### **Kenneth Brown**

Mirrors and Windows: The Children’s Literature Program at Allen University

**Project Summary**

Allen University proposes a two-year humanities initiative designed to enhance the knowledge and understanding in the humanities by strengthening the current curriculum related to humanities and the study of literature. The two-year initiative will consist of an innovative approach that will create a bridge between the humanities courses, Allen students, the field of Childrens Literature, and high school students who may be potential Allen students.

Throughout the two-year humanities initiative Allen University will focus on: the literature and language in children’s books; strengthening current humanities courses; and expanding student and community awareness of the correlation between the humanities and children’s literature.

The proposed program and activities will aid in the collection and publication of children’s book authors and historical materials; art, and music. Existing textbooks across disciplines at Allen University will be augumented with Children’s literature. Courses will focus on the mainstream population, with the efforts and knowledge of Allen university faculty/staff, the Center on the Book at the State Library; The University of South Carolina and the Richland County Children’s Library. Children’s literature will be utilized within the humanities courses related to english, religion, culture, art and history but also in the sciences. The information will also be made available to the public though the Allen university library, community pop-up libraries and a website.

Allen University will reevaluate the existing materials used in the English curriculum and develop a new humanities course/center entitled, Mirrors and Windows. The instruction component for the newly developed course will utilize collections of children’s stories and publications and books by noted childrens book authors. The courses will not only be an academic discipline that studies human culture; it will also assist in the perpetuation of the knowledge in literature and history.

Allen University will host a student and community event promoting children’s literature and history each year of the project.The students enrolled in humanities courses will have the opportunity to assist in planning and participating in the event. The proposed event will promote Allen humanities courses, student and community pride through self-identity.

The proposal components enhance core curriculum, faculty development, student involvement, and community awareness. Increasing the understanding of humanities by strengthening the institution academic core directly coincides with the mission of Allen University and its philosophy and the NEH Humanities Initiative.

**Narrative:**

**Intellectual rationale** - At Allen University Our Motto is: “We teach the mind to think, the hands to work and the heart to love.” This captures the essence of what it means to prepare the whole person for life service.

Allen University is an academic community which provides students an opportunity to obtain a baccalaureate degree in liberal arts and professional programs. The University has a strong unalterable commitment to teaching in delivery of its baccalaureate programs.

Allen University is a Liberal Arts institution whose purpose is to prepare leaders who are skilled in communication, critical thinking, and who demonstrate high moral character. Our aim is to provide an environment of academic excellence in order to heighten our student’s chances of succeeding in a culturally diverse and economically global world. Allen University desires to follow a Total Life Curriculum model, which addresses preparation of the whole person for life service.

We seek to develop the intellect, the spirit and the body as we bring our students into a climate designed for success. Successful development of each student is our goal. Allen believes that faith plays a major role in developing one’s character. Therefore, our curriculum includes principles and practices of the historical beliefs of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Allen University’s core values are selected principles that govern our behavior and operation as an organized body. We seek to practice truth and propriety in our personal and corporate practices and relationships and we accept our responsibility to be consistent in sound practices, loyal in reference to duties, agreements, obligations and relationships. Allen University aspires for its faculty, staff and students to live and work in harmony with peers, by respecting each individual’s right to exist, think and speak in an appropriate manner. The dignity of each one will be honored by all. Allen University is committed to the vigorous pursuit of excellence in our educational endeavors. Allen University is a Christian liberal arts institution of higher learning under the auspices of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

This humanities initiative provides the opportunity for Allen University to strengthen the institution's core curriculum and provide students and potential students with a better understanding of the humanities. Allen University proposes to create a children’s literature center which be designed to enhance knowledge in the humanities by strengthing the interdiciplinary study of the total Allen curriculum. The newly developed program will be titled *Mirrors and Windows: The Childrens’s Literature Program at Allen University.*

A generation ago the scholarship devoted to children’s literaure tended to be cordoned off from the larger scholarly community. Twenty years later, the academic study of children’s literature is a thriving hub sustained by and extending along a network of interdisciplinary crosroads. We now know that children’s literature contributes to the ways we understand history, culture, psychology, art, and other branches of humanistic and social-scientific thought.

African American students entering into a college setting are at a disadvantage and some times not prepared for English courses. Based on research conducted by the SC Department of Education there is a dire need to implement programs and tools to assist students to become successful in not only receiving their high school diploma but also prepare them for higher education.

The typical textbook format used in American schools is based on a cultural view that is often incommensurate with the culture and traditions of many minority groups. The Childrens Literature Program at Allen University will aid in the development of a culturally competent curriculum that focuses on African American achievements through the use of literature and cultural history.

The project will be incorporated into the existing English courses and cross diciplinary courses. The program will not only be an academic discipline that studies human culture it will also assist in the teaching of African American history.

**Program content and activities** - The proposed project will consist of two phases. A detailed work plan grid listing objectives, activities, time-frames, and project team members assigned to each objectives is located in Appendices A. *Phase I* - involves the planning and development of the proposed children’s literature program. The project will also mesh the rich history of the community with the latest in literacy technology. By making the information easy to obtain, the vibrant traditions of the Waverly Community and Allen University will remain alive and relevant to students.

An Advisory Board will be formed by the project team. The board will be made up of seven faculty, staff and students. The board will recommend what books and authors are suited to be a part of the curriculum and the visiting/ lecture faculty. We plan on using Jacqueline Woodson, Reginald Hudlin, and Ta-Nehisi Coates for lectures on their published works and how they managed to publish their work. We want to include the three writers because we feel that they have a lot of material to bring forth to inspire our community. The lecture will also feature a master class in which they will show, whoever wants to write and publish a book, where and how to network to become successful in the publishing industry. We feel that the master class will motivate aspiring writers who wish to one day publish their work. This will also inspire both the community and the students at Allen University who wants to be successful in life of whatever career field they plan on getting into. We will also have events related to their work such as a read along with the youth and book signings. This will bring the youth from K-12 to join in on a fun, interesting, and educational experience. We will have a pop up library for the community opened on campus for whoever is interested, including monthly campus reads of our proud HBCU. For this event, we will have a festival which will include a parade, food trucks, a cook out, and games. We plan on having faculty training as well for whoever in the community wants to volunteer for staff in the event. We also plan on having acting sessions with professionals who are experienced in the career of theatre. This will make the event of this section fun for all in which the community can get involved in. We will also have monologue readings for the community and students who wish to volunteer in acts from varieties of stage plays such as Renaissance and Contemporary theatre. This will have them all engaged in an activity that is adventurous and thrilling as they play roles of classical and known characters such as Hamlet or Dorothy from “The Wiz”. Most of the plays that will be displayed for performance will be remixed with Hip hop since Allen University and the Waverly Community is predominately African American. This will bring the community together in one adventurous and exciting event. We also plan on having a costume making or design workshop for those who are into fashion or design. We want to make the event more interesting for not only the acting part of theatre, but give those who want to get into fashion or design a chance to showcase their talent. Anyone is welcome to volunteer in this event, rather they’re into theatre and fashion or not. For the creative writing session, we will have workshops for poetry and short stories. The short stories in the workshop will feature a session in which the community and students alike will create short stories of certain topics to choose from, and will get to critique each other’s work after finishing. The poetry session will be the same in which those who wish to be a part of it will also get to choose not only topics to choose from, but also forms of poetry in which they will learn to use during the session. The workshops will be separate and anyone who wants to join has to sign up. Those who sign up for the workshops will get a chance to have their work included in the Mirror & Windows section of Allen University’s literary journal, Upended Words.

*Phase II* - involves the evaluation of existing English literature course materials and the development of a new Humanities course entitled, Children’s Literature & History. The culturally relevant courses will positively engage student learning. Students will learn composition, grammar, and critical thinking skills. The students will explore the various means of human communications in contemporary times. Reading and analyzing various works, such as, short stories, novels, poetry, language materials, and oral history about one’s own history will create a renewed enthusiastic environment for the students.

In the second year of the proposed project, the project team will strengthen the existing Humanities courses offered at Allen. The team will reevaluate the existing Humanities course objectives and review new instructional materials from from *Phase I.* The team will focus on students gaining the knowledge and understanding of interdisciplinary content, literature, history and cultural diversity as related to the Humanities. The interdisciplinary fields of study will include literature, language, philosophy, and cultural traditions related to African American history and the cultural diversity aspect that explores ethical and moral issues. This will give the students a clearer understanding that humanities are academic disciplines that study human culture and have a significant historical element. Instructors and students will have greater access to primary sources that deal with literature and culture. This will enhance the teaching and learning opportunities in the classroom.

The current core classes at Allen University provide the students with a foundation for reading, writing and critical reasoning. The proposed center will incorporate literature, language, philosophy, cultural traditions into the core classes. Students will gain an understanding and overview of literature in general, and what it is and why it is important for study. Coursework will include reading texts and learning to place them in context. Development of interpretation and analytical skills appropriate to novels, short stories, drama, poetry and essays will be practiced.

**Project Personnel** -The Project Team will consist of Allen faculty & staff and Key consultants. See Appendix B for project team resumes and support letters. *Project Director* -***\_\_\_\_\_,*** Humanities Department Head and Social Science instructor at Allen. *Team Member -* ***,***  *Team Member* - . *Team Member* - . *Team Member\_\_\_,* *Team Member* -***,*** Graphic Design\_\_. *Team Member* -.Flipper Library Director. *Consultant* ***\_\_\_\_\_\_ .***

**Institutional Context** - Founded in \_\_\_\_\_\_, Allen University is named in honor of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

The College offers \_\_\_ Academic Degrees and \_\_\_ Certificate Programs. The academic degree programs related to Humanities are as follows: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ The humanities courses offered are: \_\_\_\_. The faculty within the program is highly knowledgeable and willing to expand their resource base.

Alen currently has a total of \_\_ faculty (full/part-time/temp) & staff. Of the \_\_\_\_\_(full/part­ time/temp) faculty, \_\_\_\_\_ teach humanities courses. All \_\_\_\_ humanities instructors are members of the Proposed Project Team: Currently, \_\_\_% of the faculty and staff are African American, \_\_% are white, and \_% are other.

The Flipper Library serves as an academic and community library providing reference and research resource for students, faculty, the residents of Waverly Community, and the surrounding area. The library's collection of African American authors, topics, and culture, are of special note. The library offers extended evening and weekend hours, a public access computer lab, fax and copying services, and special events such as learning opportunities, and adult learning seminars.

**Follow-up and Dissemination** -The project director will share the experience of the childrens literature center with other professionals at state and regional conferences, whenever possible. An article detailing the project will be prepared for the Journal of Higher Education. In addition information will be shared at the annual meetings of HBCUs and through the college's website.

The long term impact of the Children’s literature Program will strengthen the institutions academic Humanities core structure, student knowledge and understanding of Humanities, and foster academic student success by improving student writing, grammar and critical thinking skills.

**Evaluation** - The data to be collected for the evaluation allows for both quantitative and qualitative measures. In the qualitative area, the project utilizes open question student surveys to assess satisfaction and student perception of effectiveness. In the quantitative area, the project will use program based data supported by data from instructors.

This evaluation format is appropriate to the project in that it is objective based and provides an ongoing measure of project effectiveness. The Allen administration will be able to use the evaluation data in quality assessments of the project. Allen University intends to use the results of an evaluation to make programmatic changes based upon the results of the project evaluation.