2016 Request for Proposals (RFP)  Deadline: March 18, 2016

Introduction
To encourage experimental thinking, creative risk taking, and collaborative research, the Graduate College sponsors *Focal Point*, an initiative to stimulate intellectual communities of faculty and graduate students around significant research questions for the 21st century. *Focal Point* is designed to engage faculty and inspire graduate students to advance knowledge in areas of critical need, whether in the humanities and arts, global health and engineering, economic and social issues, or the challenges of communicating in an increasingly complex world.

*Focal Point* encourages bold ideas. Of particular interest are new interdisciplinary collaborations that explore the relationships among disparate fields of scholarship. All *Focal Point* projects are intended to provide graduate students with opportunities to engage directly in the process of developing new research questions, including how to identify, define, and frame them.

*Focal Point* projects are also opportunities to address globalization and diversity, topics central to the goals of contemporary higher education. Globalization, fueled by advanced communications technologies, has in many ways fundamentally altered social, cultural, and economic interaction. Today’s graduates are expected to be globally engaged, adept at collaborating with teams in various locations with diverse languages, cultures, practices, and problems. They will be called on to engage in productive and innovative teamwork addressing the complex needs of multicultural and multiracial societies.

Program Description
The Graduate College invites proposals from teams involving faculty and graduate students on the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana campus for activities spanning at least two semesters or one calendar year. The group may be led by faculty or graduate students. Participation in *Focal Point* activities should be open to all campus and community members who might be interested.

*Focal Point* seeks to enhance and sustain interdisciplinary research across campus, including the incorporation of resulting new ideas and perspectives into ongoing graduate education. In addition, *Focal Point* projects are expected to involve campus-wide dissemination of new knowledge via symposia, workshops, exhibits, performances, recordings, or other events.

The 2016 *Focal Point* RFP solicits proposals for a broad range of projects, particularly:
- project teams who collaborate with international institutions or NGOs to establish new partnerships for graduate education in the pursuit of innovative topics with international/global impact;
- collaborative research communities addressing issues of domestic underrepresented minorities in graduate education, aligning with the campus’s diversity initiatives or proposing collaborations with domestic institutions to strengthen diversity in graduate education.

*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.
Participating students may earn up to 3 hours of independent study/project course credit in an appropriate department as determined by faculty organizers.¹

Previous Focal Point projects are listed at www.grad.illinois.edu/focalpoint, with links to further information about their activities. Examples serve to illustrate the concept and operation of Focal Point projects of various themes. They should not be viewed as examples of preferred topics or organizational structures.

Award Information
Focal Point grants will be awarded in the following categories:

1. **Focal Point Projects**: Proposals may request up to $12,000/year for project activities. An additional $3,000 may be requested for: a) a culminating campus event (e.g., workshop or conference); or b) travel funding for projects with an emphasis on diversity or international components. (Total request may not exceed $15,000.) Funded projects must begin August 2016 and pursue activities for two academic semesters or a 12-month period. The program budget will be administered through a faculty organizer’s home department.

2. **Focal Point Phase II Projects**: Previously funded Focal Point project teams may submit proposals for Phase II projects. Phase II projects should build on previous Focal Point collaborations to reconceptualize the project and develop new directions for the group. Phase II funding is intended not simply to extend the activities of a previous year, but rather to move to a new level of organization and productive activity. Proposals may request up to $12,000/year for project activities. An additional $3,000 may be requested for: a) a culminating campus event (e.g., workshop or conference); or b) travel funding for projects with an emphasis on diversity or international components. (Total request may not exceed $15,000.) Funded projects must begin August 2016 and pursue activities for two academic semesters or a 12-month period. The program budget will be administered through a faculty organizer’s home department.

Eligibility
Proposals should include two faculty and two graduate student organizers from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Graduate student organizers must be enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and in good standing. At least two academic units (and preferably more) should be represented among the four principal organizers.

Additional participating members of the Focal Point group may include graduate students and faculty from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus, as well as external participants affiliated with other domestic or international institutions, industry partners, or community organizations, if appropriate.

Proposal Requirements
Each proposal should contain the following three sections:

¹ Credit may not be earned in an existing credit-bearing course, nor may thesis credit be earned.
A. **Cover page and list of faculty and graduate students who have explicitly agreed to participate if the project is funded.** (template provided).

B. **Project Description** (no more than 4 single-spaced pages, no smaller than 11-pt font)
   1. **Focal Point topic and rationale.** Proposals should explain the project’s intellectual value and research goals, and should also include specific justification for main budget items (e.g., visiting speakers, conference/workshop).
   2. **Structure and frequency of group meetings and other activities.** It is expected that faculty and students will meet once a week, in general, but no less than twice a month, during the period of the grant.
   3. **Roles and responsibilities of organizers.** All proposals must identify a total of two faculty and two graduate students to serve as co-organizers. The organizers are responsible for the overall program design, execution, and oversight, including external speakers and workshop or conference (if included as part of the proposal). The four organizers are expected to attend all meetings. Proposals should highlight in particular the role of graduate students, being mindful that students not be overburdened by the tasks associated with the Focal Point activities. 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 substantive engagement desired.
   4. **Expected outcomes.** At least one of the following outcomes is required and should be addressed in the proposal:
      - Scholarly conference presentations, journal publications, or “opinion” pieces in magazines/newspapers.
      - Submission of grant proposals for extramural funding. Focal Point may be used to seed activities targeted for development as grant proposals with strong graduate education components (e.g., NIH training grants, HHMI, Department of Education FIPSE grants, NEH, SSRC, NSF Research Traineeships).
      - Graduate education innovations, such as new knowledge leading to significant and demonstrable improvements in current pedagogy; or new graduate education elements complementing campus research initiatives (e.g., energy, sustainability, climate change). In addition, development of new graduate course(s) or program(s) related to the Focal Point topics is a highly desirable long-term goal. Departmental support of such advances to education should be secured early in the process to insure the viability of this option.
   5. **Space to be used** (with approvals if necessary)
   6. **List of invited speakers** (if appropriate)

C. **Budget page** (template provided)
   Proposals for **Focal Point** and **Phase II** projects may request up to $12,000/year for project activities. The following are allowable expenses:
   1. Up to $1,500 research funds (for travel, professional development, or equipment) per graduate student organizer.
   2. A research incentive contribution of up to $1,500 per faculty organizer.
   3. Total amount in items 1 and 2 must not exceed $5,000.
   4. A stipend for creating and maintaining a website. (A website linked to the Graduate College website is required).
   5. Honoraria, travel support, and up to $750 for event refreshments for visiting speakers.
6. Project activities and materials (e.g., publicity/dissemination, photocopying, space rental, required poster).
7. If requesting an additional $3,000 for (a) culminating campus event, or (b) for travel if proposal is on international or diversity topics, provide detailed justification of anticipated expenses. Be sure the project description clearly justifies need for the event or travel.

**Submission Instructions:**
All proposals and completed templates should be submitted electronically to the Graduate College website ([http://www.grad.illinois.edu/focalpoint](http://www.grad.illinois.edu/focalpoint)) by **March 18, 2016**. Please save and rename templates before uploading your proposal.

**Proposal Review Process and Criteria**

**Review Criteria:** Proposals will be evaluated according to intellectual merit, impact on graduate students and graduate education on campus, and anticipated contributions to interdisciplinarity. Projects that substantively address either issues of domestic U.S. underrepresented minorities in graduate education or international networks for graduate education are especially welcome.

**Review Process:** Proposals will undergo peer review by a committee of faculty and students, as well as review by the Graduate College deans.

**Award Information**

**Notification of awards:** Decisions will be announced by May 15, 2016.

**Reporting Requirements:** At the end of the program, Focal Point project organizers are responsible for submitting a final report (2 pages) to the Graduate College (template will be provided). In addition, funded groups will be expected to participate in a poster session showcasing their results for the campus community in August after the award year. Note that each funded Focal Point project is required to maintain a website linked to the Graduate College website.

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