

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE SECTION

Instructions: Provide a thorough explanation of the following information about your proposed scholarly research activity.

1. **Abstract:** (200 words or less)

This proposal seeks to obtain the funds necessary for Rogers State University (RSU) to become an institutional member of the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC). ACTC is an academic association of faculty, students, and independent scholars dedicated to promoting the integrated and common study of world classics and other texts of cultural significance. Becoming an institutional member of ACTC is in RSU's interest given the scholarly opportunities it will afford students and faculty. These opportunities have the potential to improve learning outcomes, retention, and graduate school placement as well as to enhance the University's reputation. Aside from the benefits gained, the investment will affirm RSU's commitment to promoting and safeguarding its programs in the liberal arts.

2. **How will your project promote RSU's [mission](#):** (100 words or less)

Institutional membership in ACTC affords students certain privileges. Only students from member schools can attend ACTC-sponsored undergraduate conferences in the liberal arts. In addition, only students from member schools are eligible to publish in the association's undergraduate, liberal arts journal, *Agora*. These activities align with RSU's mission to "provide a general liberal arts education that supports specialized academic programs and prepares students for lifelong learning and service in a diverse society" and "provide student services, activities, and resources that complement academic programs."

3. **Problem Statement and/or Project Description:** (350 words or less)

Many American colleges are facing enrollment declines. [Since 2011, colleges have lost about 3.3 million students](#) (~17% of enrollment). Especially hard-hit have been programs in the liberal arts. [Over the past decade, colleges have seen a significant drop \(~25%\) in students studying in the liberal arts and humanities](#). Those trends, unfortunately, seem to be accelerating. Worse yet, cost-cutting measures, magnified by the financial challenges of COVID-19, have led many small colleges and universities to cut back or eliminate entirely programs in the liberal arts. Only a few years ago, the University of Tulsa eliminated its bachelor's degrees in music, philosophy, and religion. The problem, therefore, is clear: Colleges, and specifically liberal arts programs, need to bolster their numbers or (saving that) accrue marks of distinction, or risk collapse. RSU is no exception.

4. **Research Strategy:** (750 words or less)

Programs in the liberal arts are under pressure to shore up major counts and produce graduates. Elimination of underperforming liberal arts degrees at respectable universities, at one time unthinkable, is becoming increasingly common. That being the case, programs need to use everything at their disposal to improve student retention and learning outcomes. This can be achieved partly through marketing. RSU's Department of English and Humanities is in the process of refreshing its branding and promotional materials. This will likely have a favorable impact on enrollment, but more can be done.

As an institutional member of ACTC, RSU will provide students with access to a first-rate academic association. The major benefit is that students will be able to present at ACTC-sponsored undergraduate conferences. This could have a positive impact on student retention. Many exceptional students transfer from RSU to larger universities owing to the resources and programs that they offer. Providing students with opportunities to gain experience and prestige of presenting papers at national conferences will be an incentive for them to continue their studies at RSU. Institutional membership in ACTC can also be used as a marketing tool to attract new students. For not only will students have the opportunity to present at conferences, but while they are there, they will meet people who could assist them in getting into graduate programs.

In order to measure the effectiveness of this project, records will be kept regarding student and faculty involvement in the association including conference attendance, publications, and committee involvement. The expectation is that institutional membership in ACTC will achieve the following: (1) boost student retention in participating academic programs, (2) attract new students to those programs, (3) raise the chances that participating students upon graduation pursue graduate studies, (4) improve learning outcomes for participating students, and (5) increase student satisfaction with their respective academic programs and the University as a whole.

A small committee of RSU faculty and staff will manage promotional matters, data collection, and project evaluation. The author of this proposal, as project director, will be responsible for committee formation and management.

5. **Evaluation Methods:** (350 words or less)

The expectation is that, within the first year of institutional membership, RSU students will submit papers to upcoming ACTC undergraduate conferences. Apart from the benefits afforded to students, institutional membership will allow faculty to serve in various capacities on the association's governing board and publish in peer reviewed proceedings volumes. Therefore, within the first year of institutional membership, an effort will be made by RSU faculty to serve in some capacity on either ACTC's board or one of its committees. The long-term goal is that, as a continuing institutional member of ACTC, RSU students will earn marks of distinction, such as presenting and publishing papers, which will not only advance their own academic interests and careers, but also strengthen

retention and enrollment numbers and shed favorable light on the University and its degree programs. On an annual basis, the project committee, in light of the data collected, will evaluate the efficacy of institutional membership in ACTC and recommend continuation or termination of the project.

6. **Benefit to Students:** (300 words or less)

As noted above, becoming an institutional member of ACTC will allow RSU students to attend ACTC-sponsored conferences. Attending these conferences will have the direct and immediate benefits of introducing students to other researchers and providing them with an opportunity to improve their presentation skills and showcase their projects.¹ These conferences will also allow students to make valuable contacts through networking. These relationships can be rewarding in themselves, but they can have practical benefits as well, as many of our students are considering graduate studies in the liberal arts. Conference participation, therefore, has the obvious benefit of preparing them for graduate-level academic work, but it can also improve their chances of being admitted into a graduate program owing to the professional connections made and the prestige earned from presenting peer-reviewed papers as undergraduates.

7. **Timeline:** (No word limit)

If this request is approved, the University will be an institutional member of ACTC for remainder of AY 2022–2023. All activities related to our membership will be assessed and reported at the end of the academic year.

8. **Budget:** (No word limit)

The annual fee for institutional membership in ACTC is **\$1,000** (\$1,015 if electronically transferring funds between banks via an ACH transfer).

9. **Attachments:**

Attached is an email from ACTC with an invoice number and amount due for becoming an institutional member. The University is obligated to pay this amount *only if* the scholarly activities committee approves this request. No financial commitments with ACTC have yet been made.

¹ This is not simply an *a priori* opinion; it has empirical support. See, e.g., P. A. Mabrouk, “Survey Study Investigating the Significance of Conference Participation to Undergraduate Research Students,” *Journal of Chemical Education* 86, no. 11 (Nov. 2009): 1335–1340 and S. J. Potter, et al., “Intellectual Growth For Undergraduate Students: Evaluation Results From An Undergraduate Research Conference,” *Journal of College Teaching and Learning* 7, no. 2 (Nov. 2010): 25–34. One study focused on the benefits of undergraduate research specifically in Oklahoma. See T. E. Wohlers, et al., “Celebrating Undergraduate Research in Oklahoma: The History and Impact of Statewide Undergraduate Research Conferences,” *Council on Undergraduate Research Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (Jan 2012): 15–20.

