



Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education (NetVUE) Grants to Individuals for Vocational Exploration

Awarded in 2025 • Funding for 2026–2027

Spring 2026 Cohort

Heather Brady (Grand View University, IA) will create a resource for use by faculty members that equips instructors with tools, guidelines, and strategies to support undergraduate vocational formation and reflection in community-engaged learning (CEL) environments. Informed by findings from a pilot study on the impact of reflective practices in CEL on youth sports in community, the resource will offer data-driven recommendations adaptable to a range of institutional and pedagogical contexts.

Çağlar Çetin-Ayşe (Augustana College, IL) will investigate the impact of Augustana College's vocational reflection and leadership formation program for sophomores. Positioning vocation as a collective pursuit and centering diverse student voices, the project engages students and mentors as co-researchers in the inquiry process. Project outcomes will include a public exhibition, conference presentations, blog posts, and a peer-reviewed article. Together, these artifacts will advance an inclusive, community-rooted model of vocational exploration adaptable across a range of educational contexts.

Andie Day (Belmont University, TN) will study how students explore vocational discernment in an intensive, four-week course in New York City for undergraduates studying fashion design and merchandising. The project will equip students with tools for purposeful career development. By engaging industry leaders, students will explore real-world examples of navigating the intersection of creativity, commerce, and personal values. Structured reflection will help students articulate their sense of calling, reconcile their values with professional realities, and envision their future contributions to the field.

Diane LeBlanc (St. Olaf College, MN) will integrate existing sophomore co-curricular programming into a new educational model centered on holistic vocational development for second-year students. This project builds upon three existing sophomore programs that center vocational reflection and exploration: fall-semester advising, a mid-year symposium, and a spring series of programs that foster belonging and support transition to an academic major. The new paradigm will integrate these elements into a comprehensive framework adaptable across diverse higher education contexts.

Melissa Pavlik (North Park University, IL) will produce a literary magazine-style publication through collaboration of two cohorts of incarcerated and non-incarcerated students in a semester-long series of workshops on vocational questions, particularly as they relate to the common good. Cohort participants will study the same curriculum and submit original writings on vocation for inclusion in the magazine. Incarcerated teaching fellows and student coordinators will co-facilitate sessions alongside course instructors, provide feedback on submissions, and assist in preparing them for publication.

Summer 2026 Cohort

Allie Alayan (Pepperdine University, CA) will develop for publication her quantitative scholarly research on passive and active discernment strategies in relation to religion, spirituality, and career decision-making. Building upon her dissertation research (which investigated the validity and reliability of a widely used vocational discernment inventory), this new publication will seek to support scholars and practitioners engaged in integrating religious and spiritual frameworks with career development and discernment-focused programs.

Alison Cook-Sather (Bryn Mawr College, PA) will examine how student-faculty pedagogical partnership programs inspire students to pursue relational ways of learning, growing, and being with others, as an expression of their sense of vocation. Through narrative analysis of assessment data and interviews of graduates, the project will investigate how graduates' life pathways have embodied this calling. The project will culminate in published recommendations to help higher education institutions more intentionally support this dimension of students' vocational formation.

Thomas Albert Howard (Valparaiso University, IN) will explore the theological relationship between vocation (*vocatio*) and mission (*missio*), particularly in the context of church-related institutions of higher education. By examining how these concepts intersect historically and theologically, he will propose frameworks for reimaging them in a

pluralistic, postcolonial world. The project aims to inform how faith-based colleges and universities think about mission and vocation in tandem in a modern educational context.

Alyse Knorr (Regis University, CO) will consider how the discipline of creative writing can enrich vocational discernment in higher education. Through theoretical concepts such as finding narrative voice, and through practices of workshopping writing and disciplined revision, creative writing models vocational discernment as communal, iterative, and imaginative. By bridging creative writing and vocation studies, this scholarly project will offer educators concrete pedagogical tools for guiding students as they explore questions of identity, purpose, and calling.

Adam Smith (University of Dubuque, IA) will examine what it means to pursue a vocation in professions like teaching or health care, when the institutions that organize those professions are increasingly distrusted. The project will culminate in an engaging book suitable for use in undergraduate courses related to vocation, inviting undergraduates to think more carefully and clearly about what it means to pursue a vocation in a time of profound and growing institutional crisis.

Academic Year 2026–2027 Cohort

Christopher Atkins (Baylor University, TX) will develop a new undergraduate course inviting students to consider how the approaches of Stoicism (especially with respect to resilience, virtue, and purpose) have informed and can further inform vocational reflection in a modern context. The course will examine the application of Stoic principles in business leadership, the military, and athletics. By leveraging the writings of ancient Stoic philosophers, this project will expand the pedagogical body of expertise on vocation in undergraduate education.

Terese J. Lund (Wingate University, NC) will investigate how vocational reflection in work-study and experiential learning contexts influences purpose formation, vocation-related identity, belonging, and overall student engagement. Building on pilot interventions, the project will refine and scale reflective tools and generate research-informed practices that more intentionally connect classroom learning, co-curricular involvement, and students' emerging future aspirations. By these contexts as sites of growth and discernment, the project enhances vocational exploration across a range of transformative experiences.

Laura Nicole Miller (Assumption University, MA) will integrate vocational exploration into organizational communication courses, providing a replicable model for vocational

reflection in undergraduate business curricula. The courses will feature vocation-focused modules that link identity, calling, organizational culture, and ethical decision-making to real-world communication practices. By grounding leadership and workplace communication in vocational reflection, the project prepares business majors to pursue meaningful, transition-resilient careers while avoiding patterns of burnout and disconnection.

Stephanie Mitchell (Carthage College, WI) will revise a curriculum for training faculty members and staff colleagues to hold skillful conversations with students about vocational exploration and discernment. First created for use at Carthage College, this curriculum, once revised, can be adapted for a range of institutional cultures. It features five broad themes related to vocation: responsibility and place; the relationship between character and calling; the interplay of passion, purpose, and social location; the pressures and constraints of choice; and the role of self-knowledge in relation to self-transcendence.

Jane Simonsen (Augustana College, IL) will examine both the promise and the limitations of liberal arts conceptions of vocation as they apply to incarcerated students. By situating her work within prevailing frameworks that understand education for incarcerated people as liberatory, rehabilitative, and restorative, the project will explore the meanings, tensions, and possibilities of vocational reflection in carceral learning contexts. In addition to its scholarly contributions, the project will produce adaptable vocational reflection materials for use across diverse educational settings serving incarcerated learners.

Kristin VanEyk (Hope College, MI) will examine the effectiveness of vocational instruction within an undergraduate teaching methods course for pre-service English teachers. By expanding vocational coursework and developing both course-based and post-graduation assessments that follow graduates through their first year of teaching, the project seeks to deepen students' understanding of vocation and to support vocational flourishing among the program's graduates. The project will also produce a replicable set of protocols adaptable to teaching methods courses in other subject areas.

Brian Viliunas (Samford University, AL) will write a book on vocational calling in the arts, examining how artist-practitioners discern their purpose amid their evolving faith commitments and broader societal changes. Drawing on biblical narratives as well as contemporary insights, the project seeks to inspire educators and artists at multiple stages of formation to integrate questions of meaning and purpose more intentionally into their creative practice. In doing so, it will foster deeper vocational exploration within both academic and faith-based communities.