

Essex School @ Ashland 2021

Application to the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation

Open Grant Application, Deep Learning Narrative

Request for \$15,000

Project Contact: Donna Breault

Co-Coordinator: Jennifer Groman and Patricia Farrenkopf

Provide a brief overview of your organization*

The Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted and Talented™ was created in 1976 and named for Dr. Essex, the state superintendent of public instruction from 1966 to 1976. The Ohio State University hosted the School until dedicated state funds were eliminated. Otterbein University was the proud host of the Essex School beginning with the summer of 2011 and provided access to professors known for their exceptional ability to engage students in the arts and sciences. This past summer was the first time in the school's 44-year history that an online option was the only way to offer the school due to the pandemic.

The Martin W. Essex School for the Gifted and Talented™ at Ashland University is TRANSITIONING to a new home for the summer 2021, moving from Otterbein University to Ashland University. The design of the school is also TRANSFORMING, taking the best from past Essex Schools and the Governor's Summer Institutes. Each morning, a keynote will set the stage for leadership experiences through the lens of change: connection to identity development, leadership using the head and the heart, leadership in literature, leadership in mathematics, and leadership styles. The afternoon will be devoted to daily, in-depth, small-group instruction in a topic of passion by an expert in the field. This mentorship will be carried throughout the afternoons of the 5 days of Essex. The dates for the 2021 School are June 20-26, 2021. Due to the pandemic, the school will once again be virtual.

Executive Summary*

Problem

Ohio recognizes the need to connect gifted students to educational opportunities that maximize their potential (Operating Standards to Identify and Serve Students Who Are Gifted (from the Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-15, adopted July 1, 2017), yet the absence of programming is problematic in school districts that lack funding and parent demand. Students who benefit from College Credit Plus and similar early college programs may not be prepared for the social or academic experiences unique to college campuses. The Essex School seeks to broaden access to educational opportunities – aligned with the Jennings Foundation’s focus on deep learning – for gifted students.

What will happen?

Ashland University (AU) will hold Essex@Ashland virtually for one week, June 20-26, 2021. The move to AU has been enthusiastically embraced with the granting of a High Impact Grant from the Center for Innovation and Teaching Excellence at AU. Our College of Education and the other colleges at AU will support this experience through faculty participation as instructors.

Intended Results

For many gifted students, in-school learning comes easily to them. Many students fear failure, or perceived failure, that accompanies risk-taking and can benefit from participating in an environment that encourages critical thinking, questioning, and discovery. With sensitivity to each student’s unique learning abilities, a supportive environment will enable them to expand their already prodigious potential. The Essex School encompasses talents of creative writing and visual and performing arts. "Young adolescents with profound talent in mathematical and verbal reasoning hold extraordinary potential for enriching society by contributing creative products and competing in global economies. Many hold important leadership roles and are entrusted with obligations and responsibilities essential for individual and organizational well-being." (Kell, Lubinski; & Benbow, 2013)

Request

A grant from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation in the amount of \$15,000 will cover instruction and virtual platform fees for the Essex School online. It will enable us to offer the camp at an affordable rate for families or districts. Full and reduced scholarships are awarded with careful budgeting and other resources. Our plan includes targeted marketing and promotions to students in all Ohio counties, to drive awareness and participation that can ultimately decrease grant dependency for Essex@Ashland.

Need

Gifted students in Ohio are not only an untapped resource, but they are an at-risk population. The Ohio Operating Standards for Identifying and Serving Students Who Are Gifted, which outline directives from the Ohio Department of Education, require Ohio districts to identify gifted students in the content areas of Language Arts and Mathematics (possibly, but not required, are Science and Social Studies), four areas of the visual and performing arts (Music, Dance, Theater, and Visual Arts), Creative Thinking Ability, and Superior Cognitive Ability. Students may be identified in one or more of these areas. Most districts identify gifted students in most of these areas, using test scores for some, and multi-factored identification criteria for others. It is a challenging process, and ODE provides funding for testing and identification, which often does not go far enough.

The Ohio Department of Education does not, however, have a requirement for districts to serve gifted students in any area, and very little funding, if any, is available for this purpose. Fordham reports that there are approximately 1,668,000 students in Ohio public schools, and 15% are usually identified gifted, and yet only 52% of those identified are served in their area of giftedness - out of 250,000 identified students only 130,000 students have any kind of gifted support. To compare that to Special Education populations, approximately 257,000 students are identified - and 100% of those students receive support services specifically geared to meet their needs. Why? Because these services for Special Education populations are required by law.

For identified gifted students, the Essex School is one resource that can, for a brief week each summer, spark the experience of deep learning within each participant and allow these students to learn and collaborate with like-minded peers. This gives gifted students, whose cognitive abilities and social behaviors often alienate them from age-mates, the opportunity to feel understood and valued.

The discipline-focused afternoon Intensives of the Essex School can also challenge gifted students with expectations of college-level educational studies in a domain of interest and their area of giftedness. Small group activities among peers have proven to be a powerful method to engage these students in discipline-focused and interdisciplinary studies, and allow them to push themselves beyond the capabilities of their traditional school setting.

Leadership is not an area of giftedness identified in Ohio, yet we know that today's young people are tomorrow's leaders. The evening activities that are part of the Essex School provides gifted students a chance to question and explore their own leadership qualities, and set goals for a future of leading others from all levels of an organization.

Traditionally, rural districts and deeply urban areas often lack or have suboptimal gifted services. Students of color, of poverty, and who may be twice exceptional (identified as gifted and with a disability), are often left out of gifted programming as well. The Essex School steering committee is especially interested in recruiting gifted students like in these subgroups who are underrepresented and underserved, not only through full or partial scholarships for those in need, but in making application and tuition fees low enough to be within the means of all Ohio families.

Plan of Action

Transition & Transformation

The School co-directors meet regularly with their steering committee which includes Donna Breault, Dean of the College of Education. The focus for this first year at Ashland is TRANSITIONING to a new home, moving from Otterbein University to Ashland University. The design of the school is also TRANSFORMING, taking the best from prior Essex Schools and the past Governor's Summer Institutes. Each morning, a keynote will set the stage for leadership experiences through the lens of change: connection to identity development, leadership using the head and heart, leadership in literature, leadership in mathematics, and leadership styles. The afternoon will be devoted to daily, in-depth small-group instruction in a topic of passion by an expert in the field. This mentorship will be carried throughout the afternoons of the 5 days of Essex.

The school moved to Otterbein University from Ohio State University after legislative funding was pulled in 2009 and OSU offered their last Essex School in 2010. The school then moved to Otterbein University where it was hosted from 2011-2020; this last year was virtual instead of residential due to the Pandemic. The move to Ashland is more than an existing school being transplanted into a new location. -First, we learned positive benefits from having to hold the 2020 school virtually. This format made it possible for students to attend while also carrying on with their other summer activities. No housing or food service expense has reduced the attendance cost for students. -Second, we are combining the best parts of Essex at OSU and at Otterbein with another summer program for gifted students that was eliminated due to the budget being pulled in 2009: the Governor's Summer Institute. Ashland was a location for this gifted option and created time with professors for extended investigations in the area of passion for each student attending. Essex@Ashland will continue to offer exposure to global issues in all of the disciplines, thus stretching students out of their comfort zone when the topic is not a recognized strength. Essex@Ashland will also find the real passion areas for each student and provide dedicated time to investigate deeply with a professor who is an expert in that area of study. (Kell, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2013)

The Essex School's sessions focus on sharpening students' creative and critical thinking skills, and on deepening students' sense of themselves as gifted and as individuals with the ability to make a difference in their schools and communities. The School seeks to move students outside of their comfort zone for the purpose of skill exploration and building, and for the way it can lead them to new understandings of the way power is distributed in society. The centrality of experiential learning is inseparable from the goals of the School. Sessions are guided by the benefits of experiential learning—that one engages in the deepest and most memorable learning by using the lenses of leadership, change, individual identity, current world challenges.

The curriculum spans the disciplines and highlights continuity when it comes to understanding and solving problems, exposing students to the interdisciplinary thinking expected of first year students in many higher education institutions.

Learning Outcomes

Deep learning will be experienced by students as well as the Ashland Talent Development interns and university professors. Our goals are indicated through the learning outcomes we have designed for each of these three groups:

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR ESSEX SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS

Students selected and participating in the Essex School will be able to:

- apply concepts of gifted identity development to their own identity discoveries;
- create new associations with other Essex participants;
- evaluate the benefits of the Essex experience in moving them out of their comfort zone;
- integrate their existing areas of passion into the presented Essex session challenges.

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT GRADUATE INTERNS

Interns who are students in the Talent Development Program will be able to:

- observe and apply the competencies learned through the endorsement courses to the Essex school experience;
- monitor and appropriately respond to the intellectual, social, and emotional uniqueness of Essex participants;
- actively assist staff and professors to create the appropriate social and emotional environment for Essex students to learn and share as one community.

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR FACULTY WORKING WITH ESSEX SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS

Faculty involved in teaching Essex sessions will be able to:

- list characteristics and identification areas of gifted students;
- apply new knowledge of characteristics and identification areas to their area of expertise;
- design student learning outcomes related to their content.

Marketing & Awareness

School co-directors Farrenkopf and Groman promote the School among the state's gifted and talented coordinators and endorsement students throughout the academic year and at the state conference of the Ohio Association of Gifted Children (OAGC). For the first time, we are featured in the Northwestern University Center for Talent Development Gifted Opportunities publication. We are using the mailing labels pulled from the Talent Search of Ohio sophomore juniors and seniors to advertise directly to their families. In addition, Essex@Ashland is featured in their 2020-2021 Gifted Program Guide. AU Admissions representatives who visit high schools in Ohio have agreed to carry the Essex@Ashland flyer and application with them, either on in person or virtual visits. Also for the first time, we had an

Essex@Ashland virtual booth at the OAGC fall conference and raffled a paid registration to Essex. The winner was a curriculum director from a district that has never had any students attend Essex.

Gifted students of all socio-economic strata and cultural and linguistic diverse backgrounds are drawn to the Essex School. Statistics show that 14 of the school districts represented in 2018 have 60% or 80% of a single population (i.e., % of white or African-American residents) indicating minimal interaction with diverse groups within their home schools. Essex School provides students with a unique chance to learn and engage with students who are different from them. Such diversity is an essential part of an enriched educational system. We are concentrating additional efforts to improve diversity and access through a balance of direct recruitment and lower tuition.

Key Individuals

Dr. Jennifer Groman one of the Co-Directors of the Essex@Ashland, joined Ashland University (AU) in 2017 after being a K-8 teacher and working over a 30-year span as a general education teacher, Title I reading and math and Gifted Interventional Specialist in Ohio, Georgia, Florida, and Caithness, Scotland. Her areas of research include Gifted and Teacher Education, Creativity, Arts-Infused Practice, and Transpersonal Psychology. She has experience working in Arts Administration in Ashland and Mansfield, and working as a Gifted Consultant for the Ohio Department of Education for four years as part of the I-GET-GTEd Ohio Javits Grant project. Groman was the Assistant Director of the AU Summer Honors Institute for the Gifted (formerly the Governor's Institute) for 12 years, and she was an adjunct for the College of Education from 2000 and was twice awarded as a Professional Fellow. She is a singer/songwriter. Her alma maters include Bowling Green State University, University of Akron, Ashland University, and Sofia University.

Dr. Patricia Farrenkopf has served as the On Site Director for the Essex School at The Ohio State University, as well as the Co-Director at Otterbein University. She is now the other Co-Director of Essex@Ashland. Farrenkopf joined Ashland University (AU) College of Education as Professional Instructor in August 2019 after serving as an AU adjunct for over 20 years. Her teaching experience includes K-12, undergraduate and graduate/doctoral levels and her administrative experience includes Gifted Coordinator and Building Principal (mentor for new principals). She designed and taught Ashland online coursework to address Ohio Gifted Operating Standards requirements for general education teachers to obtain gifted professional development hours. Her areas of research include Gifted Education: Mathematics, Identity Development, High Quality Professional Development, Neuroscience of Learning. Her alma maters include Miami of Ohio, The Ohio State University, Ashland University, and Concordia University of Chicago.

Dr. Donna Breault joined Ashland University in 2016 and teaches undergraduate and graduate education courses. Her research interests include John Dewey's theory of inquiry and how it relates to curriculum theorizing, teacher education, and the nature and purpose of educational research. Recent publications include Curriculum as Spaces: Aesthetics, Community, and the Politics of Place (2014, Peter Lang, co-authors David M. Callejo-Perez & William L. White); Experiencing Dewey: Insights for Today's Classroom (2014, Routledge, co-editor, Rick Breault); The Red Light in the Ivory Tower: Contexts and Implications of Entrepreneurial Education (2012, Peter Lang, co-author David M. Callejo-Perez); and Professional Development Schools: Researching Lessons from the Field (2012, Rowman & Littlefield, Co-author Rick

Breault). She is published in *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, *Teacher Education and Practice*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *Planning and Change: An Educational Policy Journal*, *Journal of Thought*, *Educational Forum*, and *Educational Studies*. Much of her past experience in higher education includes redesigning and developing graduate programs in leadership and working with doctoral students in educational leadership, curriculum studies, and higher education administration.

Detailed timeline of project activities*

Promotion for the 2021 Essex School began in the fall of 2020 at conferences and meetings for counselors and gifted and talented coordinators. Groman and Farrenkopf meet virtually with guidance counselors and families who need direction for their gifted students, regardless of their intended college path. They distribute hundreds of flyers and respond to calls and emails. Ashland promotes the School on our website and through the Office of Admission. Curriculum and instructors, advisors and mentors, supplies, and activities will be finalized in April. Registrations are accepted through May to enable families to pay in installments and to better identify those students whose attendance will depend on scholarships.

From May through June, organizers will prepare for speakers, group and classroom sessions, extracurricular activities, and conduct a mock session within VirBELA to customize the platform.

A week of Essex School @ Ashland is June 20 to 26, 2021. The week begins Sunday afternoon with an orientation session for students and families and ends on Saturday morning with a final gathering.

- The morning passion project guided explorations are interdisciplinary and incorporate student choice of topic and outcome. These explorations may incorporate any of the below subject areas, and more.
- As for the afternoon Intensive studies with expert instructors: Recruitment of Ashland University faculty is currently underway. The team has invited all interested faculty to submit subject area and content proposals by March 1, 2021. Past Essex and AU Summer Institute subjects include physics, comparative religion, mathematics, genetics, medical ethics, songwriting, visual art, poetry, Shakespearean theater, improvisational theater, fight scene choreography, philosophy, transpersonal psychology, political science, and more. Representation of a variety of subject areas and possibly interdisciplinary subjects is expected.
- Evening activities allow students to explore their inner lives and the joys and challenges of giftedness. These activities fall into subject areas of social and emotional needs, guidance and counseling issues, as well as storytelling, listening, and writing. The weekly schedule is as follows:

Sunday (6.20)

Orientation

- Erin O'Neil and her team

Monday (6.21)

- Andrew Mahoney, Keynote - AM
- Identity Development and Change
- Intensive Course
- Erin O'Neil and team, PM

Tuesday - Thursday (6.22 - 6/24)

Choice activity, AM

Intensive

Erin O'Neil and team, PM

Friday (6.25)

Choice activity, AM

Intensive

Erin O'Neil and team, PM

Talent Share - PM

Saturday (6.26)

- Final Gathering and Talent Share

Project's relation to the Foundation's funding theme(s)*

The Essex School creates the conditions for and initiates the kind of deep learning the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation seeks to encourage and recognize. The School builds and exemplifies openness to a range of artistic and intellectual questions, exposing its students to workshops and experiential learning opportunities taught in innovative ways by Ashland University faculty. Our contact with parents, from the beginning of the week until the end, is one way that we share information about the skills we are teaching.

Students are presented with material for which they are asked to think and reflect critically, solve complex problems of social and ethical dimensions, complete a Talent Share project, refine their debate skills, communicate, and, most important of all, delve deeply into topics of their choosing during the afternoon intensives. The Essex School curriculum is based on multidisciplinary learning and assessment. Essex students often come to the summer experience with advanced knowledge in STEM or literary topics.

Sessions on STEAM topics typically ask students to consider the ethical, moral, and humanistic ramifications of scientific inquiry. Sessions that explore creative expression and pressing sociopolitical and ethical questions also elicit student immersion into the depth and complexity of the issues.

Every session is participatory, involving robust discussion and debate, the production of an artifact, and/or the enactment of various performances. The interdisciplinary approach to the Essex School prepares gifted students for general curriculum in the college of their choice. Many of these students are enjoying for the first time the sustained company of gifted and talented peers. During the evening activities, the Essexers debate issues raised in the day's sessions. Students also work throughout the week on a collaborative project for the Talent Share, a social event that takes place during the closing Friday evening ceremony. In this project, teams of students demonstrate and deepen their diverse talents, inspired by some aspect of their experience at the School.

Dissemination*

We are currently considering offering an opportunity for the 2021 Ashland Essexers to come to our Ashland campus to experience a tour and in person conversations with their peers. This will of course depend upon the pandemic and may be scheduled later in the 2021-2022 school year.

We will evaluate the School's success in reaching outcomes of deep learning, social opportunities, and socio- economic diversity. This data, collected through surveys from participating students at the end of each week, and a sampling of high school educators, counselors, college faculty for first-year students, is analyzed in the summer following the camp. Results and changes will be part of the design of the 2021 Essex School at Ashland (recruitment, curriculum, and assessment). Co-directors Groman and Farrenkopf will propose a session on the lessons learned and ways stakeholders may improve education for the state's gifted students at an annual conference in October (Ohio Association for Gifted Children) and possibly the OAGC Teachers Academy in February 2022. Groman and Farrenkopf will prepare a presentation to disburse to Ashland faculty through the Center for Innovation and Teaching Excellence.

Project outcomes*

“My experience was completely, one hundred percent, totally awesome! The professors seemed interested in what they were doing. Our camp counselors were enthusiastic and enjoying every moment!” – Essex students report to parents on their arrival for the graduation ceremony at the end of the week.

The success of the Essex School will be noted by reaching outcomes of each student’s 1) acquisition of deep learning and improved sense of social well-being, and 2) an improvement in the Essex School’s socio- economic diversity. Student feedback at the close of the week and remarks sent to us throughout the summer are the best indications of a successful camp.

It seems we have reached the right tone and level of the camp’s academic content and collegiality, and will continue to maintain a challenging experience. The operations of the camp are smooth, given the coordination team’s efforts and forethought.

Past attendance has varied between 15 and 30 students. In 2018, we benefited from the outreach efforts of our advisory group of gifted professionals and alumni who serve districts throughout the state. To achieve our goal of serving 35 students (this year) and more in the future, Ashland reaches into central Ohio school districts, where we have strong relationships, and intends to broaden the project’s scope each year identifying gifted students throughout the state as well as district and scholarship funds to support their attendance.

Evaluation*

Activity/Targets/Outcomes/Assessment Instruments/Collected by and when/ Analyzed when and how

1. Hold an Essex School including 12 sessions to stimulate deep learning

- 35 qualified students from diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds in Ohio
- Students will have experiences with multidisciplinary topics and complex problem solving relevant to contemporary society
- Student feedback on survey, teacher and co-director assessment reports. An Ashland faculty member in a related field will be engaged to design and administer an evaluation of the program.
- Co-directors and AU College of Arts & Sciences, June 2021, independent evaluation to be conducted during the week-long School.
- Co-directors and AU College of Arts & Sciences, independent evaluation, July and August 2021

2. A variety of daily group activities.

- Participating Essex students
- Profound experiential learning affecting cognition and social growth in gifted students
- Student survey
- Co-directors during the camp week
- Co-directors and Dean Breault, summer 2021.

The evaluator will consult with the Ashland's Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Larry Bunce.

3. Improved socio-economic diversity

- A 10% increase in participating students from diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds in Ohio, from current 20% to 30% while maintaining 96% public school registration
- A more realistic college-level experience where diversity informs complex learning
- Registration information, zip codes, district designation qualifying the student who receives free or reduced lunch
- AU College of Arts & Sciences, April/May 2021
- Prior to School commencement and taken into consideration for next year recruitment.