

2010-2011 Grant Proposals

Patricia Leavy
AAUP Higher Education Conference
Pedagogy Travel Grant

Project Proposal:

The funds will purchase travel to and participation in the AAUP Higher Education Conference that will be held June 8-12, 2011 in Washington D.C. My regular academic development funds will have already be used for travel to a regional conference I am participating in, as well as maintaining my professional memberships so in order to attend this event on pedagogy I need these funds.

I want to attend these meetings in order to attend sessions that will enhance my teaching of both department requirements as well as my elective courses. I plan to attend a range of sessions related to setting 21st century curriculum. Specifically, I am interested in how sociology can become more engaged in addressing large-scale social issues and problems, and how to address this issue as we select teaching methods, subjects and assignments. In short, I am interested in learning how to prepare my students to deal with contemporary real-world problems and issues (which rarely fit neatly into disciplines and require broad and integrated thinking). I also hope to learn strategies for promoting critical thinking and social engagement. I am submitting an abstract to present a paper at the conference on: "Institutional barriers and pathways to transdisciplinary research." Irrespective of whether or not I my paper is accepted I very much want to attend this conference to attend the sessions noted.

In order to clarify what I hope to get out of this conference I need to briefly address my current research and teaching goals, both of which center on the practice of "transdisciplinarity." I am currently finishing a book for Left Coast Press on transdisciplinary research practices. While it takes me two chapters in the book to explain what these are and how they differ from disciplinary, multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to research, here is a very brief explanation in order to contextualize my interest in this conference. Transdisciplinary approaches to research are problem-centered approaches that draw on expertise in all relevant disciplines and by all relevant stakeholders-the idea is that the project is a response to an identified need. These approaches are used to study problems of import in contemporary society (such as sustainability, poverty, violence) and other real-world problems whose solutions are unlikely to emerge in any one discipline. In my book I talk specifically about problems that are likely to be of interest to researchers in the social sciences, but where other expertise is needed to really address the problem. For me this isn't just about research, it is also about how sociology students need to be taught/trained.

I believe that transdisciplinarity is a basic requirement in a contemporary education in sociology (and liberal arts more broadly as evidenced at our own institution by developments in integrated studies and the like). Over the past few years I have made moves in my courses to teach students to think more holistically about social problems (this is a departure from how sociologists used to teach these topics and how I was taught). There is evidence that this kind of teaching is more and more common across the discipline of sociology. To assist me I have taken a seminar on problem-based learning as one strategy to get at topics more holistically and in more participatory ways. At this point, I am interested in learning more about how others have identified needs when teaching college students in the 21st century-needs which include things like: thinking conceptually, integrating knowledge sets, identifying social issues and problems of import with real-world implications, and so forth (all of which can be fostered, I believe, by transdisciplinarity). I want to attend this conference in order to attend sessions that address these issues. I will then incorporate what I have learned into both the content of my courses as well as the pedagogical styles by which I teach the content. I also want to share my ideas about how institutions can better enable (or prevent) this kind of teaching in order to get feedback from others struggling with these issues. Given the complexity of some of these issues it is hard to get across in a small space but I hope this gives you a better sense of the clarity I have about how this education conference will help me further my teaching goals.

Benefits:

My participation in this conference will benefit my teaching and research. With respect to teaching, I plan to use

what I learn to help me as the college continues to move towards more integrated approaches to curriculum development. I also regularly teach three of my department's required courses for majors (as well as electives) and I will use what I learn to continue to update my teaching of these courses. I want to help prepare sociology students for living and working in the contemporary world. With respect to my research, I have been seriously studying various approaches to problem-driven research and learning (for example, studying PBL, CBR, and also transdisciplinarity) for the past couple of years. I am currently writing a research book about transdisciplinarity. When this project is finished I would like to write an article about implications of transdisciplinarity for teaching in the 21st century. Attending this conference will assist me.

Community Outreach Plans:

In addition to revising my course syllabi for the benefit of my students, I would like to publish an article about teaching transdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving in a peer-review journal.

Budget: \$750

Travel expenses: I am applying in this early round of grants in order to take advantage of early registration fees (\$275 early-bird registration fee) as well as lowered hotel and airfare costs. I still anticipate out-of-pocket expenses (if the CTL would be willing to increase the \$750 cap I would request \$1,000 so that I do not incur significant out-of-pocket expenses.)