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in partnership with

Association of American Colleges and Universities

Students at University of North Carolina.

Feature

BTtoP Well-Being and Higher Education Seminar, November 2014

One of many insights we gained from the BTtoP Well-Being and Higher Education Seminar last fall was the importance of the clarity and simplicity of our narrative—the basic story we tell—even as we recognized that narratives do have to be nuanced to present essentially the same story to different audiences in different ways.

Contributions to BTtoP’s story came from almost all of the sixty attendees at the seminar—presidents, foundation leaders, faculty, student affairs leaders, scholars, and activists. Many applauded the story line, but they also reminded us that it will be heard differently by various audiences. How will a new majority student interpret this narrative? Or a current campus administrator concerned with cost savings?

Below, we share some of the major themes of the seminar, and words from some of those whose spirited involvement moved us forward.

“[T]he time is ripe for Bringing Theory to Practice to understand its considerable achievement and imagine its future possibilities within a larger movement...to bring [the fuller] aim of higher education to public consciousness... [T]here has never been a greater need for developing a movement dedicated to bringing back what [BTtoP] has called the exiled aims of liberal learning. Students need this. Educators need this. And perhaps most of all, the American democracy needs this.—William Sullivan, coauthor of Habits of the Heart, BTtoP Planning Seminar, November 6, 2014

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For some, raising up attention to well-being as a core purpose of higher education will mean a return to a long-neglected but once primary aim; for others, it will mean a reimagining. But for many, it will mean a discovery of evidence that confirms the expectation of engagement in learning, and a campus culture that encourages, values, and supports such engagement, brings with it greater manifestations of the well-being of participants, such as identity formation, persistence, purposefulness—in a word, flourishing (eudaemonic happiness). These outcomes are not soft and unclear, but have evidentiary bases and determinable outcomes, and they should be measured in both the near and long term.

Attendees posed questions regarding the complex meanings of well-being and how to provide helpful analyses. We focused on well-being as a construct—but one that can be analyzed. It can be “parsed.” As a state of being, it can be understood developmentally, as well as dynamically. Manifestations of well-being can be documented and the conditions that maximize or facilitate their expression can be understood and acted upon.

“In one sense, [well-being] is a state in the present (I am happy, fit, flourishing, etc.), but it is also about change over time. Partly it is future—preparedness and ability to plan for change, hopefully positive, but also weather adversity and take risks. It also goes back into the past, by continually deepening one’s understanding of the journey taken, including one’s history of growth as well as loss and pain, which integrate with present identity. Well-being is a process of change as much as a condition. I would view it dynamically and longitudinally.”

—David Kahn, clinical professor emeritus of psychiatry, Columbia University, BTtoP Planning Seminar, November 6, 2014

However parsed, the context is formative. In order to raise up well-being as a core purpose, we must understand it in ways that recognize attention to differences in class and culture. The demographics of a new majority of undergraduate students are very different from those of the “traditional” students for whom most current engagement experiences were originally designed. What actually facilitates well-being will have to be rethought. Moreover, fostering a greater sense of well-being and agency will require including all involved in the solving of real problems, and doing so within a supportive campus culture. Despite their cynicism about the ineffectiveness of political structures and who holds power, students do want to make a difference. What should the narrative be regarding involvement in real problems and students’ agency to address them? And on our campuses, what is the reality of engagement, even when the message is that engagement is a key to learning and to flourishing? Engagement must be rewarded and valued. In policy and practice, each institution’s commitment beyond self-interest to the common good must be recognized, as it motivates its constituents.

This narrative can become so complex a story that it could lose its effectiveness. We welcome your thoughts on how to emphasize or clarify various parts of this story.

As BTtoP advances from raising attention to well-being, to crafting and implementing a strategy for change via the collective creation of a compelling case, we will engage in the following strategies:

• confirm well-being as among the core purposes of higher education and emphasize consequences of engagement and a campus culture that supports and expects engagement; and
• collaborate with campuses, associations and foundations to craft a compelling, evidence-based case that, if promulgated and acted upon, will help to change the conversations regarding higher education’s full purpose and promise.

For some, raising up attention to well-being as a core purpose of higher education will mean a return to a long-neglected but once primary aim; for others, it will mean a reimagining.

We anticipate that changing those conversations will affect the expectations of all relevant constituencies—students, their families, faculty and administrators, boards, and the public—with resultant changes to institutional policy, practices, and priorities. And making those changes, higher education will be responding to internal and external criticisms of its diminishing value. The result should be greater public support for its full purposes and its unique and sustaining role in an open and diverse democratic society.

Thank you for any suggestions you may have, as this narrative shapes the BTtoP agenda for 2015-2017. —The BTtoP Project
Campus Highlight

Student Work Ethic and Community Engagement at Chattanooga State Community College

By Amanda Hyberger, QEP director and associate professor of music, Chattanooga State Community College

In April 2014, Chattanooga State Community College began implementing the “Executives-in-the-Classroom” project, supported by a Bringing Theory to Practice grant, to pilot a modernization of the college’s freshman success course. The vision of the project is to provide a distinct contrast to the traditional lecture experience and build a campus culture of social responsibility and civic engagement. Chattanooga State is committed to strong work ethic development, focusing on the personal well-being of every student.

Through our Quality Enhancement Plan—W.E. Succeed: Work Ethic First—and a collaboration with other community colleges supported by the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Roadmap Project, Chattanooga State determined the need for students to envision strong personal goals, to have early opportunities for career exploration, and to begin building support networks to improve their likelihood of academic and personal success. Through “Executives-in-the-Classroom,” faculty and staff model strong work ethic and develop courses that include mentoring and service-learning activities; local businesses become active partners with the college to help build a workforce grounded in strong work ethic principles and civic mindedness; and students have the opportunity to develop a personal commitment to strong work ethic and community involvement that is directly related to their intended academic and career paths.

To begin, area business leaders were invited to the campus to discuss student success and professional well-being and to respond to the idea of participating directly in the classroom through mentoring.

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Each course has included
• work ethic education;
• group discussions for college and career success;
• career exploration, including through StrengthsFinder and Type Focus assessments;
• e-portfolio development and personal reflection; and
• service-learning projects.

The pilot courses received support networks to improve their likelihood of academic and personal success. Through “Executives-in-the-Classroom,” faculty and staff model strong work ethic and develop courses that include mentoring and service-learning activities; local businesses become active partners with the college to help build a workforce grounded in strong work ethic principles and civic mindedness; and students have the opportunity to develop a personal commitment to strong work ethic and community involvement that is directly related to their intended academic and career paths.

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Student Work Ethic
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port from three local businesses, most notably the Unum Group, a Fortune 500 disability insurance company based in Chattanooga. Unum sponsored two of the four courses both financially and through executive mentors. These mentors attended class several times each month to encourage the students to excel in their current studies, to begin personal financial planning, and to understand local workforce concerns. At the end of the semester, the students completed a service-learning project in partnership with their corporate sponsor. For the Unum Group courses, the students provided manual labor by moving employee-donated goods from the Unum campus to the Partnership for Families, Children and Adults (Elder Services division).

Unum also provided three resume workshops that were open to the entire campus, followed by mock interviews to help the students practice skills for high-level job seeking. The workshops were led by executive teams with generous time for Q&A; workshop planning is already underway for future semesters.

The partnership with Unum has demonstrated the possibility for deep collaboration between the college and the larger Chattanooga community, and this pilot experience will be used to develop more business collaboration.

Of particular value to all stakeholders is the discussion that continues to grow through this project. Often, businesses only work with successful students who have graduated or are finishing their degrees in an internship or capstone project. The opportunities to discuss and impact wellness and success for all students open wide as the college invites local businesses to work with students during their first semester—a time during which students do not generally expect to receive this kind of support or interest. For community college students, discussing career, financial, and work ethic issues with real-world mentors quickly separates this new college experience from the previous high school or collegiate experiences.

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businesses around them, and they have the opportunity to give back to their community during their first semester.

Due to the successful launch of this program, the college is asking each of the academic divisions to develop a robust freshman experience course incorporating the core design of the “Executive-in-the-Classroom” pilot work for fall 2015. This will allow the divisions to connect students and local businesses appropriately within academic interests and to tailor the courses for specific majors. Students who participate in the redesigned courses will be monitored over time to better understand the long-term impact of this student success project. Student success data and ongoing discussions between students, faculty, and executive mentors will inform the continual improvement efforts and provide the necessary support for sustained commitment to student well-being. The potential for student engagement and confidence building is remarkable, and the Chattanooga State community is excited to work in the coming semesters for the greatest student impact possible.
From the Director

Internal Scholarship and a Strategy for Change

By Don Harward, Director, Bringing Theory to Practice Project

We at BTtoP have been focused on what we have called the “scholarship of engagement”—advancing with your help (through commissioned studies, publications, conferences, and campus grants) a broader and deeper analysis of the conceptual and practiced dimensions of higher education’s core purposes and their multiple connections. In addition to highlighting engaged learning, the civic, and students’ preparation for meaningful choices—including purposeful work—we have begun emphasizing the inclusion of well-being as a core purpose, reasserting well-being as an integral part of higher education’s purpose and promise.

We have also concentrated on compiling and promulgating the evidence that supports these claims of connection. We refer to this work as the “scholarship of reflection.” What do we know from more than a decade of support? What are the insights and evidence gained from the work of nearly 350 institutional projects? Our objective is to establish the evidentiary basis for what confirms a “compelling case.” At the AAC&U Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, January 21–24, 2015, we made an initial, partial presentation of that evidence—and the full report and its significance will be featured in materials published this year. Please look for it!

The gradual development of BTtoP, and the recognition of its importance and unique voice of support for campuses, has been an intentional movement from establishing the necessary connections among core purposes (including seeing their source in a campus culture that expects and values engagement), to confirming them through multiple forms of research, to now developing a strategy for how those gains could be used both within and beyond the institution to advance positive change.

A “scholarship and practice of change” refers to the design and implementation of a strategy that will be initiated by using a “compelling case” to influence the expectations of constituencies within and beyond higher education. The promulgation of a compelling case for higher education could gain traction by first altering the conversations within the faculty and boards of trustees, as well as among students—indirectly advancing changes in policy, practices, and priorities. We have provisionally concluded that the immediate strategy for championing such a compelling case will be to generate a coalition of interest among associations and higher education institutions of all types; to have them fully involved in the development of a case; and to use their own patterns of dissemination and communication with their own constituencies to promote the case.

Making this case to the public at large will be particularly challenging—but necessary if expectations are to change.

Discussions of change must also address the difference between making transformative change and simply adjusting current patterns and practices.

Using the urgency of having all students as whole persons be fully engaged in whole aims of their higher education institution—by addressing the most basic and existential threats to their future—will be a convincing appeal for changing expectations and opening opportunities to link convictions to meaningful actions. Doing so will rely on the students’ latent aspiration for making a difference—for having their education prepare them for a world they really will inhabit, and giving them agency for shaping it.

Providing the inspiration to do so, however, will require each institution’s own willingness to demonstrate through its actions and messages that it truly values and makes manifest its full purposes—going beyond self-interest to contribute to the common good.

Discussions of change must also address the difference between making transformative change and simply adjusting current patterns and practices. But what is sufficient? What is necessary for making the substantive changes we col-

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lectively advocate?

BTtoP, in collaboration with others, will work to construct a compelling case, and a coherent strategy, as well as cite and support best practices. One special role for the Project may be to bring together experienced voices in leading changes with those whose vision of the future includes the needs of tomorrow’s students and the impending threats and challenges that higher education must help to address. The outcomes could include major re-imaginings as well as practical bold steps—steps that would be sustainable and messages that would “have legs.”
In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

BTtoP Track at AAC&U Annual Meeting in Washington, DC

BTtoP’s annual Thursday evening reception at the AAC&U Annual Meeting in January continues to grow—we cherish the opportunity each year to catch up with colleagues and friends of the Project, old and new! Thank you to everyone that stopped by.

We also were happy to see so many of you at our various sessions throughout the meeting. We are excited to work with all of you as we push our shared work forward.

Call for Newsletter Submissions

BTtoP created this newsletter to highlight the good work and outcomes of grantee campuses that have been involved with us as a Project over twelve years. We are excited to share your campus story—and encourage you to submit pieces to appear as Campus Highlights or news to appear in our In Brief section. We look forward to hearing from you! For guidelines and detailed information on submitting, contact the editor, Jennifer O’Brien, at obrien@bttop.org.

Georgetown Biology Professor Heidi Elmendorf Named Carnegie’s DC Professor of the Year

On November 20, 2014, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching announced Heidi Elmendorf, professor of biology at Georgetown University, as its District of Columbia (DC) Professor of the Year.

Commenting on the importance of Carnegie’s recognition in the Georgetown News, Elmendorf states, “What matters to me most, day in and day out, is doing a good job for my students, and that we successfully introduce new and innovative pedagogies that truly benefit our undergraduate learners.” One of Elmendorf’s students, Colin Liebold, explains why she is deserving of such an award: “She is the definition of a student-centered professor… That requires a unique blend of humility, passion and a loving attitude.”

Georgetown News also reported that all five Georgetown faculty members who have received the DC Professor of the Year award have been involved in the university’s Engelhard Project for Connecting Life and Learning, a project begun in 2005 with a BTtoP grant and endowed by BTtoP co-founder Sally Engelhard Pingree. The Engelhard Project, organized within Georgetown’s Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, involves Georgetown faculty members creating courses that relate academic content to health and wellness topics through readings, presentations, and discussions led by campus health professionals.

Barb Jacoby Publishes Service-Learning Essentials: Questions, Answers, and Lessons Learned

Barb Jacoby, faculty associate for leadership and community service learning at the University of Maryland College Park, has recently published a new book on service learning with Jossey-Bass.

From the author: “Service-Learning Essentials is organized in a question-and-answer format and covers a range of topics from basic to advanced, the latter addressing the complexities and dilemmas that service-learning educators encounter. Each question comes with a comprehensive response, including examples from different disciplines, situations, and institutional types; related issues and questions; and resources for further information. The intended audiences for this book are faculty in all disciplines, leaders and staff members of civic engagement and service-learning centers, student affairs professionals, campus ministers, leadership educators, teaching and learning center staff, service-learning advocates, and administrators seeking to support service-learning.”

For more information or to order, visit http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118627946.html

Allegheny College Hosts National Conference on Voting Rights and Democratic Participation

Allegheny College will host a two-day national undergraduate conference on voting rights and democratic participation April 10-11, 2015, bringing students together with five nationally recognized scholars and activists: John Aldrich, Anne Boxberger-Flaherty, Joy James, Gabriel Sanchez, and Carol Geary Schneider. The five keynote addresses will anchor the undergraduate conference of papers and panel sessions exploring themes of social justice, democratic engagement, and liberal learning.

Allegheny has invited students to submit papers, posters, or panels that examine voting rights and democratic participation from multiple disciplinary or inter- and cross-disciplinary perspectives. Work that explores these themes from philosophical, political, artistic, religious, linguistic, historical, educational, economic, and/or cultural perspectives is encouraged, as are mathematical and scientific perspectives.

Information on registration and on submitting a paper or panel presentation (deadline to submit was February 10; late submissions may be considered) can be found at http://sites.allegheny.edu/cpp/news-updates/undergraduate-conference-on-voting-rights-and-democratic-participation/.
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.

Publications Available By Bringing Theory to Practice

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