

Primary Request for Proposal (RFP) and Ask

RFP: France-Merrick Foundation

<http://www.france-merrickfdn.org/education>

Letter of Inquiry (LOI), containing the following information:

- Legal organization name, mailing address and 501c3 Tax ID number of the organization/fiscal sponsor
- Contact information (name, title, phone number and email address) for the person who can best answer questions about the LOI
- Brief description of organization including mission, population served, scope of activities and current organizational budget
- Brief description of the proposed project for which funding is sought
- Total cost of the proposed project, any funds already committed, the fundraising gap and the amount of the request
- Timeline over which funding is needed, and overall timeline of the project
- Brief description of your organization's racial demographics for CEO/ED/leader, board members and staff, following the chart, listed below.

Proposal: Organizations that receive a proposal invitation and guidelines have approximately one month to prepare and submit a proposal. As general practice, we request organizational budgets, board lists and audits as part of our application.

Sample of Past Education Grants:

- \$500,000 to Morgan State University for the France-Merrick Endowed Scholarship for low income-students.
- \$150,000 to Calvert Hall College High School for endowed scholarships for Baltimore City and Country students.
- \$500,000 to University of Maryland, Baltimore Community Engagement Center.

Secondary Request for Proposal (RFP) and Ask

RFP: T. Rowe Price Foundation

<https://www.troweprice.com/corporate/us/en/what-sets-us-apart/corporate-responsibility/community-commitment/trp-foundation.html>

Letter of Inquiry (LOI), containing the following information:

https://www.troweprice.com/content/dam/trowecorp/Pdfs/For%20Website_TRPF%20Standard%20Application%20Preview_2021_v5.pdf

Online Portal: trpfoundation.salesforce.com

Proposal: For most grants, our team will approach an organization directly to invite them to submit a grant proposal. Throughout the year we also review unsolicited grant proposals that align to our giving areas. Our grants are unrestricted for general operating purposes to help expand an organizations' mission and ability to do their important

work. Our funding primarily supports organizations in Baltimore as well as in Colorado Springs, San Francisco and New York that have an approved nonprofit status [Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) sections 509(a)(1), 509(a)(2) and qualifying 509(a)(3) supporting organizations] or that are fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3) public charity.

Sample of Past Education Grants:

- \$500,000 - Towson University College of Business and Economics Finance Lab.
- \$750,000 - Enoch Pratt Free Library.



October 21st, 2022

**CBE Writing Proficiency
Program**
8000 York Road
Towson, MD 21252-0001

Gary Williams, Program Officer
France-Merrick Foundation
2 Hamill Road, Suite 302
Baltimore, MD 21210

Dear Mr. Williams:

The France-Merrick Foundation's focus on providing educational grants to universities and colleges that provide educational opportunities to under-represented student populations in the Greater Baltimore area is directly in-line with Towson University's (TU) values that foremost espouses respect for diversity and inclusion and enriches the educational experience of students. Towson University has been recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* for inclusive excellence, with more than 57.4% of first-year students identifying as an under-represented or ethnic minority. Additionally, Towson University serves student across the socio-economic spectrum with 54% of students receiving needs-based financial aid. Your past support of critical programs that promote diversity and equity in education is one of the many reasons we are reaching out to you today—your contributions to the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, MdBio Foundation, and Urban Teachers demonstrate your commitment.

Since 2010, the Towson University College of Business and Economics (CBE) Writing Proficiency Lab has provided a network of local educators and employers aiming to optimize students' academic and occupational achievements by investing in their communications skills. The lab offers TU students a productive space where they can meet and collaborate with trained graduate assistants (Writing Fellows) to hone their skills in task completion, critical thinking, research, business writing, and presentations. The lab provides services to over 3,000 students across the campus community each year. As a testament to the program's quality, more than 97% of students reported being satisfied or highly satisfied with the services and training provided.

At the beginning of each semester, the CBE measures students' performance in critical business communications skills: writing and presenting. Based on this assessment, students work to improve their core business communication skills. The program found that nearly 30% of students must pass the initial evaluation, demonstrating a severe skill gap that cannot be overlooked. In the landmark report, "Writing: A Ticket to Work ... or a Ticket Out" by National



Writing Commission, skills in writing and presentations are deemed marker skills for professional success. As a remedy to this issue, our business communications courses help students develop skills in drafting, editing, formatting, and proofreading. After rigorous training, we have been able to achieve a 93% pass rate on our final evaluation. This high pass rate would not be possible without the support of our Writing Fellows.

As such, we need to ensure that our Writing Fellows are sustainably funded to meet the current demand for the lab and expand our services to help develop students at each stage as they progress toward degree completion. After donations from benefactors such as McCormick and Company, PNC Bank, and several smaller donors, we find ourselves with a funding gap, and we need to maintain our previous level of service to the campus community.

Due to budget cutbacks based on the sunseting of previous grants, we have been forced to reduce our number of Writing Fellows (from four part-time totaling 40 hours of lab time per week to two at 20 hours totaling an in-take 300-400 students). Further, these cutbacks forced us to eliminate our physical lab space by moving to an online modality, hindering equity of access across our student population. In fact, according to a 2018 study from *Communication Research*, nearly 20% of college students could not access reliable computing technology.

With your support, we can improve equitable access to the lab by reopening our physical space for personalized one-on-one appointments through an in-kind donation from our school. Moreover, we can establish three permanent Writing Fellows (two part-time and one full-time) and increase our available lab hours from 20 to 40 hours, allowing us to double our student intake to 600-800 30-minute sessions per semester. In addition, we can expand our program and provide focused training that compliments the lessons from their business communications courses. These lessons are based on timely feedback from local business leaders who contribute to our college's advisory board. Such lessons include resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, analytical writing, and research.

To achieve our goals and expand our services, we are seeking a grant of \$735,000 to create an endowment to fully fund three (3) France Merrick Writing Fellows in perpetuity. Instead of providing funding for a limited time, perhaps five years, a fully endowed program would allow us to sustain the program for decades. Moreover, your endowment will impact not only our undergraduate students by providing critical communications training but also some of our best and brightest graduate students from the professional writing program by providing stipends and course waivers to our Writing Fellows.



Our goal is to make our peer-led tutoring a permanent and integrated component of our business curriculum. As a result, all students could access high-quality tutoring to improve their business communications skills. The impact of your support will be immediately demonstrated by the increased availability of access to our Writing Fellows and a marked increase in lab intake to levels well above what was demonstrated before our funding shortfall. Additionally, as our students move through the program and graduate into the local workforce, they will strengthen the workplace environment by espousing the skills they learned at the Towson University College of Business and Economics. The net effects of our program will, no doubt, ripple through the greater community.

In closing, thank you for taking the time to consider our request. Please grant us the opportunity to submit a full proposal to show you how impactful your support will be. That said, we are excited by the prospect of working with the France-Merrick Foundation to improve equitable access to high-quality training, mentoring, and coaching in writing and presentations, vital career skills for our students as they seek gainful employment upon graduation. We look forward to discussing our proposal in depth; if you have the time, please reach us at 410-299-7791.

Sincerely,

/s/

Christopher Thacker
Lecturer II, Business Excellence Program



The CBE Writing Proficiency (CWPP) exists to provide students with the tools to become competent communicators within their chosen field. Our mission is to improve critical communication skills and adjacent skills of critical thinking, research, and collaboration to foster a high return on investment for our students. The outcome of this investment is to improve the employability of our students within the Greater Baltimore, Maryland area. Our success is accomplished through the tight integration of our writing lab within the curriculum of the Towson University College of Business and Economics (CBE). Through the efforts of our program director and CBE Writing Fellows, our lab helps address the skills gap identified by the industry by providing peer-led tutoring services in space and accessible space within the college.

Mission: To Improve Critical Communications Skills

The primary mission of the CWPP is to help CBE students master their business communications skills: writing and presenting. We want students to build skills that will be effective for a lifetime. Our lab is not merely proofreading or grammar service, but rather, students working with CWPP are provided tools to learn and improve, supplementing the instruction from the CBE curricula—the Lab is tightly integrated with the Business Excellence Program and its series of courses: BUSX301 Business Communications and BUSX 460 Professional Experience.

Core values are focused on growth. We embrace return-on-investment (ROI) and long-term growth as values—if students make an investment in writing, we will help make sure they get a valuable return. We want to teach skills, instill habits, reward diligence, and praise excellence.

Improving knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) is our goal. The CWPP exists to help students meet or exceed the standards set-forth by the CBE's profile of a graduate: thirteen unique criteria that demonstrates the transformation of a student into professional who will make an impact in and beyond Maryland. These criteria include business knowledge, communication, critical and creative thinking, technology, team work and leadership, and ethics.

The CBE Writing Proficiency Lab helps the goals of the college by focusing two critical KSA as outlined by the CBE Profile of a Graduate:

- Write professional documents that provide audience-centric content, rhetorically appropriate organization, and follow accepted conventions of design, style, grammar, punctuation and mechanics.
- Perform persuasive, supported, audience-centric, oral presentations, and develop skills in creating content, arranging content, creating visuals, and using conventions of delivery.

Development of adjacent skills in critical thinking, research, and collaboration. In addition to KSAs skills in writing and presentations, the CWPP also helps develop student's critical thinking, research, and collaboration. These skills help students transform data using information literacy to improve the credibility of their work. More, the Lab also encourages collaboration, which improves their overall ideation. The importance of these skills cannot be understated. In a survey of employers, The Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 93% stated, "A demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve problems is important" (AACU, 2012). Underscoring the importance of collaboration, the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that of the top three skills that employers want, the top two deal with collaboration with writing a close third (NACE, 2021).

Improving the employability of our students. CBE is a pipeline that provides unique talent to companies within the Greater Baltimore Metropolitan area and throughout Maryland, D.C., and Northern Virginia—88% of our graduates are currently employed in the State of Maryland with an average full-time starting salary of \$52,855 (Towson University, 2022). To fill this employment pipeline, CBE bookends its Business Excellence Program with our BUSX301 Business Communication course (taken in late sophomore/early junior) and our BUSX460 Professional Experience course (taken in early to late senior year). In our Business Communications course, we develop students' theoretical understanding of business communications through lectures, workshops, and challenging assignments. Using the skills developed in this course, students apply their knowledge through practical applications in a

mandatory internship in our Professional Experience course. The skills developed and applied foster proven employability within the local job market.

Purpose: To Help Students Achieve Success

The CWPP is a product of Towson University's commitment to serving our students by helping them develop their business communication skills. The Lab is tightly integrated within the programs offered at the College of Business and Economics and demonstrates our commitment to quality education as evidenced by our accreditation process. The Lab is managed by a director and career educator passionate about providing high-quality training, tutoring, and mentorship to students. This passion is reflected in the Writing Fellows drawn from the best and brightest graduate students from the professional writing program.

Unique vision: Integration with business communications course. CBE prides itself on the integration of its programs, courses, and resources. The CWPP offers services to all students throughout the college, but is closely linked to support the college's CORE 9 advanced writing course: BUSX301 Business Communications. In the course, faculty provide novel assignments to connect the theoretical aspects of communication with the applied and practical. Students learn to develop communication strategies to develop highly persuasive documents and presentations of the sort that business professionals rely on to achieve individual and organizational communications goals.

As a part of the CBE's commitment to providing a high-quality education, BUSX301 Business Communications, serves a gatekeeping course that students must pass to advance to upper-division courses. Our commitment to our students is not only evidenced by the teaching of critical skills, but also by the measurement of the mastery of these skills as a part of our Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation process. This accreditation given to only six percent of the world's business schools and more than 90 percent of the top-ranked business schools (AACSB, 2022).

Through tight integration between the CWPP and business communications curriculum, we help students make measurable improvements in their writing and presentation skills. To illustrate: our business communications program evaluates writing and presentation skills at the beginning of each semester. On average, 30% or more of students receive an initial score of "below expectations" on the evaluation. Through lectures, activities, assignments, and coaching from the instructor and the CWPP Writing Fellows, the scores on the final evaluation at the end of the semester increases to 93% who pass with at least a score of 70 (meets expectations) or at least a score of a 90 (exceeds expectations). This result means that 90% of students who initially failed the evaluation were able to receive at least a score of 70 (meets expectations) by the end of the semester.

Mission driven by Program Director Quincey Johnson. Our lab is a product of its executive director, Quincey Johnson, who developed the program through a passionate commitment to the development of student communication skills. Mr. Johnson holds multiple advance degrees including Law (JD) and Liberal Arts (MA) and is a career-educator with over twenty years of experience providing high-quality training, tutoring, and mentorship to the students of the college. In addition to his position as the executive director of the Lab, Mr. Johnson serves as the program coordinator for BUSX301 Business Communications and Legal Studies.

CBE Writing Fellows draws from a pool of talented graduate students. The Lab is staffed entirely by graduate students from Towson University's Professional Writing Program (PRWR). These graduate students are future leaders in academia and the public and private sector domains of writing for the public and private sectors, technical writing and information design, teaching writing, journalistic writing, scientific writing, and creative writing. With a strong background in communications as evidenced by their acceptance to the PRWR program, these graduate students are trained in their rigorous coursework of rhetoric, editing, style, teaching/composition studies, and grammar. Leveraging their coursework our graduate assistants share their unique experience and insights to provide training, tutoring, and mentorship to CBE students.

Background: Program Built to Address a Skills Gap

The CWPP was conceived by the executive director, Quincey Johnson, as a product of the Great Recession (December 2007-June, 2009). Driven by the need to help students develop their employability in an uncertain labor market, Mr. Johnson sought to help students become more competitive. After researching the marker skills for business success, Mr. Johnson focused his attention on communication and critical thinking skills—two skills that work synergistically. Utilizing his research, Mr. Johnson began with the business communications faculty to measure students' skills through an evaluation that was dubbed state-of-the-practice by AACSB. Our business communication evaluation is given at the beginning of our business communications course to assess the state of our student's writing and presentation skills. Using a business scenario provided by their instructor, students must research, compose, and present a project that solves a real-world business problem. From the evaluation results conducted each semester through all sections of the business communication course, he identified that student data supported a woeful gap in these skills. However, despite these gaps, students showed measurable improvements through focused training. Yet, there still was so much more that could be done; hence, the idea for the writing lab grew from the need to provide focused support to business students.

CBE Writing Proficiency Lab provides a safe space to for students to grow. Our college pride's itself on the Lab being respite for students, who desire to learn and grow as professionals. The Lab offers students tutoring and mentorship that helps them reach their potential.

Students served by the Lab. The CWPP serves the entire university community (over 110 majors) with over 77% of the students coming from the State of Maryland. The focus of the lab to help students improve their business communications skills. As such, the majority of our students are drawn from departments within the Towson University College of Business and Economics, these include, Accounting, Business Analytics & Technology Management, Economics, Finance, Management, Marketing, and Legal Studies.

Services offered by the Lab. The CWPP offers five critical services to students of the College of Business and Economics--

- **Independent and Thorough Task Completion** - Before beginning the tutoring session, our Writing Fellows examine the student's assignment and grading rubric. In consultation with the student, our Writing Fellows help the student organize the assignment materials/deliverables, and aids them in identifying the assignment's audience and the requisite questions to be addressed.
- **Critical Thinking and Research** - If necessary, our Writing Fellows provide practical advice on evaluating and researching information required to make a valid and credible claim based on the issue addressed by the student's writing assignments. In addition, the Writing Fellows help the student navigate the pitfalls of attribution, citations, and style prescribed by the essential style guides used by the university and college, including APA, MLA, and Chicago.
- **Writing and Revision** – Our Writing Fellows focus most of their time on helping students hone their skills by developing rhetorically effective, audience-centric documents that use the standard conventions of plain language: clear thesis, paragraphing (structure and cohesion), usability (headings, page layout, typography, figures/tables), style (word choice, grammar, mechanics). The Writing Fellows teach students the best practices of evaluating and correcting their documents to meet these standards--to improve understanding between the writer and the reader.
- **Effective Oral Presentations** - Our Writing Fellows also advise students on oral presentations, which is interlinked with writing as a form of composition. In short, students use the same processes to compose a presentation as they do a document and our Writing Fellows provide guidance and directed feedback to help student enhance their presentations: content, arrangement, and delivery.
- **Respectful Collaboration** - Using multiple formats ranging from one-on-one and group sessions, our Writing Fellows serve as models for professional collegiality and decorum as students work to solve often novel

problems that require collaboration. Our Writing Fellows help students navigate the collaborative process and help them develop skills that foster interdependence with their peers to meet shared goals/outcomes.

Towson University's College of Business and Economics' Writing Proficiency Program (CPWW) supports a state-of-the-practice curriculum that demonstrates measurable improvement in the communications skills of its students. This improvement has been a part of the college's commitment to providing a high-quality education to its students, as evidenced by its highly coveted accreditation from Association to Advance Collegiate Schools in Business (AACSB). Our program is designed to help provide peer-led tutoring in communication that promotes educational employability and educational equity. In order to promote equity, the program helps magnify the impact of our faculty's writing instruction. Our outcomes show that it is possible to make measurable improvements in the skills of our students through multiple interventions in and out of the classroom. However, with all of the benefits that the CPWW provides, budget shortfalls due to the pandemic have made a return to normal pre-pandemic service levels impossible without a reallocation of resources and additional funding. The shortfall resulted in a lack of equitable access to our lab and its services as the budget shortfall forced the lab into an online-only form of modality.

Early Studies Show that Students are Lacking in Critical Writing Skills

In 2003, the National Writing Commission (NWC) released its groundbreaking report on the state of writing entitled, "The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution." This report set the foundation for the next twenty years of composition studies by outlining a critical problem: educators are unable to meet their commitment to teaching writing skills. At the university level, the NWC found that "more than 50% of first-year college students are unable to produce papers relatively free from errors" (The National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 14). Additionally, these same students had trouble evaluating and developing arguments (p. 14).

These skills gaps were further studied by the NWC in "Writing: A Ticket to ... Or a Ticket Out" which surveyed 120 major corporations, concluding that workplace writing is a "threshold" skill for professional opportunities (The National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 19). From the survey there were several critical findings--

- Writing is a "marker" attribute of high-skill, high-wage, professional work.
- Writing is gatekeeper skill that consigns many to low-skill, low-wage employment.
- Writing is viewed by corporate leaders as being equated to clear thinking (The National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 19-20).

The need for writing skills is illustrated in further in the NWC's survey results. When asked about the importance of writing in the workplace, nearly 70% of respondents stated that "two-thirds or more of their salaried employees have some responsibility for writing" (The National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 7). Further, these same companies report that technical reports (59%), formal reports (62%), and memos and correspondence (70%) are required forms of communication "frequently" or "almost always" (p.11). In short, written communication skills are essential to professional success.

Twenty-Years with Little Improvement and a Widening Disparity Gap

In the twenty years since these reports were issued, have we made progress in improving our student's writing skills? Many thought leaders in the field of writing education say no. Steve Graham, EdD, the Warner Professor at Arizona State's Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation, found that too many students struggle to develop their writing skills (2019). During the last national assessment of writing skills, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 21% of students scored below the basic level of proficiency (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Even more striking is that the disparity in skills disproportionately impacts minority students. Nearly 40% of minority students (Black and Hispanic) were found to be below basic level compared to 13% of their White classmates. Additionally, 80% of English language learners (ELL) were below basic skills (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Based on the findings of the NWC, this skills gap often consigns these minority and ELL students to low-skill, low-wage hourly employment (The National Commission on Writing, 2003).

At the collegiate level, the problem of the skills gap in writing continues. To provide equitable educational opportunities, colleges such as Towson University are now on the frontlines of delivering remediation and training to

students who struggle to meet basic skills competency. Yet, employers who evaluate college-graduate hires perceive that students lack proficient oral/written communication skills. Yet in 2018, a survey conducted by the National Associate of Colleges and Employers (NACE) found only 41.6% students to have a perceived proficiency in these skills (NACE, 2018). Exacerbating this problem, instructors lack the resources to address this problem--the key being time.

Instructors are Overwhelmed by the Problem of Time and Scale

Effective writing instruction requires a tremendous amount of time as the writing process requires multiple steps such as prewriting, drafting, editing, and proofreading--more, each step requires careful revision. In addition, writing requires adjunct skills in critical and creative thinking, research, audience analysis, genre, and style. College writing instructors currently serve over 100 students per week (Graham, 2009). Based on this average, even the shortest writing assignment can quickly consume an instructor's time. To illustrate how this problem and scale impact writing instruction, it would take an instructor 8.5 hours to review a one-page document, assuming it takes five minutes to read, evaluate, and respond. As such, even the most dedicated and experienced instructor can be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work--students cannot receive the one-on-one attention they need and deserve from their instructors. This problem of time and scale is why colleges and universities have come to depend on writing support services such as the CBE Writing Proficiency Program.

Writing Support Services Magnifies the Perception of Quality Writing Instruction

CBE Writing Proficiency Program (CPWW) provides an evidence-based, cost-effective solution the problem of time and scale by providing peer-led learning programs that reinforce learning outside of the classroom. As noted by the Lab's Director, Professor Quincey Johnson, "Sometimes, students need individual, out-of-class attention in order to make strides in their writing. The Writing Lab provides students with opportunities to explore different aspects of their writing in a relaxed setting." Multiple studies supporting this sentiment have shown that peer-led writing programs improve the students' perception of writing, along with their confidence; the net effect of this change in perception is an increase in the time spent practicing writing skills (Briggs, 2013; Graham, 2019). For the past decade, the CBE Writing Support Program has shown that peer-led writing support services magnifies the quality of writing instruction, and improve students' skills.

Based on our internal research through a survey of nearly 1,400 respondents, students believe that the CBE Writing Proficiency Lab has improved their learning outcomes and skills. From the reporting period of September 2017 to May 2020, the Lab has provided 2,800 hours of student consultations. 92.3% of the respondents rated their consultations as "very helpful" (Appendix B); 97.2% stated that their consultations would help them improve their grades (Appendix B). Interestingly, 96.9% of the respondents reported that they felt "more confidence" in their ability to revise their own writing (Appendix B). These results were evidenced by writing process skills developed during their consultations--

- Understanding assignments (32.8%)
- Generating ideas (59.4%)
- Developing content (57.8%)
- Organizing ideas (64.1%)
- Editing drafts (71.9%)
- Analyzing sources (17.2%)
- Addressing style (45.3%)

Writing Support is Integrated into Our AACB Accredited Curriculum

Our lab is unique because it is integrated into Towson University's College of Business and Economics curriculum as part of its Business Excellence program. This program book-ends two state-of-the-practice courses in business communications and professional experience. Each course seeks to improve our students' communications skills through skills development and practical application. Starting in late sophomore/early junior year, Business Communications teaches students fundamental written and oral communication skills, including message, organization, design, and style, four universal skills applicable to both communication contexts. After completing this course, students qualify to take Professional Experience, our internship course. Through this internship course, students apply their communications skills through real-world application in the workplace. Both courses are used to measure and assess the communication skill development of our students. The assessment data collected is designed to improve student outcomes. Our commitment to student outcomes is one of the key reasons the Towson University College of Business and Economics receives consistent praise from the AACSB, our accrediting body.

From our annual assessment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for AACSB accreditation, the CBE is impacting our students' communications skills. During our assessment period from 2018-2022, 91% of our students either met or exceeded the expectations set forth by our evaluation conducted in both Business Communications and Professional Experience. This figure demonstrates that our students are learning and retaining the skills developed in the Business Excellence program. Our writing lab has been an integral part of this success by supporting the faculty and students to work towards mastery of their communications skills.

Budget Shortfall Due to Sunsetting of Previous Grants

The CPWW has become an integral part of the CBE curriculum, and the Lab's peer-led support services have been critical to helping students develop their business communications skills. However, despite the college's internal support and partnerships with the McCormick Spice Company and PNC Bank of Maryland, we have faced shortfalls due to the shifting priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. During this period, our previous funding has sunsetted, leaving us to change how our resources are allocated. As a result, our number of available hours has been cut from 40 down to 20, along with a reduction in Writing Fellows from four (4) to two (2). Additionally, the pandemic forced our Lab to shift solely to a remote modality, with students meeting with our Writing Fellows synchronously via Zoom.

As the pandemic waned, we have been unable to reopen the physical lab space—the college's administration has only been able to allocate resources to fund our existing services; however, as we have moved back to full-time in-person class sessions at the college, the need to move back to the services offered before the pandemic has been evident. The college's pandemic response, while robust, is not suitable for the needs of the student body. While moving to an all-online modality was appropriate as we were forced to adapt to an unprecedented pandemic, the stopgap measure failed to account for student accessibility to technology, which was already leaving nearly 20% of students unable to access reliable technology: mobile and desktop computers, and high-speed Internet (Gonzales et al., 2018). The school has operated under the assumption that all students have equitable access to this technology. While there have been strides to improve student access to reliable technology through our on-campus computer labs and distributed computers through Towson University's Office of Technology Services, there are still students who are unable to access the Lab's services remotely.

Goals

The CBE Writing Proficiency Program (CWPP) currently focuses on two key goals that benefit the students of Towson University:

1. To provide sustainable business writing support services to students of Towson University.
2. To help improve the quality of writing of students as assessed under the Towson University College of Business and Economics Profile of a Graduate.

To provide sustainable business writing support services to students of Towson University. Our first goal for this project is to continue providing sustainable business writing support services to the students of Towson University. More specially, we hope to continue to provide services that help students develop their professional communication skills. We work as one of many support networks within the university to offer peer support and tutoring to help students develop genre-appropriate, content-specific, rhetorically effective, and grammatically correct documents that business professionals use daily. We aim to provide all university students with the knowledge and support to become business communicators with the necessary skills that impact every major throughout the university.

To help improve the quality of writing of students as assessed under the Towson University College of Business and Economics Profile of a Graduate. Our second goal is to provide writing support aimed at helping the students of the Towson University College of Business and Economics (CBE) achieve the college's goal of producing students who meet the profile of a graduate. This profile outlines six categories of critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are assessed for our coveted AACSB accreditation:

1. Apply business knowledge in the context of professional employment.
2. Communicate properly and effectively.
3. Apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills to organizational decision-making.
4. Use technology effectively in business settings.
5. Work effectively toward achieving common goals within diverse teams.
6. Distinguish between ethical and unethical conduct in their professional lives (CBE, 2022).

Our lab provides writing support services to help students meet the standards to communicate properly and effectively (KSA 2). Our tutors also help integrate all other KSAs as they develop their skills. At our college, students develop documents and presentations that apply their business knowledge and skills in critical and creative thinking, goal-setting, technology, and ethics. Our writing lab helps the college develop competent business professionals, and we accomplish this by allowing the student to improve holistically. Student performance based on these KSAs is measured annually through a highly developed assessment process held throughout courses across the business curriculum.

Objectives

In order to meet our goals, we propose two objectives based on the need to expand number of tutoring session available to students:

1. To increase our lab hours to 40 per-week, totaling 600 hours available for consultation and program administration work per-semester (15 total weeks) during AY2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle.
2. To increase student in-take sessions to 50 per-week totaling 800 sessions per-semester (15 total weeks) during AY2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle.
3. To increase student writing assessment scores by 3% achieving an average of 95% meeting or exceeding expectations for AY 2023-2028.

To increase our average lab hours to 40 per-week, totaling 600 hours available for consultation and program administration work per-semester (15 total weeks) during AY2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle. Due to budget cuts, we can only support 20 available lab hours per week. To maximize our impact and provide coverage for regular business hours from 10 am - 6 pm for five days per week, we need to double the available work hours for our Writing Fellows. Our objective is to offer the most coverage possible throughout the day to meet our students' scheduling needs, which tend to run concurrently with our college's daily schedule of classes. We hope the lab can remain open at a time that is the most convenient for our students.

To increase the average student in-take sessions to 50 per-week totaling 800 sessions per-semester (15 total weeks) during AY2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle. With a doubling of our available hours, we hope to, in turn, double the available sessions that we can provide during the semester. We currently host 400-450 (30-minute) sessions per semester with our existing resources, and we can double our in-take to 800 sessions per semester with our increased hours. This increase would allow an average of nearly 1/5th of our student body to schedule a 30-minute appointment per semester.

To increase student writing assessment scores by 3% achieving an average of 95% meeting or exceeding expectations for the AY 2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle. For our next round of AACSB assessments, we hope to increase student performance on our annual assessment of business communication. Currently, 92% of our students meet or exceed the standards, with 8% achieving an unacceptable rating. Our objective is to increase our assessment score to 95% of students meeting or exceeding the standards, which would result in reducing the number of unacceptable scores to 5%. Our criterion for the KSA assessment is to achieve a percentage of 80% or more of student meeting or exceeding the standards with 20% or less. We want to keep this standard consistent throughout the AY 2023-2028 AACSB evaluation period.

Tactics

To meet our objectives, we will have to closely integrate the CWPP into our courses assessed for both internal tracking and AACSB accreditation. All three of our objectives are based on maximizing student in-take therefore improve performance as well complete our five-year AACSB accreditation cycle. As such, our plan is to require mandatory sessions with the Lab at three intervals throughout the student's progress in the CBE curriculum:

1. Require three (3) mandatory session per student in concert with the writing and presentation assessment from the business communications course offered sophomore to early-junior year.
2. Require two (2) mandatory sessions for capstone courses in management, marketing, economics, and e-business offered late junior to early senior year for writing across the curriculum.
3. Require one (1) mandatory portfolio review in the capstone professional experience course offered early to late senior year.

Business Communications sophomore to early-junior year. At the beginning of our students' progress through the CBE curriculum, we require them to take BUSX301 Business Communications. This four-credit advanced writing course serves as a CORE 9 requirement for all students within the program. As a CORE 9 course, students must produce 20 pages of revised writing by the end of the semester. BUSX301 Business Communications serves as the front-end of our writing assessment process for AACSB accreditation (KSA 2). As such, we have designed an assessment to demonstrate the acquisition and retention of writing and presentation skills. To complement the evaluation, we will require that all students (averaging 350 per semester) attend at least one mandatory lab session to address their evaluation performance (either individually or in a group session). Additionally, students will be required to participate in (2) two additional sessions to review their other major assignments given throughout the semester.

Writing Across the Curriculum late junior to early-senior year. After completing the business communications course, our students progress towards their capstone course in their concentration: finance, management, e-business, and marketing. As a part of their experience in these capstone courses, students writing performance is measured as a part of our internal assessment metrics for the college and university. Each course is responsible for its assessment instrument and content-specific rubric. This assessment tracks the assurance of learning and determines if our students are retaining their skills as they progress through the curriculum. Tactically, we will require two (2)

mandatory sessions for each student currently taking their capstone course (averaging 300 students per semester). These mandatory sessions can be either held individually or as a group.

Professional Experience early senior to late senior year. At the end of their coursework, students are required to take a mandatory internship course, BUSX 460 Professional Experience to apply their theoretical knowledge in a real workplace setting. As a part of this course, students are required to create a portfolio of work that measures both their writing and presentation skills. To support their work, we will require that students attend at least one (1) writing lab session to have their portfolios evaluated before submitting at the end of the semester. Student portfolios are assessed as a part of our on-going AACSB accreditation; interventions from the Lab can help students ensure consistency and quality, which can help improve assessment performance.

Program Measurement to Track Goals, Objectives, and Tactics

To meet our goals, the CWPP will measure performance in two ways. First, the Lab will track student intake using readily available database software such as Microsoft Access. As a part of their tracking, the database can record many different data points, including personal information, demographics, hours, session details, etc. We can also use this database to manage internal survey data to cross-tabulate and analyze for future program improvement. Second, the Lab will work closely with the CBE Assessment Committee to track student assessment performance throughout their progress within the program. Measurement will require consistent data collection and management between the Lab and the assessment committee to evaluate the progress of our students.

Our evaluation regime is closely linked to the measurement of our three key objectives. Our objectives are three-fold and have the advantage of being irrevocably linked our current AACSB assessment process:

1. To increase our lab hours to 40 per-week, totaling 600 hours available for consultation and program administration work per-semester (15 total weeks) during AY2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle.
2. To increase student in-take sessions to 50 per-week totaling 800 sessions per-semester (15 total weeks) during AY2023-2028 AACSB assessment cycle.
3. To increase student writing assessment scores by 3% achieving an average of 95% meeting or exceeding expectations for AY 2023-2028.

To evaluate these objectives, we will our measurement rationale (see. Part V – Goals, Objectives, and Tactics). In short, using a database management system along with existing assessment tracking we will collect data on—

- Lab in-take
- Administration hours
- KSA assessment scores

Lab in-take. To evaluate our first and second objectives, will maintain database to record both lab in-take and consultation hours. For these two objectives, we hope to schedule our lab to be open 40 hours per-week (eight hours per day). During this time, we hope to be able to help, on average, 50 students per-week. Using lab in-take data, we can compare the average number of students to the average amount of time spent per-session to determine the efficiency of our consultation sessions.

Administration hours. To maintain our program, we will set aside ten (10) hours per week for administration work: recording in-take data, evaluating consultation topics, norming, and training. Our evaluation of time will be based on recording the hourly activities of our Writing Fellows.

KSA assessment scores. To measure the effectiveness of our writing lab, we will use the measures from our KSA assessment (for AACSB accreditation) and our writing across the capstone (WACS) assessment. This assessment process is already built into the curricula of the college—many of the students already attend consultation sessions to have their assessments peer-reviewed before submitting them as a part of their required business communications course. Each spring, we conduct an evaluation of our entire business curriculum, including our Professional Excellence program, which contains two bookended courses, BUSX301 Business Communication (taken in late sophomore/junior year) and BUSX460 Professional Experience (taken in senior year). As a part of our evaluation, we measure business communication skills at both points during the student's time at the college. Further supporting our efforts, we have data from our newly implemented WACS assessment, which measures the business writing skills of our students at the end of their coursework. Using these data, we can track student assessment performance longitudinally and compare the data to student in-take data.

Introduction

Internal Partnerships

The CBE Writing Proficiency Program is made possible by several key internal stakeholders that help ensure the program's sustainability. From the dean of the College of Business and Economics to the Towson University Career Center, all our stakeholders share a common ethos to help students improve their skills to become gainfully employed and future business leaders in the Greater Baltimore, Maryland region beyond.

Dean of the College of Business and Economics. Our lab is driven by the support of the Dean of the College of Business and Economics, whose singular vision led to a writing support program that is highly integrated across the curriculum of the college. The CBE administration has been continuously supporting the lab by help fund much of the writing support lab's budget since its inception in 2010.

Director of the CBE Writing Proficiency Program. As director of the Lab, Quincey Johnson has help developed a robust program of services that support students at both the college and university level. Through Mr. Johnson's continued leadership, we hope to grow the program to best meet the changing needs of our students as evidenced by employer feedback and changes in curriculum of the college. Mr. Johnson is mindful of the role that the lab plays supporting the college to meet the standards set-forth by the CBE Profile of a Graduate. Our lab along with our programs are a part of a mature assessment plan as part of our AACSB accreditation.

Business Excellence Program. As a part of our state-of-the-practice curriculum, students are required to take two book-end courses: BUSX301 Business Communications (Sophomore/Junior Year) and Professional Experience (Late-Junior/Senior Year). In Business Communications, students are taught the fundamentals of professional communication: writing and presentations. In this course, supported by trained business writing faculty, students are guided through developing their skills to improve employability. Our lab works with the faculty of Business Communications by providing peer-led tutors to improve the outcomes of the course. These outcomes are measured as part of our ongoing assessment program for AACSB. After completing this course, students are eligible to take Professional Experience, an internship course that takes the theoretical knowledge acquired in their business courses and applies them directly. To complete this course, students must have high-level proficiency in business communication skills. Our lab is continuously available to help students think through and improve their daily business communications tasks.

Faculty of the College of Business and Economics. Since writing is an integral part of business, all courses in the College of Business and Economics require students to write and reflect on the lessons in their coursework. Additionally, the Lab supports students as they develop various business documents for these courses, including reports, proposals, and analyses. Recently, as a part of our ongoing assessment plan, we have begun to measure student performance through a writing across the curriculum (WAC) initiative. Throughout key capstone courses in accounting, finance, marketing, management, and economics, student writing is assessed so our program can Improve and remediate writing issues.

Writing Center at the College of Liberal Arts. Our lab regularly works with the Writing Lab at the College of Liberal Arts; the directors of both programs have an excellent working relationship to meet overlapping goals to serve all students at Towson University. Both labs work together to maximize their impact on improving student writing--this reflects continuous commitment to our students.

Towson University Career Center. Helping student develop their professional communications skills is one of the components of the CBE Writing Proficiency Lab's mission. As such, we have a long-lasting relationship with the Towson University Career Center to help students develop their employability skills in resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, and professional demeanor. The Career Center allows us the opportunity to give students seeking employment advice a broad range of opinions and best practices that improve their chances to obtain meaningful internships and employment In and around the Greater Baltimore Maryland area.

External Partnerships

Since our inception in 2010, the CBE Writing Support Program has received generous support from external community stakeholders at the corporate and family/individual levels. These funders have helped us sustain the program along with the continued support of the CBE administration.

PNC Bank. Our most current corporate partner has been PNC Bank of the Greater Maryland Region. For FY 2019-2020, PNC Bank has provided \$30,000 in direct support to our lab.

McCormick Spice Company. Our first named funder was the McCormick Spice Company of Baltimore. From FY 2010-2015 the McCormick Spice company provided a multi-year grant under the Victims of Crimes Act that totaled \$100,000.

Bill and Helen Murray. As alumni of Towson University's College of Business Economics, Bill and Helen Murray donated \$8,000 in FY 2011-2012. This donation was apart of their continued commitment to the college and its programs.

Peer Institution Models

Numerous peer institutions have developed discipline specific writing lab, namely, in the field of business communications. Specialized business writing lab's offer advice on discipline and industry specific writing

For a one-time grant of \$735,000 to fund the France Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows, you will help Towson University's College of Business and Economics (CBE) to better direct our resources to meet the unique needs of our students, and its net effects would be extensive. The France Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows would give Towson University's College of Business and Economics a cost-efficient, self-sustaining program providing critical writing support services and tutoring to our highly diverse student population. In addition to providing support services, the endowment would allow the college to draw from the Towson University Graduate School and grant its top students its professional writing program the opportunity to expand their writing instruction experience as they forge their future careers in academia, and the public and private sectors.

The France-Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows Will Offer Critical Writing Support and Tutoring

In our budget, we have created several self-sustaining endowed fellowships to fund one (1) full-time and (2) part-time graduate assistants. In-kind, these France Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows at CBE will provide writing support services and tutoring to Towson University College of Business Economics students. Additionally, these France-Merrick Writing Fellows will help run the day-to-day operations (totaling 40 hours) under the supervision of the CBE Writing Support Program's director.

Table 1.
Total Budget with Hours, Stipend, and Credit Waiver

Writing Tutor (Fall/Spring)	Hours	Stipend	Waiver	Total
Graduate Assistant (Full-time)	20	\$5,000	\$9,552 (12 credits)	\$14,552
Graduate Assistant (Part-time)	10	\$2,500	\$4,776 (6 credits)	\$7,276
Graduate Assistant (Part-time)	10	\$2,500	\$4,776 (6 credits)	\$7,276
Total	40	\$10,000	\$19,104 (24 credits)	\$29,104

As shown in Table 1., based on the number of hours required for the position, each France-Merrick Endowed Writing Fellow will be given a stipend and a credit waiver for their graduate coursework. Full-time graduate assistants will be given a \$5,000 stipend with a 12-credit waiver totaling \$14,552. Part-time graduate assistants will be given a \$2,500 stipend with a 6-credit waiver totaling \$7,276. The stipend and credit waiver gives our graduate assistants flexible options for paying for and offsetting the costs of graduate education. This highly desirable assistantship will draw from a pool of talented students in the Towson University professional writing program.

An Endowment is an Investment in the Success of Our Students

The key benefit of your donation will be an endowment that will fund the writing fellows in perpetuity. To sustainably support the France-Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows at CBE, we based our total funding on an 8% historical return managed by the Towson University College of Business and Economics Office of Major Gifts. This return rate is based on the average market return rate over the last fifty years (NYU, 2022). Currently, this fund would fully fund our budgetary goal and ensure that the France Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows at CBE will continue perpetually. The endowment would provide a 4% annual budget distribution and an additional reserve of 4% that is compounded with the total principal. This 4% reserve will help account for inflation, which has averaged 3.8% since 1960 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Table 2.

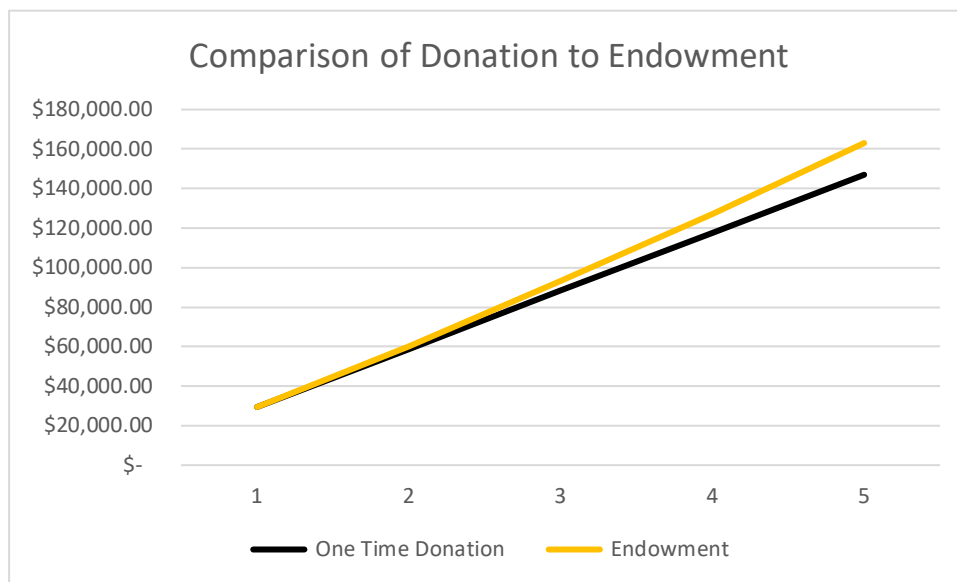
Endowment Fund Growth Over 5-Years

Year	Fund	Fund Return (8%)	Annual Distribution (4%)	Reserve (4%)	Total Principal Growth
1	\$735,000	\$58,800	\$29,400	\$29,000	\$29,000
2	\$764,400	\$61,152	\$30,576	\$30,576	\$59,576
3	\$794,976	\$63,598	\$31,799	\$31,799	\$91,375
4	\$826,775	\$66,142	\$33,071	\$33,071	\$124,446
5	\$859,846	\$68,786	\$34,393	\$34,393	\$158,839

As shown in Table 1. above, the France Merrick Writing Fellows endowment should grow to \$928,632 within five years, with annual distributions directly to our program totaling \$158,839. The impact of your endowment, when we compare it to a one-time grant for five years of funding, difference is dramatic.

Figure 1.

Comparison of One-Time Donation Versus Fund Growth Over 5-Years



As you can see in Figure 1., assuming that five years of funding would total \$147,000 with an equal distribution of \$29,400 per year, the impact of a one-time donation, while generous, not be self-sustaining--at the end of the period, our lab would have to find other ways fund our Writing Fellows. However, with an endowment of \$735,000 for the France-Merrick Writing Fellows at CBE, we create a highly cost-efficient program that provides a return that exceeds the initial investment within three years based on historical market averages.

Your grant to establish the France-Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows at CBE would have permanent impact on the CBE and its students. This endowment will reflect your enduring commitment to higher-education within the Greater Baltimore-Maryland area; additionally, your endowment will ensure that our writing lab continues to help Towson University provide an equitable education to its highly diverse student population through the development of communications skills that evidenced as marker skills for success in the workforce.

Memorandum

To: Dr. Richard Rice

From: Christopher Thacker

Date: December 6, 2022

Subject: Rhetorical Analysis – France Merrick Grant Proposal

For my first proposal, I tried to match Towson University's commitment to diversity and inclusion with the goals of the France Merrick Foundation grant funding. To accomplish this, I hope to focus on how the CBE Writing Proficiency Lab improves the skills and employability of a diverse student body. With over 77% of graduates from the College of Business and Economics hailing from Maryland and the Greater Baltimore area, the college is a pipeline into the local job market. As such, development critical skills in business communication is extremely important as surveys note that proficiency in writing is a marker skill for employability. Yet, with the problem of reduced lab hours and a move to online only modes of service due to budget cutbacks, the lab is unable to provide equitable service to all of its students. To remedy this issue, our proposal asks for endowed fellowship that funds our Writing Fellows in perpetuity—a sustainable option that provides better value for the France Merrick Foundation over time.

Matching France Merrick Foundations Focus on Equity

For the letter of inquiry, I was hoping to provide the funder with information on Towson University's commitment to diversity and inclusion by providing critical facts regarding our student's demographics. Based on our internal data, 57.4% of our first-year students self-identify as an under-represented or ethnic minority (Towson University, 2022a). Additionally, Towson University serves students across the socio-economic spectrum, with 54% receiving need-based financial aid. I hoped to convey that the France Merrick Foundation's focus on equity directly matches the strives that the university has been recognized for in terms of inclusive excellence by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Continuing on this rhetorical strategy, I highlighted the problem created by the sunseting of current grants and the elimination of writing lab coverage capabilities of the Lab. In short, cutting the number of available hours and eliminating in-person lab appointments increases inequity within the college. As our university provides education across the socio-economic spectrum, assuming students have equal access to technology does them a tremendous disservice. In fact, according to a recent study, nearly 20% of college students do not have access to reliable computing technology (Gonzales et al., 2018).

Focusing on How the CBE Writing Proficiency Lab Improves Skills

To solve the problem of inequity, I wanted to convey an implicit link between socio-economics and the need for skills development to foster employability. As such, I provided the mission, history, and background of the CBE Writing Proficiency Program (CWPP). The purpose of the section was to provide context for the reader.

The central theme was that the lab helps students achieve a high return on investment (ROI) through the primary development of communication skills and secondary skills such as critical thinking, research, and collaboration. Moreover, I wanted to link skills development with increased employability within the job market.

To complement the idea of skills development, I wanted to demonstrate that the CWPP is tightly integrated within the curriculum of the CBE in that it currently works with the business communications faculty in helping students with their assignments in BUSX301 Business Communications. This course is the first in a series of courses that help students develop and apply their business communications skills.

Proving the Impact of Reduced Lab Hours and Service on Equity

In the needs statement, I wanted to provide background on early studies highlighting the impact of the skills gap in students preparing for job marketing and utilizing two critical studies from The National Writing Commission (NWC) and The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Based on the NWC's report, writing is considered a marker skill for professional work (The National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 19). Additionally, there are disparities in skills, with over 40% of minority students (Black and Hispanic) found to be below basic skills compared to 13% of their White counterparts (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

After demonstrating the disparities in the skills gap of minority students, I hoped to establish that the sunset of grant funding for the CWPP would exacerbate inequities between students of differing socio-economic backgrounds. The lab helps these students rise to the challenge of overcoming the skills gaps to be more employable upon graduation. In short, the CWPP helps the CBE meet Towson University's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive institution.

Creating a Sustainable Program Through an Endowed Fellowship

For the budget, I wanted to demonstrate the college's commitment to creating a sustainable program by proposing a one-time grant of \$735,000 to create the France Merrick Endowed Writing Fellows. While the ask was high, the rhetorical strategy was based on the premise that a year-to-year donation to our program for two part-time Writing Fellows and one (1) full-time would total over \$29,000. Over a five-year period, the funding for our Writing Fellows would total over \$145,000. However, over the same period, with an average rate of return, the endowment's principal growth has the potential to total over \$158,839. This growth would allow us to fund our Writing Fellows in perpetuity. Moreover, this funding would benefit our undergraduate students by providing peer-led tutoring by some of the best and brightest in the graduate professional writing program. It would also help these graduate students fund a considerable part of their graduate education.

Conclusion

For my proposal, I want to demonstrate that by funding the writing lab through an endowed fellowship, the France Merrick Foundation could make a lasting impact on the student of Towson University and the College of Business and Economics well into the future. I believe I made a convincing case for such an enormous ask; however, I will need to refine this document well past the submission date to make it ready for final submission. While I did take the lead on writing this grant proposal, there will be several institutional hurdles that this document will have to overcome before submission to the France Merrick Found. I suspect this document will require extensive review by the CBE Office of Major Gifts and an ad hoc committee from the CWPP and the CBE administration. That said, I have created the groundwork for continuing the project into the spring of 2023 and will push to have this proposal ready for submission after it has gone through the review process.

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