

**BRIDGED RETIREMENTS:
A STRATEGY FOR PERPETUAL FACULTY AND CURRICULUM RENEWAL IN THE HUMANITIES
AT THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY**

Proposal Summary

Faculty retirements should be the perfect occasion to re-energize research, teaching, and campus-wide strategic objectives, but several factors have conspired to frustrate the efforts of colleges and universities to achieve this potential. Chief among these have been the diminished pace with which they have been able to hire new faculty and the tendency that colleges and universities, like most organizations, have had to use this opportunity for change as a chance to reproduce the status quo. This has had three coordinated consequences: a constrained pipeline into academic careers for young scholars; an inertia that prevents departments from responding nimbly to new trends in their disciplines; and an inability of the institution as a whole to use new hires to achieve strategic objectives, including building new interdisciplinary programs. This proposal addresses all three of these concerns, with an emphasis on the third.

The College of William & Mary proposes to create three flexible positions in humanities fields that will provide the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences with a perpetual opportunity to get the most out of faculty retirements. Departments that anticipate retirements in the next two-four years will be able to apply to the Dean for new tenure-eligible faculty positions that will serve as early, or bridge, replacements for the anticipated retirements. The Dean will allocate these early replacements conditioned, in part, on the commitments of departments to use the new hires to contribute to important goals of the College, including support for interdisciplinary programs, general education, and other strategic targets. When the retirements occur, these positions will revert to the three-position pool that the Dean will continue to use for the same purpose.

The foundational premise of this proposal is that these positions will give the Dean critical leverage to incentivize department participation in emerging campus-wide initiatives. The result will be a one-time, start-up investment from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that will in effect permanently “endow” this significant opportunity to energize faculty and bring their research and teaching efforts into alignment with evolving cross-departmental and campus-wide objectives.

Context and Rationale

It has been well-documented that the explosion in tenure-eligible jobs that deans expected to be filling in the 1990s and 2000s never fully materialized. An important cause, of course, was the elimination of the mandatory retirement age by Congress in 1993. High job satisfaction, working in tandem with improved health benefits, stagnant salaries, and economic uncertainty, have had the overall effect of keeping faculty on the job. Another factor has been the long-term national shift from tenure-line faculty to contingent positions, which has had a significant secular impact on the composition of instructional faculty as the bulge of faculty hired during the 1960s and 1970s have been replaced. The Mellon Foundation has addressed this issue through various retirement incentive programs and, most recently, by funding the ACLS post-doctoral program. The ACLS program represents an important effort to respond to the present crisis, but unless we confront the issue of retirement, we will not fundamentally alter the situation.

The simultaneous graying and shrinking of the tenure-eligible professoriate makes it difficult for institutions to embrace new research or curricular specialties, achieve diversity objectives, and realize the economies that should attend the replacement of well-paid senior faculty with new assistant professors. These considerations are magnified by the tendency of academic departments to be conservative in their hiring practices, cloning retiring faculty with new colleagues who will fill their precise niche in the department's research agenda and course offerings. Operating together, these factors can easily form a wall of granite blocking the growth of new interdisciplinary initiatives and the best-laid aspirations of strategic plans and curriculum reviews that are attempting to shape the institution's evolving priorities and personality.

Many of these general trends hold at William & Mary. Despite a phased-retirement program, several of our humanities departments have significant, and in some cases growing, fractions of their faculties that are currently 60 years old or older: 44 percent in Religious Studies; 36 percent in Art and Art History; and 34 percent in English, the College's largest department. These faculty members have not had raises in four years, and a recent interpretation of the state's retirement law has made it much less advantageous for faculty to retire. At the same time, we have recently completed a strategic plan and launched a new curriculum review, and students have shown a keen and growing interest in interdisciplinary degree programs (almost 30 percent of the College's Arts & Sciences graduates now receive a major in an interdisciplinary field, while fifteen years ago fewer than 10 percent did). There is, then, a mal-alignment between our need for ordered change and factors linked to retirements that impede this change.

The three positions that we propose will give the Dean an effective tool for incentivizing departments to see retirements as an opportunity for them to reintegrate with institution-wide priorities, as well as to meet specific departmental needs. We will dedicate the first round of bridge positions, which will all be available in year one of the grant, to meeting cross-departmental needs in International/Global Studies. These positions will serve as a significant addition, and complement, to the three Global Studies post-doctoral positions we are currently filling thanks to generous support from the Mellon Foundation. Thereafter, the positions will almost certainly become available on a staggered schedule and the Dean will use them for institution-wide research and teaching needs that present themselves as that schedule becomes clear. All department commitments will be formalized with appropriate memoranda of understanding and joint appointments.

Our recently completed strategic plan places significant emphasis on encouraging faculty renewal, as well as on supporting both interdisciplinary and international research and teaching. The recent series of grants that the Mellon Foundation has awarded to William & Mary has also emphasized interdisciplinarity, internationalization, and faculty renewal. This proposal picks up on all of these themes, advancing them further with a tactical use of bridged retirements. Studies indicate that the research and teaching performances of older faculty do not typically deteriorate over time; the problem is less the impact of older faculty themselves and more the opportunity costs, the institution's inability to support new programs and hire a vibrant new generation of teachers and scholars, that a graying faculty can impose. Our bridged retirement plan, used in conjunction with an attractive phased retirement option, will address this need.

Bridged Retirements at the College of William & Mary			
	Salaries for three new hires in humanities departments	Benefits	Full compensation
Year 1	\$180,000 (\$60,000 X 3)	\$72,000 (40% benefits)	\$252,000
Year 2	\$183,600 (\$61,200 X 3) This reflects an anticipated 2% inflation over Year 1	\$73,440 (40% benefits) This reflects an anticipated 2% inflation over Year 1.	\$257,040
Year 3	\$187,272 (\$62,424 X 3) 2% inflation over Year 2	\$74,908 (40% benefits) 2% inflation over Year 2	\$262,180
TOTALS	\$550,872	\$220,348	\$771,220