

**MEMO TO:** Committee on Mission and Priorities (CMP)  
**FROM:** Faculty Council<sup>1</sup>  
**DATE:** October 1, 2006  
**RE:** Concept Paper on a Faculty Institute for Innovation and Leadership (FIIL)

**Overview:** The success of our current strategic planning depends in large part on sustaining a permanent culture of innovation, imagination and self-scrutiny at Smith. To this end, we propose the establishment of a Faculty Institute for Innovation and Leadership (FIIL). This Institute will foster and support innovation in the curriculum; in the creation of research and creative opportunities; and in the structures and networks that govern Smith, by providing support for numerous 'experiments in excellence.' These goals are essential for maintaining the vibrancy of any faculty, but they are particularly relevant as the College faces the retirement of one third of the faculty in the next ten years.

**What:** We imagine FIIL as an endowed, faculty governed institute. Its steering committee would be comprised of faculty from all three divisions, and would have sufficient administrative support and financial resources to enable faculty initiatives in several ways. Where appropriate, the steering committee would direct its own resources to fund new and promising initiatives. On another level, the Institute would catalyze more ambitious funding proposals, particularly those that have proven successful on a smaller scale. To this end, there will likely be close collaboration with Advancement. In essence, we view the Institute as an incubator for innovative ideas that will also maximize their positive impact by connecting like-minded people across the College.

By its nature, FIIL would energize our already vibrant structure for faculty development at Smith. An example of one type of on-going activity that FIIL might support would be the ambitious leadership seminar series that Faculty Council and the Provost have co-sponsored for the past two years. The discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of integrating existing elements of faculty development at the College into FIIL is perhaps better-suited for a larger working group. The main structural question to be determined would be how FIIL relates to CAP and CFCD, the committees with the primary responsibility for the curriculum and faculty development, respectively; the Kahn Institute, which facilitates innovative scholarship; and the Jacobson Center for Teaching and Learning.

Several successful models for sub-components of FIIL can be found at other institutions. For example, the Perlman Center for Learning and Teaching at Carleton College and the Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts at St. Olaf College both provide models for innovation in teaching and learning. The Endowment for Innovation and Leadership in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Washington supports innovation in education, research, and service at the department level, while the Center for Faculty Innovation at James Madison University does the same at the institutional level.

Our inclination is to suggest that FIIL be autonomous, endowed with sufficient resources and presence to be meaningful. To our mind, it could have a texture and impact akin to the Poetry Center or the Kahn Institute, both of which might be models for thinking about the specifics of such an entity. Yet, this does not preclude collaborative use of FIIL and Moneybook funds

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty Council acknowledges the invaluable input from numerous individuals, particularly Andrew Guswa.

toward supporting a particular curricular or faculty leadership initiative. Our intent with FIIL is to create a readily identifiable and faculty-centered body that can support and encourage the kind of innovation that often happens outside of administrative structures. FIIL would be the home for these experiments in excellence.

**Why and How:** Smith has a deep history of curricular and scholarly innovation driven by the faculty, but the majority of these efforts have occurred outside of the usual administrative structures. Thus, this level of innovation has not always manifested itself as part of the institutional culture. A central mission for FIIL would be to support a culture of creativity, risk-taking, and innovation through local, departmental and cross-departmental action. To that end, FIIL would oversee a substantial “Fund for Innovation” to which faculty could apply for *rapid* support to pursue new ideas that serve in some way to advance Smith’s mission. Here, we define innovation so as to include all of the outstanding teaching and scholarly practices that currently exist at the College, but that happen ‘under the radar’ and do not fall neatly under the rubric of funding opportunities that already exist via CFCD. In this way, the Fund for Innovation would support best practices as well as inspire new ones. A second set of Institute funds would enable faculty to get “on the scene” immediately as social and/or cultural events unfold (an “Emerging Events Fund”). Such agility would provide the means to give Smith a voice and presence during important current events, and, in essence, position Smith faculty to participate in agenda-setting in emerging issues on the national and international stage. This would also facilitate the integration of first-hand experience into the classroom and the scholarship of the faculty. For example, during the days immediately following Hurricane Katrina, Smith might have sent a multidisciplinary team to the region, which potentially would have had implications for teaching, scholarship and the College’s civic mission.

Another aim of FIIL is to reinforce a more holistic definition of what it means to be a member of the faculty at Smith. This means cultivating the desire and ability of faculty to understand, articulate and pursue the College’s larger mission. FIIL is intended to provide the material support to enable faculty to take innovative risks toward the greater excellence of the College. Taking such risks also requires supporting a culture of self-scrutiny to be able to evaluate initiatives for their effectiveness. These proposed goals of FIIL are ambitious, but they are also goals that can help Smith become an even more dynamic leader in higher education.

Part of the unspoken mission of the College historically has been to educate women to think of themselves as having the *right* to be leaders in society, and to provide them with the skills that they need to do so. As an institution, we can pursue that same mission for ourselves, imagining that Smith has not only the right, but the obligation, to lead in all that it does. We envision the Institute as a place that would inspire faculty imagination, that would broaden the scope of how faculty think about all aspects of the institution and, indeed, their individual professional lives. At the very least, the Institute would encourage faculty to continue to ask, repeatedly and with faith – what does it mean for my individual work, for my department or program, and for Smith, to be truly excellent? By supporting numerous ‘experiments in excellence,’ it is the goal of FIIL to empower and sustain such a cultural norm at the College, while simultaneously fostering a “dynamic relationship between innovation and tradition.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *History of Smith College*, 2006-07 Smith College Bulletin, p. 4.