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Feature

Reclaiming Democracy: Community Voice, Democratic Learning, and Social Justice through a Multi-Institutional, Community-Based, and Interdisciplinary Partnership

By Josie Alston Williams, *Director, Community Engagement, Greensboro Housing Coalition;* **Hollyce "Sherry" Giles,** *Professor of Justice and Policy Studies, Guilford College;* **Spoma Jovanovic,** *Professor of Communication Studies, University of North Carolina at Greensboro;* **Daniel Malotky,** *Professor of Religion and Philosophy, Greensboro College;* and **Stephen Bloch-Schulman,** *Professor of Philosophy, Elon University*[1]

In fall 2016, one of our coauthors, Josie Alston Williams, was working with the Greensboro Housing Coalition in a historically black low-income neighborhood in Greensboro, North Carolina, to enlist residents to work collaboratively to improve conditions there. As she sought to implement needed changes surrounding their health and safety concerns, she was determined to use a process that would be driven by the residents. Josie recognized the value of academic research to help develop the community's organizing and promote their goals to grant-giving agencies, yet she was skeptical about partnering with universities. In the past, she had seen academics and students tell communities what they need, rather than listen, and they often failed to bring the findings back to the

Editor's Note

Networked Collaboration and Community Building: A Theory of Change

By Caitlin Salins, *Executive Project Manager, Bringing Theory to Practice*

In this issue of our newsletter, we explore the theme of networked collaboration and community-building across silos as a theory of change in higher education. As David Scobey describes in his Director's Column, he joined BTtoP in summer 2018 with a vision for our second chapter that built on our impactful but largely campus-by-campus influence. In BTtoP's first fifteen-year chapter, we gave out well over five hundred campus grants and, we hope, had significant impact by advocating for holistic, transformative education that not only prepared students for a meaningful life but fostered their civic consciousness and personal flourishing. Still, our model was akin to that of a hub and spoke, with each of these campus-sized units of change largely structurally dependent on our national office to sustain the work.

The vision for our second chapter is a theory of change grounded in the idea that widespread transformation happens through *community*—a web of support for self-sustaining networks of courage that can cocreate initiatives, share resources, learn from each other, and foster a space of radical innovation. We hope that this goal has been evident in our programmatic initiatives, such as

- providing Multi-Institutional Innovation Grants, which required collaboration from multiple institutions from different sectors;[1]
- developing the Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators (PLACE) Collaboratory, which brings together a network of academic-community partnerships at eleven colleges and universities from diverse sectors and regions to do civic engagement and public

humanities work, both in localized clusters and as a national, collaborative group;[2]
- using participatory fishbowl discussions in lieu of traditional "talking head" panels at the Association of American Colleges and Universities annual meeting;[3] and
- sending biweekly "Bringing It" emails, which often solicit feedback from our community and highlight the work of other organizations and programs.[4]

This issue highlights what change-making through collaboration looks like in higher education and how it advances student learning, civic engagement, and social justice. In the Feature piece, a group of faculty from different institutions and a community member in Greensboro, North Carolina, tell the story of Reclaiming Democracy, an interdisciplinary, community-based course that brilliantly integrates democratic participation into transformative learning through partnerships across boundaries. In our Campus Highlight, Dilip Das of the University of Michigan describes C-THEM, a networked effort between members of academia and local indigenous communities to foster trust and cultivate a climate of belonging for Native American students on campus. In our Student Perspective, rising senior Caitlyn Keeve reflects on her participatory and community-focused study abroad experience and how it supported her development as a connector, ambassador, and compassionate leader. And in his Director's Column, David Scobey expounds on how BTtoP will continue to advance the word "we" as a verb.

As always, and in the spirit of collaboration and fostering community, we welcome your feedback and ideas. Feel free to reach us directly at info@bttop.org.

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1 For more information on Multi-Institutional Innovation Grants, see https://www.bttop.org/grants-funding/multi-institutional-innovation-grants.

2 For more information on the Partnerships for Listening and Action (PLACE) Collaboratory, see https://www.bttop.org/news-events/june-19-2019-bringing-theory-practice-launches-partnerships-listening-and-action.

3 For more information on BTtoP sessions at the AAC&U annual meeting, see https://www.bttop.org/news-events/events/2020-aacu-annual-meeting-bttop-sessions.

4 For more information on our "Bringing It" emails, see https://www.bttop.org/news-events/bringing-it.

Reclaiming Democracy

(continued from page 1)

communities in which the research began. Josie took a chance in becoming a core partner with Reclaiming Democracy after initial meetings with faculty held the promise for something different: a strong partnership focused on collaboratively finding concrete solutions to community concerns.

Reclaiming Democracy is an interdisciplinary course involving commu-

> "The specific nature of Reclaiming Democracy's impact in the community has varied through the years, but throughout has involved building a web of relationships among faculty, students, alumni, community members, nonprofit leaders, and government officials."

nity members learning side-by-side with students and faculty from six area colleges and universities. A guiding principle is to collaborate with the community using the approach Josie advocated. Meeting every other year for the past ten years, the class has grappled with two central questions: What is democracy, and what does it require of us? We, the faculty of the course, recognize that democracy depends on the inclusion of members of the community and their many diverse perspectives. Engaging people in that way has proven painfully diffi-

cult in our fractious world, yet we have decided to frame our course around that challenge. We base our instruction on dialogue and shared work among diverse students, including many who attend public and private higher education institutions and some who have never entered college. Students mirror the racially and ethnically diverse demographics of our city and range in age from sixteen to sixty-six years old. Their personal experiences are varied and provide a rich trove of information to share with one another.

The specific nature of Reclaiming Democracy's impact in the community has varied through the years, but throughout has involved building a web of relationships among faculty, students, alumni, community members, nonprofit leaders, and government officials. Students have graduated, found positions with local non-

profits, and returned as liaisons between the course and the community organizations with which they work, midwifing other students' collaborative projects for democratic social change. This web of relationships allows the teaching, learning, and community projects to break the semester boundary, with students from one iteration of the course handing off projects to students in future classes, thus offering continuity to make more significant impacts on community problems.

To prepare students to participate in democratic processes, we structure the class as a space to read, talk, and think critically about the challenges affecting the lives of residents in Greensboro. A central goal guiding this class is to respond to the persistent fight to scale back democratic norms in our country.

Reclaiming Democracy

We engage the students in analysis and understanding of these factors while also injecting a hopefulness that often comes from grassroots efforts where meaningful change is most possible.

Students' work often is directly democratic, including advancing free spaces that allow public protest, canvassing neighborhoods to educate community members about local ballot initiatives, resisting partisan gerrymandering, and upholding the importance and funding for public education to combat racial and other forms of injustice. We also learn about and use dialogue by utilizing our face-to-face time in class to highlight the differences people bring to our democracy, and by organizing for the implementation of resi-

dent-inspired murals and a community-based, low-frequency radio station. Additionally, we focus on other factors that limit, to the point of erasure, democratic decision making and action by reading about, for example, the problems of neoliberalism while working on the development of community gardens, organizing with residents to resist the reopening of a hazardous landfill in an economically depressed part of the city,[1] addressing a food desert in our city by helping to launch a

cooperative grocery store,[2] and promoting alternative municipal budget structures, like participatory budgeting.[3]

One particularly powerful example of students' partnership with a community group was a video production entitled "If You Could Hear Us, Would

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1 In acknowledgement of their full collaboration in writing about Reclaiming Democracy, the authors list their names alphabetically, with the first person listed rotating to last author in each subsequent publication about the course.

2 Susan Ladd, "Fear of Environmental Racism Justified," *Greensboro News and Record*, May 1, 2015, https://www.greensboro.com/fear-of-environmental-racism-justified/article_c3ef1d6a-3572-539a-89f2-982c1110d23c.html.

3 Eric Ginsberg, "Supermarket Chains Ignored This Black Community, So Residents Opened a Co-Op," *Vice*, Sept. 14, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3keqnb/renaissance-community-co-op-greensboro. H. Scott Hoffmann, "Our Opinion: Even as Co-op Closes, There's a Lot to Be Proud of," *Greensboro News and Record*, Jan. 13, 2019, https://www.greensboro.com/opinion/editorials/our-opinion-even-as-co-op-closes-theres-a/article_f25ceb09-ffc2-5646-9f6f-3a2174188e74.html.

4 Spoma Jovanovic, "Participatory Budgeting: People, Not Politicians, Decide How to Spend $500,000 in Greensboro," *Greensboro News and Record*, April 17, 2016, https://www.greensboro.com/opinion/columns/participatory-budgeting-people-not-politicians-decide-how-to-spend-in/article_6c497231-7828-5df1-b9af-4ea4356df976.html.

Reclaiming Democracy

Our Voices Matter?" This short video, which included interviews with residents of the community that work with Josie, gave stark visual evidence of some of the city's hazardous living conditions and was used to advocate for changes in affordable housing policy. The video was shown to the Greensboro Minimum Housing Standards Commission and led to the city making a "forced order to repair" ruling.[4] This ruling held that if the owner neglected a ninety-day deadline for making repairs on the 177-unit complex, the city could repair the units and put a lien on the property. This was the first time the ruling was applied to a multi-unit complex and eventually led the property owners to sell the building to a reputable landlord. This powerful video produced by students continues to be used as an advocacy tool to leverage support for more changes, including as the basis of a successful proposal for a Community-Centered Health grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of North Carolina.

In the most recent iteration of the class, upon completing Danielle Allen's book, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*, we asked students to write their own declaration in response to current challenges. Drawing from what they learned during the course and all they experienced, the students included among their grievances the lack of

equality, undue corporate influence in public policy, disproportionate rates of incarceration, escalating gun violence, and persistent and unfairly distributed poverty. They called for a living wage, mental health reform, government transparency, and collaboration with other nations to affect climate change, among other demands.

Inspired by our students, the faculty of the Reclaiming Democracy class offer our own declaration about education. While incomplete, our preamble would read:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident: that students have the capacity and innate joy to learn and critique, to develop the knowledge, skill, and art befitting responsible

engagement in a free society. When cultural forces combine to reduce the mission of higher education to the production of cogs in the global economic system, the stakeholders of academia have the right and duty to reclaim the mantle of freedom. Toward this end, we call for bringing disparate constituencies together, creating democratic spaces in the classroom, and developing true partnerships with the communities we serve. We frame these efforts in the disciplines of a liberal education, offering the prospect of meaningful success to our students, both as immediately experienced and as a life goal. In doing so, we aim to strengthen the foundations of democracy itself.

Campus Highlight

We See You: The Collaborative of Tribal and Higher Education in Michigan (C-THEM)

By Dilip Das, *Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, University of Michigan*

Here's a loaded question about trust: How do large, tax-supported American universities build or earn trust with their state or local indigenous communities? Large land-grant and flagship campuses like Michigan State University and the University of Michigan (U-M) often reside on lands ceded by indigenous nations in treaties, sometimes with the promise of higher education for tribal children.

The Anishinaabe children of the Three Fires Confederacy in Michigan—the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi—encountered significant barriers to college access, partly caused by the splintering of Indian families and nations through forcible relocation hundreds of miles away to reservations of marginal land quality.

American policy in the last hundred years also included acts of sequestering: the sequestering of indigenous children into state-run boarding schools that separated children from both their parents and their cultures,[1] and the sequestering, under the banner of anthropological research, of indigenous human remains and funerary objects dug up from burial grounds and stored within locked, climate-controlled collections.[2]

In Michigan, where a large majority of colleges are populated by students, staff, and faculty who are predominantly white, a sense of belonging is a key factor for the success of students from underrepresented backgrounds. We continue to work hard to create

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"U-M made a commitment to return, repatriate, and rebury on ancestral lands the thousands of ancestral remains and items in the collections. Healing began, and trust was built between U-M staff coordinating the transfer of remains and tribal representatives receiving their ancestors."

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welcoming climates on our campuses, but barriers endure. How do we break these down? The answer is, in part, the same for all incidences of trauma, whether historical or continuing: slowly, and with investments of time, commitments, resources, and relationships.

The roots of the Collaborative of Tribal and Higher Education in Michigan (C-THEM) are, like roots of a tree, multilayered. Long and sustained relationships have been built through the University of Michigan's Office of Governmental Relations, par-

ticularly through the leadership of Dana Sitzler, the office's associate director of state outreach, who has strengthened bonds with education and health directors at Michigan's twelve federally recognized tribal nations, regularly attends and hosts director meetings, learns of tribal issues, and helps to bring tribal leaders and U-M faculty and administrators together.

Other relationships developed by acknowledging the pain felt by the Anishinaabe for their ancestors' remains and funerary objects being held in U-M's collections. U-M made a commitment to return, repatriate, and rebury on ancestral lands the thousands of ancestral remains and items in the collections. Healing began, and trust was built between U-M staff coordinating the transfer of remains and tribal representatives receiving their ancestors.

Students spoke up, as they have for so long, expressing their desire, among other things, to be *seen* by the university, to have their tribal nations acknowledged on campus, and to be supported in their efforts to thrive and feel a sense of belonging. These ideas resonated with research from a 2018 report, *Reclaiming Native Truth*, that showed "how biases keep contemporary Native Americans invisible and/or affixed to the past and are holding back Native Americans from achieving political, economic and social equality,

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1 Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways, *American Indian Boarding Schools: An Exploration of Global Ethnic and Cultural Cleansing* (Ziibiwing Center, 2011).
2 "About NAGPRA," Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, Accessed August 22, 2019, https://nagpra.umich.edu/about-nagpra/.

photo courtesy of University of Michigan

We See You

as well as accurate and respectful representation."[3] Students who identify as Native, or two or more ethnicities, may feel lost on campus. Native students on many Michigan campuses—whether two or four-year colleges—have seen dwindling numbers and students returning home from college after one or two semesters.

C-THEM member Anna Larson is the tribal education director for one of the twelve federally recognized tribes in Michigan, the Hannahville Indian Community in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. Hannahville's website

proudly states, "The people of Hannahville are descendants of those who refused to leave Michigan in 1834 during the great Indian Removal. They lived with the Menominee in Northern Wisconsin and the Ojibway and Ottawa people in Canada. In 1853 some of these people began returning to Michigan. It was at this time they settled along the Big Cedar River."[4]

Hannahville is located thirty-six miles from the northern Wisconsin border and four hundred miles from Lansing, the capital of Michigan. The closest two-year campus is Bay de Noc Community College, twelve miles away in Escanaba, which hugs the beautiful northwestern corner of Lake Michigan. Many Hannahville students

wishing to attend a four-year college travel to Northern Michigan University in Marquette, eighty miles away. Larson says that Hannahville students often struggle to find cultural connections when they move to college, having lived their lives around their close-knit community. They want to go to college, she said, but connecting to the campus and staying until graduation are the largest challenges.

Geographic and institutional challenges like these abound for a new statewide collective like C-THEM. Members are spread across the two large peninsulas of Michigan, which are connected by the five-mile Mackinac Bridge. Unlike almost every other US state, Michigan does not have a statewide governing board of higher education that administratively connects its

3 Reclaiming Native Truth, *Research Findings: Compilation of All Research* (First Nations Development Institute and Echo Hawk Consulting, 2018), https://www.theonefeather.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/FullFindingsReport-screen.pdf.

4 "Hannahville History," Hannahville Indian Community, accessed August 22, 2019, http://www.hannahville.net/hannahville-history/.

We See You

people and campuses together. Instead, Michigan's four-year and two-year public colleges are autonomous, having their own constitutions and governing boards—fifteen boards for the public universities and twenty-eight boards for community colleges, in addition to the three tribal colleges. Communications across these colleges and trying to build a collective among

> "Built on the tribal belief that today's generation is responsible for the prosperity of future generations, Seven Generations A+E provides sustainable solutions inspired by indigenous planning and building orientation and regularly mentors Native students."

them is daunting but urgent, since so many Native American students are enrolled in community colleges and would like to transfer for a bachelor's degree and beyond.

Thankfully, our colleges are aligned with the tribes through the Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors, who meet quarterly and whose chair, Sam Morseau, of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, created a three-hour block for C-THEM to meet just before their own one-and-a-half-day tribal meetings. It was Morseau, taking inspiration from the nascent C-THEM collaborative, who spawned and built the first regional C-THEM college pathway partnership between Western

photo courtesy of Western Michigan University

Students and staff from three tribes, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, Huron Potawatomi, and Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish (Gun Lake) Band of Pottawatomi Indians, at Western Michigan University.

Michigan University (WMU) and three separate bands of the Potawatomi Nation: Pokagon, Gun Lake, and Nottawaseppi.

Through a partnership between the education directors of the three tribes and the office of the chief diversity and inclusion officer at WMU, Candy McCorkle, events in September 2019 brought Native students from the three tribes to campus for tours, information, and engagement with Native students, staff, faculty, and alumni at WMU. Additionally, Seven Generations Architecture and Engineering, a tribally owned company, will provide career pathway connections to students interested in pursuing a career in architecture or engineering.

Built on the tribal belief that today's generation is responsible for the prosperity of future generations, Seven Generations A+E provides sustainable solutions inspired by indigenous planning and building orientation and regularly mentors Native students. The firm is a subsidiary of Mno-Bmadsen, the investment enterprise of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians. Mno-Bmadsen literally means "walking the good path."

This regional focus has emerged as a C-THEM strategy for increasing college pathway connections for Native students. Plans for regional events between tribes and regional universities in both peninsulas are taking shape. In May 2020, the C-THEM collaborative will join with invited students from all over Michigan to gather at the Saginaw Chippewa tribe's "Honoring, Healing and Remembering" event, recognizing the "suffering, strength, and resilience" of children compelled to attend the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, one of the aforementioned spaces designed for ethnic cleansing.[5]

We have just begun our collaborative, seeded with funding from Bringing Theory to Practice and propelled by an excitement for learning and growing together. We are committed to encouraging and supporting new cohorts of indigenous students to find college pathways and thrive on college campuses statewide. It's a long-term, relationship-building process with the goal of involving all colleges in Michigan.

5 *American Indian Boarding Schools: An Exploration of Global Ethnic & Cultural Cleansing* (Mt. Pleasant, MI: Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways, 2011), http://www.sagchip.org/ziibiwing/planyourvisit/pdf/aibscurrguide.pdf

Student Perspective

Reaching Beyond the Mission: Women's Leadership Then and Now

By **Caitlyn Keeve,** *Student, Bachelor of Psychology with an Emphasis in Research, and Ambassador, Center for the Advancement of Women, Mount Saint Mary's University, Los Angeles*

The summer before my junior year, I had the opportunity to embark on the first student pilgrimage to Le Puy, France, hosted by the Association of Colleges of Sisters of St. Joseph (ACSSJ). I use the word "pilgrimage" as distinct from the typical higher education "study abroad" experience, because alongside the commitment to embrace French culture, our pursuit to grow as thoughtful and service-driven student leaders remained essential. The trip to Le Puy represented a kind of homecoming: a group of students from nine different higher education institutions across the United States bearing witness to the origin story of their institutions' original founders, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ). In 1650, these six dynamic women joined together in the city of Le Puy and began a legacy grounded in

service to the community.[1] After the sisters traveled to the United States in the 1800s, their advocacy for women's economic empowerment and leadership led them to open high schools

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and colleges across the country, anchored and continued today by

1 "Our History," Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, accessed August 22, 2019, https://csjcarondelet.org/our-history/.

members of the CSJ.

As a student away from the familiarity of a classroom, this unique learning experience, three hundred years in the making, felt like an exciting challenge to traditional models of academic research. The walking tours and cultural reflections each day were led by current Sisters of Saint Joseph and others who carry on the work of the six original sisters. Our group, representing a variety of backgrounds, academic majors, and professional interests, was tasked with learning about the role of social justice in education and bringing some of the essence of Le Puy back to campus through our intellectual scholarship, outreach, and mentorship. The implications of providing a space for students to interact with history in such a direct way expands the possibility of what higher education represents. To walk on the same cobblestone streets as the women that left their homes in sixteenth-century France to educate and empower young women across the world embodies the exact intentions of an interdisciplinary experience. Questions about how women were educated in the sixteenth century, how they were treated, or if women's universities are still significant today were answered with thoughtfulness and attention to our modern perspective.

But beyond geography and time, we learned that the pursuit of education through the lens of the CSJ has always been, at its core, about community

photos courtesy of Caitlyn Keeve

Reaching Beyond the Mission

(continued from page 9)

and collaboration. Many sisters living today use their positions as university presidents and nonprofit organizers to support students in endeavors that address homelessness, food scarcity, and gender-based violence, all through the lens of policy and local advocacy.[2] Sharing meals with students from different backgrounds and brainstorming ways to use our experience to impact lives on campus allowed us to become active participants in the living history of higher education. Being in a context

> "As a full-time student in the psychology department at Mount Saint Mary's University, my main goal is to integrate my academic studies with the on-the-ground work of understanding social systems and connecting with people to improve lives."

that embraced diversity, inclusion, historical reflection, and a vibrant call to action to continue the legacy of service was a powerful lesson in civically engaged and humanistic leadership, beyond what I might have received in the classroom.

Now a rising senior, I use what I learned on the pilgrimage to continue the conversation about the value of women's education and engaging with

the community. As a full-time student in the psychology department at Mount Saint Mary's University, my main goal is to integrate my academic studies with the on-the-ground work of understanding social systems and connecting with people to improve lives. For example, I serve as the campus ambassador for the Center for the Advancement of Women, a crucial resource for fostering positive relationships between students and faculty. In this role, and using the experience I gained in Le Puy, I organize workshops and programs, inviting STEM and liberal arts majors alike to engage with real-world issues that affect women every day. Connecting seemingly dissimilar students to advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment or help research an economic issue that has roots in gender inequity both send the message that college is meant to be collaborative and represent all pathways. These opportunities to bridge divides in pursuit of community justice

remind us to operate with a daring spirit and an intention to uplift others on the journey to learning something new.

Whether through experiences abroad or in on-campus advocacy, higher education has the tremendous potential to introduce students to new people, ideas, and worlds. It equips us with valuable skills like empathetic and collaborative leadership. My idea of leadership is a commitment and a dedication to creating a positive space for growth. Leaders are initiators and can often become catalysts for social change that affects communities for generations to come. Through my journey to Le Puy and going back in time to understand the women who founded my university, their framework of approaching higher education with compassion and an urgency for justice has strengthened my intellectual reach and redefined what it means to be a leader.

2 "Justice," Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, accessed August 22, 2019, https://csjcarondelet.org/justice/.

Director's Column

"We" Is a Verb

By David Scobey, *Director, Bringing Theory to Practice*

A year ago, at the start of my job as director of BTtoP, I posted an introductory letter entitled "Call to Community" on our listserv, sketching some hopes and plans.[1] Foremost was the goal of growing "our rich network of campuses, researchers, and practitioners into a true community of practice, as deeply tied to one another as they are to the 'hub' of BTtoP." Building such a collaborative community—one committed to both the guiding purposes of college and the need for radical change—seemed to be our special work, our historical assignment, during a time of turmoil in higher education. "The ongoing vitality of Bringing Theory to Practice," I wrote, "will depend on our capacity to weave a 'we' out of our shared commitments, the work we've achieved, and the work that remains unfinished."

It's serendipitous that this issue of our newsletter returns to the same theme, and it prompts me to reflect on that goal of "weaving the we" and the work BTtoP has done in the year since. Even before joining BTtoP, I believed that academic innovation and renewal depended on the building of collaborative communities across higher education, as well as with public partners. The landscape of the academy is decentered and sometimes maddeningly chaotic, yet I'm more

and more convinced that this distributed, networked geography can also be a reservoir of innovation and creative change.

BTtoP's work this year has only strengthened that conviction. Nearly everything we've done has prioritized the building of collaborative commu-

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"We also launched the first of our own collaborative projects, the PLACE Collaboratory, funded by a generous grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. PLACE (Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators) brings together a network of community partnerships involving eleven academic institutions in four cities: Newark, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Greensboro."

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nities to advance creative change that renews the core purposes of higher education. Our biweekly "Bringing It" emails[2] have showcased wonderful work from our network of grantees, as well as the insights of partners across higher education. Our Multi-Institutional Innovation Grants (MIGs) offered funding for project

partnerships by groups of colleges and universities. Mindful of the difficulty of building such collaborations—not to mention the modest scale of the grants—we expected no more than thirty proposals. We were elated to get ninety-five, involving almost four hundred institutions, and even more elated at the quality, creativity, and range of the proposals. We also launched the first of our own collaborative projects, the PLACE Collaboratory, funded by a generous grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. PLACE (Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators) brings together a network of community partnerships involving eleven academic institutions in four cities: Newark, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Greensboro. Through humanities and cultural projects, they will develop public agendas defined by community voice. At the same time, they'll come together regularly to distill model practices for such academic-community collaborations.

All of these efforts made clear the openness—in fact, the appetite—of educators and institutions to engage in collaborative innovation. This newsletter testifies to some of the results. The essay by our colleagues in Greensboro describes the genesis of a core feature of our PLACE partnership: an extraordinary class, Reclaiming Democracy, cotaught since 2005 by faculty from five Greensboro-area colleges and universities, whose students work in cross-

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1 David Scobey, "Call to Community: A Letter from the Director of Bringing Theory to Practice," August 7, 2018, https://www.bttop.org/news-events/august-7-2018-call-community-letter-director-bringing-theory-practice.

2 Sign up to receive biweekly "Bringing It" emails by joining our mailing list here: www.bttop.org.

"We" Is a Verb

(continued from page 11)

institutional teams with community organizations. Dilip Das' piece showcases C-THEM (the Collaborative of Tribal and Higher Education in Michigan), one of twenty-one recipients of a Multi-Institutional Innovation grant. C-THEM brings together Michigan's Native American tribes and the University of Michigan to increase access for Native American students and build leadership networks among those students. These projects embody the power of "weaving the we" in higher education. Each does more than simply build the institutional capacity of its partners; like chemical reactions, it unleashes their imaginative energy.

BTtoP did not "build" either Reclaiming Democracy or C-THEM. We were able to build *on* the work that our colleagues in North Carolina and Michigan were already forging. For me, that's an important lesson of this year of "weaving the we." Initiatives like our MIG grants or the PLACE Collaboratory

photo courtesy of Alvernia University

are only possible because the landscape of higher education is already simmering with the energies of creative innovation, energies that are ready to be organized and amplified in larger communities of practice. Such community building makes our work as educators not only larger, but more dynamic. "We" is a verb.

BTtoP will continue this work of "we'ing." We'll want to build on emergent networks and creative projects you're already creating; we'll want to propose new ones back to you. Stay tuned. Stay in touch.

photo courtesy of University of Louisville

In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

NEWS

BTtoP Holds PLACE Collaboratory Launch Convening in Greensboro, North Carolina

In June, BTtoP was awarded a generous $800,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund its Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators (PLACE) Collaboratory. The collaboratory brings together a network of academic-community partnerships, involving eleven colleges and universities from diverse sectors and regions, to do civic engagement and public humanities work. Using cultural practices like oral history or photo-voice, as well as the civic pedagogies of the humanities, these partnerships are developing shared public agendas that ground the setting and solving of community issues in community voice.

From Tuesday, October 1 to Friday, October 4, a group of 37 academic, community, and student partners came together for the inaugural convening hosted by our collaborators in Greensboro, North Carolina. The convening brought together representatives from all four regional hubs: Rutgers University–Newark; the Greensboro region; University of Maryland, Baltimore County; and the southern Los Angeles region. In venues like the Greensboro History Museum, the Beloved Community Center, the Elsewhere Museum, the Greensboro Project Space, and the Greensboro Cultural Center, participants discussed their local projects and the development of action plans grounded in community voice and enabled by academic-community partnerships. The event included presentations by Kenneth Reardon from the University of Massachusetts Boston on community-centered urban development and by Joyce and Reverend Nelson Johnson on Greensboro's complex history with civil rights and truth and reconciliation. On a national scale, the collaboratory brainstormed methods of distilling best practices, modeling the role of the humanities in sustaining them, and using networked collaboration to disseminate them across higher education. For more information on PLACE, visit: https://www.bttop.org/news-events/june-19-2019-bringing-theory-practice-launches-partnerships-listening-and-action.

BTtoP Welcomes Kate Griffin, PLACE Collaboratory Project Coordinator

BTtoP is thrilled to welcome Kate Griffin to the team as the new Partnerships for Listening and Action By Communities and Educators (PLACE) project coordinator. She brings multiple years of experience as a leader, connector, teacher, and facilitator in spheres of social impact, arts and humanities, equity and advocacy, and mental wellness for college students. In her role as PLACE project coordinator, Kate will use her experience to manage the PLACE Collaboratory, a two-year Mellon-funded initiative that brings together a network of academic-community partnerships, involving eleven colleges and universities from diverse sectors and regions, to do civic engagement and public humanities work. The project coordinator serves a crucial role in managing relationships among the participating institutions and community partnerships, sustaining ongoing communications among participants and organizing twice-yearly network convenings, and building a community of practice based on inclusive relationships and shared agenda-setting among diverse stakeholders. Please join us in welcoming Kate as she helps lead the PLACE Collaboratory during what we hope is a generative two-year journey.

Look for BTtoP at the AAC&U Annual Meeting

Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) is honored to be participating once more in the Association of American Colleges and Universities annual meeting, to take place January 22–25, 2020, in Washington, DC.

Our sessions will again follow a fishbowl format, inaugurated at last year's annual meeting. This year's fishbowls will include the following topics:

1. "Listening With: A Model for Community Engagement"
2. "Redesigning College: Whole Education for the Whole Student"

For those unfamiliar with this format, an inaugural circle of four or five discussants will unpack the theme in conversation for twenty to thirty minutes, with the surrounding audience "overhearing" their dialogue.

In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

Then, individual audience members will be invited to tap into the fishbowl, replacing discussants and offering their own questions, comments, disagreements, and stories. The resulting conversation will be wide-ranging, expansive, and also focused, with room for disagreement and unexpected connections and insights. To learn more about our sessions and speakers, visit: https://www.bttop.org/news-events/events/2020-aacu-annual-meeting-bttop-sessions.

We'll also be hosting our annual BTtoP Reception on Friday evening at 5:45 p.m. We cherish the opportunity to be with new and old friends alike.

For more information and updates on the 2020 annual meeting, please visit: https://www.aacu.org/AM20.

TRAVELS

BTtoP Director David Scobey Attends the Great Colleges Network 2019 Summer Institute

The Great Colleges Network (GCN) is a network of educational leaders from institutions and programs that provide superb baccalaureate education for adult, nontraditional students. Last August, GCN held its third summer institute at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. David joined other educational leaders to share best practices and collaborate on the advancement of innovative education for new majority learners.

### BTtoP Director David Scobey Presents at Carthage College

In September, BTtoP Director David Scobey presented at "Will Communities Save the Small American College," a conference at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin." The conference addressed questions central to the importance of partnerships between higher education and the community. For example, how might a college be meaningful to those who live near it? And what do colleges do, or could they do, so that they would be truly missed locally if they moved or dissolved? The conference brought together higher education leaders and members of the community to lead in the thinking, researching, and advocacy of academic-community partnerships.

BTtoP Staff Attend the National Gathering of Imagining America in Albuquerque

David Scobey and Kate Griffin attended the annual national meeting of Imagining America, "Mighty Dreams: Designing and Fostering Belonging in 'America'" from October 18 to 20. Founded in 1998, Imagining America is a consortium of nearly one hundred academic institutions and cultural organizations dedicated to the civic and democratic role of cultural and creative disciplines. Its annual national gathering is an important occasion for civically engaged artists, humanists, designers, and culture makers to share work and build a movement for public cultural engagement.

This year's gathering, in partnership with the University of New Mexico, considered how we define, design, and foster belonging in our home communities and as a nation-state. David Scobey, BTtoP's director, has been involved with Imagining America for several years, and BTtoP has worked with the consortium on a variety of projects.
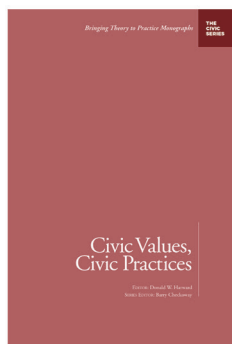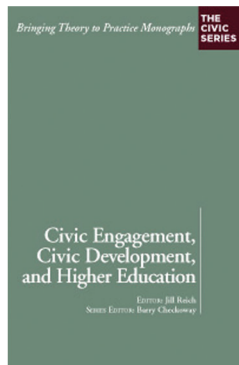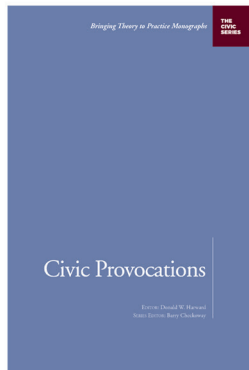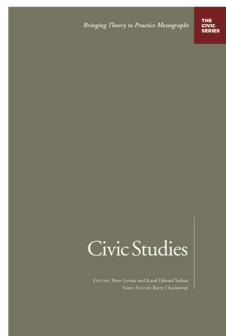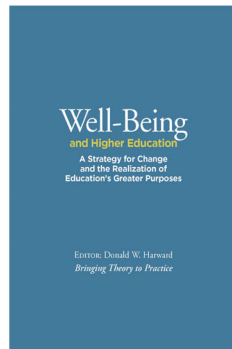
A Special Offer from BTtoP: Free Publications

Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) is pleased to announce a special offer on our publications! We've received such a positive response to our recent RFPs, and to our biweekly *Bringing It* messages, and we want to thank our community as we prepare for future offerings. So for a limited time, we are making our six books, designed for use by educators, administrators, and higher education professionals, available for free through our partners at the Association of American Colleges and Universities—you pay shipping costs only. This offer includes bulk orders for those who would like to order multiple copies for distribution to committees, faculty members, and/or community members.

- *Well-Being and Higher Education: A Strategy for Change and the Realization of Education's Greater Purposes*

The Civic Series

- *Civic Provocations*
- *Civic Learning and Teaching*
- *Civic Engagement, Civic Development, and Higher Education*
- *Civic Studies*
- *Civic Values, Civic Practices*

Visit **https://www.bttop.org/news-events/ august-8-2019-special-offer-free-publications** for descriptions of each book and to order your free copies.