

Proposal Narrative

Broadening the Bridge: Leading Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges into a More Collaborative Future

*A proposal submitted to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation by
Carleton College and St. Olaf College*

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The invitation from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges to submit a proposal in support of expanded and significant collaborative endeavors occurs at a propitious moment, when our two institutions are preparing to face emerging challenges together. As the result of more than a year of planning efforts made possible by a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation (#31200131), we are now prepared to launch a more ambitious project that will strengthen liberal arts learning and teaching in ways that we could not accomplish individually, and to take advantage of opportunities to reduce current costs or contain cost growth by working collaboratively. A Mellon grant of \$1.4 million, supplemented by equivalent investments from our two colleges, will support a four-year project to deepen the successful collaborations that we have built over the past decade in our libraries, enhance faculty and staff collaboration in academic programs and lay the groundwork for potential curricular cooperation in the future, extend the Bridge collaborative model to other institutional operations in information technology and human resources, and foster habits of collaboration broadly across our campuses.

St. Olaf and Carleton have more than a century of shared history in Northfield. We have long allowed students from one of our campuses to take courses on the other, though relatively few students have taken advantage of this opportunity. Over the years we have experimented with sharing several faculty positions and have several staff who work on both campuses. We have occasionally brought faculty or staff from the two campuses together in workshops. Though some of these efforts have resulted in ongoing cooperation between particular programs or offices, most have been limited in scope and impact. Both colleges also participate as associate members in the Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities' joint purchasing program, and for a time shared a bookstore operation. In recent years, the colleges have approached collaboration more strategically and ambitiously, most prominently in the Bridge, our decade-long collaboration to build a shared library catalog. This very successful project, funded in part by a grant from the Foundation, has demonstrated the benefits as well as the obstacles that must be overcome to build a successful collaboration. Among those obstacles are different academic calendars, union/non-union contracts, pay scales, and student enrollment sizes. The real obstacle, however, has perhaps been the tradition of autonomy and self-reliance of liberal arts colleges, a tradition that has contributed to building the distinctive capacities of our respective institutions.

However, these "go it alone" inclinations are not financially or academically feasible for addressing present and future opportunities and challenges. Rising costs, online delivery of academic services, increasing technology needs, demands to cover new fields of study, and increasingly career-minded students (and their parents) require liberal arts colleges to develop creative, forward-thinking strategies. We are convinced that collaboration between our colleges will provide a critically important strategy to meeting these challenges, which—if thoughtfully shaped and carefully nurtured—will enable us to advance our liberal arts mission and contain costs while maintaining our distinctive identities and strengths.

Project Overview. Over the past year, as part of our planning project, faculty and staff at Carleton and St. Olaf have explored opportunities for and challenges to expanded collaboration between

our colleges. We have visited other liberal arts consortia and carefully examined our own operations and past experiences to identify areas and activities in which collaboration offers us the greatest potential educational and financial benefits. We have discussed not only specific activities and initiatives but also long-term strategies for collaboration and cultural change. It is clear that successful collaboration requires strong leadership and support from the top officials of the colleges; but it is also clear that to have sustained impact, collaboration also must be embraced and “owned” by faculty and staff at all levels of our organizations. And, it came as no surprise to us that, while some staff and faculty have already benefited from past collaborations and eagerly embrace new ones, others view closer work and interdependence with their counterparts on the other campus with trepidation as well as anticipation. Our departments and operations vary widely even in their basic familiarity with their counterparts.

To have a lasting impact, we must advance collaboration across this spectrum of comfort, familiarity, and experience. Consequently, our project includes a variety of activities that tackle the challenge of building strong collaboration at multiple levels and in a variety of ways. At the most advanced level of collaboration, where a strong foundation already exists, we will undertake activities that integrate operations and will achieve benefits in service and cost savings. In areas where we can see strong potential benefits but lack that foundation, we will undertake activities to build a foundation of experience and common human and infrastructure resources to drive collaboration forward. Finally, at a more formative and exploratory level, our work will build familiarity and a sense of common goals, which will give rise to future synergies and collaborative initiatives.

1. Promote deeper integration in areas that have already proven benefits in enhancing our academic missions and achieving cost savings

The most significant opportunity we have identified for achieving substantial integration of operations and resources is in our libraries. We propose to move forward aggressively with a next, expanded, generation of the “Bridge” collaborative. We began the Bridge in 2003, funded in part by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, by facilitating cross-searching of our respective library holdings. With additional Mellon support, we then completed an intensive review of the strengths and weaknesses of both collections, a joint serials review, consolidation of government documents and inactive serials collections, and enhancement to our library system software. Materials in the catalog are now fully available to faculty, staff, and students on both campuses. The rate of cross-library borrowing now averages over 16,000 items a year. In practice, and thanks to the support of the Foundation, the Carleton and St. Olaf collections now function as a single library collection. Sharing an online catalog and supporting software has enabled us to achieve substantial savings, reducing our software system costs by an estimated 20 to 40 percent. By sharing physical (paper) materials between the two campuses we have been able to provide a stronger collection for our students and faculty than we could have individually, and we have contained growth in our collections budgets for physical materials. We have also begun to share professional expertise in several areas, including a shared science librarian, media expertise, and most recently, interlibrary loan operations.

By taking our libraries’ Bridge collaboration to the next level of integration, we can provide better service for students and faculty. We can do this while effectively reducing costs in some areas and containing future cost growth in others. We will accomplish this through:

- **Acquisition of a more sophisticated and comprehensive integrated library management system.** We propose to select and implement a new, more comprehensive library management system (including public catalog, circulation, acquisitions, and cataloging functions) to serve as the backbone and technical platform for deepening and more fully integrating our library

operations. The new library management system will need to meet three criteria. First, it must provide the foundation for an integrated suite of patron applications. Second, the platform must accommodate the demands of rapidly changing resource formats (from paper to digital). Finally, and importantly, it must increase workflow efficiencies and enable us to contain operational costs. We anticipate that with these efficiencies in a common system, we will be able to more fully integrate operations and reduce staff costs. We propose to investigate several systems, both open-source and commercial, and expect to implement the new system during the second and third years of the project.

- **Development of a single shared research portal.** Building upon the new library management system, we propose to develop a shared research portal—a single, dynamic website developed, maintained, and shared by both libraries. This new portal will ensure a seamless patron experience at both libraries, and will facilitate access to materials for users at both campuses. Currently, Carleton and St. Olaf libraries share the Bridge² online catalog that allows patrons to search for library holdings including books, articles, journals, and digital content, purchased or rented by both libraries. However, each library maintains its own web page that provides additional access to digital content, research guides, and information about the library. A single shared Bridge research portal will integrate the tools necessary for users to discover and access library resources on both campuses beyond those in the shared catalog. These tools are essential in the research process, and their integration into a portal goes far beyond what most standard website templates allow. Furthermore, a single research portal will require less staff time to maintain than would be needed to maintain two separate websites. A shared research portal is still a relatively distinctive approach to library collaboration. Our plan is to develop an open-source research portal that other library consortia could modify to create their own research portals.
- **Sharing of personnel and integration of functions.** The two colleges will implement a new organizational structure for sharing library staff. This will require developing the framework, policies, and procedures needed to govern the new staff structure. Using currently budgeted funding, supplemented with Foundation support, we will develop and pilot a set of shared positions that will enhance services in the libraries while containing costs for both colleges:
 - Natalie Wall (St. Olaf) will serve as head of Loan Services at both libraries. Loan Services staff have spent the past academic year preparing for this change by standardizing interlibrary loan processes and circulation rules on both campuses. This standardization has allowed staff in each library to assist one another regardless of location during high request periods. As a result of this collaboration, we believe that the total FTE in Loan Services will be reduced.
 - Jennifer Edwins (Carleton) will serve as Bridge Coordinator with the responsibility of overseeing all Bridge projects, including the new Bridge integration activities. She will report to both library directors in this capacity. Jennifer currently devotes half of her time to supervising Loan Services at Carleton; Natalie Wall will assume these responsibilities, releasing Jennifer to assume the Bridge management functions and project coordination.
 - Sarah Johnston (St. Olaf), will oversee all systems operations for both colleges, and will oversee implementation of the new library management system and portal.
 - During the pilot project, we plan to identify several additional positions that will be developed to “float” (i.e., the incumbent would occasionally be asked to work in their counterpart department at the other library to help out in times of need).

In addition to these shared staff positions, we will deepen integration of library functions in several other ways:

- The libraries will develop policies and guidelines for shared preservation services.
- Following the Loan Services model, the two libraries will work to standardize technical service procedures and operations. This will allow the libraries to share expertise (cataloging, language and technical skills, etc.) and to help one another with daily operations and special projects. Based on our experience with sharing this work, we will then assess the feasibility of implementing a joint Technical Services department.

These activities will result in significant advances in the integration of our libraries, providing our students, faculty, and staff better access to resources and expertise on both campuses, and helping us gain efficiencies in operations that will ultimately reduce FTE and costs.

2. Build experience and infrastructure for collaboration in new areas with potential for significant impact

We propose to undertake a series of initiatives that will build experience collaborating in two new areas—academic programs and information technology—where we see significant potential benefits, but where we currently lack experience or common human and infrastructure resources necessary to enable that collaboration. In addition, we propose to investigate the feasibility and potential savings that might be realized by offering a shared health benefits plan.

Academic Programs and Curriculum. One of the most challenging, yet potentially beneficial, areas of collaboration for colleges like ours is in the area of curriculum and academic programs. No small liberal arts college can offer courses in all the areas of study that our students now seek. Collaboration offers an obvious strategy through which we may be better able to cover areas such as lesser-taught languages, area studies, or emerging fields of study (e.g., Middle East Studies). But different calendars, daily course schedules, curricular structures, and institutional cultures present significant barriers to collaboration in curriculum. We propose to foster faculty development of shared projects and courses that will build bridges across the academic programs at our two colleges and lay the structural—and cultural—foundations for curricular collaborations. To foster these collaborations, we need to provide faculty with the resources—most importantly, time—to work together to develop collaborative academic models and to pilot those models. We propose to establish a program of competitively awarded grants that will support exploration and pilot activities with potential for substantive collaborations, both in formal classroom curricula and experiential learning. These grants will be awarded by an academic collaboration steering committee comprising St. Olaf’s Provost and Carleton’s Dean of the College, an Associate Provost from St. Olaf and Associate Dean of the College from Carleton, and two faculty members from each campus. In each case, the two faculty members will include the elected chair of the faculty governance committee that normally oversees and awards faculty development monies and one additional elected member of that committee, chosen to provide disciplinary balance. We propose to offer three kinds of academic collaboration grants, described below. In each case, priority will be given to proposals according to (1) their potential for significant long-term impact; (2) the degree to which they will advance the goals of the larger collaboration project as they apply to teaching and research, e.g., enhancing the curriculum and achieving savings and efficiencies; and (3) address specific goals for departments and programs identified by the deans and this committee. The three kinds of grants we will award include:

- **Exploration grants for inter-college collaboration.** Each year we will award between four to six exploration grants of up to \$5,000 each. These will be awarded to teams of faculty, with preference for projects that explore how courses and programs can be made accessible to students

on both campuses. Grants could be requested for such purposes as travel funds to visit successful joint programs at other liberal arts consortia, expenses for joint department retreats to discuss existing curricula and potential areas for coordination, curriculum development (e.g., stipends for two to four weeks of summer work to design a shared course or course modules), or piloting strategies to overcome the challenges presented by differing academic calendars—for example, exploration of strategies to use technology to address different calendars (e.g., online course modules combined with synchronous in-class experiences).

- **Targeted opportunity grants.** These larger grants will be made to faculty and faculty/student teams to develop and pilot more ambitious joint curricular and collaborative experiential learning projects. Targeted opportunity grants cover course releases (or up to the equivalent in expenses); we anticipate making two to three of these grants each year. Grants could include a course release awarded to a faculty member to work with departments or programs on both campuses to align prerequisites and curriculum structure, in order to facilitate cross-registration and thus provide greater coverage and depth for small majors. Deans may also assign course releases to particular departments in cases where changes in the major curriculum may be needed to take advantage of efficiencies offered by collaboration or to address low enrollments. Funds could also be requested to support intensive work by a team of faculty, either through course releases or summer support, to develop a major in an “emerging field” that would be offered jointly. Funds could also be requested to support development and piloting of collaborative engaged learning experiences for students, such as research seminars; intensive summer research collaborations, including collaborative research using the distinctive assets of our two colleges (special collections or archives, the Carleton Arboretum and St. Olaf Natural Lands, etc.); or joint academic civic engagement projects in the local community that involve courses and students from both campuses. An academic civic engagement coordinator from one of our colleges will devote one-quarter time to assisting faculty to develop and pilot these community collaborations.
- **Course releases for team-teaching collaborative courses.** Given our different academic calendars, we recognize that shared courses are the most ambitious aspect of our project. At the same time, our proposal for team teaching is perhaps our most emphatic endorsement of collaborative activity. We anticipate that faculty will apply first for an exploration grant or targeted opportunity grant that will enable them to design a course(s) that will serve departments and students at both colleges. Pairs of faculty would then receive course releases to team-teach the shared course(s). Experience has taught us that there are significant “start up” costs for faculty in developing team-taught courses that serve multidisciplinary needs even on a single campus; much more so when those courses must also accommodate different calendars. Support for development of the courses and initial team-teaching of shared courses will help us ensure that the courses integrate successfully with curricula on both campuses and draw students from both. This will also help us foster experiences among students and a degree of familiarity that will help overcome potential barriers to cross-registering for classes on the “other” campus. We expect that after being team-taught one or two times, the collaborative courses could then be taught by a single faculty member, either rotating between the campuses or with input from the faculty counterpart at the other college, ensuring the course’s sustainability. We will offer opportunities for two team-taught courses in each of years two, three, and four of the grant.

As a result of planning grant activities, we have already received preliminary proposals to explore shared curriculum or joint courses from our Political Science Departments and Educational Studies Programs. It is not surprising that these “leaders” are relatively strong departments that seek to enhance already strong curricula or continue to provide essential offerings. So, for example, early discussions among these

departments have included finding ways to negotiate our differing academic calendars in order to develop a common introductory course, and thereby address heavy enrollments, and to offer valuable seminar level courses in which majors on both campuses can enroll. We expect that departments and programs coming from relative positions of strength can lead the way, and by example help change the perspectives and culture of others, as faculty see the ways in which curricula and student learning experiences can be enhanced in a sustainable fashion through collaboration.

Shared Technology Systems. Information technology is growing in both cost and ubiquity in our academic programs and business operations, with ever-increasing demand for new and expanded services. We propose to undertake activities that will provide a vital foundation for further collaboration and sharing of technology resources. Though information technology alignment and collaboration has proven challenging within institutions as well as across them, it holds the potential to make a significant impact in containing costs while providing essential resources and services to our faculty, staff, and students. We will focus on three technology projects.

- **Infrastructure alignment.** Aligning infrastructure to enable shared software and support provides an essential foundation for dealing with rising costs. Shared infrastructure will present opportunities to explore additional shared services as well as improve data redundancy and recoverability. This in turn provides opportunities to negotiate advantageous prices, and achieve staff efficiencies. A fully developed common infrastructure would also enable cross-campus authentication, file sharing, printing, and more. Such technology coordination would contribute to establish the overall seamless student and faculty experience we seek to develop, and facilitate sharing of curriculum and other resources. It will also make possible future collaboration and sharing in business operation systems and software, with the potential for cost savings that we cannot now realize because of our different technology platforms. In sum, a common infrastructure is the cornerstone for future shared services.

We will begin the process of developing a common technical infrastructure by analyzing data storage practices at our two colleges and determining how to significantly improve our data redundancy and recoverability. We propose to hire a consultant to help us evaluate data storage infrastructure and develop both a short-term and long-term strategy for implementation of standard and, where appropriate, shared hardware and software. Once this work is complete, we will also evaluate which additional “second tier” infrastructure (e.g., directory services, cross-campus user access, servers, a calendaring platform, etc.) could most fruitfully be shared.

- **Security.** Security threats to technology systems are increasing in both frequency and sophistication, and the costs of providing necessary security for our systems and information are mounting. Due to limited staffing and expertise, liberal arts colleges are ill-equipped to address current, let alone emerging, security issues. We propose to work together to address this challenge. During the course of the grant, we will reassign a senior technology professional with appropriate expertise to act as security advisor for both colleges. (See below.) He will be responsible for developing our understanding of security threats and best practices, redesigning our infrastructure and practices to counter likely risks, and educating both campuses regarding reduction of risks. This initiative will reduce our risks and enable us to put in place a cost-effective, collaborative, long-range security plan. In addition, contracts for penetration testing will be procured together, yielding an economy of scale.
- **Shared professional staff.** To facilitate collaboration in both the areas of infrastructure alignment and security, we will reassign one of our senior technology professionals with security

expertise to act as the information technology project coordinator and security advisor for both campuses. The reassigned staff person (Rich Graves, currently Carleton's Senior Unix Administrator and Network Security Administrator) will be a member of the technology leadership teams at both colleges. He will oversee our joint work on security protocols and practices. This will be our first experience with sharing information technology staff, and we anticipate that it will give us the opportunity to understand the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of other shared positions in information technology.

We anticipate that the infrastructure alignment work will be complete by the third year of the grant period, with ongoing work absorbed by our current staff. During year three of the project, we will evaluate the shared security advisor position, and determine whether it should continue as an ongoing shared position serving both campuses.

- **Helpdesk services.** We propose to align our Helpdesk services and experiment with shared strategies to enhance service, reduce costs, and foster a larger, common community of users across our two campuses. Both of our colleges invest significant time and energy in operating Helpdesks. Through collaboration we hope to share the costs of developing support documentation and materials, improve training and reduce training costs, and share professional expertise. We will begin by developing a common framework for Helpdesk services. This will involve selecting and purchasing a common Helpdesk tracking application, developing shared customer service training, adopting common documentation including a shared knowledge base, sharing a student scheduling application, and employing the same help-service instant messaging or chat service application. This framework will then provide the basis for integration or sharing of Helpdesk services in ways that enhance service and reduce costs (for example, through a shared call center). We also plan to explore and pilot new concepts in user support that rely on social media and crowd-sourcing. These experiments will be enhanced by drawing upon the larger community of users on the combined "virtual" campuses, and may in turn foster a sense of familiarity and community across the physical campuses.

These initiatives represent a first generation of collaboration and sharing in information technology operations, analogous to the initiatives our libraries undertook in launching the Bridge in 2003. We expect that they will bear the same fruit as the Bridge has, and can serve as a model for other colleges.

Joint health benefits plan. As part of our planning grant we explored the feasibility and likely savings to be attained by integrating our human resources services. We concluded that consolidation of our human resources departments was not likely to offer meaningful cost savings. However, our efforts did point to the need for deeper exploration of the potential for collaboration in the area of health insurance benefits for our employees. Like all enterprises, Carleton and St. Olaf face significant and rising costs related to health care. Especially in light of the new health care law, it behooves us to study carefully whether the two colleges might benefit by offering a shared health insurance plan. We propose to investigate whether by combining forces, and thereby representing more "covered lives" we may be able to work with a common health benefit broker to gain efficiencies, save money, and/or offer better coverage than would otherwise be possible. We will need both professional and legal assistance in evaluating the feasibility of such a two-college health care plan and its potential for cost savings.

3. Foster habits of collaboration

Our experience during the planning grant, and in other recent collaborative ventures, has reinforced the value of bringing together faculty and staff in low-stakes activities that enable them to get to know their counterparts at the other campus, share their ideas, and learn together. Some of the best

ideas for collaboration in our library and technology organizations have emerged from breakout discussions at joint retreats or workshops. Likewise, faculty and staff participants in our recent digital humanities workshops (supported by a planning grant from the Foundation to Macalester, St. Olaf, and Carleton) have found new areas of common interest and partners for future projects. Ideas for a possible shared political science course similarly emerged from joint meetings during the planning grant. To ensure that such synergies continue to emerge—fostering new ideas and creating habits of collaboration and sharing across our campuses—we propose to support a series of joint faculty workshops, faculty/staff training and information sharing, and staff training opportunities.

- **Faculty workshops.** Both St. Olaf and Carleton sponsor robust faculty development programs that include workshops focused on particular pedagogical, curricular, or intellectual issues. We propose to support two joint faculty workshops each year of the project. These might involve department (or interdisciplinary program) pairs discussing future directions in their disciplines/fields, or workshops focused on specific topics or pedagogical approaches (e.g., digital scholarship or academic civic engagement). Priority would be given to workshops with the potential for stimulating greater curricular collaboration.
- **Joint learning opportunities and technology training.** We propose to expand programs of joint training developed by St. Olaf and piloted as joint endeavors during the planning grant that bring together faculty and staff to share learning technology ideas and explore new applications. During the planning period, the colleges sponsored two learning communities, an [iPad Learning Community](#) and an [eText Learning Community](#), which included a series of separate and joint meetings between faculty from each campus over the course of a semester. In each year of the project, our library and instructional technology staff will organize at least two such learning communities to explore a specific educational technology. We will also offer “Teaching and Technology Showcases” as cost- and time-efficient events at which faculty and staff can participate in demonstrations of new technologies, devices, and applications. St. Olaf has employed these showcases, of half a day to one day in duration, to successfully facilitate sharing and cross-fertilization of ideas. We will expand these showcases to involve faculty and staff from both campuses, sponsoring at least one each summer.
- **“Mini-retreats” for academic administrative assistants.** Though we do not request Mellon support for this activity, in our planning discussions with faculty we repeatedly were reminded of the important role that academic administrative staff play in maintaining good communication; ensuring that important news about public events, speakers, and other activities reaches counterparts on each campus in a timely way; and ensuring that events run smoothly. A few of our departments and interdisciplinary programs have already developed practices for sharing information about speakers and events. But most have not. The colleges propose to bring together academic administrative staff in luncheon “mini-retreats” at least once each year to discuss ways they can support academic collaborations and foster good communication across our campuses.
- **Staff training workshops.** We propose to consolidate and share staff training and development activities, including training in human resource areas, and professional development for library and information technology staff. In addition to helping staff across the two campuses become more familiar with their counterparts and building a culture of sharing and collaboration, these joint training activities should result in both near- and long-term improvements in quality of service for our campuses, as well as cost savings.

4. Provide project leadership, administration, and coordination

A project of this scale and importance requires sustained, high-level leadership. As such, the colleges have committed to dedicating significant time and effort from the two Presidents and the highest-ranking academic officers at each campus—Dean of the College Beverly Nagel at Carleton, Provost and Dean of the College Marci Sortor at St. Olaf—as well as an associate dean at Carleton and an associate provost at St. Olaf. The leaders of our libraries and information technology departments will also contribute significant fractions of time to overseeing and promoting the project in their areas of responsibility.

At the conclusion of this project, Carleton and St. Olaf will have engaged in an array of collaborative activities that will meet immediate needs, lay the groundwork for areas of further collaboration, and also set new best practices in collaborative innovation among American liberal-arts colleges. One set of activities will directly advance our core academic missions: collaborative team teaching and faculty-initiated joint curricular planning projects. Online patrons of our libraries will have an integrated and seamless experience; we should also be well on our way towards a shared technology Helpdesk. We will implement shared positions in library services and information technology and we anticipate reduction of operations costs. We also anticipate a reduction in the rate of increase in costs in additional areas, including information technology and security. We will have experimented with models for collaboration and have developed a good sense of what works and what doesn't. Perhaps most importantly, by the end of the project, we will have set in place new habits of collaboration, communication, and sharing of resources and expertise. These efforts will enhance the distinctiveness of our individual missions, and they will also position us to collaborate regionally and nationally in ways that contribute to the vitality of liberal arts colleges.