Aristotle and a World of Wonder

Rationale

Prince George’s Community College, located in one of the country’s most ethnically diverse counties, offers credit course instruction and associate’s degree opportunities to more than 18,000 students. As is the case at most community colleges, students can major in traditional, liberal arts curricula in preparation for transfer to a four-year institution or may complete a series of courses preparing them for careers and immediate employment. In December 2000, the Association of American Colleges and Universities selected Prince George’s Community College as a Greater Expectations Leadership Institution. We joined 15 other institutions (e.g., Duke University, University of Michigan, University of Southern California) as exemplary models of undergraduate education. At the same time, the college faces two cultural challenges that will impact our ability to achieve the college’s vision of becoming an intellectually vibrant institution.

Cultural Challenges

In the next few years, Prince George’s Community College faces the prospect of losing a significant number of its strong, senior faculty—the scholar/teachers who created and cultivated a campus culture that fostered significant innovations and achievements. As the over-50 generation of faculty retire, the college must nurture and develop a new generation of scholars to ensure that the undergraduate curriculum continues to serve the intellectual needs of our students. Of critical concern is the retention of promising faculty members with 5-10 years of services.

Prince George’s Community College also faces the challenge of responding to the richly diverse population it serves in Prince George’s County. Upon his appointment as the college’s new president in 1999, Dr. Ronald A. Williams declared that “As the wealthiest African American community in America, Prince George’s County is poised at an historic confluence of wealth and
race. Prince George’s Community College will be the agent that transforms these elements into national and community leadership.” Given that Prince George’s Community College annually enrolls more African American students than all of the state’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities combined, we are uniquely suited to this mission. As part of the college’s new strategic plan, the instructional area has been charged with the following task: Develop and implement an integrated learning program that fosters an academically stimulating, enriching, and engaging collegiate experience and environment for faculty and students. As part of this initiative, we are seeking ways to develop our students’ civic responsibility, cross-cultural sensitivity, and community leadership.

In light of these two cultural challenges, we are seeking a focus grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that will help us retain our most promising faculty and provide an integrated learning environment for our students.

The 1989 Humanities Revolution

In 1989, Prince George’s Community College secured its first National Endowment for the Humanities grant to support a four-week faculty seminar titled The Nature and Function of Greek Mythology. Led by the eminent scholar, Dr. Bernard M. Knox (who would soon win the NEH’s Jefferson Award), 20 humanities faculty spent four weeks in June studying Greek history and mythology.

The Greek Mythology seminar created a humanities revolution at Prince George’s Community College. For the first time in our history, faculty members were encouraged and supported as academic scholars. The 20 faculty participating in the seminar became a critical mass of scholars that transformed a primarily teaching-focused institution into a legitimate intellectual community. Well before Boyar’s scholarship of teaching was touted as the “answer” to calls for
effective instruction, our faculty members had embraced and extended Boyar’s notion that “Those who teach must, above all, be well-informed, and steeped in the knowledge of their field.”

Following the 1989 seminar, Prince George’s Community College secured NEH-support to sponsor a statewide and then a national faculty institute in Greek history, philosophy, and literature, also under the guidance of Dr. Knox. Subsequently, a series of summer seminars for public school teachers were offered focusing on Civil War history. Through grants from the Maryland Humanities Council, public lectures were offered to members of the local community. Throughout the 1990s and to this day, an NEH-supported Blues Project has developed into the largest community outreach project in the college’s history. Yet, despite an abundance of humanities programs and activities for students, K-12 teachers, and community members, we have had only a single opportunity—the seminar in 1989—to create a community of faculty scholars capable of launching and sustaining a decade of humanities research and scholarship.

The Need for a New Humanities Revolution

Since 1989, most of the faculty scholars participating in our first NEH seminar have left the college. The remaining scholars will soon retire. Given that many of the college’s current faculty were hired during the 1990s, the administration is concerned about the college’s ability to retain its best and brightest faculty. We have discovered that the most vulnerable faculty are those with 5-10 years of service. In an attempt to support and retain our best junior faculty, the vice president for Instruction created a committee of such faculty and charged them with recommending strategies designed to retain and strengthen the faculty by supporting academic scholarship. The time has come to pass the scholarship torch to a new generation of faculty.

The faculty scholarship committee has urged the college to create a community of scholars similar to the one that developed and prospered in the early 1990s and that also understands,
respects, and adapts to our diverse student population. To achieve this dual goal, the committee urged the college to develop an NEH focus grant proposal in order to study a common humanities topic that extends across most academic disciplines. After considering several options, one topic was agreed to with unanimous support: Aristotle’s works, their impact on Western thought and teaching in higher education, and their relevance in a multicultural society.

A collegewide survey of faculty members yielded enthusiastic interest and support for the seminar and topic of study. More than three dozen faculty, representing almost every discipline on campus (e.g., art, biology, business management, chemistry, computers, English, history, language studies, literature, nursing, political science, philosophy, physical science, psychology, speech communication), responded. The applicant pool is highly diverse, including African American, Hispanic/Latino, Arabic, and African faculty members.

Dr. Alicia Juarrero, professor of Philosophy will serve as project director with Professor Christopher Hunt, chairperson of the Faculty Scholarship Committee and associate professor of Physical Science, as the assistant project director. Dr. Isa N. Engleberg, director of the college’s Humanities Resource Center and professor of Communication Studies will supervise the project’s administration. (See vitae in appendix.)

Why Aristotle?

In 529 AD, the Emperor Justinian closed the academies of philosophy in Athens. From then on, Aristotle’s thought was largely lost to Western civilization until the 12th century. Until that time, knowledge of Greek thought had been largely confined to Plato, whose work was often seen as mystical and other worldly. In contrast, Aristotle’s work displayed great knowledge of logic, physics, biology, psychology, ethics, and aesthetics. Moreover, and in the words of Mortimer J. Adler, “whereas Plato raised almost all the questions that everyone should face; Aristotle raised
them too, and, in addition, gave us clearer answers to them. Plato taught Aristotle how to think philosophically, but Aristotle learned the lesson so well that he is the better teacher for all of us.”

By working with distinguished Aristotelian scholars, we can explore why Aristotle took for granted that all human values are constituent parts of the good life, but also that human agents are inextricably embedded in the physical and cultural world in which they live and act. In this way, we can hope to achieve the college’s integrated learning goal so critical to the “good life” for our students and the communities in which they live.

**Project Goals**

1. To help faculty and students understand and appreciate the ways in which Aristotelian philosophy has framed the development and core questions of Western thought.

2. To create a community of scholars to enhance faculty members’ intellectual development as teachers and scholars.

3. To help students understand how the enduring questions raised by Aristotle have relevance in the context of their own lives, cultures, and communities.

4. To help faculty members integrate an understanding of and appreciation for Aristotle and/or philosophical theory into their courses and curricula.

5. To disseminate an understanding and appreciation for Aristotelian thought and process to faculty colleagues and students through a variety of formats and media.

*Aristotle and a World of Wonder* will provide faculty members with a better understanding of the origins of their academic disciplines as well as an appreciation of why and how their disciplines rest upon the framework established by Aristotle.
Scope of Study

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<td>Metaphysics, Ethics, and Politics</td>
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**Spring Orientation: Wonders and the Order of Society**

Faculty Scholar and Facilitator: Dr. Alicia Juarrero, professor of Philosophy at Prince George’s Community College, will provide an orientation to Aristotelian philosophy and discuss how Aristotle fits in the context of philosophical and academic study. This two-day orientation session will prepare faculty members for the topics to be discussed by the first three scholars and begin a discussion of faculty projects.

**Metaphysics**


Dr. Gomez-Lobo will facilitate a discussion of questions such as: Why does Aristotle refer to general ontology and theology as first philosophy? What are Aristotle’s views on cause and explanation? What are Aristotle’s conceptions of the academic disciplines?

**Ethics**

Scholar: Dr. Nancy Sherman, professor of Philosophy, Georgetown University. Author of *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue* and *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue*.

Dr. Sherman will facilitate a discussion of questions such as: How does Aristotle’s ethics fill out the landscape missing in utilitarianism and Kantian ethics? Does Aristotle teach us how to
teach character? What does luck have to do with virtue? What is the relationship between morality and the emotions?

**Politics**

Scholar: Dr. Alasdair MacIntyre, senior research professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame University. 

*Author of After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory and Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

Dr. MacIntyre will facilitate a discussion of questions such as: What is the relationship between politics, philosophy, and the common good? Is the nature of a diverse, heterogeneous society like ours such that it is no longer possible to appeal to moral criteria in a way that had been possible in other times and places? In particular, is the *ethos* of “the distinctively modern and modernized world” unsatisfactory when confronted by the variety of moral beliefs and practices that characterize a multicultural society?

**Fall Orientation: Wonder and the Order of Nature and Aesthetics**

Faculty Scholars and Facilitators: Dr. Isa Engleberg, professor of Communication Studies and Christopher Hunt, professor of Physical Science at Prince George’s Community College, will provide a two-day orientation to the second half of the seminar and its focus on nature and aesthetics. The orientation session will prepare faculty members for the fall scholars’ presentations and provide an opportunity to discuss their progress on faculty projects.

**Nature**

Scholar: James G. Lennox, Primary Appointment: Department of History and Philosophy of Science; Secondary Appointment: Department of Classics, University of Pittsburgh. Author of *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Biology: Studies in the Origins of Life Science.*

Dr. Lennox will facilitate a discussion of questions such as: Why did Aristotle urge us to “avoid a childish distaste for examining the less valued animals . . . for in all natural things there is
something wonderful?” Why did Aristotle believe that the “nature that fashioned (animals) offers immeasurable pleasures to those who can learn the causes and are natural lovers of wisdom?” In what ways did Aristotle’s observations open the main fields of biological inquiry—comparative anatomy and physiology, embryology, ethology, and ecology?

**Rhetoric**

Scholar: Dr. Thomas B. Farrell, professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University. Author of *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* and editor of *Landmark Essays on Contemporary Rhetoric*.

Dr. Farrell will facilitate a discussion of questions such as: Why does Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* continue to be pertinent in our contemporary and context-sensitive culture? How is rhetoric an art of practical reason and enlightened civic participation? How have the *Rhetoric*’s tenets been adopted and adapted by contemporary scholars? How does Aristotle’s treatment of rhetoric and the moral principles in his *Nicomachean Ethics* add value to the study of both works?

**Poetics**

Scholar: Gregory Nagy, professor of Classical Greek Literature and director of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University. Author of *The Best of the Achaens: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* and *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*.

Dr. Nagy will facilitate a discussion of questions such as: Why did Aristotle’s *Poetics* gain an extraordinary hold over our modern standards for dramatic literature? Why does Aristotle focus his discussion of poetics on the notion of “imitation” or *mimesis*? How can we interpret Aristotle’s definition of tragedy, his account of the “tragic hero,” and his theory of the “unity” of tragedy?

**Participant Selection**

A committee composed of the two project directors, the director of the Humanities Resource Center, and the academic assistant to the vice president for Instruction will constitute a committee to select seminar participants. Twelve faculty members will be selected based on their completion
of an application form indicating their academic interests and background as well as their signed commitment to complete all seminar requirements. Preference will be given to faculty scholars with 5-10 years of employment at Prince George’s Community College. All participants will be provided with and expected to read six of Aristotle’s primary works supplemented by secondary materials chosen by seminar scholars.

**Evaluation**

In addition to an internal assessment of how well the project achieves these goals, Dr. Evelyn Edson, professor of Humanities at Piedmont Virginia Community College, will serve as an external reviewer and address how well the faculty and college responded to the project’s cultural challenges. Dr. Edson was the primary evaluator of the college’s 1989 Greek Mythology seminar and has been nationally recognized for her work in developing interdisciplinary humanities courses and curricula.

**Dissemination**

Three major activities will ensure the widest possible dissemination of the project. During faculty development week in spring 2003, the project directors and participating faculty will present a symposium to the entire faculty in which they will share their perspectives and applications of Aristotle as well as the value of incorporating Aristotelian works and perspectives into the curriculum. Following the symposium, faculty participants from the college’s four divisions will make presentations specific to the disciplines in which they teach to faculty members in those departments.

As a way of reaching a larger audience, all guest scholar lectures and discussions will be videotaped (with their permission) by the college’s cable television station under broadcast-quality
conditions. The videotapes will be used for several purposes: (1) to disseminate seminar content to other interested faculty, (2) to prepare an edited videotape on Aristotle’s contributions using seminar excerpts, (3) to form the basis for an interdisciplinary Honors Program colloquium, and (4) to cablecast lectures and/or lecture excerpts on the college’s cable television station.

In support of the college’s instructional initiative to develop more interdisciplinary courses, seminar participants and other interested faculty members will be encouraged to create an interdisciplinary honors colloquium in which Aristotle’s works are linked to courses in disciplines such as literature, history, political science, biological and physical sciences, communication, and the arts.

Prince George’s Community College has a proud history of transforming single humanities projects into activities that educate and enlighten larger audiences. Our study of Greek mythology expanded into public lecture series, special courses and course modules, and state and national humanities institutes. Our public humanities project, The Blues Project, achieved its local objectives but also became a nationally broadcast public radio show and one of the largest, community-based blues festivals in the mid-Atlantic region. Summer study seminars for teachers focused on the Civil War directly benefited participants but also expanded the teaching of history in public schools through the county, state, and country. Now we want to return to our own faculty and students to enhance their professional and intellectual development.

Just as Aristotle’s Lyceum became a hive of creative intellectual activity—a center for teaching, learning, and investigation—Prince George’s Community College is confident that the Aristotle project will enable us to become a more intellectually vibrant community of humanities scholars and students.
APPENDIX A: Seminar Schedule

Orientation I: January 18 & 19, 2002

Faculty Scholar/Facilitator: Dr. Alicia Juarrero

Session A: Friday, March 1, 2002

Metaphysics: Dr. Alfonso Gomez-Lobo, Georgetown University

Session B: Friday, April 12, 2002

Ethics: Dr. Nancy Sherman, Georgetown University

Session C: Friday, May 3, 2002

Politics: Dr. Alasdair MacIntyre, Notre Dame University

Orientation II: August 19 & 20, 2002

Faculty Scholars/Facilitators: Dr. Isa Engleberg and Prof. Christopher Hunt

Session A: Friday, September 20, 2002

Nature: Dr. James Lennox, University of Pittsburgh

Session B: Friday, October 18, 2002

Rhetoric: Dr. Thomas Farrell, Northwestern University

Session C: Friday, November 15, 2002

Poetics: Dr. Gregory Nagy, Harvard University

Summation: Faculty Development Sessions, Spring, 2003
Appendix B: Resumes of All Project Personnel

Prince George’s Community College

Alicia Juarrero
Christopher Hunt
Isa Engleberg

Aristotle Scholars

Alfonso Gomez-Lobo
Nancy Sherman
Alasdair MacIntyre
James Lennox
Thomas Farrell
Gregory Nagy

Evaluator

Evelyn Edson
Appendix C: Statements of Commitment and Support

Email Commitments from Scholars

Evaluator Commitment Letter

Honors Program Letter of Support
Appendix D: Cable Television Studio Capabilities

Prince George’s Community College’s television production and television cable station capabilities will be made available for recording and disseminating all or edited portions of the scholar-led seminars. With their permission, scholar presentations will be videotaped. Tapes can be used or edited for use to support the following three purposes:

1. Disseminate seminar sessions to faculty members interested in using the tapes for professional development and/or course enhancement.
2. Develop an interdisciplinary Honors Program colloquium supported by the videotapes.
3. Develop a telecredit humanities course focused on the works and impact of Aristotle and other major philosophers and theorists.

TELEVISION PRODUCTION CAPABILITIES

Field Production

Two-three chip SVHS cameras for ENG style productions, portable audio (up to 8 mics) and lighting kits are available which can be configured for field studio set-up. Five cameras are available, complete with switcher, computer graphics, audio, and lighting.

Studio Production

One chip, multi-camera studio equipped with 3 cameras, two digital switches, 3/4 and SVHS VTR’s, computer graphics, and 16-track audio are available. The studio is complete with all necessary lighting and light board as well as one stand-alone teleprompting system. A/V devices include audiocassette recorders, CD player, mini disc and turntable, video copystand, handheld and lavaliere mics as well as wireless mics.

Editing

SVHS, 3/4 and non-linear editing equipment is available in the television production editing suite.

TELEVISION CABLECAST CAPABILITIES

The Prince George’s Community College cable operation has the potential to reach all 162,000 Comcast subscribers in Prince George’s County. Currently, the station broadcast telecredit courses and a limited number of college-based programs. The station cablecasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With permission from the scholars, the cable station is able and willing to cablecast either edited portions or all of the seminar sessions.
Appendix E: Information about Prior Humanities Projects

Prince George’s Community College

The Nature and Function of Greek Mythology
A Faculty Humanities Seminar
National Endowment for the Humanities
June 5-30, 1989

Masks and Myths
Presentations on Greek Mythology
Maryland Humanities Council
1990-1991

The Blues Project
A Public Humanities Project
National Endowment of the Humanities
1993

Freedpeople and Southern Society in the Late Nineteenth Century
Summer Institute for Teachers
National Endowment for the Humanities
July 5-31, 1998