

2008-2009 Grant Proposals

John Lanci "A Community of Collaborators" SOTL Research Grant proposal

I have been developing projects involving collaboration between students and faculty since 1996, when two juniors and I participated in the first season of the SURE program at Stonehill. That summer we created a textbook for my course in Women in Early Christian Tradition, sections of which I use to this day.

We were collaborators-peers-on that project because we were encouraged by the administrators of the SURE program to think that way. The focus of the program today remains two-fold: it seeks to build a community of learner/scholars and to foster genuine collaboration between faculty and students. Our undergraduate research (UR) students are encouraged to become junior colleagues of the faculty with whom they work, not subsidiary research assistants; faculty and students collaborate on their application to the program and one of the criteria for acceptance is their joint articulation of how theirs will be a truly collaborative relationship.

Collaboration with students as junior colleagues has become crucial to my teaching at Stonehill. I include TAs in the planning and execution of my classes and encourage them to interact with me as a colleague whenever possible. So, when the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion and Theology invited me to join their consultation on the future of undergraduate research in our field, I jumped at the chance. I was surprised to discover that while all of the dozen or so participants were experienced in UR, none of their programs-and as far as I could discover, no other UR programs in religious studies or other field in the humanities-incorporated the degree of collaboration between faculty and students that we have developed at Stonehill. Indeed, I encountered resistance to a model of genuine collaboration even among the most enthusiastic supporters of UR.

As part of the Wabash group, I presented a short paper on how I envision faculty/student collaboration at the American Academy of Religion in San Diego last November, and I am currently working on a chapter for a book we have planned-as far as we can tell, the first of its kind-on UR in the study of religion and theology. My contribution to the wider subject of UR will be the role of the faculty as mentor and collaborator with students.

The work of the Wabash group will be winding down with the book's completion, but my interest in the theoretical underpinnings of collaboration abides. As the literature on mentoring makes clear, one of the strongest predictors of success is the development of a mutual relationship between mentor and protege-even on the undergraduate level. I am convinced that Stonehill, with its unique emphasis on faculty/student collaboration and community, has a contribution to make to the wider discussion of this sort of pedagogy.

Project Description: Once I complete the chapter on mentoring this fall, I plan to continue to explore and develop what I am calling a pedagogy of collaboration by drafting an article on the collaborative project I ran last semester as a course (RS 335: Icons, Altars, and Pop Religion). For this class, I employed a model of problem-based learning. The students were confronted with the question: What kind of religious or spiritual art do you think Stonehill should install in its new science center, art that would speak to your generation of students? The class was based on collaboration between me and the students; we functioned as peers throughout.

The article, which would be completed by the end of the spring semester, would itself be an exercise in collaboration: it would be co-authored with one or perhaps two students who were in the class (one of them would be my current TA, Kendra McKinnon, '09). Using a version of the case study method popular in pedagogical literature of this sort, the article would introduce the project as well as the methodology we drew from problem-based learning theory, and demonstrate the ways in which the students themselves set up their learning outcomes and documented their work (we have a box or two of data-journals, group reports, emails to and from administrators, architects plans, a blog on-line, and the class's final report-to sift through and document).

After we complete some follow-up interviewing of faculty and staff involved (particularly people in the sciences and fine arts, as well as development), we will discuss issues that we worked through as a group (Where do we get the money for the art? How will the project be completed after the end of the semester? How does one grade this sort of work?), and place the project in the wider Stonehill context, highlighting the support and cooperation we received from members of every corner of the college: from the President on down to the folks in buildings and grounds.

Community Outreach: I think we have a fair shot at publishing this article in a journal such as Teaching Theology and Religion. Locally, I would like to use this project as a spring-board for discussion of types of faculty/student collaboration, perhaps at a teaching round-table or a discussion for Academic Development Day.

Benefits: This research would facilitate the next stage of my plan to explore, write about, and publicize Stonehill's approach to student/faculty collaboration. It would also position me well locally to pursue some of the future pedagogy projects I have in mind: to collaborate with Bonnie Troupe on an article about the origins of the SURE program (for the Council on Undergraduate Research Quarterly, perhaps); to work with Martha Ucci in developing more collaborative approaches to the TA program; and eventually to begin a book-length manuscript on the pedagogy of collaboration.

Budget:

\$1000 stipend for J. Lanci

\$700 stipend for one or two students (via the work/study program, perhaps)

\$100 photocopying

\$700 books on collaboration for the CTL's library

Total: \$2500

Bibliography:

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