

PROPOSAL Provost's Initiative Fund

"Any effort to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts requires decisions funded at the center."

Provost Bidy Martin

The Provost's Perspective

When deans, faculty members, or students develop wide-ranging, innovative programs that require cooperation among colleges and disciplines, they look to the Provost's office for funding.

The Provost of Cornell University is uniquely positioned to serve as a forum of support for, and initiation of, interdisciplinary and cross-college initiatives and programs. As the chief academic officer, the Provost is responsible for all educational and research programs, as well as the planning and budgeting process. All the college deans report to the Provost, bringing their proposals for innovative and unusual collaborations, as well as their needs for the vital task of recruiting and retaining excellent faculty members.

As Provost Bidy Martin explains, "Our faculty and students have many more extraordinary ideas than we can afford to fund. With discretionary funds we can be optimistic about supporting those ideas – ideas that make Cornell great."

Initiative Funds, Past and Future

In years past, a generous foundation supplied the necessary support for projects initiated from the Provost's office. When that foundation completed its mission and its funding, the Provost's office had to carve out funding from the general purpose budget to use for discretionary purposes.

With interdisciplinary projects becoming an integral part of academic research, and with the need to compete for new and replacement faculty members increasing, it is essential to Cornell's future that the Provost has robust discretionary funding available.

"We want to diversify and sustain the quality of the faculty and the educational experience," Provost Martin says. "We keep the basics strong, but we don't want to let things coast into the comfort zone. Integration and synthesis are critical to a great educational and research institution."

A Provost's Initiative Fund serves as startup backing for interdisciplinary groups. "We do a lot of planning," says Provost Martin, "but at Cornell, ideas emerge and develop constantly. Support from this office can position new projects to qualify for external funding from corporations, foundations, and our alumni and friends."

Stories of Support

Integration and synthesis are essential to educational and research initiatives. In recent years, the Provost's office has funded many projects that keep Cornell ahead of the curve. Below are two examples of such projects.

Life Sciences

The Life Sciences Program followed the steps of a Provost's initiative to the letter. First, a grassroots faculty initiative received early support from the Provost's office. As the project grew and developed, it became the focus of a university-wide fundraising plan.

Faculty at the intersection of biological, physical, and computing sciences began to collaborate, and then sought funding from the Provost. With that support, the Life Science Program has grown to encompass a new building and numerous leading-edge collaborations.

Program in Biogeochemistry and Environmental Biocomplexity

When a faculty member suggested integrating research in biology, geology, and chemistry, the Provost provided funding for this new group to study some of the most difficult environment problems of our time.

Today, the Program in Biogeochemistry and Environmental Biocomplexity integrates the activities of faculty, staff and students in ten departments, ranging across four colleges and two research institutes. Using this cross-college, multi-disciplinary approach, scientists study problems such as acidification of streams and lakes, forest die-back from excess addition of nutrients and acids, and global changes in the cycling of atmospheric greenhouse gases.

The Critical Need for Faculty

As faculty from the post World-War-II and baby-boom generations retire, hiring and retaining faculty over the next ten years has become critical to Cornell's success. Cornell expects to lose up to 600 faculty over the next ten years. Peer universities will face similar recruiting challenges at the same time, placing new pressure on Cornell to attract and retain the very best teachers, researchers, and scholars in an intensely competitive hiring environment. The Provost's office can help deans respond quickly in this intense, fast-moving situation.

To help retain our existing faculty, the Provost needs to provide flexible financial support to faculty for special programs or projects, or to meet unforeseen expenses related to their work. Support from the Provost can also improve research funding and pay for lab renovations, so that Cornell can be ready when a hiring or recruiting decision emerges. Recently, for example, the Provost was able to provide the College of Arts and Sciences with additional research funding to attract and hire young faculty members.

Your Gift

A gift to create a Provost's Initiative Fund enables our academic leadership to provide funding for innovative, multidisciplinary programs; to supplement a faculty compensation package, or to meet any number of important needs to help Cornell remain a great teaching and research university. You can start your fund with a minimum gift of \$50,000, and you can add to the fund whenever you like.