

SPARK Interdisciplinary Projects Incubator

An incubator grant program from SPARK, the Teaching Center, and the Bell Core

Introduction

Belmont's SPARK Symposium for Scholarship, Performance, Art, Research, and Knowledge is the University's annual celebration of student creativity, inquiry, and scholarship. SPARK proves that curiosity doesn't belong to any one field as it represents all 12 of Belmont's colleges, uniting undergraduate and graduate students across every discipline.

This year, we are excited to dive into this cross-campus identity by supporting faculty pairs who develop collaborative interdisciplinary projects for students. Specifically, we would like to support projects that are developed between two faculty in diverse disciplines across campus. Faculty can request up to \$500 each, for a total of up to \$1,000 per collaborative pair. Since its earliest planning, SPARK leaders have had an interest in highlighting and facilitating interdisciplinary work. It's a natural fit for a campus-wide event, in a community known for its collaborative, supportive spirit. Now entering its third year, and alongside the significant changes underway with the Bell Core, the timing is right to lean further into that interest. To spark this work, SPARK, the Teaching Center, and the Bell Core are launching a pilot incubator program to support faculty in developing collaborative interdisciplinary work with students. SPARK's portion of this funding comes from funds remaining from last year's support by the Kern Family Foundation. We're excited to put these dollars back into faculty and student work.

Some fake example collaborations are 1) (Environmental Science & Theology) a class assignment that pairs ecology data with theological reflection on stewardship, 2) (Architecture & Social Work) a semester-long project for architecture students to redesign a nonprofit's space grounded in community impact, 3) (Nursing & Theater) a semester-long project aimed at improving standardized patients. Funds can be used for things that will improve your projects including materials, experiences, speakers, or books. Funds cannot be used for faculty or student stipends.

To foster faculty connections, we're also building an "Open to Collaborate" database and website, where faculty can advertise their interest in collaboration work and browse what others across Belmont are exploring. We hope this will be a low-lift way to find your next collaborator, whether you already have an idea in mind or are just curious what other fields are working on.

What We're Looking to Support

Because SPARK is centered on student work, our aim with this grant centers on supporting projects that give students the chance to explore interdisciplinary work. With that in mind, we hope to:

- Support projects that are creative, innovative in their collaboration, and that make unexpected connections across disciplines.
- Welcome any scope of work, from a single class assignment to a semester-long project, whether inside or outside a course.
- Serve, as a joint effort of SPARK, the Teaching Center, and the Bell Core, as an incubator for the future of collaborative interdisciplinary teaching at Belmont. We are excited to see how these projects might apply across the university.
- Foster as much diversity and creativity of ideas as possible, evaluating proposals in part on how novel and how far-reaching the collaborations are across disciplines.

Judging Criteria

Our judging criteria are intentionally broad, so as not to limit the diversity of ideas we hope to see. We're excited to hear about the collaborations that excite you. Proposals will be evaluated on the following:

1. **Strength of the interdisciplinary collaboration:** How far the collaboration stretches across disciplines, and its originality, innovation, and unexpected connections.
2. **Student reach:** The number of students integrated into the work. Since student experience is central to this program, a whole-class project is preferred over one involving only a few students; however, we will weigh this factor with the other criteria.

3. **Transferability:** How well the project's approach could apply to future interdisciplinary work at Belmont.
4. **Feasibility of the plan:** How specific and well-developed the project plan is, and how realistic it is to carry out.

We will also ask faculty to describe why the work matters and any broader community impact or integration; however, these factors will not weigh into the evaluation of proposals. *Please don't let these criteria discourage you from applying. We don't yet know how many proposals we'll receive or how competitive the process will be.*

Timeline

- August 17: RFP launches with a Belmont-wide announcement to faculty
- August 17-31: Window for faculty to submit an “Open to Collaborate” survey to seek collaborators (note that you do not have to go through this process to submit a proposal)
- October 14 (the day after fall break): Proposals due
- Following two weeks: Proposals reviewed and winners selected

To Do

- **Open to Collaborate Database Survey** (Due Aug 31st): [SPARK Open to Collaborate Database Survey – Fill out form](#)
- **Funding Application** (Due Oct 14th): [SPARK Interdisciplinary Projects Incubator Grant – Fill out form](#)