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Executive Summary

In the University of Notre Dame's ACE Teaching Fellows program, 154 AmeriCorps members(150 original request, 4 no cost MSY) will serve as teachers of record in over 100 under-resourced urban and rural schools in 12 states and the District of Columbia. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for educating over 13,000 disadvantaged youths. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 1500 volunteers who will serve over 6000 hours in their schools' communities. ACE's focus area is the CNCS goal to ensure high quality educational and behavioral outcomes for students from disadvantaged communities by providing a highly qualified, rigorously trained corps of teachers to serve the critical shortage of education professionals in high needs areas. The requested CNCS investment of $135,000 will be matched with $3,800,000 in program funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

1. Problem/Need

The University of Notre Dame's ACE Teaching Fellows program recruits and prepares high quality classroom teachers for service in under-resourced Catholic schools across the United States. Located in urban and rural communities, these schools meet the expressed educational and social needs of thousands of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, most frequently from racial and ethnic minority groups. These schools request ACE teachers for difficult-to-fill positions to help produce improved educational outcomes for students.

The paucity of high quality educational opportunities for economically disadvantaged and minority students is well-documented. Recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test indicate that white students have average scores at least 26 points higher than African-American students in reading and math for fourth and eighth grades. The achievement gap between white and Latino students ranges from 21 to 26 points in these tested subjects and grades. These numbers highlight a vast discrepancy in educational achievement between populations--a discrepancy that is attributed in large part to differential access to high quality schools. Catholic schools, particularly those in urban settings, provide a high quality educational alternative for low-income and minority children. They increase the likelihood of graduating from high school (Altonji, Taber, & Elder, 2005; Neal, 1997), engender high levels of civic engagement in their students (Campbell, 2008; Dee, 2005). For example, Latinos who attend Catholic schools are 42% more likely to graduate from high school and are 2.5 times more likely to graduate from college (ND Task Force Report, 2009).

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Effective teachers are central to the success of these schools--and to all schools that provide a high quality education for their students. Research indicates that classroom teachers are the single most important factor in students' academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2003). Schools must attract and retain effective teachers capable of challenging students to reach their fullest potential. Unfortunately, schools that serve students from high-poverty communities are more likely to hire conditionally licensed teachers without advanced content knowledge in their subject (Ingersoll, 1999, 2001). Retention rates for teachers in these positions are strikingly low, and the teachers that are hired are more likely to leave the school for better working conditions (NCES, 2011). As such, schools with the greatest need for high quality teachers are often the least able to attract and retain them. ACE was founded in 1994 to train teachers in order to improve educational outcomes of economically disadvantaged students. Superintendents and principals from the southeastern U.S. approached Notre Dame seeking highly qualified educators to serve their students. In response, ACE began its program to recruit and train talented college graduates with strong content knowledge in their undergraduate disciplines (e.g., math, chemistry, or engineering). They spend two years teaching in communities in across the country, enabling schools to carry out their work in educating students for success. From the outset, ACE formed a critical partnership with CNCS. As one of 11 inaugural Demonstration Programs that combined support from AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America, ACE leveraged this support to develop an innovative Master's degree program to prepare its membersfor the rigors of teaching. Today, the need for ACE AmeriCorps teachers has increased. ACE has grown from 40 to 180 teachers (90 per cohort), yet requests from schools outstrip the number of teachers we can provide. We receive over 150 requests for teachers from partnering sites and fulfill about 90 vacancies. Each year, ACE staff visit all partner schools to identify and prioritize the teaching positions of highest need. Each school makes specific requests to ACE (e.g., high school Spanish, middle school math). These schools find great value in our members because of their content knowledge; training in our innovative M.Ed. program (see Theory of Change); and their commitment to service, which finds them, beyond their work in the classroom, coaching, tutoring, leading extracurricular activities, and engaging students in volunteerism. ACE AmeriCorps teachers are intentionally placed in under-resourced, high-need schools, serving in schools in which the largest percentage of students is economically disadvantaged. ACE was founded in recognition of both the importance of effective teachers for students' academic achievement, and the dearth of quality teachers and college teacher education programs meeting this need in under-resourced schools. Consider ACE's track record in serving some of the poorest students in high-poverty schools: in Notre Dame's ACE Academies--a

network of under-resourced Catholic elementary schools operating in partnership with ACE and staffed with at least one ACE teacher--the substantial initial achievement gap in mathematics between students in ACE Academies schools and all other schools in each of the two respective dioceses has been cut in half over the first few years of the partnership. Similarly, data on student literacy highlighted in our most recent internal evaluation shows a 52% increase in oral reading rate from fall to spring among a sample of 5th graders served by ACE AmeriCorps members.

Since 1994, CNCS and ACE have partnered to recruit, educate, and retain highly qualified college graduates to serve as ACE AmeriCorps members. Our partnership has evolved, always focused on continuous improvement to increase achievement outcomes for children. This relationship has yielded lasting benefits, not only for the students and the schools served, but for the broader field of education. We have collectively trained over 1,500 men and women for service as teachers, and over two-thirds remain active professionals in education. In addition, collaboration with CNCS has inspired Notre Dame to show how higher education can provide innovative solutions to educational challenges, as we have helped 15 other universities develop service through teaching programs modeled after ACE. We hope to continue this successful partnership with CNCS to address the crucial need for high quality educators for our nation's vulnerable students.

2. Theory of Change and Logic Model

ACE meets the urgent need to provide students in underserved communities with high quality teachers. ACE does this through a comprehensive and evidence-based theory of change. The logic model is presented below, including the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. The inputs include our ACE AmeriCorps members as well as our faculty and staff, financial investments, and partnerships that we sustain in order to enable this program to succeed. Our theory of change comprises four core activities: Recruitment, Formation, Addressing Critical Need, and Retention. Detailed descriptions of these activities and connections to outputs and outcomes of the logic model are described in the following sections.

Core Activity #1 -- Recruiting Highly Talented Teachers. ACE recruits and enrolls high caliber college graduates, targeting highly competitive universities across the United States. Research indicates that classroom teachers are the single most important factor in students' academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2003). ACE's success in advancing student growth begins with its ability to attract intelligent candidates with strong motivation and work ethic. Nationally, GRE test takers whose intended graduate major was education were in the 37th percentile in math and the 50th percentile in verbal from August 2011 to April 2014. In comparison, the GRE scores of the 19th ACE

cohort were in the 64th and 78th percentiles for GRE math and verbal. Our partnership with AmeriCorps is invaluable for recruitment for three reasons. First, it helps to publicize this opportunity in the world of higher education, as the potential to serve through AmeriCorps appeals to college graduates eager to perform national service. Second, being an AmeriCorps program gives ACE a powerful stamp of approval and is a sign of programmatic quality and stability. Third, the AmeriCorps partnership enables ACE to recruit a pool of candidates with greater socio-economic diversity. The Eli Segal Education Award opens the door for applicants with student loans to perform national service and reduce their debt. Without AmeriCorps it is likely that our teacher population would have less economic diversity.

Core Activity #2 -- Formation of Effective Teachers. Once admitted and enrolled in Notre Dame's Graduate School, ACE teachers complete a rigorous, innovative, and supportive two-year degree program (concurrent with their service) that prepares them professionally for effective service in their schools. The Master of Education (M.Ed.) program in which all ACE teachers participate offers multiple levels of support, ongoing faculty supervision, and academically excellent coursework (see Evidence Base and Evaluation Report). Notre Dame's M.Ed. is a leader among its peer programs. Teacher candidates in high-coursework (top tier) alternative certification programs complete an average of 432 hours of instruction (NCEE, 2009). In contrast, candidates in ACE receive 479 hours of graduate level instruction, including 145 before they enter their classrooms. The number of course hours included in ACE--especially those that focus on the practical aspects of classroom teaching--place the program in the top quartile of all alternative certification programs and well above the average for traditional certification programs. According to a 2011-2012 survey by the NCES, 48% of traditional public school teachers, 37% of charter school teachers, and 36% of private school teachers have earned a master's degree (NCES, 2013). Conversely, 100% of ACE graduates earn a Master of Education degree from Notre Dame. AmeriCorps resources contribute significantly to this high quality education and professional support. Without it, our capacity to appoint strong faculty and provide vital supervision would be negatively impacted. Class sizes and supervision loads would increase, thereby reducing the amount of feedback from faculty to ACE teachers and inhibiting their capacity to be as effective as agents of change in their communities.

Core Activity #3 -- Addressing Critical Need and Impacting Student Achievement. The ACE AmeriCorps members are intentionally placed in school communities that need high quality teachers. Research on teacher placement confirms that highly qualified candidates who enter and stay in teaching gravitate to well-resourced schools (Boyd, Lankford, et al., 2005; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

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In contrast, ACE places teachers in under-resourced schools, with 100% of our placements in sites where superintendents and principals articulate areas of high need, specifying the particular subject area and grade level in which they need an ACE teacher. Over the last grant cycle, we have used a stringent poverty criterion to further define local need, and over 70% of ACE placement schools have a student population comprised of a majority of students from racial and ethnic minority groups.

Core Activity #4 -- Retention in Education. A hallmark of our theory of change is the evidence that ACE AmeriCorps graduates remain in the field of education longer than graduates of traditional teacher education programs. Nationally, 10% of new teachers leave the professional after their first year (NCES, 2011). ACE teachers demonstrate high retention, with 73% remaining in teaching or working in schools once they complete their two-year service commitment. This rate is significantly higher than other selective teacher corps programs, which have been cited with 50% attrition after two years, and 80% attrition after three years (Heilig & Jez, 2010). The partnership with AmeriCorps is vital to this success for three reasons: members experience professional success, are inspired by the ethic of national service, and the Segal Education Awards reduce the economic burden of outstanding loans.

3. Evidence Base

Program-Specific Evidence. Converging sources of evidence document that the ACE AmeriCorps program achieves our key program outcomes [Between Moderate to Strong Evidence Level]. The uploaded evaluation details several areas of assessment. First, pre/post surveys demonstrate significant improvement in teachers' instructional practices. Second, quantitative evaluation of the quality of instruction, assessed by university faculty, is consistently rated as very good to excellent. Third, direct observations of ACE AmeriCorps members in their classrooms show critical and statistically significant growth in pedagogical skill from their first semester of teaching to their fourth, as reported by university faculty supervisors and local school principals. Because of space limitations, the first two points are elaborated more fully in the required evaluation (uploaded to eGrants), while the third is addressed at more length here.

Among the most critical tools of formation that ACE employs is the direct observation and feedback on instruction provided to our teachers. Both university faculty and on-site principals provide regular, systematic, and rubric-based feedback to increase the teaching effectiveness of our AmeriCorps members. All ACE AmeriCorps members are enrolled in a series of courses centered on the more than 3,000 hours of classroom teaching completed over the two years of ACE. The performance indicators cover four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and

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Professional Responsibilities. Each site visit is documented using a two-year site visit form that standardizes field notes and aligns a two-year narrative with performance indicators, rated on a 4-point scale: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and exceptional. The local school principals also rate the teacher across these four domains. ACE tracks the percentage of teachers who have been rated "proficient" or "exceptional" in each performance indicator each semester, with the goal to have each ACE AmeriCorps member score at the proficient or exceptional levels for the performance indicator by the end of the fourth semester. A snapshot (see full evaluation report for detail) of these performance indicator data for the 19th cohort of ACE AmeriCorps is described here, from both the perspective of principals and university faculty.

ACE's first key domain focuses on "Planning and Preparation" and assesses whether the teacher demonstrates knowledge of content and pedagogy and is able to select effective instructional objectives. In Semester 1, 56% and 57% of ACE's 19th cohort were scored by university supervisors as proficient or exceptional for these two indicators; by semester 4, 99% and 96% were rated proficient or exceptional. A similar pattern was recorded from principal observations: by Semester 4, 98% of the cohort demonstrated knowledge of content and pedagogy and 97% were at or above proficient in delineating instructional goals and outcomes. These pre/post differences in proportion were assessed via a z-test and were significant at the $p < .01$ level. ACE's second domain--"Classroom Environment"--measures indicators such as whether the teacher manages classroom procedures and manages student behavior. University supervisor observations indicated that during Semester 1 nearly two-thirds of teachers were proficient at managing classroom procedures. By Semester 4, 94% were proficient on this indicator and 6% were exceptional. Principals' observations track the same growth: 89% of teachers were proficient or exceptional at managing student behavior by the fourth semester of teaching. These pre/post changes in proportion demonstrated statistical significance on the z-test. ACE's third domain--"Instruction"--tracks indicators such as "engages students in learning" and "provides feedback to students". Whereas 52% and 58% of ACE 19 were scored by university supervisors as proficient or exceptional in Semester 1 for these two indicators, by Semester 4, 98% and 86% were rated proficient or higher. A similar pattern was recorded from principal observations: by 4th semester, 94% engaged students in learning and 97% were at or above proficient in providing student feedback. Taken together, expert observations from University faculty and direct observation by local principals provide two independent sources of high quality data. AmeriCorps support ensures that these ACE teachers attain high levels of instructional effectiveness. As they do, their students are more likely to succeed, according to research highlighting high teacher quality as the most important

factor contributing to student achievement.

Alternative Entry Programs Evidence. The positive effect of strong teachers on student academic achievement has generated research interest in the core components and overall effectiveness of teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; NCES, 2010; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). A model framework for our evaluation efforts as well as evidence-based support for the effectiveness of alternative entry programs to the teaching profession is centered on recent evaluations of Teach for America (TFA). Similar to ACE, TFA (another AmeriCorps-supported program) recruits individuals with strong academic backgrounds into the teaching profession and places corps members into high-poverty schools. Recent studies that use both experimental and quasi-experimental (value-added models with school fixed effects) designs suggests that TFA corps members are on average more effective at promoting growth in student achievement than traditionally trained teachers. These effects are primarily found in STEM courses (mathematics and science) and at the secondary school level (Clark, et al., 2013; Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011; Henry, et al., 2014a; Henry, et al., 2014b). Despite this evidence of increased student achievement, TFA has been criticized for the high exit rate of corps members from the teaching profession after fulfilling the program's two-year commitment (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). Fifty percent of TFA graduates leave teaching after two years and 80% leave teaching after three years (Heilig & Jez, 2010). Unlike Teach for America, ACE teachers' high rate of program completion (98% continue teaching over the two years of the program) and high retention to service through education (73% remain teaching or working in schools once they graduate) confirm the efficacy of the ACE model for training and retaining high quality teachers. In fact, ACE's retention rate exceeds the retention rate for teachers of both alternative and traditional teacher training programs. The ACE AmeriCorps partnership excels at providing the nation with high quality teachers who remain in the field.

Evidence of the growth of ACE AmeriCorps teachers' instructional effectiveness through principal and supervisor observations is augmented by evidence of student academic growth. As longitudinal assessment data on Catholic school students has become more readily available, coupled with the increased use of sophisticated, research-based methods of analysis, we are fully committed to meeting AmeriCorps' suggested performance measures. We will build on our experience in using these methods to evaluate the performance of the Notre Dame ACE Academies, a network in which ACE teachers serve in under-resourced Catholic elementary schools in Tucson and Tampa with vulnerable student populations. Students enrolled for all four years in the network's Tucson schools, which serve

low-income Latino students, have moved, on average, from the 29th percentile (nationally) in mathematics achievement at baseline in 2010 to the 47th percentile in 2014. Similarly, students enrolled for two years in networks schools in Tampa have gained five percentile points in both mathematics and reading. Value-added estimates suggest a positive annual contribution to student achievement. In sum, our comprehensive evidence base--comprised of a multi-pronged internal evaluation, quantitative gains in our network of schools, and experimental evidence from a comparison program--provides a foundation for a reasonable prediction: positive student achievement outcomes across a broader sample of ACE AmeriCorps' teachers. We detail our rigorous design to evaluate ACE AmeriCorps teacher performance using student-level assessment data in the Performance Measures section.

4. Notice Priority

Our proposed ACE AmeriCorps program is fully responsive to the CNCS Focus Areas. Ours is a Professional Corps program in the area of Education. As outlined on page 2 of the NOFO, our program primarily "contributes to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children." Our program delivers on this outcome is through the four core activities outlined in our theory of change: Recruitment, Formation, Addressing Critical Need and Impacting Student Achievement, and Retention (spelled out fully in Section 2).

5. Member Training

ACE AmeriCorps members receive high quality training both prior to and throughout the duration of their service. All members are alerted to the prohibited activities during their AmeriCorps orientation. Besides reading them together out loud, the prohibited activities are also part of the member contract that members sign, listed in their handbook, and mentioned in their semi-annual time sheets. Subsequently, candidates in the ACE program complete a two-year academic teacher preparation program that is accredited by the Indiana Department of Education, culminates in a Master of Education degree and satisfies all Indiana requirements for teacher certification. Over the course of two years, members participate in full-time teaching, ongoing graduate study, and sustained and supportive supervision. A chronology of their training follows. First Summer: Begins with a 8-week summer session at the University with graduate courses that integrate educational theory and research. First year course work focuses on areas of specialization as well as the social, philosophical, theoretical, and empirical foundations of teaching. Simultaneously, ACE teachers participate in mentored, supervised teaching at public schools in South Bend, IN. First Academic Year: All ACE teachers are full-time teachers of record. Each participant receives a mentor teacher at his or her

assigned school whose purpose is to support, advise, observe, and evaluate the ACE teacher. Mentor teachers receive training at Notre Dame every other year. An academic supervisor--a Notre Dame faculty member with a terminal degree in education--provides formal evaluation of all ACE teachers twice a year. These observations are conducted using the evidence-based Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (mentioned in Evidence Base), and provide formative feedback that improves both the teacher's command of the learning environment and instructional technique. A member of the ACE staff who provides non-evaluative support to individuals and communities also visits ACE participants twice annually. Staff members meet with principals and members of the wider community to assess and address any areas of concern. Throughout this first year, participants enroll in graduate online coursework related to teaching and assessment in their content area, classroom management, and other pedagogical and content-specific topics. They gather at a retreat in December to meet again with their faculty and supervisors. 2. Second Summer: ACE teachers return to campus to continue academic coursework, deepen their theoretical understanding of the enterprise of education, and build upon the experiences of their first year to refine their professional practice of teaching. The perspective and experience gained through the first year of teaching prepares candidates to engage in more specific coursework on teaching children with exceptional learning needs, preparing comprehensive unit plans, and to use varied assessment strategies to inform and shape their classroom teaching. Second Academic Year: Proceeds as the first, with additional online graduate course work. ACE teachers graduate from the program immediately following their second year of teaching.

6. Member Supervision

There is a comprehensive system of professional and personal support to guide ACE AmeriCorps members during their service commitment. Site supervisor training begins with an orientation weekend in April, as ACE convenes superintendents, principals, and new ACE teachers to be trained on operating an AmeriCorps site. During the weekend, ACE orients the supervisors by reviewing the AmeriCorps ACE handbook, answering questions regarding their role, and collecting a signed site agreement form. Follow up with each site supervisor occurs during fall/spring site visits, which are also a part of our monitoring activities. During the academic year, university faculty members visit teachers' classrooms, observe them teaching, and provide formative feedback. From a professional perspective, high quality supervision greatly improves the experience and efficacy of novice teachers (Glazerman, 2010; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). School principals and mentor teachers provide coaching and mentorship as well. ACE Program staff have frequent communication with both ACE

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AmeriCorps members and site supervisors over the course of the year through email, phone calls, texts, and in-person visits to every site where AmeriCorps members serve. Site visits are made each semester to monitor compliance issues. Site visits also allow faculty to offer the ACE AmeriCorps members the formative feedback vital for professional growth. Finally, ACE provides a full-time as a psychological resource consultant for its members. In sum, ACE teachers benefit from multiple, integrated supervisory experiences, which contribute to the near 100% completion rate among participants and to the high percentage of participants remaining in the teaching field after completing the program.

7. Member Experience

All ACE AmeriCorps members are teachers of record in elementary and secondary schools across the United States. ACE teachers are taught to hold high expectations and standards for all students and employ an array of teaching and assessment methods to foster student success. ACE teachers also assume many additional responsibilities critical to their students' development: moderating clubs, coaching, leading volunteer opportunities, mentoring, and tutoring. As a Master's degree program with multi-layered support structures, ACE emphasizes its members' personal and professional growth to enhance the quality of their service. ACE promotes active reflection among its teachers. During the two summer sessions at Notre Dame, all ACE teachers live in one dorm on campus, eat together in the dining hall, attend class and student teach with one another. The faculty and staff share meals and join in community events, and the program's administrators meet with each ACE teacher regularly. Throughout the two school years, ACE teacher submit bi-weekly reflections on specific topics in their classroom to their University supervisors, who offer timely and thorough feedback. Additionally, a member of the ACE staff communicates multiple times each month to discuss their service experience. This systematic support encourages completion, retention, and a lifelong ethic of service. Every ACE AmeriCorps member plans and leads at least one service project with their students to help them experience the ethos of service that drives our members. As ACE teachers learn in their coursework, it is developmentally important for their students to perform service and reflect on it. Students and community members benefit from the example of these teachers who, as AmeriCorps members, promote volunteerism. Finally, to ensure that ACE AmeriCorps members capitalize on acquired skills beyond their service experience, members can utilize the ACE staff and Notre Dame's Graduate Career Services for career planning. For the majority who stay in education, ACE offers licensing assistance through its certification officers.

8. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

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ACE consistently emphasizes its AmeriCorps identity. For more than two decades, our partnership has been a point of pride for our members and for the entire ACE team. In its recruitment of talented college graduates, ACE underscores its historic partnership with AmeriCorps and our hopes to be awarded funding for the upcoming fiscal year. During the summer at Notre Dame, we host an AmeriCorps orientation for our members and encourage them to get involved with the national service movement in their communities across the country. We provide AmeriCorps apparel to our members, and our partner schools display the AmeriCorps signage to identify their connection with national service and to encourage students to volunteerism in their communities. As AmeriCorps sponsored activities occur such as Martin Luther King Day of Service, Education Week, AmeriCorps Week, and the nationwide swearing in ceremony, we encourage our members to involve their school communities. Our members participate with their classroom in a service learning activity, which allows them to share their AmeriCorps experience and participation in the national service movement.

Organizational Capability

1. Organizational Background and Staffing

Primary Contact: John Schoenig--Director of Teacher Formation and Education Policy, ACE; 107 Carole Sandner Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556, jschoeni@nd.edu, 574-631-7052; Secondary Contact: John Staud--Senior Director, ACE, 107 Carole Sandner Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556, jstaud@nd.edu, 574-631-7052.

For the past 21 years, ACE has worked in partnership with AmeriCorps and CNCS. In the past 8 years, we have received federal support from CNCS as a National Direct Professional Corps program with annual support ranging from $207,000 to $412,913, depending on the requested number of members and cost per MSY. In the last three-year cycle of our grant, ACE had on average 135 AmeriCorps members. ACE is an integral part of Notre Dame and is subject to all of the University's policies and procedures for fiscal oversight. ACE works closely with University budget, audit, and accounting offices, with their vast experience managing federal grants, for financial planning and review.

ACE has 14 full-time administrative staff, 8 full-time faculty members, and more than 50 adjunct faculty members who are responsible for the AmeriCorps members' performance in and out of school. ACE's Program Manager, Kathleen Fulcher, handles the logistics of executing AmeriCorps grants. She is the members' primary resource for paperwork, accountability, and branding. The team collaborates closely and reports to John Schoenig items that warrant attention. Faculty and staff conduct site visits at all our 100-plus AmeriCorps sites twice a year, with each ACE AmeriCorps member visited four times during each year of service. ACE staff are trained to meet with site supervisors and members to

review position descriptions, monitor allowable activities, maintain proper documents, and ensure each site has its AmeriCorps signage displayed.

ACE operating sites are high-need, under-resourced schools in 30 communities. ACE begins the placement process by soliciting input from the superintendent on which schools need AmeriCorps members. For ACE to consider the school as a potential service site, the school must clearly demonstrate: 1. It is a community challenge to hire a highly qualified teacher for its staff vacancy, 2. The skills of an ACE AmeriCorps member benefit the school in a way that no other staff member could, 3. The ACE AmeriCorps member would be serving a community in high need, 4. The ACE teacher would be given the required support to be successful as a teacher, and 5. The leadership of the school can ensure that the ACE teacher has a powerful service experience. At the operating site, each AmeriCorps member meets frequently with his or her site supervisor (principal) and assigned mentor teacher, who monitor their daily activity in the classroom.

2. Compliance and Accountability

After 21 years, ACE has valuable experience to ensure compliance as a grantee and to hold our service locations accountable. All compliance for staff, AmeriCorps members, and service sites is done centrally in the ACE office at Notre Dame. Kathleen Fulcher coordinates these efforts with the assistance of the rest of the staff. Each ACE AmeriCorps member has his or her own AmeriCorps file, which contains all compliance documents. These files are stored in a secure location and undergo weekly compliance checks to ensure their completion and security. Throughout the year, Fulcher coordinates the timely and complete collection of all AmeriCorps paperwork. We also monitor the compliance of the schools in which our members serve. Each spring, we host an orientation meeting at Notre Dame for representatives from these schools at which Schoenig explains all compliance regulations as a site hosting an AmeriCorps member. Each principal receives a site supervisor handbook and AmeriCorps sign, along with regular communication from Fulcher about AmeriCorps. Sites receive two annual visits by an ACE staff member who meets with the site supervisor to discuss all AmeriCorps compliance topics as outlined in our approved site visit tool. Members' orientations focus on the CNCS prohibited activities so that all members are aware of what can and cannot be counted towards their service hours. ACE team members, during their fall visit to the school site, review with the site supervisor the prohibited activities to ensure that the ACE AmeriCorps member reports only allowable service activity hours. Should an issue or occurrence of non-compliance arise, ACE is committed to working with its Program Officer to take corrective actions and to document and share the issue with CNCS staff.

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3. Past Performance for Current Grantees

Due to the stricter service site qualification set by CNCS, ACE did not fill its MSYs for the first two years of its most recent grant cycle, making target Performance Measures difficult to meet. ACE AmeriCorps members successfully met the Performance Measures target for ED1 and ED2 each year. Target percentages were reached for specific Professional Corps Performance Measures, although raw number goals were not reached due to the lower MSY. For year three of our grant, 2014-15, we achieved 100% member enrollment (plus a few no-cost slots) because of our successful execution of the corrective action that we described in our end of year grant progress reports. For year two of our grant, 2013-14, we achieved 97.1% member retention (138 out of 142). Of the four who were not retained, one member left the program within a few weeks of successfully completing their service year. The other three members completed their service, and graduated from Notre Dame, but they did not complete the required paperwork, and lost their opportunity to earn their Education Award. To improve our member retention rate, the ACE team puts member experience at the forefront. ACE is attentive to members' well-being and development. For example, ACE has added a full-time staff member as a psychological resource. Such attentiveness is vital for ACE to achieve 100% member retention. The recent National Criminal History Check review period allowed the ACE staff to reevaluate its process for conducting criminal history checks. By reviewing the CNCS provided video lessons and completing the required quizzes, the staff identified weaknesses with the state background checks and followed up with the ACE AmeriCorps members to ensure they complete those checks. ACE AmeriCorps members will have all required components of their criminal history check completed before they report to Notre Dame for their summer session and AmeriCorps orientation. As soon as they are accepted to participate in ACE, their history checks will be executed, ensuring that these results are received prior to the members' start date.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

1. Cost Effectiveness: The total amount of funding required to operate ACE is $3.9 million. ACE maintains a diverse set of stakeholders for financial support. Our largest funding stream is from school fees. Each school that ACE partners with pays a stipend to our members in addition to a fee directly to ACE to cover part of their members' educational expenses. For the current fiscal year, $3.1 million is the amount generated from school fees. Beyond school fees, ACE has several private benefactors who financially support our efforts to recruit and train highly effective teachers.

As a fixed amount Professional Corps program, ACE seeks $900/MSY (at 150 members a total of $135,000) to assist with essential program operations, representing a 33% per MSY decrease from our

2012-2015 grant. This support, though sharply reduced, remains vital for the continued efficacy of the graduate-level preparation of ACE teachers. The AmeriCorps operational funds yield highly leveraged impact. From the inception of ACE, the University has offered significant financial support in multiple areas (all figures are taken from the 2014-15 fiscal year). Most notably, the University waives graduate school tuition ($8.3 million for 180 ACE teachers) and offers summer housing as an in-kind gift ($257,000), a total annual benefit of over $8.5 million. Notre Dame's contribution keeps the per teacher cost of ACE's nationally recognized teacher education program at $21,944 annually. Administrative fees from the schools provide the largest source of revenue to offset this expense. These administrative fees vary from school to school and are tied to the local salary scale of a new teacher. They are calculated by subtracting from this salary figure the modest stipend the school provides the ACE teacher (the average stipend is $12,880). The average administrative fee is $17,200, which means that ACE must raise an additional $4,827 per ACE teacher to run the program.

Without CNCS programmatic support, the capacity of ACE's Master of Education program would be negatively affected, compromising ACE's student/faculty ratio and straining our supervisory loads (which, at 30-35 teachers per full-time faculty supervisor are already much larger than most teacher preparation programs), thus making it more difficult to educate exemplary teachers and impacting adversely the students they serve. The increased supervisory burden would likewise make compliance monitoring more difficult. Indeed, continuing the historic programmatic support of CNCS through the Professional Corps is vital for ACE to offer its teachers the educational and professional support so critical to them and their students. The high need schools in which our teachers serve face considerable financial challenges, meaning that their school salaries (on which the modest ACE teacher stipends and administrative fees are based) are typically 30% lower than salaries at neighboring public schools. The loss of operational dollars would impose a difficult dilemma: either the preparation of ACE teachers would suffer or the lost revenue would be passed on to under-resourced schools.

In addition to this Fixed Amount Professional Corps Grant application, ACE is seeking 30 MSY AmeriCorps Partnership Challenge slots to serve additional schools. These are under-resourced schools that have established local need but do not meet our stringent criteria as determined by district poverty rates. They nonetheless serve low-income students whose neighborhoods represent pockets of economic disadvantage.

2. Budget Adequacy: See Budget Module.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

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Description of Theory of Change

Our theory of change rests on a four key activities: a) recruiting highly talented college graduates for service through teaching; b) providing rigorous formation and training via a practical and professionally supportive Master of Education degree program; c) identify economically disadvantaged schools, deliver high quality instruction in them, and positively impact student achievement; and d) retain talented and highly trained professionals in education.

Measurable Outcomes Aligned with Theory of Change

Outputs:

a) Members provide services in 100 high-need schools (ED 14); b) In these schools, our members serve over 13,000 students in grades 2-12 who start with an AmeriCorps Education Program (ED 1). C) Over 13,000 students successfully complete an AmeriCorps Education Program by successfully meeting the requirements for promotion (ED 2)

Outcomes:

Short-term: a) ACE teachers insist on high expectations and standards for all students; b) ACE teachers employ an array of teaching and assessment methods to foster student success; c) ACE teachers assume additional non-teaching responsibilities (i.e., moderating, coaching, mentoring, tutoring, and leading volunteer activities). Medium Term: a) Number of AmeriCorps members who complete their term of service (ED 13); b) Teachers with a positive impact on student learning (ED 18); c) Number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math; Number of students who demonstrated improved academic engagement (attitudes) (ED 27A). Long term: a) Teachers remaining in education field but not teaching after service (ED 17); b) Individuals receiving teaching certification (ED 19)

Overarching Evaluation Questions

We consider process and outcome evaluation questions in this evaluation, which taken together provide feedback on program design, delivery, and impact. The domains and questions are:

1. Program Design: How does the ACE Program's theory of change manifest in practice? That is, how and to what extent does the articulated theory as proposed become operationalized in practice?
2. Program Delivery (Professional Training): How and to what extent does the ACE Program ensure high quality and intensive professional formation?
3. Program Impact: To what extent do ACE Program AmeriCorps members perceive growth in their professional competence, according to their own self-assessment?
4. Program Impact: To what extent do ACE Program AmeriCorps members grow in their professional

competence, according to expert observations of their pedagogy and practice?

5. Program Impact: To what extent do ACE Program AmeriCorps members produce student-level impacts (e.g., improved academic performance and academic engagement) as a result of their service?

Overview of Design and Methods

1. Program Design: Assessed via administrative monitoring data collected on an ongoing basis for tracking, reporting, and compliance

2. Program Delivery (Professional Training): Course and Instructor Feedback (CIF) data are collected near the end of each academic session (summer, fall, and spring). The survey administration is managed by the Office of Institutional Research and is conducted entirely online using anonymous feedback from students enrolled in each course. Students complete an identical series of items for every course offered at the University. These 10 items are clustered into three domains, with their associated items as follows: a) Clarity and Organization of the Course; b) Guidance and Support; c) Stimulation of Learning

3. Program Impact (Self-assessment of Growth as Educator): All admitted participants in the ACE Teaching Fellows program are invited to complete an entry survey once they arrive to campus to begin their summer coursework. The survey is administered electronically in the first week of the ACE summer. All graduating teachers are invited to complete an exit survey at the conclusion of their second year of ACE. Results are used to inform decision making related to recruitment efforts, admission criteria, placement of teachers, and ongoing support of teachers throughout the program as well as for internal program evaluation concerns.

4. Program Impact (Teacher Observations): Assessed via faculty and principal observations of ACE AmeriCorps members in the classroom. Both University faculty and on-site principals provide regular, systematic, and rubric-based feedback to increase the teaching effectiveness of our AmeriCorps members. The performance indicators cover 4 domains: Planning and Preparation; Classroom Environment; Instruction; and Professional Responsibilities. Each site visit is documented using a two-year site visit form that standardizes field notes and aligns a two-year narrative with performance indicators, rated on a 4-point scale: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, exceptional. The local school principals also rate the teacher across these four domains. ACE tracks the percentage of teachers who have been rated "proficient" or "exceptional" in each performance indicator each semester, with the goal to have each ACE AmeriCorps member score at the proficient or exceptional levels for the performance indicator by the end of the fourth semester.

Narratives

Note: Our evaluation plan for this current grant application cycle has built upon and extended the range of proposed methods and data sources in order to examine student-level impacts more directly. These student-level examinations of program impact are new.

5. Program Impact (Student Academic Achievement):

We will assess year-to-year academic achievement growth to evaluate whether or not students taught by ACE AmeriCorps members demonstrate improved academic performance in literacy and/or math. We will work with a randomly-selected sample of ten dioceses (described below), to establish data sharing partnerships and collect annual student test score records (e.g., from ITBS or TerraNova in grades 3-8 literacy and math) along with other student and teacher background information. This sample will include approximately 25 percent of all ACE AmeriCorps members, with over half of the grade 3-8 teachers for whom we would be able to compile annual test score data. All ACE AmeriCorps members within sampled dioceses will be included in the framework.

We will measure annual achievement growth by comparing a student's literacy or math test score with their prior year test score by using the Normal Curve Equivalents (NCE) measure. We expect students to grow by a minimum of 2.0 NCE (2-4 percentile points) to demonstrate improved academic performance. We expect that an ACE AmeriCorps member will have an average of 50 percent of their students meet this threshold. This would be approximately 800 of 1600 students taught by teachers in our sample (these numbers will adjust based on actual enrollments and test participation), or by extension 6750 of the 13500 students served by all ACE AmeriCorps members.

Sample and Data Collection

We will evaluate ACE AmeriCorps members over the next three years by working with a randomly selected sample of ten dioceses, stratified based on the number of K-8 Catholic schools in each diocese. We categorize dioceses as large (>75 schools, 2 total), medium (26-75 schools, 12 total), and small (1-25 schools, 13 total). While the we stratify by number of schools in the diocese, we only include in our sampling frame those dioceses that have three or more ACE AmeriCorps members responsible for literacy and/or math instruction in grades 3-8. After we randomly choose dioceses within each strata, we will work to establish data sharing partnerships with one large-, five medium-, and four small-sized dioceses. Each of these dioceses has an average of four grade 3-8 ACE AmeriCorps members responsible for instructing an average of 160 students total per diocese. With ten dioceses, our total sample includes approximately 1600 students.

6. Program Impact (Student Academic Engagement):

We will develop a survey to be administered by ACE teachers measure the number of K-12 students

demonstrating improved academic engagement. The survey will be administered to students with parental consent twice during the school year (the first and last months). The survey will include items taken from two scales of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) Biennial Survey: the Academic Engagement Scale (4 items) and the School Connectedness Scale (5 items). These scales measure aspects of student engagement that include interest in school and attachment to school. Each of these scales has been used extensively with samples of both elementary and secondary students with a reported Cronbach's alpha reliability ranging from .65-.78. We expect to receive parental consent for about 70% of sampled students and anticipate improved academic engagement for about 50% of those surveyed. After consent, we expect 500 of 1600 students taught by teachers in our sample to demonstrate improved engagement, or by extension 4725 of the 13500 students served by all ACE AmeriCorps members.

Evaluator Qualifications

James M. Frabutt, Ph.D., a university faculty member since 2007, will serve as lead evaluator, and he brings over 15 years of experience implementing applied research/evaluation designs in classrooms, schools, academic research centers, and non-profit agencies. Joseph Waddington, Ph.D., Research Associate in the unit, who recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for Research on Educational Opportunity, has an active program of research centered on school choice, quantitative methods, and education policy. Monica Kowalski, Ph.D., received her undergraduate and M.Ed. degrees from the University of Notre Dame and her Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership from Ohio State University, with a specialization in educational psychology.

Amendment Justification

Not applicable

Clarification Summary

Clarification Question 1:

1. The application indicates that, to host an AmeriCorps member, superintendents and principals must articulate areas of high need. Please further describe what information is provided to the University of Notre Dame to be used in determining whether the school qualifies to host an AmeriCorps member. How do schools demonstrate that they have difficulty filling a position? During the months of January and February, ACE Teaching Fellows solicit placement requests for the upcoming school year from the Superintendents of the Dioceses that we serve. At the top of the placement request document, the Superintendent certifies that "I request an ACE AmeriCorps teacher(s) for the following position(s)

for which it is difficult to find comparable professionals locally." This documentation is on each placement request that we receive from our partner Dioceses. The superintendents work with their principals(ACE site supervisors) in soliciting their requests for teacher placements. Each year we receive more requests from our partner dioceses than we can programmatically fill. In addition to the superintendent's verifying the difficulty in filling these teacher positions and the site supervisors communicating their school site need, ACE staff and faculty visit each school twice a semester which allows ACE to see the community need and understand the local community context for which our members are serving.

Performance Measure Clarification:

1. Measures ED1 and ED2: Please confirm that the students being counted in ED2 come from schools in which the largest percentage of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and/or have special or exceptional needs, as defined in the ED2 performance measure instruction.

Response: Yes - ACE will place teachers in schools in which the largest percentage of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

2. Measure ED2: Please provide a definition for how program completion will be defined in order to qualify a student to be captured under this measure.

Response: Program completion for this measure refers to students in ACE classrooms that meet end of course requirements and are promoted to the subsequent grade level. Such information is collected through a Fall and Spring Semi Annual Report that is a modified version of the CNCS provided Education Service Output Summary document.

3. Measure ED14: Please confirm that AmeriCorps members will only be placed in schools meeting the CNCS definition of "high needs schools" (please see 2015 Performance Measure instructions and reference to Race to the Top).

Response: University of Notre Dame ACE AmeriCorps members serve in schools in which the largest percentage of students is economically disadvantaged. Students are considered economically disadvantaged if they attend school within the geographic boundary of a public school district wherein

the percentage of school-aged children (ages 5-17) living in families in poverty exceeds the national average of 18.6% (NCES, 2009).

4/5/6 are answered within the Performance Measure application.

7. ED 1 and ED 2 have been deleted from the Teacher Corps performance measures.

8. Performance Measures Sampling Plan: Please verify that for selected dioceses, the assessment will be based on all members serving within the diocese. The sampling plan mentioned can be found in our supplemental evaluation plan. As we describe in our evaluation and sampling plan, we will be able to gather annual student achievement and engagement data from a sample of dioceses in which ACE AmeriCorps teachers serve. We will be able to collect these data for teachers instructing students in grades 3-8. Therefore, all grade 3-8 ACE AmeriCorps teachers within a diocese selected as part of our sample will be included as part of the evaluation.

No Cost MSY Request 2015-16

1 . The number and type of slots requested. Please confirm that for the MSYs requested, the additional members will only engage in activities aligned with the proposed member activities outlined in the application narrative.

Programmatically, ACE AmeriCorps projected our placement request prior to receiving our actual requests for the upcoming school year 2015-16. ACE is requesting 4 no cost MSY slots. Operating sites have been revised to include these 4 no cost slots.

2. A description of resources that will be provided to adequately support the additional members and how they are sufficient to; support the member costs, management, oversight, program operations, and the program activities. All the information regarding program resources are presented in our Organizational Capability narrative also apply to these no-cost MSY slots.

3. Source(s) of non-CNCS funds. This information can be found in our budget/cost effectiveness narrative.

4. The organization's capability and capacity to successfully implement, manage, and monitor the additional members. Again, all the information regarding program organization capability and capacity to implement, manage, and monitor these additional members can be found in our Organizational Capability narrative.

Narratives

Clarification Round II

In our proposal, under the section on cost effectiveness, we disclose that school fees comprise the largest funding stream for ACE Teaching Fellows, at $3.1 million for the current fiscal year. This figure represents school fees for all 180 ACE teachers, not just the ones (154) who would be enrolled as AmeriCorps members. The total funding required to operate ACE annually is $3.9 as budgeted for the 2015-16 fiscal year. This budget includes the following categories as principal areas of expense:

1) salaries of staff responsible for the recruitment and support of ACE teachers

2) salaries of the faculty who teach in the Master of Education graduate program that prepares them for high-quality, high impact service

3) travel expenses connected with visiting sites to support the formation of ACE teachers as professionals and to monitor the adherence to AmeriCorps protocols

4) meals at Notre Dame during the 8 week summer institute for 180 teachers

5) travel support for ACE teachers to and from their sites at the beginning and end of the summer institute at Notre Dame

As we detail in our proposal, school fees account for 78% of the revenue needed to operate annually. There is a funding gap of $4,774 per ACE teacher between the school fees per ACE teacher ($17,200) and the cost per ACE teacher to run the program ($21,944). ACE generates resources from endowment, grants from private and corporate foundations, and an annual fund in order to make up the funding gap. The clarification question seems to presuppose that ACE's per teacher cost is high, but in fact this figure represents less than 50% of Notre Dame's graduate school tuition, and the University has generously agreed since the founding of ACE 22 years ago that it would waive its standard tuition and intake no revenue from ACE to its general fund. Tuitions at comparable master of education programs typically run at least twice as much as our per teacher cost to run the program. For example, Stanford University's STEP tuition cost is $41,901 for the 2015-16 school year and Harvard's TEP tuition cost is $43,280 for the 2015-16 school year. The majority of ACE's expenses are connected with the Master of Education program and the multiple layers of support provided to ACE teachers to develop professionally. Our high retention rates and high stick rate in the field of education upon completion demonstrate the highly leveraged value of these expenses.

We are proud that the MSY funding request of $135,000 represents a modest percentage of our

overall budget, a figure we have lowered by 10% in light of CNCS desires to limit MSY costs, but it is nonetheless critically important for us to help address the funding gap.

Continuation Changes

Grant Characteristics