

Proposal for the 2018-2019 Mellon Foundation Inclusive Teaching Grant

Submitted by Johannes Evelein, Chair of Language and Culture Studies
and Meredith Safran, incoming Chair of Classics

For a group of faculty including Dario del Puppo, Sara Kippur, Giuliana Palma, Vince Tomasso, Lauren Caldwell, Martina di Florio Gula, Jason Doerre, and Aidali Aponte-Aviles

This coming fall, colleagues from Language and Culture Studies and Classics will launch a year-long Peer Teaching Exchange group to discuss effective strategies for teaching across our curricula. Members who opt in to this group have agreed to visit each other's classes, meet one-on-one to share observations and critical insights, and convene as a group once a month (four times per semester) for a more general discussion of overarching topics, including effective use of technology, optimizing the TAsip, and experiential learning.

Underlying discussion of all such strategies for teaching is the need to understand how to implement them to the benefit of all the students in our classrooms. The Mellon grant thus provides an opportunity to bring particular focus to ensuring an equitable and inclusive classroom by addressing a traditional assumption in second-language acquisition pedagogy: that all students are familiar with the rules and terminology of English grammar before setting foot in the classroom. Even when instruction is delivered primarily through the medium of the language being learned, understanding the mechanics of grammar for the language that serves as the matrix for instruction—in our case, English—can affect students' access to educational opportunities.

When students lack confidence in their understanding of English grammar, or in their ability to function at the same level as some classmates, they can be deterred from pursuing study in another language into the intermediate and advanced levels. Critical commentaries on primary texts and scholarly discussion of rhetoric and literary analysis tend to assume an analogous understanding in English of how these phenomena manifest in the language being learned. As we recently heard from President Berger-Sweeney's presentation at this month's faculty assembly, first-generation college students and international students will compose a significant proportion of Trinity's Class of 2022. Over the past several years, we have all experienced the exponential growth in the number of students who come to Trinity with documented learning disabilities. Students in all three of these groups would benefit from our thoughtful attention to how to accommodate their needs and thus make our classrooms more inclusive.

In the context of the classroom visits that form the core of our Peer Exchange Group, faculty in LACS and Classics can help each other to recognize the impact that knowledge of English grammar has on the pedagogical strategies that we are currently employing and how various

instructors are currently attempting to compensate for differences in knowledge among our students. This diagnostic work in individual classrooms can then be discussed in our monthly meetings to pool knowledge of how various faculty address these challenges. Such conversations rooted in local teaching culture can be further informed by engagement with colleagues at other institutions, including through attendance at conferences where pedagogy is a major topic of discussion. Since the various language programs within LACS and Classics generate their own specialist discussions, we are liable to benefit from exposure to conversations happening outside of our individual fields. The various language programs may then experiment with implementing various pedagogical strategies in and out of the classroom.

To provide some concrete examples for how this grant might be implemented:

- Faculty in Classics are planning to reach out to two organizations that promote undergraduate language learning and the development of inclusive educational projects: the Paideia Institute and Synoikisis, which was started with a Mellon grant a number of years ago. Classics has invited the director of the Paideia Institute, Jason Pedicone, to visit Trinity next year to talk about Classics and digital humanities; we could also ask him to meet with members of our Peer Exchange Group to talk about inclusivity and language learning in their Aequora Project, which helps college students learning Latin to set up after-school programs for local public school students who do not have access to that educational opportunity.
- While the national organization focuses primarily on research and professional concerns in higher education, local and regional Classics organizations focus intently on pedagogy and extracurricular enrichment opportunities: the Classical Association of Connecticut and the Classical Association of New England. The annual meetings and special events hosted by these groups are hotbeds of discussion about innovative pedagogy and may serve as resources for Trinity language instructors: not only for Greek and Latin, but also for other languages with similarly complex grammar, like German, and with different alphabetic systems, like Russian and Hebrew.
- Classics has also planned to invite Diane Arnson Svarlien, a Classics PhD and professional translator of Greek and Latin poetry, to run a workshop in the fall aimed at inducing students to consider learning ancient Greek by thinking about the craft of translation. In addition to the public event, she has agreed to visit two classes. In lieu of one class visit, we propose setting up a special session for students in the POSSE program and/or who are first-generation college students. Such workshops in translation may also be appealing to other language programs. Emphasizing the larger payoff for language study may encourage students who are intimidated by the linguistic equivalent of being thrown into a cold swimming pool to take that risk, especially if faculty are mindful of providing the particular support needed to keep those students engaged.