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Bringing Theory to Practice Selects Six Institutions as Demonstration Sites for 2010–2012

The Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) project recently selected six institutions (Georgetown University, Otterbein University, State University of New York-Cortland, Tufts University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Wagner College) to join the project as demonstration sites for the 2010-2012 period.

Demonstration sites are awarded two-year grants to study and foster relationships among students' civic development, psychosocial well-being, and sustained opportunities for transformational educational experiences. This new round of sites was developed with specific additional foci in mind: amplifying assessment goals and strategies and sustaining gains and priorities in creating a campus culture for learning.

The demonstration site program is the most robust research initiative funded by BTtoP. Almost \$3 million in grant and matching funds since 2004 has supported college and university initiatives studying these relationships by means of many different paths, including institutional research, curricular reform, faculty training, and the restructuring of campus fiscal and organizational

priorities. Program Director Barry Checkoway (a professor of social work and urban planning and the founding director of the Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan) summarized the program's inception. "The [demonstration site] program assumes that colleges and universities have a level of responsibility for learning, and also for a measure of psychosocial well-being and civic development, of the student 'as a whole person' and not just as a 'consumer' of education or 'recipient' of knowledge."

Following the eight institutions that served as demonstration sites



University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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Bringing Theory to Practice Selects Six Institutions as Demonstration Sites

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before them, (Barnard College, California State University-Chico, Dickinson College, Emory University, Montclair State University, Morgan State University, St. Lawrence University, and Syracuse University), these six institutions—Georgetown University was also involved as a demonstration site in previous funding periods as well—will give priority to the evaluation and sustainability of their planned initiatives. The six campuses will be responsible for collecting data that will contribute to the knowledge base the BTtoP Project has been gathering over its nine years of support and studies, and to the understanding of both the civic and psychosocial well-being relationship and of the sustainability of best practices. Evaluation will operate at the institutional and cross-site levels.

Otterbein University (Westerville, OH) plans to institutionalize its “Five Cardinal Experiences” to provide high-impact transformational praxis opportunities for students and faculty; the experiences are innovative, integrated, and community based, and lead to the civic and psychosocial development of students. The Five Cardinal Experiences include community engagement; scholarly research and creative work; leadership; global engagement; and internships and professional development.

The State University of New York College at Cortland (Cortland, NY) will intensify the use of high-impact

learning practices in the college’s three schools, integrating academic practices with cocurricular activities. The project team will systematically examine the connection between high impact learning practices and student flourishing, including the additive and cumulative effects of such practices, to more fully understand and share with similar institutions effective ways of deepening transformational change through high-impact learning.

Tufts University (Medford, MA) aims to use longitudinal data (first year to post-graduation) and revisions in civic engagement programming to augment existing knowledge about the impact and sustainability of a campus wide culture of engagement on students’ civic engagement, their development as “whole people,” and their sense of well-being, and to disseminate an empirically based theory of change to other colleges and universities. A secondary focus will be to understand how a strategic readjustment at a relatively new “college of citizenship” has changed the whole civic culture of a research university and affected students’ civic engagement and psychosocial well-being.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Lincoln, NE) will create a certificate enabling students to connect what they learn from their general education program with key experiences that help develop lifelong habits of civic engagement, improve psychosocial well-being, and contribute to higher retention rates. With the creation of the certificate, UN-L intends to establish a research and evaluation environment around civic engagement that informs curricular and cocurricular program development, enhances understanding of the impact

of these programs on student learning, civic development, and psychosocial well-being outcomes, and assesses effects of student involvement on the needs of local, national, and international campus community partners.

Wagner College (Staten Island, NY) will identify and assess the relationships among different models of experiential learning/civic engagement, psychosocial well-being and persistence toward graduation while further developing the transformative educational experience within the Wagner Plan (a curricular model that combines elements of experiential learning and interdisciplinary inquiry in a learning community format across the four years



Wagner College, photographer Jason Jones

of an undergraduate program of study.) From the data gathered, the college will develop a strategic plan for curriculum adjustment, cocurricular activities, and student support services with the goal of creating a more transformative educational experience for all undergraduate students, providing continuous assessment of goals and implementation, leading to campuswide sustainability. They will also assess alumni-reported “feelings of connection” to Wagner College in relation to the experiential learning activities alumni participated in when they were students at Wagner College.

Georgetown University (Washington, DC) will build on its established curriculum infusion initiative (which infuses health topics relevant to students, i.e., drinking, depression, etc., into general curriculum courses) to deepen institutionalized knowledge about linkages between psychosocial development and other dimensions of learning. These formalized inquiries will link ongoing assessment of curriculum infusion to other high-impact practices (such as civic engagement, undergraduate research, and cocurricular activities) as well as to critical sites of learning in practice after graduation. Inquiries and findings will be made visible through an annual institute and a virtual environment for studying the evidence of engaged learning. ■

For additional information regarding the demonstration site program and past recipients of the awards, see www.bringingtheorytopractice.org.

BTtoP Campus Highlight

Montclair State University: Hosts BTtoP Regional Conference

Jennifer O'Brien, Project Coordinator, BTtoP

Randall Bass of Georgetown University opened his presentation at a regional conference of individuals and teams of faculty members from Bringing Theory to Practice project grantee institutions by explaining the foundation of Georgetown's Engelhard Courses program. “A gen. ed. course simply with timely, interesting or controversial topics *without* engagement is nothing,” he said. The Engelhard Courses program is successful because, “...caring for the whole person is the *integration*, not the *aggregation*, of all the different offices and silos put together.” Bass, an associate professor of English and assistant provost for teaching and learning initiatives and executive director of the Center for New Designs in Learning & Scholarship, all at Georgetown University, emphasized the great effect the program has had on campus culture. “This is the only project I've been involved in where faculty come out of the woodwork to change,” he said.

In March 2010, Montclair State University (MSU) hosted the regional conference at which Bass spoke. After Bass's presentation, the conference, offered as part of the Provost's Series on University Teaching and Learning at MSU, featured an interactive discussion group luncheon moderated by Ken Bain, vice provost for instruction and director

of the Research Academy for University Learning at MSU.

The regional conference is one of many strategies employed by BTtoP grantee campuses to exchange information and learn from colleagues at the local and cross-institutional levels; additionally, the conference offers a low-cost opportunity for intensive participation and intellectual gain in a time of drastically diminished institutional travel budgets.

“This is the only project I've been involved in where faculty come out of the woodwork to change.”

Montclair State University has been involved with the BTtoP Project for three years, supported by three grants: first, a program start-up grant to investigate the effects of engaged learning on civic development and well-being of first-year students; second, a two-year demonstration site grant to build upon the work of their program start-up grant by expanding institutional capacity for engaged learning through multiple curricular and cocurricular efforts; and third, a planning grant as part of the Leadership Coalition. The MSU BTtoP demonstration site team, bolstered in recent years by Ken Bain's leadership, strives to deepen the expectations and realities of transforma-

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Montclair State University

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tive educational practices and experiences for their students. Throughout its work, one of the team's major goals has been to provide as many project team members as possible with the opportunity to interact with colleagues from other campuses to discuss successes and failures, best practices, and strategies for strengthening their work.

Bryan Murdock, director of service learning and community engagement at MSU and the university's demonstration site project director, illustrated the benefits of such national conversations, "Without exception, every one of our BTtoP team members who participated in the cross-site [meetings] returned to campus inspired by the work and accomplishments of other BTtoP project schools. While we greatly benefited from the sharing and transfer of information that the cross-sites facilitated, we always felt there was so much more to learn and that we were barely scratching the surface." Planning a regional event provided the MSU project team an opportunity to expand the conversation beyond their institution, and to help put the MSU BTtoP project into a larger context from which others on campus could learn.

The lecture by Bass was widely attended by various members of the MSU campus community, along with individuals from other institutions, including the College of New Jersey, SUNY-Purchase, Wagner College, the New School, Muhlenberg College, the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, and Rutgers University. Bass's presentation set the



Montclair State University

tone for the later discussions, providing an example of a very successful and powerful integrative learning model: Georgetown's Engelhard Courses, a program that involves course design and faculty training focused on "the whole student" that is enacted through curriculum infusion of health topics (e.g., alcohol, depression, and stress) and engagement into various disciplines.

Bain's discussion-group luncheon that followed was open to the entire MSU campus and designed to create an opportunity for faculty, student affairs personnel, administrative personnel, and students to informally learn about and share pedagogies, practices, and experiences of learning.

Discussions got a jump-start with Bain asking the audience to think of a time when they had learned most deeply. While conversations opened up at each table, Bain walked around the room asking questions to further develop the discussion: What were the conditions for this deep learning? What was the

environment like? Audience answers to Bain's deep learning question included "personal relevance, curiosity and experience," "mentoring," "the need to answer a question," "high, but *meaningful* standards," and "the opportunity to try, fail, receive feedback, and try again." Bain asked the group to consider how these conditions might be translated into a classroom reality, highlighting a few key points: deep learning is something that moves across spaces; we need to find the questions students are already asking and incorporate those into the curriculum; and we need to be more meaningful with motivation as a tool.

The MSU regional conference, like most events in which BTtoP campuses are involved, sparked engaged and excited conversations. More questions were asked than answers found, but the participants left the room still talking about how they learn most deeply and what it means to be able to translate that experience to the student body, both in and out of the classroom. ■

Letter from the Director

What Might Liberal Education Import from International Projects?

Donald W. Harward, Project Director, Bringing Theory to Practice, and President Emeritus, Bates College

We're inclined to think that sustaining the gains made in strengthening a campus culture for learning have to do with looking internally—evaluating, prioritizing, finding means of ongoing support, etc. These are all quite reasonable and true. There is, however, a case to be made for also looking “far away” to liberal education initiatives that are emerging in countries and in cultures where they had heretofore not occurred. We usually think of our work in championing liberal education as something we “export.” I suggest that there are lessons for us, especially regarding what might sustain our work, which should be “imported.”

We could learn much if we stopped thinking that liberal education is an export we in the United States are sharing, and instead realized that we should be importing greater understanding of core features of liberal learning by seeing how it has been fostered in Poland, India, or Belarus, not with the cultural traditions of Jefferson and Dewey, but with these nations' own cultures, histories, and commitments.

In a recent weeklong visit to the University of Warsaw in Poland to learn about a liberal education initiative, I discovered many things. The first was quite specific. The civic goal of liberal education has, in the United States, been considered to be effectively realized when practices of voluntarism and service are integrated into the academic curriculum, and the pedagogy of service learning is utilized to assist students

look beyond self interest to the “common good.” In speaking with students in Poland I realized more clearly than I had in the past that such concepts as service and the common good are culturally and historically relative and are not at all fixed in our common understanding. The students remarked that “serving” or being told that “there is a common good” to be served have very different connotations for Poles. For them, it is much more important to the understanding of the relation of the civic to liberal education to be exploring complex concepts and practices of freedom, of contrarian independence, and the balance of the tension between libertarian and communitarian instincts.

There are three other “takeaways” from interactions with those at the University of Warsaw that were less specific, but perhaps more important to the gains they could bring to bear on sustaining our work.

The first is a basic reminder of Cicero's judgment that the aim of learning is a long-term objective; while the aim

of providing information is a short-term objective. Short-term objectives have become paramount in higher education in the United States—and in that respect, we have lost touch with the core aim of learning.

We need the reminder to be refocused on the purposes of higher education. Those long-term aims may be inclusive of, but they are not identical to, professional job preparation. They are not simply preparation for steps in the social and economic structures. The purposes are greater than that and longer term than that; they have always been greater than that. So the first message to be exported, one that we need to hear in the United States, is Cicero's message.

The second is an admonition. Some argue that higher education in the United States has been struck with a pernicious bargain. It is a bargain—and this is a very simplistic way of putting it—between the students and their families and the faculty. And the bargain is, “We will not ask much of you, we will not demand much



University of Warsaw

Letter from the Director

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of your time, attention and energies, if you do not demand much of us.”

The admonition is to replace that bargain (if it exists on our campuses) with another bargain—one that I heard in these emerging initiatives: “We pledge not to reap gain from selling something worse than the best we can offer.” We pledge not to gain from selling something—class work, courses, and reputation—worse than the best we can offer as educators and as learners.

Sustaining our work depends on striking such a bargain—one that says

that the relationship between students and faculty is hallowed. It is precious, not in the sense of fancy or rare, but in the sense of profoundly important and fragile. That bargain includes not presenting information rather than learning, because the former is cheaper and easier for the institution to provide; that bargain means dropping the tone of tolerating students as the condition for having the time to do something that is rewarded as being more important. Everyone (students and faculty) associated with sustaining a strengthened campus culture for learning can pledge not to reap gains from selling something worse than the best they can offer.

A third exportable lesson to be gained by looking afar is an example of how to sustain the gains of strengthening the campus culture for learning by observing how these initiatives (represented by their creators and leaders) “from away” have asked themselves, “What is at the soul of what we are about,” and “How do we align the institutional structure to reflect that ‘soul’?” For many of us, aligning what we identify as the soul of our institution with structure and reward systems is a task being done on the periphery, when it is done at all. We struggle hard to move it from the periphery to the very center, for we know that only at the center will it be sustained. ■



**Bringing Theory to Practice Project
4th National Student Conference**

**Saturday & Sunday
November 13th & 14th, 2010
Washington, DC**

*Recasting the “3 R’s” of Learning:
From
Reading, WRiting & ARithmetic
to
Reflection, Resiliency,
Relationships and Responsibility*

**Visit the website for more
information on the conference, the
Call for Presentations
and travel grant opportunities**

http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/meetings.cfm
Questions? Email Jennifer O’Brien at obrien@aacu.org or Dylan Joyce at joyce@aacu.org.

In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

4th National Biennial Student Conference

BTtoP is calling all college and university students, as well as accompanying faculty members and student affairs professionals, to come to Washington, DC, November 13-14, 2010, to attend the 2010 BTtoP biennial student conference, *Recasting the 3 R's of Learning: From Reading, WRiting & ARithmetic to "Reflection, Resiliency, Relationships" and Responsibility*. Students will have the opportunity to engage with their peers from across the country to explore the necessity of solidifying the partnership between traditional and transformational outcomes of higher education. For more information, or to refer this event to your students, please visit the conference Web page on the Project's Web site (www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/StdntConf.cfm).

BTtoP to Host Reception at AACU's Annual Meeting, January, 2011, in San Francisco

Members of the BTtoP Advisory Board and staff will host a reception at the AACU Annual Meeting Friday evening, January 28th. The reception will be an opportunity to meet with staff and advisors of the Project for informal discussion, sharing of ideas, and the opportunity to have any questions about grant funding or upcoming conferences answered.

BTtoP is on Facebook

Friend "Bringing Theory to Practice" on Facebook and join the group of the same name for complete up-to-the-minute information on grants, events, publications, and more. As a member of the group, you can easily network with current grantees, faculty members, students, and members of the BTtoP team.

BTtoP Leader Wins Ehrlich Award

BTtoP is proud to announce that Barry Checkoway, professor of social work and urban planning and founder of the Ginsburg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan, has won the prestigious 2010 Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award in recognition of his over twenty years of work in service learning and community-based programs. The award, given by Campus Compact, recognizes "exemplary engaged scholarship, including leadership in advancing students' civic learning, conducting community-based research, fostering reciprocal community partnerships, building institutional commitments to service-learning and civic engagement, and other means of enhancing higher education's contributions to the public good." Checkoway is director of BTtoP's Demonstration Site Program and was among BTtoP's first advisory board members. For more information on this award, visit www.compact.org/news/ehrllich-award-2010/11843/.

BTtoP's "Civic Engagement, Public Work, and Psychosocial Well-being" Symposium Papers Featured in AACU's *Liberal Education*

What are some strategies for strengthening the relationship between civic engagement and psychosocial well-being of college students, as part of the core mission of higher education?

This question is significant, especially at a time when there is concern about both engagement and health on the campus. Too many of today's undergraduates disengage from democracy to the extent that there is concern about its future, and experience depression and other conditions that interfere with their academic work.

The special issue will provide fresh perspectives on this question and some of the issues that it raises. It will examine core concepts, assess case studies and best practices, and analyze general propositions on which there is relative agreement and unanswered questions which remain for future work. Look for this special issue in spring 2011.

In the Next Issue— Winter 2010

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**c/o Association of American
Colleges and Universities
1818 R Street, NW
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The Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP) is an independent national effort. It is funded by the Charles Engelhard Foundation of New York, and functions in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Washington, DC.

The **Charles Engelhard Foundation** is a New York-based foundation whose mission focuses on projects in higher and secondary education, cultural, medical, religious, wildlife and conservation organizations.

S. Engelhard Center is a nonprofit public charitable foundation; its mission is to support projects and initiatives that affect greater and sustained commitments by educational institutions at all levels to provide effective means of addressing the intellectual, emotional, and civic development of today's students in preparation for claiming their positive future.

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