Writing at the end of Year 1 of a three-year grant from the Davis Educational Foundation, the “Integrative Learning Team” (IL Team) at Castleton University eagerly anticipates implementing new integrative coursework in the coming academic year.

1. Progress toward project goals:

Our original application requested support for meeting several Undergraduate Education objectives in Castleton’s 10-year strategic plan. The project was intended to: a) expand students’ opportunities to reflect on the connections between their General Education coursework and their major; b) deepen integration of their co-curricular and academic programs; and c) increase our emphasis on undergraduates’ application of knowledge and skills to complex regional, national, and global problems. Ultimately, we hoped to create a plan that would both enhance students’ dispositions for learning and empower their academic planning. Having learned a great deal about integrative learning programs at other institutions and thinking about implications for Castleton, we intended to build an “integrative learning pathway” in our General Education Program. It was to be built around “bookend” courses in our first and third years. In the past year, the IL Team has met most of the major Year 1 benchmarks toward this goal. Specific accomplishments are detailed in Appendix I which revisits the Year 1 timeline submitted to the trustees in July 2016.

Year 1 was to be largely devoted to capacity building and clarification of our plans. We undertook the project by forming an Integrative Learning Team, which currently consists of five faculty members drawn from various disciplines, the Dean of Students, and the Dean of Special Academic Programs. We also formed three working groups tasked with specific goals. A General Education working group focused on program and curricular development in the General Education Program. A Co-Curricular Learning working group explored a parallel and complementary approach to integrative learning in our division of Student Life. A First-Year Seminar/Advising working group implemented integrative learning in our First-Year Seminar Program. In addition to the IL team, which provided the leadership, these working groups involved an additional eight faculty members, three staff members, and four students.

The IL Team, supported by the working groups, conducted a thorough self-study of integrative learning at Castleton. Part of this self-study involved a systematic survey of courses and programs identified as “integrative” by faculty members. We also visited three nearby campuses with integrative learning programs: Skidmore College, Keene State College, and Champlain College. We consulted with staff and faculty members who built and administer these programs.
In December of 2016, we passed Castleton University Campus-Wide Learning Goals through approval of the President’s Cabinet and a unanimous vote of our Faculty Assembly. The fourth campus-wide goal addresses and affirms the goal of our project:

Castleton University teaches students how to make connections between various intellectual and social domains and to apply their knowledge in critical and creative thinking and expression.

Working in parallel with our self-study, we established an essential framework that, we believe, best characterizes such integrative learning at Castleton. It includes four dimensions:

**Connection making**: We found that effective integrative courses intentionally guide students to draw upon their experiences of other coursework and activities. A preliminary research study conducted this spring found that this dimension of course design has significant effects on increasing students’ intrinsic motivation for learning.

**Transfer of skills**: Integrative programs implement pedagogies that require students to transfer knowledge and skills across domains as a way of developing more subtle dispositions of learning. We found such pedagogies most active in “case studies” courses, simulations, and other courses implementing problem-based learning.

**Reflection on learning**: Our integrative courses also include frequent and structured opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. This pedagogical dimension facilitates another broader goal of the project to promote better academic planning. While this kind of work takes place most prominently in our First-Year Seminar Program, we see opportunities to expand reflection throughout the curriculum.

**Taking action**: We learned that the best integrative learning courses involve some measure of taking action in a real world context, such as public reporting of research or conducting a community-based project.

Our self-study and programmatic mapping confirmed our sense that such “integrative learning” does happen at Castleton, but in a limited number of academic programs and for specific programmatic ends. Our Business Administration Department is an ideal example. An intentionally sequenced and strategic integration of the subject matter of different courses prepares students for the transition from introductory business theory to professional internships.

We reaffirmed our goal to assure educational equity and to promote effective IL principles more generally in the curriculum. Our General Education Program has seemed the obvious place to assure that such learning takes place for all Castleton students. However, our study confirmed that it contains limited coursework or program architecture to teach and promote this integration after the first year. Further, although the program currently has some aspirational “goals,” it has no agreed-upon and measurable learning outcomes to guide further program development. Toward the end of the self-study, we began work on drafting such measurable learning outcomes. We hoped that this project would help to build consensus among faculty about the need for
structural refinements to the program and that it would achieve the larger goal of aligning the program with the campus-wide goals.

To assist us in the process, we hosted two consultants: Martha Stassen, Assistant Provost for Assessment and Educational Effectiveness at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Dee Fink, a fellow of the American Association of Colleges and Universities and nationally recognized expert on program and course design.

Given the success of our process toward ratifying campus-wide learning goals, we decided to follow a similar calendar for our General Education Program learning outcomes. We have presented our learning outcomes in draft to the Faculty Assembly General Education Committee, the faculty group tasked with oversight of the program. They are extremely supportive of our draft, voted unanimously to endorse our project and process, and will assist in the wider discussions among faculty members in the next term. We now plan to bring these learning outcomes to a final vote in December of 2017.

The various experts we consulted advised taking a more deliberative approach to program development than we had originally proposed. Rather than aiming ambitiously to launch a branded “pathway” in Year 2, we were advised to aim for launch at the end of the grant period. We decided to follow this advice. This approach allows us to put the pieces of the pathway into place and to achieve broad consensus about what we hope will be a newly branded, perhaps renamed, General Education Program. It also allows us to promote continuous improvement in the Gen Ed Program by establishing new approaches to assessment. Please see Appendix III: Timelines for Years 2 and 3.

In place of moving toward the pathway launch next year, we moved up curricular and pedagogical development. We will now offer pilot sections of an upper-level bookend course in the spring of 2018. This upper-level course planning was originally scheduled to begin in Year 2 anticipating pilot courses in Year 3. We put out a call for faculty and have formed a cohort of six faculty members who will offer the pilot.

We experienced strong support for our project among our First-Year Seminar instructors. Faculty members discussed IL principles and the Castleton IL framework throughout the fall 2016 semester and attended an all-day retreat workshop during a January break. To conduct the workshop we hosted Simeon Dreyfuss, Chair of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies. This work resulted in 11 new FYS courses (of 25 total) with innovative themes and explicitly integrative dimensions. It is a strong departure from our tradition of offering many introductory courses in the disciplines as FYS sections. We are confident that we have begun a process that will move this early bookend of our pathway fully into place by the conclusion of the grant period.

2. Advancing the foundation’s objectives of strengthening teaching and learning practices and controlling costs:

Ultimately, our aim has been to promote a more learner-centered curriculum that will have a positive impact on retention and pace to degree and, thereby, to lessen our students’ debt burden upon graduation. Since our work this year was primarily in capacity building, we don’t yet have ready data. However, we can point to several steps in building the infrastructure to support these goals.
Our work during the first year has advanced Castleton’s institutional support for teaching and learning. In addition to the winter retreat workshop described above, we held regular discussion group meetings focused on teaching, and we hosted Dee Fink for two days of meetings, lectures, and workshops. We also intend to offer a new course design process during this summer. Participants will conduct in-person meetings and take an online course in “Designing Courses for Significant Learning” offered by Dee Fink and Associates. These initiatives follow some of the best practices in support for teaching and learning that we have learned throughout this year.

We are building program structures to complement our existing institutional assessments. Our First-Year Seminar working group designed a new assessment to determine needs of first-year students; the preliminary data were reviewed by FYS faculty at our summer retreat on May 16, 2017. We are building a problem-based learning assessment for our upper-level course as a way to assess advanced learning dispositions. Additionally, we have plans to explore a co-curricular e-portfolio system in the coming year that will also help with assessment. Our Co-Curricular Learning working group surveyed existing assessment data from sources such as our Office of Admissions, Career Services, and our Alumni Office; the group will facilitate sharing of these data. We hope that these various data will provide insight toward the program goals of retention and supporting pace to degree. Perhaps more than that, we hope that they will help us to determine how to best support our students in securing rewarding lives after graduation.

3. Lessons learned so far:

Our work on information literacy through integrative learning has proven one of the most exciting and unexpected outcomes of the project. We have been collaborating with our librarians and new Library Director who are revising library and research instruction. This partnership was facilitated by our visit to Champlain College in which we learned about their approaches to library instruction as part of their IL program. Our librarians have followed up and now hope to replace an information literacy test currently used to meet the graduation requirement with a staged and sequenced curriculum that will overlap with the planned integrative learning pathway. The IL team believes that new “threshold concepts” for information literacy promoted by the Association of College Research Librarians will complement new integrative approaches to study in the Frames of Reference that will be enacted in our upper-level bookend course. Happily, the emphasis on information literacy in the upper-level course will eliminate a non-curricular graduation requirement and support our goal of reducing the student experience of our curriculum as a checklist of such requirements.

4. Sharing Information:

The launch of the project was well-publicized. To report our steps and progress, we conducted a variety of forums, discussion groups, and workshops aimed at communicating our work and promoting pedagogies that support integrative learning. We offered reports regularly to key stakeholders such as the President’s Cabinet, the
Faculty Assembly, the Chairs Committee consisting of department chairs, and our Student Life division. Additionally, our work was a major subject of a student forum hosted by our Student Government Association. Talking with our colleagues at other institutions, we have encountered some surprise that we passed our campus-wide learning goals with unanimous approval of our Faculty Assembly. We believe that this accomplishment was due to our open and collaborative process.

5. Plans to build upon this year’s success:

In addition to supporting further FYS development and piloting the upper-level courses, this next year will see some practical steps in program development toward the planned pathway. We hope to continue our successful working group strategy into Year 2 by making some strategic reductions in other allocations. Please see Appendix IV, the Year 2 and 3 Revised Budget Narrative.

Our General Education working group will lead the passage of learning outcomes and will conduct further curricular development of our upper-level course. We anticipate that through this work the group will provide crucial leadership for broader discussions among the faculty about the purpose and architecture of the Gen Ed Program. We believe that our collaborative process has built trust for our work in an area of curriculum that can be bitterly contested and marked by intransigence. Thus, we think that we have established the foundations for a more significant shift in our Gen Ed Program and broader academic culture that extends well beyond the addition of a new course in our Junior year.

The other working groups will make progress on projects begun this year. Following the reports of a university-wide task force on advising, the FYS group will work with FYS faculty to develop new models for academic planning and developmental advising. Our Co-Curricular Learning group will begin a process of drafting learning outcomes for our division of Student Life, which includes areas such as Residence Life, Athletics, and student clubs. This group will also experiment with the e-portfolio system that will help to document learning achievements in co-curricular learning. If successful, it would eventually be used as a complementary part of the pathway courses.

Two new working groups emerged from the project this year. First, we will contribute to the development of our information literacy programming by supporting three faculty members who will work with our librarians on curricular development. Second, we will add a new working group focused on design. This group will be responsible for developing new materials to promote our General Education Program and support academic planning. It will also extend our project to our Admissions and Advancement Offices, collaborating on how the emerging program will be branded and contribute to the overall Castleton brand.

The IL Team is grateful for the opportunity afforded by the Davis Educational Foundation grant, and we are eager to begin the challenging but exciting work that lies ahead.