Campus Highlight
Oregon State University: Paths to Flourishing

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Oregon State University (OSU) is at a crossroads. The campus and student population are expanding and reorganizing at unprecedented rates through new infrastructure, buildings, global student representation, and an increase in new degree programs at the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate levels. In times of transition such as these, the opportunities to re-examine, and possibly re-frame, how we support student success, flourishing, and positive community growth is available to us as never before. Our ultimate aim is to create flourishing as a core competency on the OSU campus.

As we consider all the ways our students interact with and move through OSU, it is our goal to infuse more intentional learning opportunities into new and existing structures and processes. We are aiming to hone and develop practices that will increase the mental well-being, whole-person learning, and ultimately academic engagement and success of our students. We also believe that faculty and staff need to flourish as students strive for wholeness. To create real and lasting impact on our campus, we need to be inclusive of the various constituencies that make up our community, including teaching and professional faculty, advisors, and students.

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Corey Keyes’ model of flourishing is our compass. According to Keyes, “flourishing is defined as a state in which an individual feels positive toward life and is functioning well psychologically and socially” (2007). In winter 2013, Keyes came to OSU and key stakeholders invested their time and consideration identifying how to bring flourishing to the OSU community organizationally and personally. A coalition of campus partners identified as the Mental Health Initiative (MHI) group, led by Counseling and Psychological Services, was established with the following goals:

• begin to understand where the presence and absence of flourishing is in our students and on our campus
• identify how to impact our campus and create intentional opportunities to flourish
• continue to develop the Mental Health Initiative as a learning community.

After OSU joined the Bringing Theory to Practice Project at the September 2013 Well-Being gathering, the MHI realized flourishing was a concept that was experienced and practiced in dynamic and diverse ways. From this, the MHI created a Flourishing @ OSU lecture series that focuses on OSU and community perspectives on how flourishing is understood through student services, teaching, advising, coaching, writing, and contemplative practices. The MHI is creating a library of these talks and other resources on its website that help define what flourishing is through the lens of the various speakers (http://oregonstate.edu/counsel/mental_health_initiative/flourishing_lectures). The series has created a buzz on campus, with more stakeholders contacting the MHI to find out how they too can engage in the work.

The MHI working group further identified a focus on the first year-experience (FYE) and advising. The first project that we will assess for effectiveness will be creating a ten-week FYE course that focuses on flourishing. The syllabus for this course will be intentionally crafted with research-based practices that include, but are not limited to, specific exercises outlined in Seligman (2011). A second intervention will intentionally incorporate the academic advising experience into an FYE course as well as a reflective writing assignment, as research supports writ-
ing as a process of self-renewal, which can in turn lead to flourishing (Higgins 2011; Adams and Lohndorf 2013).

It is our hope at OSU that this project will provide a platform for long-term decision making, as we consider shaping intentional experiences on campus that promote flourishing.

References


Just as BTtoP-supported campuses are working hard to understand their data and evidence to tell a story about learning and institutional efficacy, we at BTtoP are similarly trying to make sense of the data we have collected over the past ten years. After awarding over $4.2 million in grant monies to over three hundred campuses, BTtoP will be undertaking a major effort over the next two years to gather, synthesize, and explore our existing data and also mine potential areas for further information. Our intent is to more completely and coherently lift up the many data collected from grant-funded campuses in order to help us create a national case for the empirical connections among students’ engaged learning, civic learning, and psychosocial well-being.

At BTtoP, we have labeled this endeavor the “Scholarship of Reflection.” We are attempting to take seriously the charge we give to campuses about their own projects—the need to not only gather data but to do something with it. The first step of this process is to reflect on what you have, think about how to package it, and then write and talk about it. In this vein, the first phase of the Scholarship of Reflection will be to systematically sort, code, and analyze nearly three hundred final grant reports, collected from 2004 to 2013. We will be examining all levels of grants, from demonstration and intensive site grants to seminar grants. During this phase, we will also be gathering case study information from grantee campuses in order to explore the degree to which project emphases on engaged learning, civic development, and psychosocial well-being have been institutionalized following grant funding.

The second phase of the Scholarship of Reflection project will involve analysis of data gathered in 2014 from the Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory (PSRI) consortium campuses. The PSRI is a campus climate survey developed by AAC&U as part of the Core Commitments initiative with funding from the John Templeton Foundation. A number of campuses have agreed to be part of a special consortium supported with BTtoP funding that will administer the PSRI study on their campus over the next two years, in spring 2014 and spring 2015. Of particular importance for this consortium is that directors of the PSRI at Iowa State University have added the flourishing scale (http://calmhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/mhc-sfenglish.pdf) for this special administration. If your institution is planning or considering the administration of the PSRI survey in 2015, let us know if you would like to be part of the BTtoP consortium utilizing the flourishing scale.

Second-phase work will also involve a survey of campuses that were part of BTtoP’s Leadership Coalition from 2008 to 2011. The BTtoP Leadership Coalition focused on the role of presidential leadership as a critical means for moving initiatives aimed at engaged learning, civic development, and psychosocial well-being to the center of campus life and learning. The coalition was organized in 2008 and involved fifty-three public and private colleges and universities. A survey of these campuses conducted approximately three years after the conclusion of funding is intended to provide insights into how presidential support of BTtoP work on campuses has helped to facilitate efforts, evolve programs, and deepen project goals.

The final phase of the Scholarship of Reflection will entail additional analyses from the second wave of the BTtoP/PSRI consortium study administered in 2015. We will also be conducting some new analyses of data from the BTtoP cost and expenditure study conducted in 2008 (http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/documents/coststudyfinalreport_r.pdf) and the BTtoP Faculty Reward study conducted in 2010 (http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/documents/finley_pod_Nov2010_withblurb-1.pdf).

BTtoP will be releasing reports and providing updates on the Scholarship of Reflection project over the next two years as each phase is completed. We are eager to share our findings with you—our network of colleagues and project campuses—and also with those that would like to join our community. BTtoP has long been the voice championing the work of campuses to intentionally connect civic learning and psychosocial well-being with student learning. We believe that the effort to synthesize and utilize the data we have gathered over the last ten years will enable us to share our message broadly and loudly!
In January 2014, BTtoP announced the emphasis for its next few years of work: raising attention to well-being as the third dimension of the core purposes of higher education. We are focused on the inextricable connections, in both theory and practice, among the civic, engaged learning, and well-being—the transformative conditions of flourishing, self-realization, purposefulness, and of being ‘whole’ in the world.

Our initial objective has been to achieve a clearer understanding of what well-being and its composites (flourishing, purposefulness, persistence, transformation, and emergent personal identity) mean. What evidence supports their connection to learning or to civic understanding and actions? And most importantly, what would be gained by increasing attention to well-being in higher education? We know that to answer these questions will require more research, greater development of analysis and conceptual inquiry, and initiatives on multiple campuses developing best practices, policies, and structures that are supportive of well-being.

Significantly increasing attention to well-being, however, cannot be achieved by BTtoP-supported projects or research alone. The effort will require us to encourage a pattern of collaboration and cooperation—a broad and strong network of institutions, associations, scholars, practitioners, and the public at large. Peter Levine’s new book *We Are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For* (Oxford University Press, 2013) argues convincingly that significant social (and, I would add, educational) change gets made through the cultivation of a network of similar-minded organizations, associations, institutions, and public voices. While having no connecting thread, what emerges is a web of connections, each locale on that web influencing its own contacts.

If raising up well-being starts with the work of clarification, analysis, and confirming evidence, it must move to an inclusive effort of accomplishing this second objective: achieving the participation and engagement of multiple institutions, associations, foundations—and with them, scholars, practitioners, and the public. But why should anyone care? What strategy would succeed in generating inclusive interest, and result in making well-being a priority?

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We believe that raising attention to well-being and the demonstrated effects of doing so could be the key ingredient in the making of a full, newly enhanced, and compelling case for liberal education—its transformative virtues, its inherent utility, and its promise to prepare learners for being in the world. Establishing such a case could provide reason for interest and involvement because it would change the conversation about higher education’s core purposes—and when the conversation shifts, actions follow. Moreover, it would be both timely and relevant to use such a strategy, answering liberal education’s prevailing critics, as well as providing a needed response to its own perceived marginalization.

Building a more complete and compelling case for liberal education must be done while appreciating the three partial cases or justifications most frequently provided: (1) the epistemic case; (2) the civic case; and, (3) an economic or work/jobs case. These cases cite necessary elements (both the civic and the work cases have only recently been given deserved attention) but even together they are not sufficient.

What has been missing is the dimension that can be demonstrated to be central to the transforming and liberating power of liberal education—how greater attention to well-being creates conditions for affecting students as whole persons; how it has the power to be emancipatory; how it is meaningfully measured and promoted. With the identification of both theory and best practices, what can be created and assessed is a campus culture for learning and engagement that is highly mindful of well-being, practicing such mindfulness in theory and action. This is what we want to achieve and promote.

Making well-being a key part of a more complete case for liberal education is likely to face the judgment that it is too vague to be salient, too emotive to be relevant. To the contrary, we believe it is a case waiting to be made—once made, it will resonate with what has always been a key motivation for educators: to make a difference in the lives of students.

We will want to consider how a full and convincing case for liberal education is transferrable (adaptable and affordable) as best practices and policies applicable to all institutions of higher education. It may be that the core purposes of any category of higher education (community or technical college, or research graduate school) should include focus on the well-being of the whole student. As a result, the basic conversation regarding the purpose of higher education is changed—it becomes more porous, and gains deeper meaning and more compelling justification. Regardless of the route taken in higher education, learners could find educational opportunities designed to help them flourish—to realize, actualize, and prepare for living meaningfully in the world.

### Resources from BTtoP and Other Organizations that Help Make the Case


**The Civic Series.** Barry Checkoway, editor (BTtoP, 2012–2014.) Volumes I, II, and III (of five) now available online at BTtoP.org

**Work and Liberal Education.** Kettering Foundation report, forthcoming.


**The Well-Being and Flourishing of Students.** A BTtoP conference publication (2013). Available online at BTtoP.org

News

New Volume in BTtoP’s Civic Series of Monographs

Civic Engagement, Civic Development and Higher Education, the fourth monograph in BTtoP’s Civic Series, was released in April. This monograph, edited by Jill Reich, contributes to an understanding of why civic engagement in higher education matters, both inside and outside the classroom, for teachers, students, and community members. For more information, including the monograph’s free (electronic) and purchase (print) links, see http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/CivicSeries.cfm#ceedhe.

For more information on the Civic Series, including the upcoming monograph Civic Learning and Teaching, edited by Ashley Finley, visit the Civic Series web page: http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/CivicSeries.cfm.

BTtoP Funds Over 200 Projects Between 2012 and 2014

BTtoP has funded over 200 grants under the 2012–2014 RFP to date. Examples of funded projects and information about the 2012–2014 funding period are available at BTtoP.org.

Michelle Fine Awarded for Distinguished Contributions to Research in Public Policy

BTtoP Demonstration Site Grant Co-Principal Investigator Michelle Fine (distinguished professor, City University of New York Graduate Center) received an American Psychological Association (APA) Psychology in the Public Interest award in 2013. The APA notes that these awards are given to a psychologist who has made a distinguished empirical and/or theoretical contribution to research in public policy, either through a single extraordinary achievement or a lifetime of work. Congratulations to our wonderful colleague Michelle!

Collaborations and Travels

Gallup and Lumina: What America Needs to Know about Higher Education Redesign

Gallup and Lumina Foundation presented findings and a panel on their 2013 study of the American public’s opinion on higher education, as well as a poll on US business leaders about higher education in Washington, DC, on February 25. This collaboration is focused on studying the most pressing issues facing higher education today, including cost, access, quality, and workforce readiness. This year, in addition to the annual public opinion poll of the US general population, a second survey was conducted of business leaders in the United States to understand their perceptions of postsecondary education and how higher education institutions are doing in preparing employees for the world of work.

Kettering Foundation Workshop on Work, Action, and Civic Learning

The Kettering Foundation, through its “Research Exchanges,” has long supported the connection of scholarship to practices that address fundamental problems of democracy. In late February, hundreds of scholars, practitioners, and advocates met at Kettering in small clustered discussion sessions. BTtoP Director Don Harward participated in the “Work and the Liberal Arts as Civic Arts” session, which explored how a more enhanced understanding of work is compatible with the civic mission of liberal education and with the practical needs of graduates in a period in which work place preparation is a key concern. The outcome will be a report from Kettering providing an analysis that criticizes the common definition of the purpose of higher education as exclusively job preparation for the twenty-first century, while arguing for separate but compatible notions within liberal education of the civic and of meaningful work.

Carnegie Summit on Improvement in Education

The Carnegie Summit on Improvement in Education, held March 10–12 in San Francisco, brought a wide range of education professionals together to study improvement science and its practical applications. Hosted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the summit’s reform-minded agenda was designed for a K-12 audience, but the keynote presenters and many of the sessions focused on the applicability of improvement science to all levels and types of education and organizations to enhance efficacy and appreciate change. Stimulating sessions included skill-training in understanding systems processes and a nuanced keynote on the internet, social networks, and education delivered by Clay Shirky, associate arts professor at New York University. For more information on improvement science, the four-strand agenda, and presenters, please visit http://carnegiefoundationsummit.org/agenda/.
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 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.

Publications Available By Bringing Theory to Practice

Civic Engagement, Civic Development, and Higher Education

What is, or can be, achieved by using the civic as an agent for change? Civic Engagement, Civic Development, and Higher Education, the fourth monograph in The Civic Series, is composed of thirteen essays written by leaders and practitioners in colleges and universities who consider engaging the community to be an intimate and necessary component of learning and knowledge creation for students, faculty and staff, and the community itself.

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 both authored a chapter and co-edited the case studies.

For more information: www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/publications.cfm