

Dear Students,

I am writing to tell you about an exciting, new curricular program that we are piloting for the next few years. For the moment we are calling the program “Kaleidoscope,” although that name may change as the program grows and develops. Situated within the tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching that Bryn Mawr has developed, the Kaleidoscope program proposes to explore new arrangements of interdisciplinary and interactive educational experiences for students and faculty. This program builds on a strong institutional history of learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom walls yet placed within a rigorous academic framework. The Kaleidoscope program connects multiple courses, their students and faculty in a single semester (or in some cases across contiguous semesters) through common problems, themes, and experiences for the purposes of research and scholarship.

For next year we will be offering one Kaleidoscope in association with the College’s 125th anniversary celebration. The Kaleidoscope is called “Changing Education” and features a collection of courses from Education, English, Biology and History, as well as a General Studies course on community mural projects. (Please see the attached description for specific details and more information about how to participate in the “Changing Education” Kaleidoscope). Over the course of the next three years, several more Kaleidoscopes will be offered as we develop the program to its full potential.

Below, I provide some more information about the program.

What is a Kaleidoscope project?

A Kaleidoscope project is an identified cluster of courses occurring within a single semester or across two contiguous semesters that possesses five characteristics:

1. It offers an **interdisciplinary** experience for students and faculty.

Faculty will work with students to evaluate, use and combine different disciplinary perspectives in meaningful ways via the courses and coursework of a Kaleidoscope cluster.

2. A Kaleidoscope will be unified by a focused **theme or research question**

These unifying themes can be topics that cut across disciplines such as “poverty,” refer to a particular space or time like “Vienna at the turn of the 20th century”, or define a complex research question, such as the impact of Hurricane Katrina in the city of New Orleans.

3. Kaleidoscope projects will **engage students and faculty** in active and interactive ways in a **non-traditional classroom experience**. Essential to the program is a component beyond traditional classroom walls. This could occur through data gathering or research trips, praxis-like community based partnerships, artistic productions, and/or intensive laboratory activity.

4. Kaleidoscope projects will encourage students and faculty to reflect on these different perspectives in **explicit ways**.

Over their course of study, students often informally put together a set of related courses. In a Kaleidoscope, these connections are made explicit, shaped by collaboration among faculty members, and explored reflectively among faculty and students as they participate in the program.

5. Kaleidoscope participants will enrich the entire community by **sharing their work** with the community in some form.

In keeping with the tradition of the Tri-College Peace Missions, Kaleidoscope participants will share their experiences through such activities as poster sessions, research talks, web postings, panel discussions and/or data sharing, research, visuals etc. Both the Kaleidoscope programs and the data they produce will be archived for later use by others within the College community.

Who are the likely participants for a Kaleidoscope experience?

Because Kaleidoscopes will allow students to experience the shifting and questioning of frames that sometimes comes from interdisciplinary work with faculty, most will be targeted for sophomores and juniors who have some foundation/engagement with disciplines.

How does a Kaleidoscope project come about?

Faculty (often working collaboratively with students) will create a Kaleidoscope project around a theme or research question. They will coordinate the courses involved so that they are offered within a single semester (or across contiguous semesters). Most importantly, the courses will be planned and implemented together so that they create a rigorous, integrated, interdisciplinary experience for the faculty and student participants via the course content and course work. Within this basic framework, there will be wide variability in how the Kaleidoscope is actually implemented.

Kaleidoscope projects can vary on the number of courses involved.

A Kaleidoscope cluster could involve anywhere between 1 and 4 courses, depending on how it is constructed.

Kaleidoscope projects also can vary as to whether students only take courses within the Kaleidoscope cluster or they enroll in other non-Kaleidoscope courses during the semester. If a Kaleidoscope consists of four courses, students will only take courses within the Kaleidoscope for that semester. Kaleidoscopes also can vary as to whether Kaleidoscope courses are open to non-Kaleidoscope students.

Kaleidoscope projects also vary as to whether all coursework takes place during traditional classroom time frames.

Some courses in the Kaleidoscope may count for a student's major, but Kaleidoscopes are deliberately designed to include work in a variety of fields and at the intersections of those fields.

If you have any questions about the Kaleidoscope pilot program, please do not hesitate to contact me, or any member of the steering committee listed below. I encourage you to read the attached description of "Changing Education," our first Kaleidoscope project, as it will give you a concrete sense of how the Kaleidoscope program will work.

Sincerely,

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Kaleidoscope Steering Committee Members: Anne Dalke, Pim Higginson, Carola Hein, Sandy Schram, Marc Schulz, Jennifer Spohrer, Dianna Xu.