Request for Proposals
Faculty Planning and Curricular Coherence
Revised Fall 2016

The Faculty Planning and Curricular Coherence initiative supports efforts for faculty to work together and to create a more coherent and intentional curriculum whose goals, pathways, and outcomes are clear to students and other constituencies with a stake in the future of higher education. Grants of varying amounts, ranging from $100,000-$300,000 over a 24-36 month period, will be made for each funded project participating in this initiative.

Background and Context

For the past decade, the Teagle Foundation has focused its grant programs on improving teaching and learning in the liberal arts. Examples of past grant programs include: creating faculty-driven approaches to assessing student learning, developing programs for faculty to discover and use current research on how students learn, incorporating technology into liberal arts education, enhancing civic and moral learning, and preparing graduate students for teaching. The RFP and grant program outlined here shine the spotlight on the curriculum, and specifically on the collective efforts that faculty must make to design a coherent and integrated curriculum so that learning objectives are interwoven between and across courses for general education and the major. The process of creating a cohesive intellectual experience for students also needs to be coupled with an effort to sculpt a more compact curriculum that is more cost-effective to deliver.

The call for the undergraduate education to be more intentionally structured for both intellectual cohesion and curricular efficiency is not new. In 1985, the Association of American Colleges (AAC), now the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), offered a compelling critique of undergraduate education in its report Integrity of the College Curriculum:

As for what passes as a college curriculum, almost anything goes. We have reached a point at which we are more confident about the length of a college education than its content and purpose…Indeed, the major in most colleges is little more than a gathering of courses taken in one department…. (p. 2).

This call for curricular coherence was made at a time when higher education institutions looked forward to a period of continued growth, involving more courses, more choices for students, and increasing numbers of faculty. Perhaps for this reason, the problem was less solved than aggravated. As Robert Zemsky, in his recent book Checklist for Change, points out, little has changed since that report was issued: “Three decades of constantly adding new programs and more choices to the undergraduate curriculum have yielded colleges and universities that are economically unsustainable and educationally dysfunctional” (p. 82).

The contemporary demands for both quality and cost containment give new urgency to tackling the issue of curricular coherence and integration. As institutions seek to sharpen their programs’ goals and expected outcomes, they must do so in the context of limited resources, recognizing
that the additive approach is not only financially unsustainable but may ill serve the goals of a liberal education.

Despite some interesting and productive initiatives on campuses across the country, obstacles to change abound. Aside from the tendency to continually add new courses rather than to rethink and redesign the curriculum, we see a prestige hierarchy between research and teaching that has come to pervade the reward structures of too many institutions; a widespread belief on the part of faculty members that their teaching should be limited to their own scholarly specialties; and a consumerist view of higher education in which offerings should appeal to as many tastes as possible.

**Goals**

We seek to support institutions in pursuing an ambitious approach to curricular reform. Many efforts to rethink curriculum result in minor adjustments that, while they may be improvements, do not squarely address the issues of course proliferation or the lack of curricular coherence. This grant program seeks to support campus initiatives that delve deep into the structure of the curriculum and make transparent to students what they can expect to learn and how the curriculum’s architecture delivers this learning. As is always the case for Teagle-supported initiatives, the goal of curricular change is improved student learning in the arts and sciences.

To facilitate progress towards substantive curricular change, we encourage institutions to identify models of collaborative faculty efforts to redesign and streamline the curriculum so that it is more coherent and integrated and its goals and pathways are explicit. For example, the formation of learning communities among faculty across departments, at the same institutions or multiple institutions, may be one such model. These communities could accomplish their work through face-to-face meetings, virtual platforms to share materials, and/or small interest groups who communicate around shared practice and learning. Institutions are expected to create a knowledge base of concepts and strategies related to designing coherent curriculum that can be disseminated nationally. This knowledge base might take the form of publications, conference presentations, websites, or blogs.

**Criteria for Project Proposals**

The Teagle Foundation welcomes the participation of a diverse array of institutions – community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive and research universities – in the Faculty Planning and Curricular Coherence initiative. Grants of varying amounts, ranging from $100,000-$300,000 over a 24-36 month period, will be made for each funded project. The size of the grant will be based on the number of institutions involved and the scope of the project; larger awards may be considered in exceptional circumstances. Requests from both single institutions and multiple institutions partnering together will be reviewed.

- **An ambitious approach to curricular change.**
  
The outcomes of curricular change efforts will vary by institution and should include the following elements: clearer learning outcomes for general education or the major; more intentional interrelationships among courses in a program or major; greater clarity for students about how the pieces of their educational experience fit together; and perhaps most important, an effort to curb course proliferation and engage in substantive curricular streamlining as part of designing a more intentional and cohesive educational experience. Curricular planning should take account of those approaches to teaching that have proven
most effective in engaging students, commonly referred to as “high impact practices.” Initiatives might address general education or the major.

- **A faculty led and faculty owned initiative.**
  The Teagle Foundation approaches the challenges of improving teaching and learning with the conviction that the faculty must lead the way. Although the support of senior leadership and trustees is essential, it is the faculty’s responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and well delivered, and to continually monitor the impact the curriculum’s content and pedagogy on student learning.

- **Creation of a faculty community across multiple disciplines.**
  Through this RFP, we want to explore how faculty can create solutions by working together across departments on a given campus, as well as benefit from cross-campus collaboration. Accustomed to seeing themselves as a community of scholars, faculty members are encouraged by way of these projects to view themselves also as a community of teachers who seek a better understanding of how reshaping the curriculum influences student learning.

- **Attention to inter-institutional learning**
  Although the majority of the work on the curriculum will take place at the institutional level, and notably by crossing departmental and disciplinary boundaries, the Foundation believes that efforts by individual colleges will be enriched when they are informed by the experiences of other institutions. Such collaboration can involve either existing or ad hoc consortia.

- **Assessment**
  Successful proposals will include clearly articulated goals and appropriate means of assessment. They will seek to evaluate effects of curricular redesign both on student learning and faculty practices, and to use what they learn to inform ongoing improvement. With this grant, as with others, the Teagle Foundation may wish to collaborate with participating institutions in a follow-up study three to five years after the conclusion of the grant period in order to assess the longer-term outcomes of the funded project.

- **Dissemination efforts**
  Active dissemination efforts will be important in order to spread the effects of the knowledge gained by grantees and practices to interested and influential audiences.

**Submission Process**

Invited proposals will be accepted following the two-stage process. First, we request that prospective grantees share brief concept papers. After review of the concept papers, a limited number of applicants will then be invited to submit full proposals.

Interested institutions, organizations, or consortia may submit a 3-5 page concept paper and sketches the project description, with an eye towards meeting the criteria discussed above for faculty-led curricular reform and collaborative learning through a community of practice. The concept paper should also provide a brief discussion of how the work will be sustained beyond the life of the grant. The guiding question to keep in mind while developing your concept paper (and if invited, your proposal) is: in what ways will your curricula be substantively different as a result of a grant? And how will the curricular redesign be sustained beyond the life of a grant? For complete details on the submission process, please refer to information on how we grant here:
Deadline for Submission

We consider concept papers on a rolling basis. The Teagle Board of Directors reviews all grant requests when it meets in February, May, and November. Please confer with program staff to determine the appropriate timeline for submitting a concept paper, and if invited, a full proposal in line for potential review by the board.

All concept papers (and if invited, full proposals) should be submitted electronically at proposals@teagle.org.

FOUNDATION CONTACTS: Please feel free to contact Loni Bordoloi (bordoloi@teagle.org) if you have questions about the Faculty Planning and Curricular Coherence initiative.