Studies suggest there is a relationship between community engagement and the well-being of students during the college years.

Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) grant projects suggest that there are relationships between engaged learning, community engagement, and the psychosocial well-being of students during the college years. For example, some projects aim to make connections between civic engagement and students’ interpersonal relationships, social connectedness, and other characteristics.

These findings are a contribution to the knowledge base, to be sure, but they derive from a focus on students as a general category rather than on particular students and, as such, are most applicable to students from majority groups. Yet traditional minority groups such as low-income students or students of color are increasingly enrolling in higher education, and when differences between majorities and minorities are neglected in research projects, the findings are of limited use.

BTtoP is eager to contribute to this work on underserved student success as both a field of practice and subject of study which examines what happens when
colleges and universities try to strengthen the well-being of first-generation or low-income students or students of color through educational programs that are designed with them in mind.

We know that diversity in the classroom contributes to the educational experience of the students, for when there are students whose approach to a given topic is informed by their diverse group identities—such as their race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and other characteristics—it contributes to the diversity of perspectives, makes the discussion more complete and accurate, and enriches the learning for all. This was the core concept that the University of Michigan brought to its defense of affirmative action in higher education before the US Supreme Court.

We also know that first-generation and low-income students and students of color have special strengths—including motivation, resiliency, and grit—that can enable them to flourish in education and employment. But too many of these students face obstacles which frustrate the quality of their educational experience, and they are often forced to redouble their resolve in order to succeed despite the institutional tensions and barriers which affect them.

Some institutions respond to these tensions with “student services,” such as financial aid, counseling services, and the establishment of minority “centers” located on the edges of campus. While well-meaning, these programs often originate in student affairs offices rather than in academically-based educational initiatives led by faculty members who are—or should be—at the heart of their educational experience.

In contrast to the typically peripheral location and engagement of the student affairs offices, faculty members are strategically situated to enhance the well-being of these traditionally underserved students, through research projects and academic courses responsive to their particular situations. Unfortunately, faculty are conditioned—from their first days in graduate school and into their academic careers—to view student well-being as outside their primary work. Indeed, many faculty fear that if they concern themselves primarily with student well-being rather than with research and teaching, they might jeopardize their place in the academy, as institutional reward structures prioritize research and teaching, sometimes exclusively. In fact, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that faculty’s concern for students’ well-being would affect the scope or quality of their research or teaching in ways that might hinder their case for promotion or tenure, but this misperception and subsequent conditioning of faculty remains strong in the academy.

The time is right for BTtoP to invite proposals from faculty members and educators with ideas for academically-based initiatives—especially research projects, curricular initiatives, and specific courses designed to strengthen the well-being of all students, with special emphasis on first generation, low income, and minority students of color, in ways which are consistent with the core educational purposes of the institution. If colleges and universities were to broaden their perspectives and think more about all students, everyone would benefit, and higher education would more likely fulfill its mission in the changing society of which it is part.

If colleges and universities were to broaden their perspectives and think more about all students, everyone would benefit, and higher education would more likely fulfill its mission in the changing society of which it is part.
For some racial and ethnic minority students, the University of Nebraska—Lincoln (UNL) can be a lonely place. Out of the 19,979 undergraduate students enrolled at UNL this year, 3,015 are minorities—15 percent of the undergraduate body.

The most recent National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), administered in 2013 to UNL students, revealed that only a small percentage of students claim they interact with those different than themselves. Data collected in the spring of 2015 during an investigation of UNL student experiences and attitudes around intervention practices in situations involving bias offers additional insight into the larger campus climate. Survey findings suggest that, on average, 58 percent of the student population witnessed verbal mistreatment or harassment based on race during the 2014–2015 academic year. Approximately 80 percent of the student respondents indicated that they were “very” or “extremely bothered” when observing the behavior, yet only 25 percent of the students surveyed said that they intervened “frequently” or “most of the time.” When asked whether or not something should be done, 84 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that someone should intervene when another person is harassed or mistreated based on their race.

So what is getting in the way of students acting when observing problematic situations involving race? Data from the 2015 Bystander Intervention Survey provides some insight. Three reasons students cited as barriers to intervention include (1) the lack of confidence to intervene, (2) not knowing when to intervene, and (3) not knowing how to intervene.1

Through funding provided by Bringing Theory to Practice, UNL faculty and staff developed Allies for Diversity: Creating Conditions for Student Well-Being, a dialogue-based project nested in a larger, comprehensive university effort to make the campus more welcoming by, in part, reducing the barriers identified through the survey.

Pass It On is an interactive conversation using customized playing cards featuring questions that prompt healthy and challenging discussions… it provides an avenue for growing and developing skills for generating productive dialogue about diversity, inclusion, and social justice.
using customized playing cards featuring questions that prompt healthy and challenging discussions, directed at UNL faculty and staff. Pass It On provides an avenue for growing and developing skills for generating productive dialogue about diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Many participants find dialogues prompted by Pass It On challenging, but the questions and prompts on each card are intended to stimulate dialogue—providing an opportunity that makes discussing these issues increasingly less difficult. Ultimately the goal of Pass It On is to develop and practice skills that can be passed along from the faculty and staff to all those they interact with, increasing both the inclusivity of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus community and the likelihood of students intervening in problematic situations as their confidence and skill levels improve. Each discussion is intended to be group facilitated to mirror real-life settings in which we rarely have certified or trained “diversity” facilitators to guide challenging discussions surrounding privilege, oppression, and discrimination.

Pass It On has fifty questions and prompts that are placed on a deck of playing cards. Dialogue for Pass It On can begin many ways. If participants are talking with familiar people they may choose to begin and continue dialogue by selecting a card and addressing the prompt. If participants are unfamiliar with people in their group, they may want to get to know the others better before beginning Pass It On.

We originally intended to host six campus-wide workshops for about two hundred faculty and staff. Our expectations were exceeded—during the 2014-2015 academic year, we hosted ten workshops and directly impacted over four hundred faculty, staff, and students. Each participant was provided at least one deck of cards upon completion of the session. Many actually requested more decks as they thought about the conversation’s utility not only within but outside of the classroom. Pass It On has also proven to be transferable and adoptable outside of UNL’s campus; since its introduction to UNL, Nebraska high schools and colleges and universities across the country have requested decks of Pass It On playing cards. Recently, an enterprising graduate student facilitated the “Dine, Dialogue and Pass It On” activity during a job interview. To date, approximately 25 percent of the 2,500 decks we originally purchased have been distributed to Pass It On participants.

Plans are underway to extend the reach of Pass It On to the newest members of the campus community. New Student Enrollment Orientation Leaders used the cards this summer to engage incoming students in conversation during their first visit to campus, and learning community faculty are integrating the activity into their fall curriculum. Greek Affairs will provide opportunities to engage in dialogue around difference through new member and leadership seminars, and faculty responsible for first-year scholarship classes are adding Pass It On to their syllabi.

The program, which began as a robust collaboration between academic and student affairs, found a home within the recently created office of the Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs for Diversity. Institutionalization of the program, within this set of responsibilities, ensures that Pass It On will remain beyond the life of the grant and help us become the more welcoming university we aspire to be. We will chart our progress against the baseline data described above and enhance the project with complimentary initiatives based on our findings.

For more information about “Dine, Dialogue and Pass It On” at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, please visit the website http://stuafs.unl.edu/dine-dialogue-and-pass-it, or contact Linda Major, Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, at lmajor1@unl.edu.

1. This survey, developed by Linda Major and Janice Deeds for use specifically at UNL, draws on similar bystander intervention surveys developed at the University of Arizona and the University of Virginia.
“My well-being is my responsibility, not the college’s,” is analogous to, “My learning is my responsibility, not the college’s.” Both statements are, at least in part, correct. So what is the college’s responsibility or role? What connects well-being and higher education?

Well-Being and Higher Education (to appear late summer 2016) will offer a full answer to that question. The essays composing this book will examine and thoroughly analyze various definitions and interpretations of well-being, their expressions or manifestations, and their connection to learning and civic engagement—individually and collectively. The essays explore how campuses could facilitate those manifestations of well-being—citing what makes possible their occurrence and their relevant implications for higher education.

Institutions that give attention to well-being cultivate and sustain a campus culture for learning that exhibits a commitment to public as well as private aims. But how does an institution do so? How does it construct and sustain a culture that exhibits and values individual and community well-being, a deeper and connected sense of the civic, and the purpose of preparing for meaningful life choices—including meaningful work?

The hard part is that constructing and sustaining a culture requires redirecting resources and realigning priorities. But while this is hard, it is not mysterious. Contributing authors suggest what needs to happen and why. The view that limits the purposes of higher education to training and to utilitarian objectives alone can be addressed; the conversation can be altered and expanded; the greater purposes of higher education can reaffirmed. Attending to well-being begins to do that—and that is a clear objective of Well-Being and Higher Education.

In January 2016, BTtoP will announce the forthcoming publication of Well-Being and Higher Education, and several of its over thirty contributors will participate as panelists at AAC&U’s 2016 Annual Meeting. Below are some of the contributors and topics that will be included in the volume:

- Barry Schwartz: “Higher Education and Education in Virtue”
- Corey Keyes: “Why Flourishing?”

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- Laurie Schreiner: “Thriving and Higher Education Learning Experiences”
- Elsa Nunez: “Student Well-Being as a Function of Identity Development”
- David Schoem: “Teaching Matters: Engaging the Whole Student”
- David Scobey: “Well-Being and the New Majority—What Will it Mean?”
- Amanda Hyberger: “Well-Being and the Community College Mission”
- Martha Kanter: “From the Inside Out—What Are the Necessary Conditions for Change in Higher Education?”
- Nance Lucas and Paul Rogers: “The Well-Being University”
- Tricia Seifert: “Well-Being and Student Persistence: Reframing Student Success”

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• Elizabeth Minnich: “Sources and Complexities in Understanding Well-Being”
• Kazi Joshua: “Is Well-Being an Individual Matter?”
• Thia Wolf: “Student Narratives and Well-Being”
• Brian Murphy: “Well-Being, Agency, and the Environment as Community”
• Theodore Long: “A Well-Being Campus Discussion”
• Kevin Kruger and Stephanie Gordon: “Why Institutional Commitment to Well-Being Bridges the Academic/Student Affairs Divide”
• Carol Geary Schneider: “Well-Being, LEAP, and the Promise of Liberal Education”
• John S. Wilson Jr.: “Do We Know What Constitutes a Campus Culture for Connecting Learning to Well-Being? What is Adaptable and Adoptable?”

It is our hope that Well-Being and Higher Education will provide a robust, timely source of insight, perspective, and practiced approaches and applications. The perspectives in this volume may be used to initiate conversations or inform policy decisions, to stimulate directional change or to reaffirm a mission. We also hope this new publication might be a resource for the campus grants that will be awarded over 2016–2017 through BTtoP’s new Request for Proposals: http://bttop.org/grants-funding/funding-opportunities.

Look for BTtoP at the AAC&U Annual Meeting

Bringing Theory to Practice will again be participating in AAC&U’s Annual Meeting, to take place January 20-23, 2016, at the Grand Hyatt Washington, 1000 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

We invite you to join us at any or all of our sessions for what we hope will be provocative, well-timed and spirited presentations and discussions on key issues in higher education.

BTtoP also will be hosting an informal reception on Thursday evening, January 21, 2016.

We welcome friends and colleagues to attend for the opportunity to engage in discussion, share ideas, and connect with each other and the BTtoP team on current and future directions of our work together. Look for our Save the Date in your email soon—if you are not signed up for our mailing list you can do so on our website homepage: www.bttop.org.

For more information and updates on the 2016 Annual Meeting, please visit: http://www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/am16
In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

News

Ten Year Anniversary of the Engelhard Project at Georgetown University

Georgetown University’s Engelhard Project, which originated as a concept in a 2005 BTtoP Demonstration Grant, is now approaching its ten year anniversary. Since its inception, the project has reached over sixty faculty members, twenty-eight academic departments, and 11,000 students through the model of curriculum infusion. By connecting and embedding student health and wellness into the classroom, the goal of the project has been not only to foster the gain of knowledge, but to build meaningful relationships between faculty, students, and the community, and to ultimately encourage students’ personal growth. The anniversary events will celebrate and honor the accomplishments of all those involved in this transformative program.


BTtoP has funded over 480 grants at more than 300 institutions to date, and there are still funding opportunities available from our 2015–2017 RFP! Category I Well-Being Grants range up to $1,000 and are aimed at providing support for seminars that give focused attention to a particular dimension of the well-being of those involved—be it students, faculty, or other leaders—in creating and maintaining an engaged culture for learning. We invite proposals to be submitted by the deadline of January 15, 2016. For more information on our RFP, funding opportunities, examples of previously awarded grants, grant frequently asked questions, and other resources, please visit our website at http://www.bttop.org/grants-funding/funding-opportunities.

Imagining America: Now Accepting Proposal Submissions for a New Host Institution

In 2017, Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life (IA), will complete its ten year residency at Syracuse University and move to a new host academic institution. To initiate the two-year transition period before Summer 2017, IA has put out a call for hosting proposals to assist in determining their new partner institution, with submission open to both single institutions or lead institutions in collaboration with other educational, cultural, philanthropic, and governmental partners. Initial letters of interest are due by November 2, 2015, and full proposals due by January 16, 2016. To find out more about Imagining America and their search for a new host, visit http://imaginingamerica.org/about/transition/.

Welcome: New Bringing Theory to Practice Team Member Caitlin Salins

BTtoP is pleased to welcome Caitlin Salins as a new member to the team! Working as our project coordinator and assistant to the director, Caitlin brings a background of library science, classical languages and literatures, and a passion for working with the higher education community. A native to Prince Georges County and the DC area, she completed both her undergraduate and graduate studies at the University of Maryland College Park.

Congratulations to BTtoP National Evaluator Ashley Finley on Her Move to Dominican University

Ashley Finley, BTtoP’s national evaluator, has accepted the position of associate vice president for academic affairs and dean of the Dominican Experience at Dominican University in California. During her time as AAC&U’s senior director for research and assessment, Ashley has been integral in building the organization’s assessment program. She has most recently been making strides as a leader in the VALUE/Multi-State Collaborative initiative, supported by the Gates, Sherman Fairchild, and Spencer Foundations, to launch AAC&U’s VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) approach to direct assessment, enabling the gathering of evidence to evaluate student learning and ultimately better campus teaching. Her new position will allow her to further champion and implement the values she has been instrumental in supporting—liberal education, civic development, and student well-being—with the opportunity to affect and improve higher education on the ground level. Although she will be dearly missed on the east coast, BTtoP offers the highest congratulations and support and is excited to have Ashley continue her work with BTtoP as National Evaluator.
The Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BToP) 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 non-profit 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.

The Civic Series
Bringing Theory to Practice’s The Civic Series is composed of five monographs that raise questions and provide perspectives on fundamental issues about the civic mission of higher education.

Civic initiatives are ongoing in democratic societies, but only some of them become papers which invigorate the intellectual climate and promote public discussion. We believe that if each successive wave of visionary thinkers were to share their boldest ideas about the civic mission of higher education, it might contribute to theory and practice.

Transforming Undergraduate Education
This resource features chapters from twenty-four scholars, educational leaders, and practitioners, as well as ten case studies of campuses that have been recipients of Bringing Theory to Practice support. Project co-founder and director Don Harward contributed Part 1 and edited the book; national evaluator Ashley Finley authored a chapter and co-edited the case studies.

For more information: www.bttop.org/resources/publications