To: Carol T. Christ and the Committee on Mission and Priorities
Re: Emerging Scholars Lectureship: A Strategic Initiative Proposal
Date: October 16, 2006
From: Faculty Council

One of the biggest challenges any institution of higher learning faces is diversifying its faculty. In fact, addressing diversity has been a central component of Smith College's institutional profile for the past ten years. There have been some successes, including the Target of Opportunity (TOO) initiative five years ago, which brought accomplished senior and promising junior scholars of color, and the authorization of an administrative position in the Office of Institutional Diversity (OID) to assist departments and programs with every search toward ensuring a strong and diverse pool.

As the College moves forward with its strategic planning, the time seems right to consider again initiatives that might dramatically increase the diversity of the faculty. To this end, we propose an Emerging Scholars Lectureship that would, annually, solicit applications from junior scholars early in their careers to be invited to give one of a number (say, for example, five) of guest lectures on campus. From that pool of invited speakers, promising visitors could be offered a one-year post-doctoral fellowship, extendable to two years, housed in a department that has both interest and need. These fellowship stays would give a department/program the flexibility to pursue tenure-line appointments in a way that is more flexible than current authorization practices, but would also add value to the College's curriculum and co-curriculum. Further, they could advertise Smith as an exciting possibility for junior scholars, thereby increasing our attractiveness to candidates when we pursue new faculty in more traditional ways. Finally, they could offer a chance to further mentor students in our rapidly diversifying student population. For example, one could imagine ways that junior and senior students might be linked to the program as hosts for the visiting lecturers, and then, in a research assistant capacity at the fellow stage. The possibilities to increase the engagement of our students in an intellectual way are abundant, even before the level of tenure-line appointments.

In some ways, this program is a modification of the TOO initiative, the differences being that the fellowship focuses on younger scholars, inserts a temporary stage (the fellowship stay) as a trial period, and does not automatically guarantee a tenure-line position. The details are left to be determined, but for sure the College would want to commit, say every four years, to making a tenure-line appointment via this initiative. This kind of fellowship works nicely with the institutional push to get departments and programs to think long-term and collaboratively. Of course, the real heart of this initiative would have to be its agility, which means that in particular cases, the movement into a tenure-line position could be expedited.

One immediate question to be worked through is how this program would relate to the two established fellowship programs currently at Smith: the Mendenhall/Five College Doctoral fellowship and the Mellon Post-Doctoral fellowship. Both of these programs bring promising junior scholars to our midst and already offer a potential pool of candidates for tenure-track hiring consideration. But the differences are also apparent: both programs are high institutional commitments and have limitations determined by

their extensive application and review processes. The proposed Emerging Scholars Lectureship could be a more flexible place for identifying interesting new scholars, and if directed by or housed under the auspices of CAP, could help support and shape curricular initiatives and speak to anticipated needs of departments and programs. (The call for lectures could be framed around broadly defined themes so as to give coherence in advertising on campus in any given year, or could be left open so as to attract the deepest field of scholars. This might also be a place where the Kahn Institute and the newly proposed Faculty Institute for Innovation and Leadership [FIIL] could be involved.) Even if this fellowship were established as a separate entity, it seems worthwhile to consider ways that CAP or some other body might think of this group of fellows as a regular, rotating pool of talent, and might even try to shape that pool to reflect anticipated curricular needs and growth in traditional and creative ways.

Penn State University has a similar program supported by the Africana Research Center and the College of Liberal Arts. Notably, the intention to increase the diversity of their faculty is not explicit in the mission or the operation of the program, called the Emerging Scholars Speakers Series. Instead, it is to "enrich the diversity of scholarship at Penn State" and to that end, their fellowships require no teaching and are not linked to the possibility of tenure-line appointments. Our sense is that Smith already does a good job of presenting a diverse intellectual spectrum via the co-curriculum, and our more pressing struggle is to diversify the members of the permanent faculty, especially in regard to the new, interdisciplinary emerging areas of scholarship. As such, our fellowship would involve teaching (one class in the first year; two if extended to a second) so as to give departments and programs involved more opportunity to learn about a fellow's interests and abilities. Further, the application process for lectures should be streamlined; here Penn State's model might offer some guide.