



Sit Lux: Deans' Initiative for Interdisciplinary Innovation

A Program for Collaborative Academic Exploration

What – A call for proposals to establish interdisciplinary teams of students, faculty, and/or staff in Summer 2023 to tackle novel challenges.

Background: One of the key long-term goals associated with UMU's academic redesign into three colleges was to prevent disciplinary silos by creating new academic relationships among faculty. The deans value interdisciplinary programming and continue to develop and facilitate opportunities for cross-college collaboration and partnerships. A second goal of the redesign is to reaffirm student engagement as a primary faculty responsibility given our commitment to remain a small, teaching-centered university.

To continue supporting the two long-term goals noted above, the deans are pleased to announce a third year of the Sit Lux Initiative, which builds upon the mechanism of interdisciplinary teams to collaborate on a community need, a novel curriculum, or a wicked problem. To guide our work, we continue to use the broad definition of interdisciplinarity found in Julie Thompson Klein's chapter from *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (2017): "Integrated designs prioritize focusing, blending, and linking."ⁱ The Sit Lux projects will follow the Nuffield Foundation's Group for Research and Innovation's 1975 bridge-building metaphor where disciplines work together to tackle a topic or wicked problem.ⁱⁱ

The Sit Lux: Deans' Initiative for Interdisciplinary Innovation projects coalesce around Mount Union's institutional core values of service and student learning. The Sit Lux Initiative illustrates how, as a collective academic community, faculty, students, and community partners may engage collaboratively "to bring light into the world" through impactful service and community-based learning. Each interdisciplinary innovation project is predicated upon high-impact practices with the promise of providing deeper engagement of our students that extends and transcends traditional modes of instruction.

The Sit Lux projects are primarily framed around the high-impact practices of student-faculty research and service learning.ⁱⁱⁱ Student-faculty research provides an outlet for individual or collaborative student projects, typically supervised by faculty members where the role of faculty is not only to oversee the design, development, and implementation of the student initiative but also to serve as faculty mentors and potentially as inquiry collaborators as the process unfolds. Students benefit from these partnerships with faculty through continued development of their own problem-solving skills. Additionally, students are afforded increased opportunities for enhanced high-level interactions with their respective faculty, typically leading to more satisfying educational experiences. Outcome opportunities include applications through publication, presentations, or project implementation.

Service learning provides linkages between community needs and an academic course or curriculum. It should be noted that service learning is distinctly different from cocurricular volunteerism given the faculty supervision and curricular connections embedded within the service-learning model. Additionally, well-designed experiential learning initiatives should embed opportunities for structured reflection. Service learning provides an authentic vehicle for students to engage meaningfully in social responsibility, which ultimately offers positive impacts on academic and civic outcomes.

In an Association of American Colleges & Universities report, Kuh (2008) describes the positive effects that are a result of student participation in high-impact activities such as undergraduate research and service learning. Additionally, in a subsequent report by Kuh, O'Donnell and Reed (2013) there was a positive correlation between deep learning and academic rigor embedded within both high-impact practices of undergraduate research and service-learning initiatives.

Outcomes and Feedback from Years One and Two:

Outcomes:

- Eight weeks of intensive engagement of research and community collaboration for 10 UMU faculty and 12 students in Summer 2021 and 6 UMU faculty and 10 students in Summer 2022.
- Students have had diverse research experiences, including analyzing 300 surveys, 25 interviews, and archival research.
- Students and faculty developed STEM Coding modules currently being used in high schools across the state of Ohio and their experiences helped support the Data Science program.
- Students have built on their Sit Lux work for SCE projects and conference presentations.
- Groups have worked with community members and organizations such as the Mayor of Alliance, Alliance City Schools, UMU's Peace Building Society, UMU's Diversity Initiatives Steering Committee (DISC), Akron Children's Hospital, Louisville Public Library, and UMU's Library.
- There has been continued collaboration with our sister school, Akron North High School.
- Participants have stayed connected, recognizing the overlap across their many fields of study. One group even formed a Math Club.
- Students have enhanced communication skills, seen a project through from the beginning to end, and prepared for competitive internship opportunities and graduate school.

Student and Faculty Feedback:

- One student from Summer 2021 noted, "...felt like I was part of an active change in what I was doing...I felt that I made a difference and that our entire group accomplished something. It was a great feeling to be engaged in this change."
- A Summer 2022 student commented, "...I appreciated how we had a clear community partner. I was able to build relationships with the staff members" which allowed the student to know they were making a positive impact on those community members with whom they were working.
- A Summer 2022 student shared their appreciation at having the opportunity to work with a diverse group of peers with various lived experiences.
- One faculty member stated that they were impressed with their students' research and work while another faculty member appreciated having the opportunity to work with students outside the classroom.

Parameters

What: Each interdisciplinary team will identify the community need, pedagogical/curricular topic, and/or wicked problem with which they will work. By working with a designated community or regional partner, the campus team will bring the need/topic/problem into the community. The Sit Lux Initiative is designed to be a short-term experience, like many implementation grants. Each team will develop their project outcomes and report on those outcomes at Sit Lux Initiative sharing opportunities through the 2023-2024 academic year.

When: Projects will run May 15-July 7, 2023. Projects must include a full eight weeks of student engagement. Students will work for 28 hours each week on their Sit Lux project and for 12 hours in a position that gives back to the campus. The on-campus work assignment will be determined by the college deans in consultation with the students. Students cannot work over 40 hours/week for the University of Mount Union. Students should not make on-campus work commitments during the Sit Lux Initiative schedule but are welcome to find work with campus offices/departments before and/or after the eight-week Sit Lux period.

Who: Each project must have at least 2 faculty/staff members, 3-5 student researchers, and at least one community partner (which can be finalized as part of the project). More than one discipline must be represented in each team, as every project will benefit from a diversity of thought and experience. Proposals may be initiated by faculty, staff, and/or students. Once the Summer 2023 projects are selected, a call will go out campus-wide for participants (either a call for student researchers or a call for faculty mentors). The team leaders, those writing the grant, can be predetermined but the team participants will be determined through this campus call.

Application Process

Project proposals should be no more than 600 words in length and must be submitted by 12 noon on February 1, 2023.

Please submit a proposal to the college deans that includes the following:

- Name and contact information for the Project Lead/s.
- Name and contact information from either the primary community collaborator or a list of potential community collaborators. If you need assistance finding a community partner, please reach out to Abby Schroeder in the Regula Center.
- A description of the project and its potential outcomes (e.g., course, curriculum, engagement opportunity).
- A draft project budget (see budget guidelines below).
- A brief description of the number of faculty, staff, and/or students who would be engaged in this summer effort and their envisioned roles.

Please feel free to reach out to the college deans to discuss your project idea and clarify questions that may emerge as you prepare your proposal.

Budget Guidelines:

We anticipate that each project will warrant \$15k-20k of funding, but we will consider any proposal. A project budget, detailing how funds will be allocated, must accompany the project proposal. If there are other sources of funding proposed to supplement this project (e.g., departmental operating funds or restricted accounts), please describe them.

Students will be paid \$11/hour, 40 hours/week, for the eight weeks of Sit Lux work. Students will be expected to clock in and clock out and pay dates will follow the student worker pay schedule for the year. Summer on-campus housing costs \$110/week. Students can opt for an \$880 housing stipend that will help cover on-campus housing for the duration of the Sit Lux work. (Please note, the housing stipend is taxable income and will not cover the full cost of housing. Students who wish to live in campus housing before and/or after the eight weeks of the Sit Lux Initiative will need to cover those housing expenses themselves.)

Faculty team members can propose varied levels of stipends based upon their individual level of contribution to a project, noting that at least one member should be available to mentor a project's students across the entire eight-week period. Half of each faculty stipend will be paid in June and the other half in July once the project's outcomes have been submitted to the college deans.

Additional Opportunities Afforded by the Sit Lux Initiative:

Once the Summer 2023 projects are approved, the deans will work with team leaders and our partners at North Akron High School to determine if some of their faculty and/or students might connect with any of the supported projects. By bringing our North Akron partners into the Sit Lux Initiative, we further develop our sister school partnership and potentially bring college-level experiential opportunities to Akron North's students.

Additionally, the three colleges are continually expanding our resource councils/advisory boards, with the aim of developing new curricular partnerships, student internships, and increased faculty exposure to industry leaders that will assure that our curriculum prepares students for professional success. The Sit Lux projects intentionally build some of the community partnerships that will assist with further resource council/advisory board development.

Finally, these interdisciplinary initiatives provide our UMU students with authentic ways in which to fulfill and embody our UMU mission of preparing our students for fulfilling lives, meaningful work, and responsible citizenship.

ⁱ Julie Thompson Klein, "Typologies of Interdisciplinarity: The Boundary Work of Definition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, 2nd Edition, ed. Robert Frodeman (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2017), 24.

ⁱⁱ Klein, "Typologies of Interdisciplinarity: The Boundary Work of Definition," 26.

ⁱⁱⁱ George D. Kuh and Ken O'Donnell, with Case Studies by Sally Reed, *Ensuring Quality and Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale* (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2013).