Macalester receives $800,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for Digital Liberal Arts and Writing

St. Paul, Minn. – Macalester College has received an $800,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York to support faculty development in the areas of multimedia approaches to scholarship and learning as well as multimodal writing.

The grant, entitled "The Liberal Arts in a Digital Age," will be administered by the Jan Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching. The Center facilitates the professional development of faculty members by providing information, guidance, and tangible assistance in an environment that fosters collaborative and collegial relationships across disciplines.

The programming began January 1, 2015 and will run through June 30, 2018.

"This award bolsters campus-wide efforts to help our students become better writers and supports faculty engagement, both as scholars and educators, with the emerging field of digital liberal arts," said Prof. Paul Overvoorde, Acting Director of the Jan Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching.

Digital component
Digital resources have changed the landscapes on college campuses and altered the way in which faculty work. Faculty members now have the capacity to access large amounts of data, present information using multimedia elements, and collaborate with scholars from other disciplines across the world, resulting in their research being available to broader audiences. Adopting these approaches can be time-consuming and requires technical support when faculty are just beginning this process. As a result, this grant aims to create a community of digital learners: faculty who have used digital techniques in both their research and the classroom, those who are interested in doing so, and experts from our library and IT departments.

Writing component
Advances in digital technology have also changed the nature of writing by making possible the blending of prose with graphics, images, audio and videos. For some students, any type of writing can be difficult. After recognizing this, the faculty adopted recommendations to strengthen the writing program at the College. The grant will advance these efforts by supplementing existing professional development programming in writing pedagogy making faculty members more skilled and comfortable helping students develop their writing skills. “Multimodal writing” was chosen as the focus for this programming as it represents a form of writing that spans disciplines, preparing our students for a variety of careers.

Two current professors will guide the programming for the award. Environmental Studies Prof. Chris Wells will serve as Director of the Digital Liberal Arts, and Political Science Prof. Zornitsa Keremidchieva will be the Director of Writing.

“This grant will allow us to hire up to six post-docs to support both initiatives,” said Prof. Adrienne Christiansen, Director of the Jan Serie Center for Scholarship and Teaching, who will oversee the project. “We're very excited to have Prof. Keremidchieva lead these efforts to strengthen student writing and to oversee implementation of the new writing requirement, and Prof. Wells to supervise the digital liberal arts component of the grant.”

Macalester College, founded in 1874, is a national liberal arts college with a full-time enrollment of 2,045
students. Macalester is nationally recognized for its long-standing commitment to academic excellence, internationalism, multiculturalism, and civic engagement. Learn more at macalester.edu

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