

Dickinson College's House Divided project to offer framework for summer program for low-income students

Tammie Gitt Feb 24, 2021

Using the history of abolition movements as a backdrop, rising seniors from low-income households will get a taste of college life in a program to be offered by Dickinson College over the next three summers.

Students in the free program, conducted as part of the House Divided project, will learn how to read classic texts and how to discuss and write about them with teachers and other students at the highest level, said Matthew Pinsker, House Divided Project director at Dickinson College.

The House Divided Project helps K-12 classrooms learn more about the American Civil War and slavery, with special attention paid to efforts to end slavery.

Twelve students will be part of the three-week residential experience this July in the program's first year. In the following two years, one additional seminar will be added each year to allow for a total of 72 students to take part.

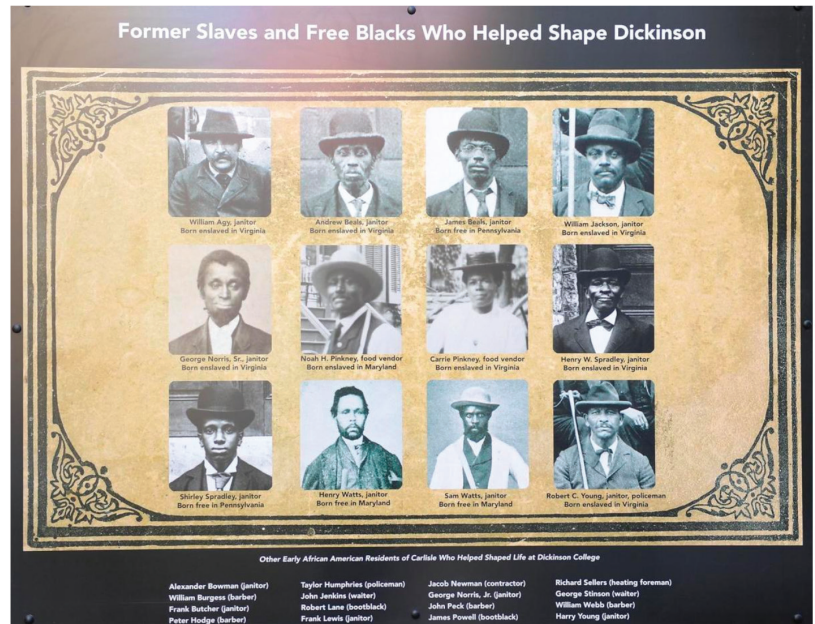
Pinsker said the program is designed for first-generation college students who may not have the same access to college prep courses as other students and to give them experience with college and the liberal arts. It includes follow-up components such as civic activities and mentoring during the college application process.

"The program is designed to help give them a gateway into the college experience," Pinsker said.

The program is funded through a three-year, \$300,000 "Knowledge for Freedom" grant from the Teagle Foundation. The initiative supports programs that invite underserved high school students to college to study questions about leading lives of purpose and civic responsibility.

The program was pioneered at Columbia University and has since been adopted at colleges and universities nationwide. Nearly every one of the 300 graduates of Columbia's Freedom & Citizenship program has enrolled in college within six months of finishing high school, though they attended public schools where fewer than 60% of graduates advance to college.

"We have developed a series of curricular innovations on the study of slavery that seem almost ready-made for



The Dickinson and Slavery exhibit is part of the college's House Divided Project at 61 N. West St., Carlisle.

Jason Malmont, The Sentinel

serving the goals of the Knowledge for Freedom program," Pinsker said. "Few subjects can better illuminate the ongoing debates about freedom, democracy and self-government than a complex understanding of global abolitionism in all its competing strategies and achievements, and also, unfortunately, in the elements of its still-unfinished work."

Pinsker said the program at Dickinson will be organized around the Dickinson and Slavery exhibit that opened in 2019 and explores the school's complicated history with slavery.

"We're going to teach the story of people's resistance to slavery over time, and especially in the United States during the 19th century. We're going to use Dickinson as a window into that story," he said.

That means students will look at John Dickinson's role in the Constitutional debates, the abolitionists on campus who fought against slavery and the Civil War. Special focus will be given to the debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas on the best ways to bring about the end of slavery.

"We'll also look at the legacy of slavery through monuments and art and popular culture. We'll think about how history and heritage can have an impact today," Pinsker said.

Pinsker said the House Divided project will reach out to schools in south-central Pennsylvania to identify potential candidates for the program, who will then submit online applications in March and April with decisions about who will be accepted into what is expected to be a competitive program in May and June.