Major Grants

By Dale Nimrod

Major improvements of facilities and curricula require money as well as time and thoughtful planning. Four grants have been especially important in improving broad-based Luther College programs—programs that affect nearly every student. One facilitated expansion of the sciences. One strengthened and sustains attention to the humanities. One provided a new academic building. And one supported integration of the concept of vocation across the college. A beneficial bonus of the formulation of any grant proposal, regardless of the academic area, is the articulation of common goals.

The completion of Valders Hall of Science in 1961 opened a new era for the natural sciences at Luther. Subsequently, in 1970, the science faculty won a grant of $250,000 from the National Science Foundation to offer a more robust program in the sciences by the addition of biochemistry, aquatic biology, biostatistics, and geophysics. The grant enabled the addition of three faculty (one in each science department), funded a professional technician for each department to free faculty for teaching and research, and provided needed equipment.

In the 1980s faculty in the humanities sought support from the National Endowment for the Humanities to improve the introductory course in literature, history, and writing. In 1983 NEH approved a proposal requesting $131,000 for this purpose. That same year NEH invited proposals to endow humanities programs in college curricula. Luther submitted a 3 for 1 matching grant proposal for $350,000 to endow the Paideia program. NEH approved the proposal and the college reached its required match by 1986, resulting in an endowment of $1.4 million, a figure that has grown to $3.6 million today.

Luther's largest grant was awarded by the F. W. Olin Foundation in 1995: $7 million to fund the construction and furnishing of a new classroom building to house the departments of mathematics, business, and computer science. The foundation commended Luther as "a rare gem among America's liberal arts colleges . . . that provides an environment that fosters a community of learning that we have rarely seen elsewhere."

A college has important goals besides the curricular ones. At Luther College the concept of vocation has been, from its beginning, one of these. The challenge is to integrate this concept into the intellectual and residential life of the college. In 2002 the Lilly Foundation awarded Luther College a grant of $2 million to support this effort. Dozens of initiatives by individuals and groups within academic departments, administrative units, and campus ministry received financial support to incorporate into their own mission the goal of helping students think about life in terms of a calling.