

**AAUP note on college governance concerns connected to tenure-track allocation  
procedure and the MNI Initiative grant  
Version 3.0, July 22, 2022**

To: Provost Lisa Anderson-Levy  
Dean of the Faculty Professor Tom Halverson  
Current and next FAC chairs Professor Beth Severy-Hoven and Professor Kelly  
MacGregor  
Current and next EPAG chairs Professsor Duchess Harris and Professor Mario  
Solis-Garcia

**Summary:**

In January, Macalester announced an excellent \$1 million Mellon grant to support the Macalester Native and Indigenous (MNI) Initiative, a highlight of which would be four postdoctoral scholars, with the “long-term goal [ ] to retain [them] through appointment to tenure-track positions.” On June 17th, an announcement was circulated to all faculty describing the application procedures for the first two of the four postdocs. However, that announcement, and the process that led up to it, has overstated the connection between these postdocs and future tenure-track allocations. Central here is the problematic June 17th statement that “EPAG has approved the allocation of these future tenure-track positions.” Many key elements of the College’s curricular policies and procedures have been bypassed. Information provision, relevant elected committee deliberation, and all-faculty consideration of this major curricular addition were either inadequate or missing.

Though it seems wise to move ahead with the early phases of a 2022-23 search for two MNI postdoctoral scholars, the College should immediately a.) publicly retract or clarify the statement that “EPAG has approved the allocation of these future tenure-track positions”; b.) initiate whole-faculty deliberation of this major addition to the College’s T/TT ranks; c.) clarify what the College committed to in its Mellon grant; d.) change a problematic summer quasi-allocations round; and e.) address numerous additional specific but no less important procedural concerns as outlined in the paragraphs below.

Nothing in these notes is meant in any way to question the substantial merits of Native and Indigenous Studies as a field, nor its importance to the Macalester curriculum, nor the excellent faculty who initiated the grant. These notes are meant solely to shed public light on, and address a long list of, problematic features of the process, and the inadequate faculty governance of curriculum to this point.

**Full discussion:**

On June 17th, the Provost’s Office circulated to the faculty an email titled “Call for MNI grant postdocs.” It offered the welcomed news that in connection with the \$1 million Mellon grant announced in January, four postdocs in Native and Indigenous Studies would be created. A two-stage application process was described: initial letters of intent would be due on August 15th; then a subset of the applying departments would be invited to submit full applications by

September 23rd. Awards of postdocs to departments for the first two of the eventual four positions would be announced on October 10th.

The following remarks are not intended to question the merits of Indigenous Studies, nor the excellent faculty colleagues who have joined to help secure this important grant. The co-authors of this document have read in and taught landmarks of scholarship in this field for years. These remarks concern only the procedure which has been followed: a procedure which in our view has been so multiply flawed that numerous changes need to be made in both the immediate and longer terms, until important issues connected to the future tenure-track lines can be fully deliberated and resolved.

**The concerns begin** with this phrase from the Provost Office's June 17th email: "EPAG has approved the allocation of these future tenure-track positions." This sentence is problematic in eight ways.

First, EPAG is not authorized to approve any allocations. Allocations can only be recommended (but not approved) by the Allocations Committee. The Allocations Committee consists of 13 members: EPAG's seven voting elected faculty, five nonvoting administrators, and the faculty Affirmative Action Officer (ex officio but with vote). EPAG's two student members are not included. To the best of our knowledge, an Allocations Committee of this description did not meet to consider the allocation request.

Second, the Faculty Handbook, which governs allocations requests, authorizes only *departments* to request tenure-track lines. But no department requested "these future tenure-track positions." The request seems to have come from the College's administration. Thus there seems not to have been a qualifying request for the Allocations Committee to evaluate.

Third, we know of no process by which *future* allocations can be approved. At times a department's search for a tenure-track colleague is deferred by a year. For example, if a department is searching for two new colleagues, it might be wise to do that in successive years. But the June 17th email refers to searches "for a new [tenure-track] colleague in the next *several* years" [emphasis supplied]. This timeframe is unsupported by anything in past practice or the Handbook's allocations process.

Fourth, at this writing, no EPAG minutes, which would include a list of those present, have been published to document the stated approval of these future tenure-track positions.

Fifth, if approval of an allocation by an elected committee is understood to mean that a vote was taken and recorded, to the best of our knowledge, no such vote was taken. It is also not clear if EPAG received a formal and clearly delineated allocation request in writing: did it?

Sixth, according to the Handbook, approval of the allocation of tenure-track positions requires that the Provost "make available all relevant information" to the Allocations Committee. In the case of the four MNI future tenure-track positions, minimally that information would include the Fall 2021 Mellon grant application, and any January 2022 approval document returned by

Mellon. But to the best of our knowledge, EPAG has not seen either of these documents – nor any documents connected to the request for four future tenure-track positions.

Seventh, normally decisions on tenure-track allocations requests are announced in a public memorandum by the Allocations Committee, which includes short statements of the grounds for any recommendation for approval or rejection. A companion statement from the Provost and Dean of the Faculty is released at the same time, describing their decision on Allocations' recommendations. This hasn't happened here.

Eighth – and here we speak to longstanding practice rather than Handbook requirements – approval of the allocation of tenure-track positions by the Allocations Committee presumes substantial review and extended discussion of detailed application materials. Requests by departments for single tenure-track positions are often twenty or more single-spaced pages; the requests robustly discuss the scope and shape of the field, the structure of the existing department, the importance of the subject matter to students and the College, and much more.

More broadly, EPAG makes other decisions of consequence (outside of allocations) only after extensive study and deliberation. As an example, it developed a motion on end-of-course surveys for close to two years. But to the best of our knowledge, EPAG was not given nor did it consider any written materials about the importance of Native and Indigenous Studies to inform its evaluation of these four future tenure-track positions. Though we may be mistaken on this point, though the grant was awarded in January, EPAG's consideration of these positions was limited to one meeting five months later, after graduation, in early June, where multiple voting members were absent, with no shared or pre-circulated documents to review. Why? This was, it seems, a hasty and inadequately informed consideration.

These eight concerns are substantial: in our view sufficient to bring important changes to the postdoc process as currently described, especially its link to tenure-track lines. In addition to these eight concerns, several broader considerations reinforce that view.

**First there is the *scale* of the proposed tenure-track lines, and what that scale implies for the locus of approval.** The Faculty Handbook's section on Curricular Policies and Procedures notes that "any significant programmatic additions must be determined by the faculty as a whole, not by EPAG acting alone." The question then becomes, Do four planned or anticipated tenure-track lines in a single interdisciplinary field constitute a "significant programmatic addition"? The answer is Yes. Macalester currently has eight departments with fewer than four tenure-track lines. From the smallest up, they are WGSS, Education, German, Linguistics, Russian, American Studies, French, and Media & Cultural Studies. Six more departments have (as best we can determine) four T/TT faculty: Asian Languages & Cultures, Classical Mediterranean & the Middle East, Environmental Studies, Philosophy, Sociology, and Theater & Dance. Thus these four new MNI planned tenure-track lines, in T/TT size, are equal to or larger than 14 of Macalester's 31 departments. This is significant, requiring the decision to be made by the faculty as a whole, not EPAG or Allocations acting alone.

The MNI's announcements have forthrightly noted that a concentration program in Native and Indigenous Studies is currently in preparation, and will be "brought to the faculty for approval [...] following the shared governance practices of the college." This is of course excellent. But Macalester's concentration programs by design require almost no College resources, since they are built of existing parts. But four new T/TT lines is far larger: thus the purview of the faculty as a whole.

**Second**, there is the question of a possible implied commitment to an outside funding agency, and possibly also to applicants for the positions: that these postdocs will eventually become tenure-track lines. This is first discussed in the EPAG minutes of October 14th, 2021, which report that the Provost announced to EPAG the submission of two Mellon grant applications (both later funded): one on the Mississippi River, and the other to attract post-docs in Native and Indigenous issues. Those minutes note that "Mellon is hoping these will eventually become tenure lines. A pipeline of sorts. This has implications for allocations."

The June 17th email to the faculty states that "the long-term goal is to retain these postdoctoral scholars through appointment to tenure-track positions," appointments that would go through the Allocations committee. Of course final say on allocations recommendations rests with the Provost. This raises the question of whether a grant application made in Fall 2021, with the Provost as Principal Investigator, and the intentions expressed in that application, will predispose the Provost to grant allocations for later connected conversion requests. It would thus be important to make the Mellon grant application and approval letter available to the broader faculty.

**Third**, there is the question of where these four T/TT lines will come from. Allocations decisions are departmentally zero-sum. When the total number of T/TT positions at the College is fixed, one department's gain is another department's loss. Since Mellon hasn't funded *new* T/TT lines, the question emerges: where will the four tenure-track lines in Native and Indigenous Studies come from? And did EPAG consider this question in early June when it apparently approved four future tenure-track lines in this field? Did it make a four-position allocations decision without weighing competing requests from other departments?

In some cases, MNI lines might come from reshaping a given department's priorities, and thus not result in the shrinking of any department. For example, the Spanish & Portuguese department just lost a TT line in Latin American literature (an astonishing gap for any Spanish department in the world), and the History Department was rejected in its bid for a new line for a historian of Africa. Both Latin American literature and African history have substantial indigenous dimensions; indigeneity unfolds in both regions in complex ways often sharply different from how it unfolds in the United States. Thus both the Spanish and History departments might seek to reshape their rejected 2021-22 Latin American literature and African history position requests to more fully reflect MNI priorities. We mention these only as hypothetical examples.

But in other cases, new MNI-focused T/TT lines will come at what one might call the “pure expense” of some other department which does not have MNI priorities.

This is not a hypothetical question, nor is it only a question for the future, as the Mellon MNI initiative may already have had allocations effects. In the recently completed allocations round, ten departments applied for re-allocations – that is, ten T/TT Macalester faculty had either departed or retired, generating ten free T/TT lines for allocations. However, only eight, rather than the ten available lines were filled. The other two have been reserved for future initiatives or requests. Might these be for MNI postdoc conversions? A Provost may hold back lines for future purposes. If those purposes are known at the time of withholding, they should be publicly shared and available for discussion, particularly if the scale of the withholding is large.

The eight requests rejected in Spring 2022 were the international relations line held by David Blaney, the Latin American literature line held by Galo Gonzalez, the logic and philosophy of science line held by Janet Folina (all three of those departments thus became one T/TT line smaller), and requests from Environmental Studies, History, International Studies, Linguistics, and Math-Stats-CS. Were it not for the lines withheld, two of these eight requests could have been granted. The Allocations Committee’s memo of April 10th notes shortcomings in the eight non-approved requests, but doesn’t note the constraint that only eight of ten available lines could be approved. Indeed, the Allocations memo of April 10th encourages two rejected departments (Environmental Studies and Spanish & Portuguese) to apply for Mellon MNI postdocs.

It is the right and responsibility primarily of the faculty (not the administration) to make curricular shifts within and across departments. Macalester’s faculty-specialization lineup differs sharply from how it looked thirty years ago, and that’s a good thing. The question is on what basis do shifts as large or larger than fourteen separate Macalester departments get made.

**Fourth** comes the question of financial scale. This should also be a matter for public discussion. The current invitation to apply for postdocs where “[t]he long-term goal is to retain these postdoctoral scholars through appointment to tenure-track positions” has been prompted by the \$1 million Mellon Foundation grant. Were Macalester not to have received this grant, it seems unlikely that the Provost would have asked EPAG to approve the allocation of four future tenure-track positions. There is an ample case to be made for increasing curricular commitment to Native and Indigenous studies even *without* external funding. But this grant has advanced that position considerably.

The question then becomes, is \$1 million enough to prompt the College to commit to four tenure-track lines? Macalester is well known for many things, among which is weak fundraising. So it would be good to think this through matter-of-factly. Let us assume that perhaps \$200,000 of the \$1 million grant is directed toward the rich additional activities envisioned by the grant: the annual residency program for Indigenous experts; the creation of an *Indigenous Voices* series featuring speakers, artists, and activists; and paid student internships with

community-based partners. This leaves \$800,000 for four postdocs, or \$200,000 per position. If a postdoc costs roughly (salary, benefits, and other support) \$100,000 per year, the grant could fund four two-year postdocs. Numerous postdocs like this have been funded at Mac over the years without tenure-track expectations. If this Mellon grant funded four postdocs with no intention of conversion, it would be unproblematic.

But funding for tenured or tenure-track lines is different. Our giant public neighbor [UMN endows chairs](#) for \$2 million. Elite and heavily endowed [Duke specifies \\$1.5 million](#) to endow a *visiting* professorship, and \$3.5 million for a full. Our smaller and less wealthy sibling [Knox College specifies \\$1.5 million](#) for a chair in an existing academic program, and \$2 million for a new field. Eleven years ago, our most recent endowed chair, the Edens Professorship, was funded at [\\$2 million](#), which would be about \$2.5 million today. In this light, if we are being influenced by an incentive of about \$200,000 per tenure-track line – about 8% of the Edens gift – then we need to question both our fundraising and our sense of scale.

**Fifth and finally comes the question of a de facto summer T/TT allocations round, and (whether or not the process begins this summer) numerous procedural uncertainties connected to conversion.**

Macalester's TT allocations process has a predictable annual rhythm. An autumn call is issued by the Provost, applications are due in early winter, and decisions come mid-spring. Departments have ample time to develop their requests, often well in advance of the formal call. Everything happens during the academic year. Rare "emergency" reviews are given, as when a critical member of a small department resigns in late spring: here an allocations review can be made off-cycle so that, if approved, a search can begin the following fall.

In contrast, the announcement of applications for the MNI Initiative's first two postdocs was released five months after the Mellon grant was awarded, a month after graduation, on June 17th. The first submission deadline is less than two months later, on August 15th. Let us outline several concerns about this summer timeline, and (regardless of summer timeline) about the application and advancement to T/TT status.

First, though these are postdocs, for departments this is a de facto tenure-track allocations round. With the stated goal "to retain these postdoctoral scholars through appointment to tenure-track positions," and an EPAG that "has approved the allocation of these future tenure-track positions," departments must succeed in the August 15th round to compete for two future tenure-track positions.

Second, many departments will be hard-pressed or unable to develop a strong initial application in the summer. Many faculty, including department chairs, are dispersed around the country or overseas, starting or ending leaves or chair terms, or are committed to other tasks. Oftentimes, normal tenure-track allocations requests are years in the making. With this MNI quasi-allocation, the first notice came a month after graduation. There is no precedent for a summer TT allocations round at Macalester.

Third, though the deadline for full proposals will be September 23, the first deadline of August 15th is a winnowing point. The June 17th announcement notes that “following the review of letters of intent,” only “a smaller number of departments will be invited to submit full proposals.” No Macalester precedent (other than the true fiscal and existential emergency of 2020-21) permits only a subset of aspiring departments to make full Allocations applications based on a one-to-two page letter.

Fourth, open questions surround the role of the five-person Mellon MNI Initiative Grant Organizing Team (GOT) in the review process. The June 17th announcement notes that applications will be reviewed by the Allocations Committee and the GOT. If this is a quasi TT allocations round, what is the role provisioned in the Handbook for such evaluators? If GOT members participate, will they be voting or nonvoting? If the Sociology, Anthropology, or History departments apply for one of these positions, will the relevant GOT faculty members recuse themselves from the ranking process? (We assume that a substitute Faculty Affirmative Action Officer will serve on Allocations should the History department apply.) Two of the members of the GOT are also members of the Allocations Committee: would they apply two sets of criteria in their evaluations? We lack answers to these questions, but they should be deliberated upon and publicly addressed.

Fifth come some future-oriented questions. Suppose two postdocs are hired to start in September 2023. When would the host departments submit formal TT allocations requests for them? When these allocations requests are made, would they compete against all other requests in that year’s allocations round, or would they seek to approve lines already held for them? If these requests are competing against all other applications in that year’s allocations round, how important would it be that the College had affirmed to the Mellon Foundation in Fall 2021 that it would seek to retain these postdocs in tenure-track positions?

In addition, would the Allocations Committee be evaluating the merits of the *line*, or of the specific postdoctoral scholar who seeks to fill it? If the latter, this seems more like a personnel process. The Handbook language governing the Allocations Committee has no procedures for evaluating a specific candidate; its language speaks only of positions. The Handbook’s allocations section refers to the document “Procedures for Tenure-Track Appointments Without a National Search.” Would this document govern these allocations requests? In this light, on what basis (other than any commitment made in the grant) would the College *not* open up the line to a national search? Many Macalester T/TT faculty began teaching here in non-tenure-track positions; most of them acquired their TT positions in an open national search. How can we know that these future MNI postdocs will meet the criteria for an appointment without a national search?

In this light, we might ask about the appeal of our postdoctoral positions to presumably superb candidates in high-profile fields, as compared to tenure-track positions offered by competing schools. Would we be certain to hire the best candidates in this landscape, and would they continue to be the best candidates available two years later?

**Conclusion:**

We have asked many questions in this document, but lack the answers to them. They must be addressed before this process continues.

Let us conclude with two notes we have already made. First, nothing in this document is meant to question the importance of Native and Indigenous Studies in general and at Macalester, nor the important work done by faculty colleagues involved with the grant. It is only to highlight problems with the failure to observe long-established faculty governance procedures for major curricular transformation.

Second, we think that Macalester should move forward and invite departments to apply for these important postdoctoral positions that would commence in September 2023. But we ask that the College immediately put the brakes on the many linkages described to tenure-track positions, and eliminate an August 15th round if it is a winnowing round. Far more work needs to be done by elected committees and the faculty as a whole for the College to approve the allocation of four tenure-track positions. To list all of the needed changes in this conclusion would risk replicating many passages sketched out above. But an at-least preliminary memo to the faculty should be sent well before the initial August 15th departmental deadline.

Respectfully,

Professor David Chioni Moore

Professor Arjun Guneratne, Macalester AAUP Chapter President

Research and Instruction Librarian Dave Collins, Macalester AAUP Chapter Vice-President

Professor Erik Davis, Macalester AAUP Chapter Secretary