



2012 Request For Proposals

To best prepare graduates for the 21st century, it is imperative to encourage them to be bold thinkers, risk takers, and collaborative leaders. With these goals in mind, the Graduate College sponsors *Focal Point*, an initiative to stimulate intellectual communities of faculty and graduate students around topics that undergird important issues and problems of our times. *Focal Point* is designed to engage faculty and inspire graduate students to advance knowledge in areas of critical national and human need, whether this be in global health and engineering, economic and social issues, humanities and arts, or challenges of understanding and communicating in an increasingly complex world.

Focal Point encourages bold ideas. Of particular interest are new collaborations that explore the interfaces between disparate fields of scholarship. *Focal Point* projects should create boundary-crossing opportunities for graduate students motivating them to step out of their research comfort zones. Projects should provide graduate students with opportunities to engage directly in the process of developing new research directions—how to identify, define, and frame them.

Globalization and diversity are topics central in the national dialog on higher education. Globalization in the 21st century, fueled by advanced communications technologies, has fundamentally altered the way businesses and societies conduct themselves and interact with each other. Today's graduates are expected to be globally engaged, adept at collaborating with teams located in various countries with diverse languages, cultures, practices and problems. In addition, diversity goals have challenged our campuses to insure that our graduates themselves constitute a workforce representing the many populations of our nation. This diverse educated leadership of the county is expected to be prepared through advanced studies to engage in productive and innovative teamwork addressing the complex needs of our own multicultural and multiracial society as well as reaching out to the international community.

Therefore, the 2012 RFP expands the *Focal Point* initiative to include projects that seek to establish:

1. Collaborations with international institutions or NGOs to establish new partnerships for graduate education in the pursuit of innovative topics with international/global impact.
2. Collaborative research communities addressing issues of domestic minorities in graduate education. Such projects may also propose collaborations with domestic institutions to enhance diversity in graduate education

Depending on the proposals submitted and favorable reviews, up to two additional projects within each of these categories will be funded. We envision *Focal Point* partnerships and networks will create value-added and sustainable linkages with domestic and foreign institutions enabling our graduate students to fully participate in and enrich the campus conversations and activities in these critical areas.

In addition to new *Focal Point* proposals, we also invite Phase II proposals from previous *Focal Point* project teams. Phase II projects should build on previous *Focal Point* collaborations to reconceptualize the project framework and develop new directions for the group. This is an added feature of this year's competition. It is

not intended to simply extend the activities of a previous year but rather to provide the opportunity for moving to a new level of organization and productive activity.

All *Focal Point* proposals should describe new activities to be initiated or be designed to leverage ongoing activities (if the latter is the case, a proposal should indicate precisely how the proposed project is different and adds new dimensions to ongoing activities). It is expected that faculty and students will meet once a week, in general, but no less than twice a month. Participating students may earn up to 3 hours of independent study/project credit in an appropriate department as determined by faculty organizers, but credit may not be earned in an existing credit-bearing course, nor can thesis credit be earned. *Focal Point* is intended to nurture students' interests beyond their thesis or dissertation research and to broaden their intellectual horizons and professional networks as they prepare for their careers. In addition, it is expected that *Focal Point* projects will involve campus-wide dissemination of new knowledge via Graduate College symposia, workshops, exhibits (real or virtual), performances, musical recordings, or other campus events (see especially item #7 in budget section).

Proposals are invited from teams involving both faculty and graduate students. The group may be led by (i) faculty or (ii) graduate students. Graduate students enrolled in a doctoral program and students enrolled in graduate programs such as the MFA or MSW where the master's is the highest degree are eligible. The project leaders, whether students or faculty, should outline activities spanning at least two-semester or one calendar year. Faculty led proposals must indicate the number of graduate students already committed and the number expected to participate after the project would begin. Graduate student led submissions must identify two participating faculty co-organizers. The lead organizers of each team must be clearly identified on the cover sheet of the application. The role(s) of graduate students in either kind of *Focal Point* project must be clearly outlined in the proposal. It is expected that every *Focal Point* activity will represent at least two academic units on campus within the core organizing group and will aim to create a faculty-student ratio of 1:4 among primary participants. In most cases, many more than two units will be involved through affiliated participants. Involvement of industry partners or community organizations, if appropriate, is welcome.

The primary group of two faculty and two student organizers must be from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Additional participating members of the *Focal Point* group may be affiliated with other domestic or international institution and this external participation is encouraged.

Examples: 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-12 *Focal Point* projects are listed at www.grad.illinois.edu/focal-point-feature. In addition, current and past *Focal Point* groups have websites that offer further information about their activities. These URLs can be found at the Graduate College site noted above. Examples serve to illustrate the concept and operation of *Focal Point* projects of various themes. **They are not to be viewed as examples of preferred topics or organizational structures.**

Organizer and participant roles and responsibilities: All proposals must identify two faculty and two graduate students to serve as co-organizers. The lead members of this team must be clearly identified. The organizers are responsible for the overall program design, execution, and oversight, including external speakers and the *Focal Point* workshop or conference (if included as part of the proposal). Note that a website linked to the Graduate College website is required. The co-organizers are expected to attend all meetings. Program budget must be administered through a faculty organizer's home department.

The *Focal Point* activities must enrich student and faculty research. Involvement in organizing activities, selecting guest speakers or readings, targeting central issues for discussion and participating in critical discussion or field research activities are examples of the kinds of professionalization and substantive engagement desired. Care



should be taken in proposal development to insure that students are not overburdened by the tasks associated with the Focal Point activities.

Participation in *Focal Point* activities should be open to all campus and community members who might be interested. Departmental leadership should be consulted during the proposal writing phase to insure that anticipated outcomes from the *Focal Point* group activities such as new courses, workshops, mentoring, and conferences intended to be recurrent will be sustainable.

At the end of the program, the organizers are responsible for submitting a final report (2 pages) to the Graduate College (template will be provided). In addition, it is expected that funded groups will participate in a poster session showcasing their results for the campus community. This event will take place the August after the award year.

Expected outcomes: While *Focal Point* seeks to enhance and sustain interdisciplinary dialog across campus, the Graduate College is keenly interested in the incorporation of resulting new ideas and perspectives in ongoing graduate education. Toward that end, at least one of the following outcomes is required of a *Focal Point* activity and needs to be addressed in the proposal:

1. Scholarly publications in conference or journals, or “opinion” pieces in magazines/newspapers
2. Submission of grant proposals for extramural funding
3. Graduate education innovations (i.e., new knowledge leading to significant and demonstrable improvements in current pedagogy)

In addition, development of new graduate course(s) or program(s) related to the *Focal Point* topics is a long term goal that is highly desirable. Departmental support of such advances to education should be secured early in the process of creating new courses to insure the viability of this option.

Focal Point maybe used to seed activities targeted for development as grant proposals with strong graduate education components (e.g., NIH training grants, HHMI, Dept of Education FIPSE grants, NEH, SSRC, NSF programs like IGERT, GK-12 and AGEP). It may also be a vehicle to design graduate education elements complementing campus research initiatives (e.g., energy, sustainability, climate change).

Proposal content: Proposals are limited to 4 pages containing the following information (bold indicates recommended section titles in the proposal).

- **Focal Point topic** and the **rationale for its selection**
- **Sub-topics** to be considered in the project (i.e., topic, brief description, duration)
- **Structure and frequency of group meetings and other activities**
- **Organizers**, their roles and responsibilities, highlighting in particular the role of graduate students
- **Expected outcomes** (consistent with the 5 items listed above)
- Space to be used (with approvals if necessary)
- List of invited speakers (if appropriate)

In addition every proposal must contain these 2 documents.

- Cover page and list of committed faculty and graduate students (template provided at www.grad.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/FocalPointCoversheet.xls)
- Budget page (template provided at www.grad.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/FocalPointBudget.xls)

*Save and rename templates before uploading to the Graduate College website (see details below).



Budget: Proposals may request up to \$12,000/year. If the program culminates with a campus event (workshop, conference, etc.) an additional \$3,000 maybe be requested. Proposals in the new categories—international and diversity—may budget the additional \$3000 for travel (total request not to exceed \$15,000). The project must begin August 2011 and contain activities for two academic semesters or a 12-month period. The following are allowable expenses:

1. Up to \$1,500 research funds (for travel, professional development, or equipment) per graduate student organizer(s).
2. A research incentive contribution of up to \$1,500 for faculty organizer(s).
3. Total amount in items 1 and 2 not to exceed \$5,000.
4. A stipend for creating and maintaining a website (a website linked to the Graduate College website is required).
5. Honoraria and travel support for off-campus speakers.
6. Up to \$750 for refreshments during off-campus speaker events.
7. Publicity, photocopying, CDs, photography, video, films and other dissemination activities.
8. If requesting an additional \$3,000 for (a) concluding workshop/conference, or (b) for travel if proposal is on the new international or diversity topics, provide detailed justification of anticipated expenses.

Timeline and submission: Proposals and completed templates must be uploaded to the Graduate College website at <https://illinois.edu/fb/sec/5204104> (bluestem required) by **March 26, 2012**.

Notification of awards will be made by July 1, 2012 following review by a committee of faculty and students and review by the Graduate College Deans. Selection criteria include intellectual merit, impact on graduate students and education on campus, anticipated contributions to interdisciplinarity and diversity on campus, and establishment of international networks for graduate education.

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