Campus Highlight

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee:
Community Service Scholarship Programs: A Path to Meaningful Engagement and Leadership Development for Low-Income Students

By Laurie Marks, director, Center for Community-Based Learning, Leadership, and Research, and assistant clinical professor, Educational Policy and Community Studies, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

During a 2009 speech President Obama told young Americans; “...if you are willing to volunteer in your neighborhood or give back to your community or serve your country, we will make sure that you can afford a higher education.” AmeriCorps programs have resulted in more opportunities for young people to be a part of the national service movement while also contributing to the financial support of their college education. Beyond financial assistance, both publicly and privately funded community service scholarship programs may also provide less tangible benefits such as a more welcoming cocurricular learning environment and opportunities for students to explore their civic identity, find informal professional mentors, and make connections to students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Low-income students, whose demographic includes a high percentage of first-generation students and students of color, often feel less welcome on college cam-

(continued on page 2)
uses and have more trouble connecting to a campus community than other students. Paul Thayer (2000) explains that these students “are faced with leaving a certain world in which they fit for an uncertain world where they already know they do not fit.” For low-income students, AmeriCorps and other community service scholarship programs can provide a chance to be involved in campus-coordinated volunteerism that connects them back to their communities of origin or ones like it. When these programs aim specifically to engage low-income students, they offer a peer group that is composed of students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and who are like-minded about community engagement. Connections to these peers can combat some of the isolation that this population of students may experience in college, while also creating a space to engage in experiential learning in a familiar and comfortable environment.

**Evaluating the Impact of Service Learning**

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee engages students in community service scholarship programs that are either funded privately or through AmeriCorps, such as the Bonner Program. These programs generally allow students to engage in a year of service, priming them to be engaged citizens and leaders. Through the support of a Bringing Theory to Practice grant, we conducted a grounded theory study of students in one of these programs. The students were required to complete 300 hours of community service at local nonprofit agencies in tandem with coursework in leadership development, community organizing, and service reflection. At the end of their service and coursework they were eligible for an AmeriCorps Award of $1,100 that can be applied to any educational expense or student loan within seven years of completing one’s term of service.

We did a formal study of the program because after two or three years of engaging students in community service scholarship programs, we realized that such programs offer a way of engaging students in experiential learning that, for low-income students, may be more relevant to their personal history or previous life experience than a traditional college classroom setting. In fact, students involved in these programs found a sense of campus community within the service experience, professional mentors at their community service sites, learning opportunities in their field of study, and a comfort in connecting with their home communities or ones that were similar.

The study of the scholarship programs was conducted at two universities and demonstrated that the programs not only encouraged a sense of community, but also supported student learning and development (Marks, 2010). Specifically, students’ civic identities were largely affected by four aspects of their experience in the program: (1) development of relationships with community mentors and other low-income students; (2) recognition of their ability to make a positive impact on their communities as a result of the long-term exposure to a particular agency or issue; (3) discovery of pathways to career discernment and confidence; and (4) understanding of complex social issues at a deeper level. In order to realize such benefits, community service scholarship programs should be designed to treat students as individuals by connecting the potential for experiential learning at the service site with the participant’s passion for particular community/social justice issues.

Since the advent of such programs is fairly recent, existing programs can offer
University of Wisconsin

(continued from page 2)

best practices. Specifically, we have learned the value in limiting eligibility to low-income students and requiring them to take a leadership development course as a cohort. Also, we found that it is important that students are placed at sites with strong professional mentors who will build relationships with the students and can serve as role models and references beyond the term of service. Finally, our program now offers incentives for meeting intermediate milestones and provides students with a public forum to present their perspectives on the social issues their agencies address, leadership styles and beliefs, and their own personal development at the end of the year.

The support of the Bringing Theory to Practice grant provided the opportunity to look more critically at ways in which our students were benefiting from the program. While we saw developmental changes related to the participants’ leadership identity, the program was designed to be holistic and intensive, with various components and activities. During the grant year we required all program participants to attend an overnight leadership retreat that included teambuilding activities, personal reflection on leadership ethics and values, and hands-on communication exercises such as a low-ropes challenge course. This requirement, which was a graded part of the class, was evaluated twelve months later as students were completing the rest of the program.

Interviews about this aspect of the program revealed that the retreat, although costly, really was the launching point to the meaningful connections that the low-income students made with others of the same socioeconomic background. Specifically, participants outlined how their peers were now “visible,” and this relieved feelings of isolation when they would acknowledge one another and connect through social media or in person. As a result, this retreat is now a required piece of the curriculum and attendance accounts for a significant part of the class grade.

According to Wohlgemuth, Whalen, and Sullivan (2006), a scholarship of as little as $1,000 can increase student retention between 13 percent and 89 percent, depending on the year in school. So the inclusion of national service programs as a form of engagement is significant for low-income students, especially those who come with an interest in pursuing a degree which will lead them into a helping profession. What participants actually gain in offsetting college costs is actually quite small; however, they enjoy the even greater benefits of a community of like-minded peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, informal community networks and connections, and a niche on campus where they feel comfortable.

An earlier version of this piece appeared in the January/February 2012 issue of About Campus, published by Wiley/Jossey-Bass.

References

BTtoP views civic engagement as a core theme of higher education, along with the related themes of engaged learning and psychological well-being. As leaders within the initiative, we develop knowledge of the relationships between these themes at the same time as we provide information and ideas about each one. Consistent with this purpose, BTtoP is launching a Civic Monographs series which will raise questions and provide perspectives on fundamental issues related to the civic mission of higher education.

“Civic engagement” is when people join together and address issues of public concern, such as when they organize action groups, plan local programs, vote in elections, or contact public officials. There is no single form that characterizes all approaches to practice, but as long as people are joining together and addressing issues of public concern, they are practicing civic engagement.

Civic engagement is fundamental to democratic societies, and also to the colleges and universities located within them, which often were established with civic missions such as “education for democracy” or “knowledge for society.” Over time, however, these institutions have taken up multiple purposes, and civic engagement is only one among them. They have not necessarily abandoned their civic purpose, but it sometimes seems emphasized less than others.

We assume that discussions of 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 in a written document, it might contribute to our theory and practice.

The first volume in this project was Civic Provocations (May, 2012), a collection of informal essays and provocations that support and deepen inclusive and intentional campus-based consideration of an institution’s own civic mission and the civic mission of higher education today. Forthcoming volumes in the series, and their tentative publication dates, include

• Civic Values and Civic Practices (July 2013)
• Civic Studies (October 2013)
• Civic Learning and Teaching (February 2014)
• Civic Renewal of Higher Education (May 2014)

The authors of the papers in the series are highly involved, deeply committed, and anxious to present their ideas and provoke thought and action among people who care about democracy and higher education. These provocations are neither regular nor routine; rather, they are new, or at least offer new perspectives on the old. At a time when democratic societies are changing—for example, in social diversity, economic inequalities, or information technology—what is, or should be, new in the civic mission of higher education?

If our series promotes discussion and motivates action in response to this question, our purpose will be served.

Civic Provocations, the first volume in the series, is available online at (http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/documents/CivicProvocationsmonograph_000.pdf) or for purchase via AAC&U’s shopping cart: (https://secure.aacu.org/source/Orders/index.cfm?section=unknown&activesection=Orders).
Fourth Round of BTtoP Demonstration Site Grants Completed June 2012

By Ashley Finley, national evaluator, BTtoP, and senior director of assessment and research, AAC&U

Bringing Theory to Practice’s fourth round of demonstration site grants concluded in June 2012. The culmination of this most recent round of demonstration site grants represents a discernible maturation in BTtoP’s work over the last decade. It is easy to forget that projects and programs develop and mature over time, just like learning and our own individual development. Because of the outstanding work across all of the demonstration site projects, not to mention the many other category I and II mini and program development and grants generated since 2003, Bringing Theory to Practice has steadily matured over the years.

As a national project we have grown more aware of the uses of instrumentation to facilitate assessment on campuses, more accustomed to best practices in bridging boundaries across the curriculum and cocurriculum, and more attuned to where the true resource deficits and goldmines are on campuses. As campuses learn, so do we. In particular, we decided early on not to use a common instrument for the assessment of BTtoP-funded grants projects. As a result, we have limited ability to demonstrate findings across a discrete set of outcome measures. But this decision has also enabled campuses to think creatively and individually about the outcomes most meaningful to the pursuit of their work and long-term goals.

This range of work is clear in our most recent round of demonstration site institutions. ‘Demonstration Sites’ are two-year grants (with matching funds from the awarded institution) that support BTtoP’s major effort to study the relationships among engaged learning, civic development, and the psychosocial well-being of students. Demonstration sites have previously illustrated institutional commitment for the ongoing programming and research being supported by the grant, and are working to make these efforts sustainable and their inclusion central to their campus cultures for learning. For more information on previously funded demonstration sites, see BTtoP’s website: http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/campusgrants.cfm

Projects at the six most recent demonstration sites have generated meaningful data at varying levels of institutional scale. The University of Nebraska–Lincoln and Otterbein University both implemented projects concentrated within the core curriculum, enabling them to reach a large number of students and to engage in conversations that resulted in significant institutional impact. Wagner College and Tufts University developed evidence drawing clearer connections between students’ civic engagement and their psychosocial well-being (a brief discussion of Tuft’s research strategy was highlighted in the Fall 2012 issue of this newsletter). SUNY–Cortland and Georgetown University gained increased understanding of the pathways toward institutional inclusion across faculty from various departments and campus sectors (a brief discussion of SUNY-Cortland’s research strategy was highlighted in the Winter 2012 issue of this newsletter).

Overall, these project teams came to BTtoP as “advanced” institutions, poised to scale their projects quickly, gather data, and catalyze areas of transformation across the curriculum and the cocurriculum. Additionally, as a group the project schools helped to advance BTtoP’s national work on psychosocial well-being by collectively embracing the concept of flourishing and using this as a common outcome for all demonstration site projects. As a result, we have begun to develop more robust campus-level findings on the impact of engaged learning and civic experiences on dimensions of students’ social and psychological daily functioning (for more on this subject, see “The Joy of Learning” in Diversity & Democracy: http://www.diversityweb.org/DiversityDemocracy/vol15no3/finley.cfm).

The development of BTtoP’s work (continued on page 6)
over time and the steady articulation of the intersection of engaged learning, civic development, and students’ psychosocial well-being have improved the collective knowledge of the schools with which we work. And the necessary connection of academic and student affairs within campus projects has facilitated transformative conversations both at the campus and national levels. Change is indeed a process, and we see how campuses connected to BTtoP are thinking differently about the change process.

Over the coming two years we will be working with three more institutions prepared to “go deep” into particular aspects of the institutional change and transformation process. Tufts University will be exploring what drives civic motivation among students through the development of a virtual learning tool, in addition to examining a residential-living element of civic learning. Tulane University will be looking at civic capacity building in students’ ability to engage with diverse others in a region and community deeply impacted by racial and economic divides. And Kingsborough Community College will partner with the Graduate Center at the City University of New York to develop civic research as a model for building transformative bridges between not just campus and community life, but also between universities. We look forward to sharing additional insights about evidence and best practices as these projects develop over the next two years.

Join BTtoP at AAC&U’s 2013 Annual Meeting in Atlanta, January 23–26
Join BTtoP at an informal reception 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursday, January 24, for an opportunity to catch up with colleagues and the BTtoP team. Civic Series editor Barry Checkoway will moderate a panel with Corey Keyes (Emory University), Matthew Countryman (University of Michigan), and Michelle Fine (CUNY Graduate Center) discussing fundamental issues of the civic mission of higher education on Friday, January 25, 2013, from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. To register, see http://www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/AM13/.

BTtoP Toolkit Update
The BTtoP Toolkit has been revised to include the Academic Motivation Scale, the Need for Cognition Scale, and the NSSE Deep Learning Scale. The Toolkit draws from various standardized instruments and original items from BTtoP consortium institutions to address multiple dimensions of engaged learning, civic engagement, and student mental health and well-being in a single instrument. This and other assessment resources are available on the BTtoP.org Tools page.

2012-2014 Funded Projects and Opportunities
BTtoP has funded seventy-eight grants under the 2012-2014 RFP to date, and received over 150 proposals at the December 15 deadline. Opportunities for funding are still available. We invite proposals for projects that will promote engaged learning, civic development and engagement, and psychosocial well-being of college and university students for Seminar Grants (up to $1,000) and Program Development Grants (up to $10,000) by our next submission deadline, Friday, March 15, 2013. Examples of funded projects and complete information about the 2012-2014 cycle of funding is available at BTtoP.org. For information regarding applying for grants under upcoming quarterly deadlines, visit BTtoP’s “Funding Opportunities” page.

University of Nebraska Named Lead Institution in NASPA Civic Learning Initiative
As a result of work with BTtoP as a 2010-2012 Demonstration Site, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) was recently named one of twenty-five lead institutions for NASPA’s civic learning and democratic engagement initiative. As UNL and other partner institutions implement, assess, and disseminate a variety of strategies related to integrating civic learning and democratic engagement at their universities, NASPA will help coordinate collaboration between these institutions and foreground their results. Both NASPA and BTtoP are members of the CLDE Network (see p. 7).

TRAVELS
Donald Harward Speaks at Allegheny College and University of Pennsylvania
On November 12, 2012, the University of Pennsylvania’s Netter Center celebrated its twenty-fifth year of excellent work linking the university and the community.
In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

(continued from page 6)

BTtoP Director Donald Harward presented a discussion paper titled “Advancing Civic Learning.” His paper provided an inclusive definition of civic learning and suggested a progression of steps and structural opportunities for deepening and extending the campus climate for civic learning.

On November 27, 2012, at an all-campus convening at Allegheny College, Harward presented a talk titled “Engaged Learning” to students, faculty, administrative staff, and alumni. Developing the concept of a campus culture for learning, the talk wove together themes of learning opportunities, the full involvement of learners, and the creation of a culture that anticipates, expects, and rewards engagement. Transcripts of both presentations are available at BTtoP.org.

Project Scholar Jill Reich Attends Second Annual Eastern Regional Campus Compact Conference

Project Scholar Jill Reich represented BTtoP at the second annual Eastern Regional Campus Compact Conference (ERCC) on October 11-12, 2012, at Dartmouth College. The conference provided the opportunity to exchange information, models, and effective practices for campus civic engagement. Pre-conference institutes examined strategies for building campus cultures by developing faculty reward systems for community engaged scholarship, while conference workshops and posters covered the broad of interests and activities of ERCC’s members, with careful attention to evaluation and assessment tools and practices.

Ashley Finley Speaks at SUNY Geneseo’s ASSESStivus

Ashley Finley, BTtoP national evaluator and AAC&U senior director of assessment and research, delivered the inaugural plenary address, titled “Looking Before You LEAP: The Intent of Making Learning High Impact and How to Tell the Difference,” at SUNY-Geneseo’s “ASSESStivus” event on campus-wide assessment practices on October 10, 2012. SUNY–Geneseo is a BTtoP ‘program start-up’ grant recipient. An article in Geneseo’s student paper The Lamron describing the conference and interviewing is available online.

BTtoP’s Membership in AAC&U’s CLDE Network

AAC&U and the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network

As part of its commitment to preparing all students for civic, ethical, and social responsibility in US and global contexts, and building on the momentum generated by the 2012 White House release of the report A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future, AAC&U has formed the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network. Coordinated by Caryn McTighe Musil, AAC&U senior scholar and director of Civic Learning and Democracy initiatives, the network includes thirteen leading civic learning organizations that are committed to making civic inquiry and engagement expected rather than elective for all college students. AAC&U’s publications regularly feature research and exemplary practices developed and advanced by these partner organizations and their members:

- American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF)
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)
- The Bonner Foundation
- Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP)
- Campus Compact
- Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)
- The Democracy Commitment
- Imagining America
- The Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)
- Kettering Foundation
- NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
- New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE)
The Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP) is an independent national effort. It is funded by the Charles Engelhard Foundation of New York, and functions in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Washington, DC.

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

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