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Special Issue

Advancing the Greater Purposes of Higher Education: A Preponderance of Evidence

Editor’s Note

By Jennifer O’Brien, Project Manager and Coordinator of Strategic Planning and Development, Bringing Theory to Practice

In the winter 2016 issue of the Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) newsletter (http://www.bttop.org/sites/default/files/public/BTP%20News_winter16.pdf), BTtoP’s National Evaluator Ashley Finley (Dominican University, formerly at Dickinson College and AAC&U) wrote about evidence. After funding grants and reviewing reports at hundreds of institutions across the country, BTtoP felt comfortable addressing the “preponderance of evidence” from the grant reports showing that engaged learning, civic development and engagement, and student well-being are inextricably related in any institution of higher education offering a transformational experience for all students.

This was the original hunch behind the BTtoP project—and the dedicated work of many of you, our colleagues on campuses across the country and a few abroad, confirmed it. We now refer to these (learning and discovery, civic engagement,
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well-being, and preparation for meaningful living) as the greater purposes of higher education.

Ashley’s essay also mentioned seven in-depth case studies that BTtoP commissioned in 2014 on institutions that have been partners with BTtoP for many years (some for over a decade). What began as an internal reflection for BTtoP’s core team of staff and consultants turned into a group of must-read campus narratives that offer insight into real institutional change—directly from those involved with the projects on campus. Read more here: http://www.bttop.org/resources/bringing-theory-practice-case-studies.

Then, in the spring 2016 issue of our newsletter (http://www.bttop.org/sites/default/files/public/BTP%20News_spring16_1.pdf), Project Director Don Harward wrote about BTtoP’s interest in generating a community of practice, emphasizing that change within that community of practice requires voices, from within each institution as well as from the public, demanding that higher education be a public good. BTtoP is trying, with your hard work and encouragement, to advance these greater purposes of higher education.

While both of these essays offered readers an overview of BTtoP’s work and strategy, we thought it would be helpful to be even more explicit (bringing theory to practice) by providing you, our reader, with more specific examples of the many projects we have supported to date.

So, this issue highlights a number of recent examples illustrating what this preponderance of evidence actually looks like. Hopefully these examples inspire positive change on your campuses in advancing the greater purposes of higher education.

We hope you enjoy reading these highlights, and we would like to remind you that we are always interested in sharing your campus story in our newsletter (http://www.bttop.org/submit-article-bttop-newsletter).

I would also like to draw your attention to the save-the-date for our upcoming “The Whole Student: Intersectionality and Student Well-Being” conference to be held in Chicago, from May 24 to 26, 2017, and to an announcement about a new special round of funding for 2017–18 focused on supporting campus dialogues on advancing the greater purposes of higher education. We look forward to hearing from you!

Mateo Diaz, Intergroup Dialogue Student from Syracuse University (see article pages 6–7)
Psychosocial Well-Being Grants

In the fall of 2013, BTtoP held a “Well-Being Seminar” to which we invited colleagues representing thirty institutions especially focused on the well-being of students. Our intention in bringing together those already concerned with student well-being was to learn more about advanced theory on the topic, as well as to explore what advanced campus practice in support of well-being looks like.

Subsequently, twenty-nine campuses received BTtoP funding (with required institutional matching) to carry out psychosocial well-being research projects in 2014. Excerpts from the reports of four outstanding projects are below. We also followed up by asking the principal investigators a few additional questions.

For more information on all twenty-nine funded projects, visit the BTtoP Psychosocial Well-Being Initiative Grants webpage: http://www.bttop.org/grants-funding/psychosocial-well-being-initiative-grants.

Wofford College

Civic Engagement as Whole-Student Development: Identity Formation as a Prelude to Flourishing

Principal Investigator: Katherine Janiec Jones, Associate Professor of Religion and Associate Professor for Curriculum and Co-Curriculum

Project Summary:

The Wofford grant project was designed to bridge two initiatives already being developed by different faculty teams on campus: The Sophomore Experience and Religious Pluralism and Worldview Engagement. The Sophomore Experience initiative focused on facilitating civically engaged learning by examining how to better connect students to various opportunities on campus during their sophomore year. The Religious Pluralism and Worldview Engagement initiative focused on student engagement with difference via a course called “Interfaith Engagement and Religious Pluralism,” wherein student writing, oral presentations, and other outputs from the course comprised direct assessments of student learning and reflection on well-being and interfaith literacy and engagement.

Final Report:

“One primary theme that has emerged is that efforts towards increased communication and collaboration among different areas of campus will facilitate student learning and psychosocial well-being. This occurs by enhancing both what we can offer to students and how well the faculty and staff who interact with students are able to maintain their own ability to create sustainable structures for learning.

This grant has allowed us to examine several areas of Wofford curricular and co-curricular life in ways that will feed into our thinking about Strategic Vision implementation and our discussions about General Education reform. Because we are in the midst of multiple mission-centered discussions on campus, we feel confident that the results of our work will not end with the completion of this grant.”

Follow-up Questions:

As you formed targeted outcomes related to student well-being:

a) What were they?

b) Did you explicitly link them to specific learning outcomes? How?

c) Did you determine if they were achieved, either partially or fully? How?

“One many of our targeted outcomes were related directly to the focus of the course, and we were explicit about that (continued on page 4)
Wofford

(continued from page 3)

Is there anything else you would like to add?

“My thinking about flourishing—both on the part of students and on the part of faculty and staff—has carried over from this grant work into my current work as Associate Provost for Curriculum and Co-Curriculum. We frequently work for the students—almost to the point of rewarding self-sacrifice—with their flourishing at the forefronts of our minds. We need to remember, though … we can’t help our students flourish unless we are also thinking about our own flourishing as a faculty and staff.”

Simon Fraser University

Well-Being in Academic Settings: Taking a Systemic Approach to Student Well-Being and Psychosocial Development in Academic Units

Principal Investigator: Tara Black, Associate Director, Health Promotion

Project Summary:

The Simon Fraser University grant project, called Well-Being in Academic Settings, explored how academic units (at the faculty, department, and/or program level) can be engaged in the systemic support of well-being and whole-student development. SFU’s Health Promotion team worked collaboratively with academic units in order to embed well-being and create positive change. The project’s development was shaped by two guiding questions:

- How can academic unit practices, policies, programs, and curricula better support holistic student development and well-being?
- What are examples of practices, policies, programs, and curricula that positively affect holistic student development and well-being?

Final Report:

“Through the project implementation, an increased emphasis was placed on relationship building with academic units to jointly create resources and a shared understanding of how academic units can create conditions for well-being in academic settings. This culminated in the creation of the casebook to feature specific examples at SFU. Now that relationships and buy-in with faculty units have been established, the next phase of the work will involve further evaluation of the impacts of the identified examples on student psychosocial...
well-being, purpose, and sense of community."

Follow-up Questions:

How do you think the project has affected your campus or department?

“This project has been one component of the broader Healthy Campus Community initiative, which has been working to create a culture of well-being across our campus and infuse a consideration of well-being within campus policies, processes, physical spaces, and learning experiences. This particular project has contributed to the engagement of faculty and academic departments in the creation of conditions for well-being.”

Is there anything you would like to add?

“We will likely be publishing a qualitative research paper in the September 2016 edition of *Higher Education Studies* that provides a student perspective on what well-being in learning environments means to them and how conditions for well-being can be created in higher education settings.

In the fall of 2016 we are planning on conducting an evaluation exercise, called Most Significant Change, to try to better capture how our various efforts within the Healthy Campus Community initiative have affected our campus partners, and have contributed to the creation of conditions for well-being.”

University of La Verne

**A Sophomore Seminar Experience: Boosting Success, Well-Being, Sense of Self and Community, and Holism**

**Principal Investigator: Kat Weaver, Director, La Verne Experience and Associate Professor of Biology**

**Project Summary:**

The University of La Verne grant project helped to develop a singular experience for its sophomore students as part of the overall La Verne Experience. The Sophomore La Verne Experience (SoLVE) was designed in a seminar-style format, with a small student cohort that extended the curricular experience into the cocurricular, and was facilitated by a full-time faculty member who was assisted by a peer student drawn from the junior or senior class. SoLVE scaffolded onto the Freshman La Verne Experience (FLEX) by expanding the student experience beyond the classroom and integrating opportunities for personal and social responsibility with relationship building among students, peers, faculty, and the community at large. Students also had opportunities for self-reflection and drawing connections between academe and the world beyond the classroom, expanding their sense of community and encouraging mindfulness, active engagement, and identification of personal values.

**Final Report:**

“The core values of University of La Verne sync well with the goals of psychosocial well-being; so much so that it has taken little effort to integrate psychosocial well-being into the curriculum and cocurricular activities of the university. Our faculty, staff, and students have embraced the deliberate, intentional, and... (continued on page 6)
active programming of psychosocial well-being into the La Verne Experience initiative. They have even applauded the intentionality of our efforts because it has benefitted all through increased retention and persistence, higher GPAs, students who are content and feel connected to the community, and faculty who can walk into a class and know that their students are confident in their personal habits and values.”

**Follow-up Questions:**

**What emphasis did your project place on understanding what well-being could mean?**

“A great deal of emphasis was placed on what well-being could mean. Well-being to us is reflected in student academic performance and persistence, as well as overall social and academic involvement. As a Hispanic-serving institution, we also felt that it was important that our approach be connected with the needs of our student population (49.3 percent Hispanic, 47 percent low-income, 60 percent first-generation, and most students work).”

**How might your campus facilitate or sustain greater manifestations of well-being in the lives of students and/or faculty?**

“By creating spaces within the curriculum and cocurriculum to talk about well-being. FLEX is taken by all incoming freshmen, and SoLVE is required for all second-year students and incoming transfers. In addition, we have also begun an initiative through the La Verne Experience and the chaplain’s offices to start a Passport to Purposeful Life. The passport will ask students to think about their connections and development of purpose. They will be referred to offices across campus trained to talk with students in culturally responsive ways about purpose, career, and well-being. We hope this will sustain our efforts and continue the connections between the curriculum and cocurriculum.”

**Do you think the project affected faculty or staff engagement and/or well-being? How?**

“Yes! As a parallel to the student survey, we also surveyed the faculty teaching within the FLEX learning community. These faculty members reported a sense of belonging and greater job satisfaction because of their community. In addition, faculty are shown the data from both surveys. This has led to transparency and a culture of support.”

Syracuse University

**Measuring Socioemotional Well-Being of Students in Intergroup Dialogue Program**

**Principal Investigator: Gretchen E. Lopez, Director, Intergroup Dialogue Program**

**Project Summary:**

The Syracuse University (SU) grant project measured facets of socioemotional well-being for students enrolled in three courses that illustrate SU’s commitment to educating the whole student and that draw students from across disciplines. The courses included Intergroup Dialogue, Personal and Social Responsibility, and Cognitive Behavioral Approaches to Stress Reduction. Faculty who led these courses share a commitment to experiential learning that addresses self-inquiry and critical thinking, empathy and perspective-taking, personal and social identities, agency, and civic engagement. The three courses served as the basis for the development of survey instruments and interview protocols to better understand the impact of engaged learning on college students’ well-being.

**Final Report:**

“In gathering qualitative data, we were interested in capturing student narratives about engaged learning and well-being. These data provided the opportunity to explore questions such as: Do

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these courses inform students’ understanding of their education as a whole? Do they affect social relationships outside of academic or class settings? Do these courses inform students’ thinking about future careers and/or participation in diverse democracy? Based on previous assessment and research, we anticipated vivid examples of application and construction of knowledge from students’

“Given how strong the sense of community was in these courses, it does give me pause as a faculty member. I found myself asking why such community—from which one can grow (and reach others) as a whole student or being—is described as such a rarity.”

involvement in the courses. Indeed, video-recorded interviews captured student reflections about critical educational spaces and engaged learning.”

Follow-up Questions:
Do you think the project affected faculty or staff engagement and/or well-being? How?
“Admittedly, given how strong the sense of community was in these courses (at least as described by the students interviewed in this project), it does give me pause as a faculty member. I found myself asking why such community—from which one can grow (and reach others) as a whole student or being—is described as such a rarity.”

What emphasis did your project place on practical examples of how well-being is made manifest in the lives of students? What did you gain?
“We interviewed students at the end of the semester or academic year and asked open-ended questions about their learning through dialogue (specifically, intergroup dialogue academic courses). Given that we didn’t ask explicitly about how dialogue-based learning impacted ‘well-being,’ it was eye-opening and inspiring for us—as faculty/facilitators of these courses—to see how often dialogue students connected their course learning with their broader lives. They eagerly shared how dialogue shaped who they are becoming as people ... and engaged citizens on and off campus. They talked in ways that helped us understand how dialogue, and the design and educational and personal challenges of these courses, support their interactions and ‘meaning making’ in higher education. That is, they described feeling listened to and respected, and moved to deep thinking not only about persistent social issues and seemingly intractable conflicts, but also about themselves.

The students describe in detail the sense of community created (or co-created) in these courses/classrooms and how that reverberates through their educational and social interactions on campus. For example, some students describe the significance of writing frequent critical reflections that analyze and integrate readings, group processes in the classroom, and personal understandings and questions. Students link this to the growing confidence they have in speaking up and/or speaking out in other classes or on campus. They describe this writing as preparing them to be both open and strong in sharing their perspectives, their stories, and their positions in other contexts. They say dialogue strengthened their self-insight, voice, and willingness to put themselves ‘out there.’ Students also frequently refer to how dialogue-based learning has affected their family as well as peer relationships. They see more things, express a critical awareness, and they also express (or share examples of) being more willing to question or even interrupt/disrupt conflicts that reflect unequal power relations. Such agency, in the descriptions of their lived experiences and even most personal relationships, appears to come from and to extend a sense of well-being.”
Tufts University Receives $15 Million Gift for Tisch College
Supporting Emerging Field of Civic Studies

By Peter Levine, Lincoln Filene Professor of Citizenship and Public Affairs and Director of CIRCLE: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University

In April 2016, Lizzie and Jonathan Tisch made a $15 million gift to what was then Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service; the college became the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life in recognition of its mission to prepare all students for a lifetime of effective engagement in civic and democratic life. A substantial portion of the funds will be used to hire professors in the emerging discipline of Civic Studies.

One of the earliest works published on Civic Studies was a Bringing Theory to Practice Civic Monograph entitled Civic Studies: Approaches to the Emerging Field (http://www.bttop.org/resources/publications/civic-studies), coedited by Peter Levine and Karol Edward Sołtan in 2014. The volume helped to inform Tisch College’s strategic plan and the priorities that will be advanced by this major new gift.

Civic Studies looks at any social issue—whether climate change, racism, or the condition of the arts—from the perspective of a citizen. Citizens have limited leverage. They cannot decree a social policy, let alone institute an ideal social system. Therefore, Civic Studies asks, “What should we do?” rather than the more common question, “What should be done?” It takes seriously the strategic questions that confront actual civic actors and the challenges of working together voluntarily.

A citizen combines factual knowledge about what is happening with ethical reasoning about what is right and good. Civic Studies thus unites empirical research with normative research—the social sciences with the humanities. Civic Studies also recognizes the importance of the settings and institutions in which citizens typically have the most impact: voluntary associations, grassroots networks, social movements, and the like. It makes civic life a basic topic of research and translates that research to practice.

Much civic education is experiential, and rightly so. But citizens face challenges and opportunities that can be analyzed and understood in theoretical terms. Civic Studies aims to generate research and practical examples that will make citizens’ work easier and more effective.

Civic Studies is broad and can engage most of the existing academic disciplines. Indeed, it could be a name for the liberal arts—but only if those disciplines were reconceived to emphasize the citizen’s perspective and needs. The intellectually diverse senior faculty who will come to Tufts thanks to the Tisch gift will form the nucleus of an intellectual community devoted to Civic Studies, whose seminal volume is the Civic Monograph of that name. For more information, visit http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/civic-studies/.
Project Pericles and its collaborators commenced work this spring on a multi-campus research project that examines the impact of civic engagement on student well-being. Bates College, Goucher College, Hendrix College, and Pitzer College are collaborating on the study supported by Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP).

Periclean Program Directors are leading the work on each campus. The group has met multiple times to discuss and fine-tune the research protocol. In the fall semester, the group will be conducting pre- and post-course surveys of students in a variety of courses that incorporate civic engagement. These surveys will use a flourishing scale as well as additional questions. To reach students on all four campuses, we will be administering the survey using Qualtrics.

“Pitzer College is thrilled to participate, once again, with long-time partners Project Pericles and Bringing Theory to Practice, in the important work of studying the impact of civic engagement on student wellness,” says Tessa Hicks Peterson, assistant vice president of community engagement and assistant professor of urban studies at Pitzer College. “This unique focus on well-being within community engagement is one that does not get nearly enough attention. We believe that aims to enhance the well-being of our students (as well as our communities) must be at the forefront of our efforts to educate, support, and inspire those in and connected to Pitzer College around our core values of social responsibility and social justice.”

This multicampus research project looks at the ways in which incorporating civic engagement in the curricula influences the well-being of college students. We are examining a number of high-impact practices including community-based learning and first-year seminars. “Our goal is to gain a fuller understanding of the distinctive impact of our required first-semester course, The

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Engaged Citizen, on our students both in that first year and then as they follow their civic engagement pathways across their time at Hendrix College. Of course, this impact includes the students’ social and emotional development as young adults honing their citizenship skills,” says Jay Barth, M. E. and Ima Graves Peace Distinguished Professor of Politics and director of civic engagement projects at Hendrix College.

The project will pay close attention both to the type of course taken and to the impact of programs on Pell-eligible and first-generation students.

Our group of Periclean Program Directors is interested in and motivated by big questions concerning student flourishing and the role of higher education in developing engaged citizens. “The education of the whole person and the cultivation of informed civic action are animating priorities at Bates College,” says Darby K. Ray, director of the Harward Center for Community Partnerships and Donald W. & Ann M. Harward Professor of Civic Engagement at Bates College. “We look forward to asking questions such as: Does the full-bodied integration of the civic into the academic enterprise—not as an afterthought or footnote but as integral to student learning and experience—have a demonstrable effect on students’ resiliency, self-efficacy, or responses to stress? When student learning is focused not only on the edification and preparation of the individual but also on the transformation and flourishing of communities, are students (and communities) more likely to flourish? We need to be asking these kinds of questions in higher education, and this study invites us to do so.”

At Goucher College, “we believe that working in a focused way will help us ask better questions and more knowledgeably define key factors that link community-based work to psychosocial well-being,” says Cass Friedland, France-Merrick Director of Community-Based Learning. “We will also tie this work to our conversations around the equitable dissemination of high-impact practices (e.g., community-based learning, study abroad, internships) throughout the entire student body.”

Project Pericles is pleased to be undertaking this work with such a distinguished group of scholars and colleagues. We look forward to sharing our results when they become available in 2017.

NEW Round of Funding from Bringing Theory to Practice

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS 2017–2018

Campus Dialogue Grants of up to $5,000 (institutional matching required) will provide support for one-year projects based around thematically integrated dialogues involving diverse campus constituents. Successful proposals should demonstrate how the dialogues will, through the lens of your unique campus culture, facilitate the greater purposes of higher education: learning and discovery, well-being, civic engagement, and preparation for living meaningfully in the world.

Look for RFP release September 20, 2016
In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

News

BTtoP Research Featured in *Change* Magazine

BTtoP National Evaluator Ashley Finley describes BTtoP’s research over the past twelve years in a piece from the March/April issue of *Change* magazine, “Well-Being: An Essential Outcome for Higher Education.” The article discusses the importance of centralizing student well-being for delivering on the full promise of higher education and highlights national and campus-based research connecting student learning and particular learning experiences with students’ increased sense of purpose and flourishing. Read more at http://www.changemag.org/.

**BTtoP Panel at CIC’s Institute for Chief Academic Officers in New Orleans this November**

BTtoP Project Director Don Harward and National Evaluator Ashley Finley (associate dean of the Dominican Experience, Dominican University of California) will be joined by colleagues Kazi Joshua (associate dean for intercultural affairs and chief diversity officer, Whitman College) and Chad Berry (academic vice president and dean of the faculty, Berea College) in hosting a panel, “Well-Being and Student Success in Higher Education,” at the Council of Independent Colleges’ (CIC’s) Institute for Chief Academic Officers in New Orleans from November 5 to 8, 2016. The panel will focus on how academic leaders can encourage a campus climate of inclusion, belonging, and well-being, particularly for first-generation and underrepresented student populations.

**BTtoP’s Sessions at AAC&U’s Annual Meeting, January 25–28, 2017, in San Francisco**

BTtoP will have a substantial presence at the AAC&U Annual Meeting, to be held in San Francisco from January 25 to 28, 2017 (http://www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/am17).

BTtoP will hold four featured sessions:

**Thursday, January 26**

**Risk Taking, Freedom, Safety, and Well-Being: Dimensions of an Engaged Campus Culture,** moderated by Barry Schwartz (Swarthmore College)

**Reimagining Higher Education for the New Majority,** moderated by Barry Checkoway (University of Michigan and BTtoP)

**Friday, January 27**

**The Whole Student: Intersectionality and Well-Being,** moderated by L. Lee Knefelkamp (Teacher’s College, Columbia University and BTtoP)

**BTtoP Campus Projects: Well-Being, Civic Engagement, and Student Agency,** moderated by Ashley Finley (Dominican University of California and BTtoP)

We will also have our annual Thursday evening reception where we enjoy catching up with old friends and welcoming new ones. Look for our invitation this fall. We hope to see you there!

Travels

**BTtoP National Evaluator Ashley Finley Cofacilitates Workshops on Well-Being**

BTtoP National Evaluator Ashley Finley (Dominican University of California) and Bob Reason (Iowa State University) co-facilitated two days of workshops on well-being at the College of William and Mary from May 1 to 3, 2016. Finley and Reason worked with faculty, staff, and administrators at the college to connect student well-being outcomes to curricular and cocurricular goals and to align existing resources to support efforts.

Finley and Reason also recently collaborated, with BTtoP support, to engage BTtoP psychosocial well-being grantees in the implementation of the Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory (hosted at Iowa State); research was subsequently published in the *Journal of College Character*. Read more at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2194587X.2015.1125367.

**BTtoP Director Don Harward to Attend Sixth Annual Presidents’ Forum of Imagining America (IA)**

BTtoP Director (and president emeritus of Bates College) Don Harward will participate in Imagining America’s (IA’s) sixth annual Presidents’ Forum on October 5 at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The forum will focus on advancing publicly engaged scholarship that draws on the arts, design, and humanities. The goal of the forum is to develop an action plan for Imagining America member schools across the country; it directly precedes IA’s National Conference, “At the Crossroads,” to be held from October 6 to 8. Harward serves on the Presidents’ Forum planning committee.
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.

The 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.

Now Available from Bringing Theory to Practice

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

Well-Being and Higher Education is a book about well-being and its multiple connections to higher education—and why those connections matter. The thirty-five-piece volume of essays and provocations responds to the current landscape of challenges higher education faces today and the need to preserve and revive the institution’s role of looking beyond itself to a greater good.

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