allow class time to be spent in discussion.

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Activities. My colleague in Religious Studies, Gregory Alles, recently returned from a Fulbright studying oral literature and religion among indigenous people in eastern Gujarat, India. He has volunteered to serve as a consultant for this project, and will be able to link us via video conference software, such as Skype, with the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh, Gujarat (<http://www.adivasiacademy.org.in/>). The Adivasi Academy runs a boarding school, primarily for children of nomadic people, as well as many educational programs in the surrounding community, where nonliteracy and lack of formal education are high. Our access to the Academy provides our students the opportunity to interact directly with people who are engaged with the question of the value of formal education and of what that should consist. This activity provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the implications of Gandhi's views for education.

Further, the students will be tasked with applying what they have learned in the course to classifying, analyzing and critiquing selected curricula from American colleges and universities. During the remaining 'flex hours,' small groups of students will work together to categorize curricula according to the values implicit in their construction. The results of these efforts will be disseminated through the course blog, and wikis those discussions might spawn.

Assignments The students will be required to write two short papers that will be primarily expository in nature. A longer, final paper will extend the views of one or more of the radical primary and secondary educational theorists we cover to higher education. These papers will be presented to the rest of the class and made available to the larger community via the course website. Students with the best presentations will be asked to form a panel for an open, public forum on the value of higher education.

Every student will be required to keep a blog, updated with weekly writing assignments, each of which is related to the research on college curricula described previously. These blogs

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will be merged into a single 'class blog' which allows comments, discussions, sharing of sources, and so on. Having used blogs and similarly structured research projects in previous courses, I have found that these assignments successfully build community if they go beyond personal 'reflection' assignments and ask students to apply theoretical viewpoints to materials they find in their everyday lives.

Assessment. The course will be assessed according to how successfully it achieves the objectives specified in the third paragraph of this proposal: competency with the theoretical perspectives covered, application of theoretical viewpoints to understanding existing curricula, and the ability to extend theories of primary and secondary education to higher education. The first will be measured by reviewing the two early expository paper assignments. The weekly blog posts indicate success with the second, and the final papers will measure the third. Students will complete a standard course evaluation form, which can be supplemented with specific questions regarding the community fostered in this course. We can indirectly measure the community fostered by the course by measuring the quantity and quality of the comments on blog pages. However, to measure the impact this course has on the larger community, we will have to measure the perceived value of the final forum in which students present their ideas to the community. By teaching this course in successive years, the level of engagement at that final forum will be an indirect, comparative measure of the course's impact on the community.

Dissemination: My position as webmaster for the American Association of Philosophy Teachers' (AAPT) members-only section affords me ample opportunity for disseminating course materials. In addition, the AAPT biennial workshop conference will be held in August 2010, and if it is funded, I will present the course there. Finally, the course blog and any achievable items collected by the students (for example: college catalogs, taxonomic structures for classifying

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curricula, etc.) will be made available online. My extensive experience developing pedagogical tools online makes these tasks simple.

Plan of Work. The bulk of the preparatory work will be done in summer 2010. I have used much of the primary reading list in other courses, and hence will focus my attention on reviewing alternate and secondary sources and gathering curricula for comparison and discussion by the students. I will offer the course as a First Year Seminar in Fall 2010 and Fall 2011. I am scheduled for a sabbatical for the semester between the first and second times that the course is offered (Spring 2011), and during that time I will revise the course based on assessment data. At that time, I'll submit the course to the honors committee for consideration as an honors course.

Faculty Preparation. My training as a philosopher is in the Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science, but three recent events have pushed my interest in this direction. First, my alma mater, Antioch College, was forced in to a state of financial exigency and ultimately shuttered due to years of mismanagement. Second, in July 2008 I was privileged to attend Transylvania University's competitive faculty workshop on liberal education. Finally, last year I led a college-wide assessment of the thinking component of our general education plan. Each experience stimulated the question of why liberal education should be valued.

In the last academic year, I led enthusiastic students through a course on the theory of liberal education. These students organized the first set of fora discussed above. Finally, my research in the history of philosophy resulted in a course this term called 'Theories of Mind before 1880', using primary source material to study empirical approaches to the philosophy of mind before it was called 'psychology.' Many of these thinkers, notably Herbert Spencer, Alexander Bain and J.F. Herbart, developed education theories that are now widely forgotten.

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“Why Be Educated?”

Preliminary Course Reading list

Introduction

Crawford, Matthew B. *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.

Education as Virtue

Plato, *Apology*

(Excerpts) Plato, *Republic*. Book 6-7

(Excerpts) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Barnes, J. Princeton: Princeton UP (Book 1-3)

(Excerpts) Aristotle, *Politics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Barnes, J. Princeton: Princeton UP (Book 8)

Victor, Hugh of Saint. *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Guide to the Arts*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

Education and Society

(Excerpts) Rousseau, *Emile* and *Sophie*

(Excerpts) Perkins-Gilman *Women and Economics* 1898

Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*: Navajivan Publishing House, 1990.

Bois, W. E. B. Du. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York, NY: Fine Communications, 2003.

Dewey, John. *How We Think*. New York: D.C. Heath & Co., 1910.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, Text-book Series in Education*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916.

Hutchins, Robert Maynard. *Education for Freedom*. New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Alternative Visions of Education

Ferrer Guardia, Francisco, and Joseph McCabe. *The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School*. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913.

Illich, Ivan. *Deschooling Society*. [1st ed.] *World perspectives*, v. 44. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

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