

Sunday, April 30, 2023

TO: Resilience Seed Grant Selection Committee

FROM: Mel Wensel, Co-Director, Integrated Social Sciences

SUBJ: ISS Resilience Seed Grant Proposal



I am writing to support a seed grant proposal developed by my colleagues in the Integrated Social Sciences program – Michelle Bagshaw, Janna Lafferty, and Reed Garber-Pearson. The proposal to create a peer mentoring program within our online bachelor’s degree completion program is long overdue. As members of a widely dispersed learning community that interacts with other members – including fellow students, faculty, and educational support staff – via technological interfaces of one sort or another, ISS students sometimes struggle to feel an authentic sense of connection and Husky identity. Although ISS offers great opportunities to our non-traditional and underrepresented students, those come with inherent challenges. Creating a sense of belonging and well-being among our students, who balance academic life with all the complexities and complications of adult life, is work that would benefit our entire community.

Rather than creating a program from the top down that may not actually address the needs of ISS students, the vision of the ISS Peer Mentor Advisory Group is to enlist the insight and creativity of the students themselves to create a more organic framework. If awarded a seed grant, all funds would go directly to the student leaders selected to create a peer mentor program. The goal is a student-generated support network that strengthens retention, persistence, and degree completion among a remarkably diverse student population. ISS students are about 70% female, 35% from URM groups, 70% work full time, and 30% have dependent care responsibilities. We serve single mothers hoping to improve their chances for employment and advancement, veterans transitioning to civilian life, countless transfer students from Washington community colleges, former Husky athletes turned pro who now need their degrees, career changers upgrading their credentials, large numbers of first-generation students, students of color from urban and rural America and tribal communities, and former Huskies returning after 20 or 30 years away to finish what they once thought was a long-missed chance at a UW degree. It’s a rich and vibrant learning community, but one which sometimes struggles to feel like more than a group of disconnected individuals on their solitary paths. We would like to help them come together through a strong sense of belonging and Husky pride.

Thank you for giving the ISS Resilience Seed Grant Proposal your thoughtful consideration. Since program launch in Autumn 2014, we have graduated over 500 students and have our sights set on 1,000. I hope you can support us in that goal.

Mel Wensel  
ISS Program Co-Director  
[wensel@uw.edu](mailto:wensel@uw.edu)