Heiskell Award Category: Study Abroad

Name of Institution: Washington & Jefferson College

Name of Program: The Magellan Project

Nomination Submitted by:

Name: Dr. Tori Haring-Smith
Title: President
Organization: Washington & Jefferson College
Address: 60 South Lincoln Street
         Washington, PA 15301
Tel: 724-223-6000
Email: thaningsmith@washjeff.edu

Program Website (if applicable):

Summary of Program (50-100 words):

The Magellan Project at Washington & Jefferson College is the capstone of a progressive approach to study abroad that provides all students, regardless of their socio-economic status, the opportunity to become global citizens. Students who are hesitant to venture abroad can begin with a short, faculty-led study-tour. The next step is a semester of study abroad. Those students who are ready for independent work can design international internships or individualized research projects that involve travel and study outside of the United States. This program gives students an international mindset and promotes independence of mind, self-confidence, real world problem-solving skills, and initiative.
October 14, 2009

The Andrew Heiskell Awards for Innovation in International Education
Institute of International Education
809 United Nations Plaza, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Dear Heiskell Award Evaluation Committee:

I am writing to endorse the nomination of W&J’s progressive approach to study abroad and, more particularly, The Magellan Project for the prestigious Andrew Heiskell Award for Innovation in International Education. The Magellan Project is changing W&J’s campus in important ways. Specifically, it achieves three major goals.

First, The Magellan Project provides access to global education for all our students, regardless of their socio-economic status. Less affluent students are often the ones that can benefit most from the international experience, since many have never been on a plane. But at most colleges, they are excluded from this experience for financial reasons. At W&J, however, less affluent students not only have access to college (W&J is one of the most socio-economically diverse campuses in the state of Pennsylvania), but they also are assured the opportunity to travel and study abroad through The Magellan Project.

Second, The Magellan Project encourages students to take initiative so that they can develop self-confidence. If this generation of students is to make a difference in the world, they need to have a sense of self-agency. Because Magellan Scholars devise their own projects, which they complete on their own, they learn how to formulate questions, devise a means of investigating those questions, and, in so doing, to solve real world problems. They learn that if they work hard, they can fulfill their dreams.

And finally, The Magellan Project helps students integrate their classroom learning with their lives outside of the classroom. In this way, they learn that their academic pursuits have relevance outside of the college environment. They learn to think more deeply and independently about the world and to become intellectually inquisitive, self-directed learners. It is our belief that these students will take this sense of self-agency with them to become actively engaged citizens of the world.

I hope that you will give this program careful consideration. It is making an extraordinary difference for our students and our community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tori Haring-Smith
President
October 14, 2009

The Andrew Heiskell Awards for Innovation in International Education
The Institute of International Education
809 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Director:

It gives me great pleasure to write to you in support of Washington & Jefferson College’s Magellan Project application for the Heiskell Award. As a career-long advocate of international studies initiatives and something of a pioneer from the days of nebulous programming, I recognize in the spirit and structures of the College’s Magellan Project the essence of the kind of program we could only dream about in years past. And I am equally pleased that we have combined the Magellan concept with a number of funding sources to ensure the integrity and future of the Project. Please note the contributory awards programs supporting the Magellan initiative as listed in the application.

As you have noted from the description of the Magellan Project in the application, the program not only reflects but fulfills the Heiskell criteria in terms of both the short term and long term objectives and outcomes.

Although intended primarily for individual students, the Magellan Project serves to enrich our entire Campus. Our Magellan scholars return with the kind of infectious enthusiasm that is the hallmark of successful programs. If asked to identify the most central value of Magellan, I would iterate and reiterate the convergence of the individual student with a specific area of interest, research or accomplishment. My sincerest wish is that I might introduce to you our Magellan explorers so that they might impart to you personally the enthusiasm and satisfaction that I cannot in a letter such as this.

I urge you to review favorably the presentation of Washington & Jefferson College’s Magellan Project. We believe sincerely that ours is a program worthy of consideration.

Thanking you in advance for your kind and timely consideration, I remain

Sincerely yours

John Mark Scott, Jr., Ph.D.
Professor of Russian
Coordinator Less Commonly Taught Languages

JMS/min
THE MAGELLAN PROJECT AT W&J

We would like to nominate Washington & Jefferson College's progressive approach to study abroad, with a special focus on its innovative Magellan Project, for the Andrew Heiskell Award.

The Progressive Approach to Study Abroad at W&J
Washington & Jefferson College is one of the most socio-economically diverse liberal arts colleges in Pennsylvania. It is one of only four colleges in Pennsylvania that is rated as a top liberal arts college by U.S. News and World Report and has a student population comprised of at least twenty percent (20%) of students from households earning $40,000 or less. In addition, about 28% of our students are the first in their families to go to college. Because so many of our students come from lower socio-economic strata and/or are the first in their families to attend college, they are often cautious and lack self-confidence. On national surveys like CIRP and NSSE, they report very little exposure to international ideas and to people of different races and ethnicities. When they arrive, our students, like many nationwide, also lack the ability to shape their own learning. That is, they are accustomed to leading lives programmed by others—coaches, teachers, parents—and find it difficult to dream aggressively or in unconventional ways about their own futures. For all of these reasons, it is important that these students explore life outside of their familiar communities and learn progressively to take charge of their own lives.

To meet these needs, Washington & Jefferson College has developed a progressive approach to off-campus study. Our study abroad program has grown from 4 offerings to 40 since 2006. Since many of our new study abroad programs involve exchange agreements, we now host more than 50 international students a year, thereby internationalizing the W&J campus at the same time that we send our students abroad to see the world for themselves.

Students who have little travel experience and are hesitant to travel abroad can begin exploring the world through a 3-week travel-study course during our Intersession in the month of January. These credit-bearing courses are run by W&J faculty, so students (and parents) are reassured that the students will be in a structured and chaperoned environment. Those students who are a little more confident can study abroad for a semester or a year at one of the 40 programs we offer at universities in South Africa, Egypt, The Gambia, China, Japan, Australia, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Scotland, Ireland, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico, and Korea. Finally, students who are ready for independent travel can propose their own independent travel-study program over the summer through the Geary, Walker, and Kelso Awards that are part of W&J's Magellan Project. In this way, a student could get a taste of study abroad through a short faculty-led tour, then enroll in a foreign university for a semester, and finally become an independent world traveler. Some students are ready to begin with independent travel, but many prefer the progressive approach to global citizenship.

Because our students come from very diverse socio-economic backgrounds, it is also important that we make off-campus study an equal opportunity experience. As a result, we offer scholarships for students who need assistance in order to be able to afford the short-term January travel. Each year, more than 30 students receive this support. Students pursuing semester or year-long study abroad programs at foreign universities can take their financial aid with them, paying the same amount for a study abroad experience as they would if attending W&J. Finally, to ensure that all students can afford to travel and study in the summer, W&J provides various
kinds of monetary awards through the Magellan Project. It is our goal to be able to fund every student who submits a worthy Magellan proposal so that all students can practice the lifelong learning skills required of independent work. At present, we fund about 15 students each year to study abroad in the summer.

The Magellan Project at W&J

Within the progressive approach to study abroad at W&J, the Magellan Project is the most innovative element. The Magellan Project is a growing collection of alumni-funded and foundation-funded initiatives that foster global awareness and increase student initiative and sense of self-agency through domestic and international internships, research grants, and study/travel opportunities. For the purposes of the Heiskell Award, we are focusing on the five programs within the Magellan Project that make study abroad affordable and personally challenging for our students. These are Greb Travel Awards, Swick Scholarships, the Geary Award for Freshmen, the Walker Award for Sophomores, and the Kelso Award for Juniors. (Other programs within the Magellan Project support domestic or international internships or sophisticated research projects at domestic laboratories.) Together, these programs have allowed W&J to increase study abroad opportunities, especially for students who are less affluent. They have also altered the off-campus experience, encouraging students to be more intentional, more self-directed, and more global in their perspectives. Recent Magellan Projects funded through these programs include a self-directed tour of the Holocaust sites of Europe, a research project carried out at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, a study of public health care delivery on the politically divided island of Cyprus, a tour of fortified churches in Transylvania, work with street children in Paraguay, and an exploration of hieroglyphics in Egypt. Most Magellan programs require applicants to write both a project proposal and a personal statement as well as providing a budget that includes a personal commitment of funds in addition to a request for a Magellan grant. Grants usually range from $3000-$5500.

Magellan Projects require students to write the curriculum of their own lives. In other words, these projects ask students to be largely self-sufficient and self-directed. This is the first step in adopting habits of self-directed lifelong learning. But it is a difficult one for many students. A good example is the Magellan student who won one of only four research internships for undergraduates worldwide at The Pasteur Institute in Paris. The W&J student who won this prestigious honor had to be strongly urged to apply and, once she won, she actually considered turning it down, because she was unsure of her ability to work in Paris for ten weeks. Financial constraints also made the honor difficult to accept. However, once the Magellan Program provided her the funds and thereby expressed our confidence in her ability to succeed, she undertook the project. She returned with a sense, as she told the president, that she could do anything. She found that she was as bright and capable as the other student researchers (graduate and undergraduate) there; she learned that she could navigate a large city; and she even learned to eat snails! Her story is typical of many of our students. They need to be taught to dream.

Another student, who had no travel experience but who had focused on the Holocaust in her study of European history, traveled on her own for 6 weeks throughout Europe as part of the Magellan Project in 2008. She visited not only the famous and accessible sites, but also the less famous and inaccessible ones. Prior to her departure, she lacked self-confidence and usually avoided eye-contact with passers-by. As she now says, she feels that she can do anything, and she greets everyone eye to eye. “You can learn a lot in books,” she tells her classmates, “but
until you go and see for yourself how large these camps are, you cannot really understand what
you’re reading about.” This is learning that works.

The Magellan Project arose from the observation that, while our affluent students could afford to
take a summer to travel and study abroad, our less affluent students could not do so. In this way,
they were being closed out of the learning opportunities that would enrich their lives and benefit
them in the job market and in seeking graduate and professional school admission. (Ninety-five
percent (95%) of W&J students rely on financial aid.) The Magellan Project helps to level the
playing field—it encourages all W&J students to follow their dreams.

All Magellan Projects require students to synthesize the knowledge and skills they gain in the
classroom by applying them in “real world” situations. Magellan Projects do not, therefore,
involve enrolling in another institution of higher learning. When students use their formal
learning to solve unscripted problems in a new setting, they discover how they can best
contribute to society. As national research shows and local case studies testify, this kind of
experience changes lives. It not only drives classroom learning (especially for students of color
and low socio-economic status), but it also improves persistence to degree and teaches students
to take control of their own learning for the rest of their lives.  

While other colleges and universities offer study abroad, few provide additional scholarship
support for these activities, and none combine the financial support with the kind of
independence and self-agency required for students pursuing Magellan projects at W&J.

**Long term and short term outcomes**

Outcomes for the students involved in Magellan projects are measured through reports required
of each Magellan scholar upon his or her return. These reports are reflections upon the value of
the experience, lessons learned, and relevance to both classroom study and future life goals.
Success is also measured by the number and quality of applications received for this program,
both of which have risen from the first to the second year. New students now come to W&J with
plans for a Magellan Project already in mind. The Magellan Project was recently cited as one of
the most promising educational programs in the country by the Association of American
Colleges and Universities’ LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) Initiative at the
Associations’ national conference.

The effect of The Magellan Project on the campus as a whole has been remarkable. What was
once a fairly parochial small liberal arts college now feels much more like an international
institution.

**End Notes**

1 This statistic is based on the number of W&J students awarded federal Pell grants in 2008,
which are generally given to students coming from household incomes of less than $40,000,
2007 *U.S. News and World Report* statistics on economic diversity in U.S. liberal arts colleges,
and 2007 *U.S. News and World Report* list of top liberal arts colleges. The median household
income for a family of four in Pennsylvania is $74,072.

2 See, for example, George D. Kuh, *High Impact Educational Practices: What they Are, Who
Programs Currently Included in The Magellan Project

**The Ellis Hyman Internship Awards**, which provides support for students accepting unpaid or underpaid internships domestically or abroad. Internships may be undertaken in January or in the summer. These awards are funded annually by an alumnus and will be gradually endowed.

**The Edward and Barbara Greb Travel Awards**, which provide money for students who otherwise could not afford to undertake study abroad during the College’s Intersession. These awards are funded by a growing endowment.

**John Swick Travel Awards**, which support students traveling to non-Western and other less traditional locations for Intersession or semester-long study. These awards are funded annually by an alumnus and will be gradually endowed.

**Geary, Walker, and Kelso Awards** for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors, respectively, which support internships, research projects, and study/travel domestically and abroad for the summer months. These awards are funded internally through the President’s Discretionary Fund.

**Merck Internships for Excellence in Science**, which support students conducting summer research internships in biology, chemistry, biochemistry, and physics. Each year Merck’s pledge payment provides immediate funding for scholarships as well as endowment principal.