

THE TEAGLE FOUNDATION

GRANTS FOR FRESH THINKING WORKING GROUPS ON “BIG QUESTIONS AND THE DISCIPLINES”

Request for Proposals from Undergraduate Institutions in the Liberal Arts and Sciences

October 2008

The Teagle Foundation is prepared to commit up to \$750,000 for multi-institutional working group projects that explore the relationship between “Big Questions” of meaning and value and the work of the academic disciplines. The maximum award is \$75,000 over two years.

THE QUESTIONS AND AN OPPORTUNITY: Does the increasing specialization of research agendas in the disciplines mean that the “Big Questions” of meaning and value that are so central to a liberal education are pushed aside? Might there be intellectually robust ways of linking such questions to the work of the scholarly disciplines and the broad goals of an undergraduate liberal education? And if so, are there gains in student engagement, disciplinary mastery, and cognitive and personal growth? The Teagle Foundation believes that these questions—and the issues they raise—deserve thoughtful examination, leading to practical steps that have the strong potential to increase undergraduate student engagement, growth, and learning.

THE FOUNDATION’S GOALS:

- To explore “Big Questions” of meaning and value as they play out in the work of the scholarly disciplines;
- To determine whether engagement with such “Big Questions” within the context of the disciplines can strengthen liberal education.
- To determine what is needed to achieve such engagement and then develop a plan for testing / acting on that knowledge.
- To disseminate widely the knowledge gained by these working groups and encourage its utilization.
- To develop closer links among institutions in higher education concerned with undergraduate student learning.

ELIGIBILITY, LEADERSHIP, AND STRUCTURE: Four-year colleges and universities are eligible to apply, as are consortia, regional and national associations, theological schools and seminaries, research centers, and other similar organizations in higher education provided that a clear and strong commitment to liberal education at the undergraduate level can be demonstrated. Although proposals restricted to a single college or university will not be accepted, collaboration among several institutions—whether they are working together on an ad hoc basis or as part of a formal consortium—will be funded through a grant to a lead institution. We expect that undergraduate liberal arts colleges will be strongly represented in every proposal. Since only one proposal will be accepted from any institution, we encourage you to work with your Corporate and Foundation Relations office as you develop your proposal. Institutions that are currently leading a Teagle Working Group are not eligible to serve as the lead institution.

We look for strong faculty participation and leadership, as well as clear indications of commitment from presidents and other senior academic leaders. The c.v. of the principal investigator(s), a description of the involvement of other faculty and staff, and a presidential and / or a chief academic officer's statement of support are all essential.

DISSEMINATION AND SHARING OF RESULTS: Each proposal should present a plan for the dissemination of what has been learned through the project. The dissemination may, for example, include several of the following: publication of results in journals in the field, website development, sessions at professional meetings or appropriate conferences, mini-grants to colleagues interested in replicating the group's work on their own campuses, or White Papers that will be widely distributed and discussed in professional contexts. If a White Paper is part of the dissemination plan, Teagle Guidelines for White Papers should be followed (http://www.teagle.org/learning/pdf/guide_wp.pdf).

RESOURCES: The Teagle Foundation has encouraged projects on the "Big Questions" and on the relation between the scholarly disciplines of the liberal arts and sciences and liberal education goals. Many of these reports are available on our website and open doors to exciting collaborative projects exploring this issue (<http://www.teagle.org/learning/publications.aspx>).

Projects that intersect with religion or secularity may also wish to consult the website of the Social Science Research Council and in particular its publication, "The Religious Engagement of American Undergraduates" (<http://religion.ssrc.org/reguide/>).

Applicants should also have in view the National Endowment for the Humanities' "Enduring Questions" grant program (<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/EnduringQuestions.html>) which might be a better match for the project you have in mind.

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLES: Brief sketches of what projects *might* look like can be found at the end of the RFP. These examples are *not* meant to be prescriptive. Rather, they are meant to serve as suggestions for *possible approaches* to the RFP.

THE FOUNDATION'S EVALUATION CRITERIA:

- Successful proposals will address a significant issue of meaning and value and explore it in ways that draw upon the intellectual resources of one or more scholarly disciplines. Projects that reach across traditional divides (e.g. to medical or law schools, theological seminaries) are welcome.
- The project should be led by faculty members of distinction on their campus or in their discipline with a demonstrated commitment to undergraduate education in the liberal arts and sciences.
- Projects should have the strong commitment from the institutions' presidents and senior academic leadership.
- The project should result in specific, well-crafted developments in educational practice (either curricular or a combination of curricular and co-curricular) at the undergraduate level that can potentially benefit many institutions. Projects aimed only at the development of a single course at one or a small number of institutions will not be considered unless that course has the potential to effect change at the departmental, campus, and / or disciplinary levels.
- The goals of the project should be formulated with sufficient clarity to allow rigorous evaluation by the time the project is completed. We are especially interested in

determining if “Big Questions” projects increase student engagement, learning, and growth.

- An ambitious dissemination plan should be included, as described above.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE:

Initial approach: To respond to this RFP, please send a pre-proposal of approximately 500 words describing the general design of the project to proposals@teaglefoundation.org no later than **Monday, January 12, 2009**. After the Foundation has had the opportunity to review your pre-proposal, we will let you know (by e-mail) whether or not you will be invited to submit a full proposal. If the Foundation has suggestions that may be helpful in developing the proposal, we may follow up with further e-mail or phone exchanges.

Full proposals are due on **Monday, March 23, 2009** and must include:

1. A cover sheet which includes:
 - The name of the primary contact person for the working group, his or her mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number;
 - The project title and a one-paragraph project summary that we can post on our website if the project is funded;
 - The project’s start and end dates;
 - The amount requested and total project cost (see budget guidelines below).
2. A 5-7 page narrative describing the project: the conceptual framework, the work plan, the project’s importance to the institutions involved, the potential implications for liberal education, and the criteria that will be used for judging its success.
3. A budget as described below.
4. A timeline of project activities.
5. Indicators of faculty participation:
 - The names and contact information of the primary contact person for each campus in the collaborative;
 - A list of other faculty members from each of the participating colleges who are committing themselves to work on this project;
 - A c.v. and brief letter of commitment from the primary contact person and faculty members.
6. Letters from presidents and senior academic officers:
 - A letter from the president of the campus administering the grant, endorsing the project and speaking to his or her willingness to see the grant housed on campus.
 - Letters of endorsement from the presidents or senior academic officers of all other colleges participating in the collaborative.

Budget: The maximum grant is \$75,000, payable over a period of at most 24 months. We expect that projects will run for a minimum of 18 months and in most cases will conclude after 24 months of work.

Funds may be used for all direct, but no indirect, costs of the project, and up to \$10,000 can be used for dissemination purposes. Appropriate expenses include travel and meeting costs, meals for working dinners or similar occasions, office and research materials and assistance, reasonable honoraria or fees for visiting experts or consultants, stipends for participating faculty, etc. A modest charge may be included for release time of the person or persons in charge of the project and for support staff.

The budget should be based on July 1 – June 30 operating years. A one to two page sheet should suffice.

Institutional cost sharing should be shown whenever possible, including both direct and indirect costs borne by the participating campuses.

Drafts: Foundation staff will read drafts of proposals on request, if time permits and if submitted by Monday, March 2, 2009.

Final Submission: An electronic copy of the final proposal should be sent to proposals@teaglefoundation.org by **Monday, March 23, 2009**. All proposal materials should be consolidated into a *single* PDF file.

In addition, one hard copy of the final proposal should be mailed to

The Teagle Foundation
10 Rockefeller Plaza, Room 920
New York, NY 10020-1903

BOARD ACTION AND NOTIFICATION: The Foundation's Board will act on these proposals at its May, 2009 meeting. Notification of Board action will be released shortly thereafter, in late May or early June, 2009.

PAYMENTS AND REPORTS: The Foundation will release first payments on receipt of signed award letters. Subsequent funds will be released on receipt and successful review of interim reports.

Interim narrative and financial reports are generally due by June 15th of each grant year. Financial reports should follow the format of the budget submitted with the original proposal.

A brief final narrative report describing how the collaborative functioned, what proved especially productive or problematic, prospects for the future, etc., will be due one month after the project's completion date. The Foundation also requires a final financial report that details receipt and spending of all funds received, presented in a form consistent with that of the original proposal.

Publishable texts or websites resulting from the project must be submitted to the Teagle Foundation with the Working Group's final report.

APPENDIX: HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLES

1. Informal interviews of students at a liberal arts college indicate that while they are in general very pleased with their education, they are confused and perplexed about its purpose and indeed about the meaning of the concept of “liberal education” itself. A more systematic survey conducted at several nearby colleges confirms that the perplexity is widespread and not adequately addressed in the curriculum or co-curriculum. A joint planning group among the colleges develops several approaches, including a first-year seminar based on major texts such as Plato, Rousseau, Newman and some contemporary writers; informal non-credit discussion groups; a public lecture series; integration of discussion of educational issues in many existing courses, etc. Through a careful evaluation involving a combination of rubric-based assessments on students’ writing and critical thinking abilities, analyses of relevant growth on national instruments like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and focus group interviews with student participants, the group discovers that some of the approaches were ineffective, while others turn out to have beneficial ripple effects on students’ intellectual and personal growth. A paper analyzing the results is widely disseminated and its recommendations followed on many campuses.
2. A distinguished Economics department at a major research university whose graduate program is currently ranked among the top ten in the field, has traditionally focused on rational choice theory, to the exclusion of the history of economic thought, psychological factors in decision making, and social and ethical contexts. A recent Teagle Foundation White Paper (http://www.teagle.org/learning/pdf/2008_aea_whitepaper.pdf) produced by the discipline’s scholarly association has provoked a reconsideration of the department’s focus and policies, resulting in a willingness to re-think the goals and requirements of its major. Knowing that several other departments are struggling with similar issues, the department takes the lead in setting up a working group to explore the relationship between “thinking like an economist” and “being an effective citizen in a democracy.” The group’s members also agree to explore this issue through collaboration with the disciplinary society to develop, evaluate, and report on this work, and to stress active learning approaches to the material. Difficult national and international issues touching on race, the environment, economic development, etc. are emphasized, and students are challenged to develop effective responses to these issues, all of which have important economic dimensions. Rubrics evaluating student work (reflective writing pieces, position papers, a final research paper and accompanying oral presentation) along with exit interviews determine the impact of incorporating such issues into an Economics curriculum, as well as what works best under which circumstances, and leads to revisions and refinements to this approach, and eventually in a national conference called “Re-thinking like an Economist.”
3. A survey of departments conducted by a professional association discovers that while the standards for the undergraduate major which it has promulgated emphasize the importance of the social and ethical implications of research in the field, actual departmental practice pays little attention to such issues. Rather than exhort or scold their colleagues, the members of the association’s committee on education develop a series of modules consisting of case studies that bring out the social and ethical implications of major research issues in the field. The modules are tested for their effectiveness in increasing students’ active engagement with subject material, as well as their capacity for sophisticated ethical thought, through a range of assessments that include the Defining Issues Test and focus group interviews. These results are published in a journal, discussed in professional meetings of the association and widely adopted by departments across the country.

4. A recent article in the *New York Times* by a former English professor turned hospice worker sets a group of colleagues in the field of English literature thinking, initially about the author's angry rejection of Donne's "Death Be Not Proud," but then about the treatment of death in literary texts more generally. "Do these writers have any idea what it is like to watch someone die?" Out of these conversations came an initial plan for a course on "Death in European Literature." The group then joined with the local hospital, a hospice, and a medical school for ongoing conversations around the theme of "a good death" and the plan expanded to include an internship program and the development of a student publication focused on contemporary attitudes toward death and dying. After some months, and rigorous assessment of this multi-pronged effort that focused on both traditional academic outcomes (content mastery, analytical ability, writing) and the experience based-learning gained through the internships, evidence emerges that students are indeed performing better on the full range of these measures. An article about the project was published in *Harper's* and widely discussed.
5. Medievalists from several nearby colleges meet once each semester to discuss their scholarly projects. At one meeting the discussion turns to the *vita contemplativa*, and the group notes that the contrast between the active and the contemplative life received much more attention in both the eastern and the western medieval world than it does in their course offerings. From this discussion comes the proposal to develop ways to bring this aspect of medieval civilization alive for their students. The result is an ambitious program that includes the collection of texts relating to this topic, visits to a nearby monastery, discussions with scientist of research about the psychological and physiological effects of meditation, and comparative studies on contemplative life in other cultures. After careful evaluation of whether these efforts have led to enhanced learning outcomes for students of medieval culture—and especially of their ability to imagine a society so different from their own and to write effectively about it—the program is presented at conferences and eventually widely adopted in the field.
6. Biologists at a major research university have long been concerned about the poor understanding of evolutionary theory. Now they decide to do something about it by looking closely at the way in which the theory is taught (or sometimes *not* taught) in high schools and colleges. In collaboration with the education school at their institution and with colleagues from high schools and colleges in the area, they do a careful study that identifies several specific steps that can make a significant improvement in the situation. These include the development of new instructional material and revisions in pedagogical approach which are tested in both high school and college classrooms. Their impact is carefully evaluated for effectiveness and provides the basis for publications, conferences, and summer institutes.