

Practical Insights for 2018 Mountaintop Summer Experience Proposers

The Mountaintop Summer Experience will be located in the newly-renovated Building C. After Phase 1 construction is completed (January 2018), Building C will be activated with shop space, tools and machinery, and resources to help get projects and teams going. Some teams may require special facilities that exist elsewhere, and some naturally will occur in the community or in the field. With the goal of intellectual exchange and influence across teams, we do expect each team to foster connections with the others, at minimum through eagerness to be involved in exchanges with other groups and if possible by maintenance of a visible presence in the shared space.

Insights – Based on Strategic Direction for the Mountaintop Initiative

1. **Collaboration:** Students, faculty, and external partners bring different resources to the table. We want them to work collaboratively on projects that advance knowledge and/or praxis. We will simply call them projects – not student projects!
2. **Novel Intellectual and/or Creative Pathways:** Focus on projects, not experiences. We are not, in general, planning to fund “experiences” for students to go to a new location and experience something. We welcome projects which require field work in other parts of the world, but will have the same expectations for taking new intellectual and/or creative pathways.
3. **Potential for Impact:** Define your project’s potential for impact and how it advances knowledge, praxis, or, ideally, both. If the project may not realize the impact(s) at the end of the Summer, how will your project continue, and how will your dream stay alive?
4. **Continuity Models:** Proposals for the 2018 Mountaintop Summer Experience must demonstrate clear intention of the project’s continuity beyond the summer, or at minimum address the question of continuity. There are many different models for continuing a project’s work beyond the summer session. One such model is for a project to continue through existing courses with the project components accounting for a significant portion (40% or greater) of the student’s grade. This is the preferred and best model, and encourages creative inquiry in the classroom. Other possibilities include provisional courses like Cinq 397 (Inquiry to Impact Group Projects, 3 credits), in which projects can continue for multiple semesters with teams of students participating and then passing the baton on to the next team, and the next, and Cinq 395 (Creative Inquiry Independent Projects, 1-4 credits), in which 1-3 students can pursue one- or two-semester projects with a faculty mentor and be eligible for up to \$300 in project funding. Finally, there are continuation models involving external (and internal) grants and awards, hiring work study students to advance the project, and co- or extra-curricular channels.

Based on the review process for the 2017 cycle which involved some 25 evaluators, here are some practical insights for Mountaintop project proposers:

Do’s – observations from Mountaintop 2017 reviewers:

1. **Be Specific.** The more specificity and detail you provide in your proposal, the better. While project outcomes may not always be known, reviewers want to know what the dream is, and the kind of impact it can have in the world.
2. **Be Ambitious.** Reviewers loved projects with big dreams with potential for big impacts. Projects can arc from theory to practice, or practice to theory.

3. **Be Realistic.** If your project needs five years and/or \$10 Million to come to fruition, that's okay. Tell us what you will realistically accomplish in the summer and how you will realistically get access to larger resources to realize the dream.
4. **Be Rigorous.** Do your homework, and explain exactly how you are building on prior art and standing on the shoulders of giants.
5. **Be Compelling.** Is this really a brilliant new intellectual or creative pathway worthy of Lehigh students and faculty...or is this a project where we can hire someone for \$10/hour and get the job done?
6. **Be Committed (Have Skin in the Game).** Reviewers love to see how passionate you are about the project. If you are pursuing extramural funding, that's great. Tell us what resources you have already secured and what resources you are chasing. Successful Mountaintop 2017 teams had skin in the game through startup funds, foundation grants, open-ended industry support (industry sponsorship for specific outcomes, for example, is not a good fit), federal funds, committed students from other organizations, etc.

Don'ts - here are some of the most frequently cited critiques from last year's MTSE review process – to be used as a guide towards writing proposals:

- Project idea has already been well-studied; there are already existing frameworks out in the world.
- Core idea is less of a “game-changer” and more of a specific, targeted solution to a specific problem that could be addressed in an existing course.
- Unclear what continuation could (or will) be.
- Lack of specificity in project scope, plans, and/or intentions.
- Commitment of either students or mentors is clear, but not from both. Project seems more driven by a single person (whether student or faculty) than a team.
- Project is too close to a senior thesis.
- Community of practice/relevancy is not clear.
- Project lacks external calibration or partnership/broader outreach opportunities.
- Not enough potential for interdisciplinarity.
- They can just hire a student for 30 hours at \$10/hour to accomplish this project.
- Project is not rigorous enough, not a good use of institutional resources.