

Dear colleagues,

I hope you are doing well as we begin this academic year. I write with an update on professional development funds for 2021-2022. As Mark mentioned in a talk with the faculty a few weeks ago, we will be able to fund travel to professional conferences in the coming academic year. In typical years, the majority of our faculty development funding goes toward conference travel. The pandemic has prompted a re-consideration of how best to use our faculty development funding, and, among other concerns, how to expand access to the funding for faculty who may have been unable or less likely to make use of it in the past.

Thus, I write today to outline two different approaches to securing faculty development funding this coming year: the traditional reimbursement for professional travel and the faculty flexible development plan (Faculty Flex). The flexible development plan, developed by Mark Schneider and Meredith Goldsmith with the support of the deans and Mary Correll, will allow faculty to be reimbursed for a number of non-travel-related professional expenses (details below). Faculty Flex reflects the value we place not only on scholarly and creative dissemination, but also on the less-visible resources that go into the initiation, development, and completion of professional work. Faculty Flex, currently in a pilot phase, replaces Small Research Grants. There are, however, two key differences. First, the application process will be noncompetitive; faculty will submit a budget and brief description of the project the funding will serve. Requests will typically be approved after a quick review from the Professional Development Committee. Second, because most faculty projects typically unfold over several years, there is a different timeline for accountability. We will ask for a brief report a year *after* the flexible funds are granted (i.e., in the case of funds disbursed this semester, by Fall 2022) with an explanation of how the funds supported faculty productivity. As with Small Research Grants, faculty will be asked to give a brief update on the status of the project, how the funds were used, and plans for dissemination. It is expected that not all projects launched through the Flex Plan will be completed in a year's time; learning how the projects supported by the Plan develop over time will help us support all faculty projects more effectively in the future.

Faculty will be invited to opt into either the Conference Reimbursement Plan or the Faculty Flex Plan, and will have until November 1 to elect an option.

Conference Reimbursement Plan  
\$1000 of reimbursable expenses  
(possible \$300 top-up)

Flexible Development Plan  
\$1000 of reimbursable expenses  
(reimbursable items listed below)

Flex funds may be used to support the following:

- research, scholarship and creative materials (e.g., library privileges, database subscriptions, physical supplies, photocopying or scanning)
- publication costs, including open access or image reproduction

- travel to off-campus research sites (including parking and public transit costs)
- professional dues (for journal subscriptions, check with the Library first)
- professional services (e.g., Mechanical Turk, copy/developmental editing, proofreading, indexing)
- software or datasets
- small equipment (typically less than \$500) or repairs
- travel expenses and/or registration for physical or virtual conferences up to \$300 (may be combined with other expenses above)
- participation in conferences or meetings where your primary responsibility is typically characterized as service to the profession (chair or president, a board member or an executive in a professional society, member of a professional committee)

At present, flexible funds cannot be used for:

- travel for family or dependents to professional conferences or research sites
- improvements to or equipment for home offices
- cost of home internet
- childcare
- pet care or housekeeping in support of one's professional work

This information will be posted on the faculty development web site. Faculty will be encouraged to fill out either the conference reimbursement survey OR the faculty flex plan survey by November 1; final decisions must be made by January 15.

Please refer to the FAQ below, which may help address specific questions.

Thanks for your attention,

Meredith Goldsmith  
Associate Dean of the College

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## FAQ

Q. So what exactly is changing, in a few sentences?

A. In the past, we have supported faculty travel up to \$1000 for every faculty member, with the possibility of additional competitive, non-guaranteed funding up to a total of \$2000 per year. Starting this year, we will support faculty travel up to \$1000, with the possibility of additional funding up to a total of \$1300 per year. Additionally, we will also support up to \$1000 in non-travel professional expenses for every faculty member. Faculty will be asked to select either the travel or the "flex" (non-travel) option each Fall.

Q. Is this change a response to budgetary pressures?

A. No. We anticipate that faculty development spending will continue at similar or slightly higher levels than previously, and in fact, we aim to increase the net amount of faculty development funding in future. The change will be largely budget-neutral.

Q. Why are we making this change, and why now?

A. In the interest of moving toward a more equitable distribution of funds, we aim to enable faculty who may not have taken advantage of college faculty development funds in the past to do so. We also wish to acknowledge that faculty work is highly individualized and that needs for resources evolve over time. By allowing faculty to determine the best use of their research support, our approach to faculty development emphasizes that “one size does not fit all.” By piloting this approach this year, we will develop a greater insight into faculty needs so that we can improve in the future.

Q. You mention the pandemic. Does this mean that after the pandemic is over, we'll return to previous practice?

A. This is a pilot year. We'll assess the effectiveness of this approach at the end of the year before making determinations for the 2022-2023 academic year.

Q. What happens if I forget to choose which option I want by the deadline? Or if I change my mind about which option I want?

A. The office will send a reminder by October 15 of the November 1 deadline. There will be some limited opportunities to change options until January 15. If you need to switch options, please email the dean's office as soon as possible.

Q. To pursue my professional work, I need paid childcare. Is support for childcare expenses off the table?

A. Supporting childcare may raise issues of taxation and college liability; thus, we are unable to direct funds toward it at this time. However, we are aware of the importance of this issue and are continuing to research it, and hope to be able to support it in the future.

Q. If I understand right, there is now a hard cap of \$1300 per year on travel funding. If I need more money than this to attend my conference, are there alternative sources of funding?

A. Faculty may petition for funds up to \$1500, though additional support is not guaranteed. Faculty with budgets from grants, start-up accounts, or endowed chairships should use those sources first for either option.

Q. Will other funding opportunities supported by the professional development committee remain in place?

A. Yes. There will still be funding for Pearlstine Grants, Staiger Grants, Summer Grants, Student Humanities Research Assistantships, and Van Sant grants.

Q: I want to avoid out-of-pocket expenses for my purchases. How do I do that?

A: Faculty using the flex plan should work with [purchasing@ursinus.edu](mailto:purchasing@ursinus.edu) to procure supplies because the College qualifies for favorable pricing and tax exemption on many items. Faculty

who must order their own items should work with the dean's office and [accountspayable@ursinus.edu](mailto:accountspayable@ursinus.edu) as in the past.

Q: Is this a common practice at peer institutions?

A: Some liberal arts colleges, including Kenyon and Haverford Colleges, have been using this approach for some time. Members of the dean's office have been researching this approach since 2018.