

**The Teagle Foundation**  
**A Larger Vision for Student Learning:**  
**Education for Civic and Moral Responsibility**  
**Grantee Convening**  
**April 9-10, 2015**

The Teagle Foundation works to strengthen the liberal arts, which is fundamental to effective citizenship, meaningful work, and a fulfilling life. Its grant initiative, "[A Larger Vision for Student Learning: Education for Civic and Moral Responsibility](#)," aims to secure the future of American democracy through educational efforts that foster civic, social, and moral responsibility and create coherent intellectual experiences that enable students to grapple with big questions of meaning and purpose.

As noted in the Teagle Foundation's Request for Proposals, "Modern disciplines are not comfortable with 'big questions,' so many students leave college without having had the chance to think deeply about the foundations of democratic citizenship, the centrality of personal and professional integrity, or to develop the methods of thought and the vocabularies to analyze, scrutinize and claim their own responsibilities, values, and goals." The goal of the Larger Vision initiative is to see a return to advancing values in higher education that better prepare students to live meaningful, reflective, and engaged lives.

The ten funded projects in this initiative span 107 institutions with the involvement of many dedicated faculty and staff nationwide. Each project features faculty leadership, attention to pedagogical effectiveness, emphasis on assessment of outcomes, and sustainability through collaboration and dissemination. On April 9-10, 2015 representatives from each project came together in New York City at the midpoint of their grants to discuss, listen, and learn from the experiences of their colleagues. (Descriptions of each grant project can be found [here](#).)

**Reclaiming the Purpose of Higher Education**

Martha Kanter, former U.S. Under Secretary of Education under President Barack Obama, opened the convening with her address, "Graduation with a Higher Purpose" (a videotaped excerpt of her remarks is available [here](#)). She observed that in the last few decades a shift has occurred, with a movement away from liberal arts education that prepares students for citizenship and lifelong learning to higher education specifically tailored for employment. The economic recession, rising cost of education, and emphasis on job prospects have contributed to more students opting for an education geared to the current job market, often at the expense of reflecting on what it means to live a meaningful life and developing their capacity for civic engagement and social responsibility. This workforce-oriented approach to education is especially limiting in an era when we must navigate complex changes in our economic, social, and political spheres.

Kanter called on faculty to reclaim the purpose of higher education by communicating the valuable outcomes achieved by their institutions to students, their families, and other stakeholders. Discourse about education no longer puts at the center the humanistic ideal of nurturing the whole person. And yet employers often seek strong character for ethical decision-

making as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Educational efforts inside and outside of the classroom that prioritize cultivation of civic and moral responsibility can in fact develop the skills, traits, and character desired in the workforce while preparing students for future democratic participation.

In his evening keynote address, Andrew Delbanco, Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University and author of *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be*, also brought attention to the importance of communicating the value of liberal arts education to an increasingly skeptical public. His driving question was: how well are we doing in making the case for liberal arts education to students, to families, and to the public?

His answer was: not well enough. As the Larger Vision RFP notes, “If we are to believe the mission statements of virtually every college and university, students are expected to develop the capacity for moral reasoning and to learn to exercise their civic responsibilities in a diverse and contentious democratic society that operates in an endlessly complicated global context.” Yet institutions struggle to put this into practice in a cohesive, systematic, and purposeful way. Delbanco notes that part of changing public perception is doing the necessary inward-looking analysis of what is happening on our college campuses. What are we doing well and where we are failing? Issues of access, equity, and diversity alongside questionable recruitment practices and less-than-effective teaching are all areas that need to be strengthened. Colleges and universities need to take responsibility for these inadequacies, among others, and set an example by making change and demonstrating the value of liberal arts education through compelling and innovative programs with real results.

Despite the many challenges that higher education faces, Kanter and Delbanco are encouraged by their experiences with students across the country who have shown avid curiosity and commitment to academic and civic pursuits. Students and their stories are one of the greatest resources at our disposal in changing how the public perceives the purpose of higher education and the return on the liberal arts.

Kanter’s and Delbanco’s remarks set the tone for the convening and sparked some interesting group discussions. How do we change the public perception of liberal arts education? How can we persuade students and their families that the opportunity to develop the capacity for civic engagement and social responsibility is valuable in its own right and is transferrable to other domains like the workplace? How do we measure seemingly intangible skills and traits – those that are often formed and developed when asking big questions of meaning and purpose? And how do we acquire the necessary student and faculty buy-in to make these efforts widespread and sustainable without external support?

## Grantee Experiences and Insights

A panel discussion featuring four representative projects that spanned a diverse array of institutions— two- and four-year, religious and non-sectarian, private and public – provided insight into the achievements and challenges for faculty and staff engaged in the substantive issues at the heart of the Larger Vision initiative. The panel consisted of Roberto Franco from Kapi’olani Community College on behalf of the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE); Janie Leatherman at Fairfield University on behalf of the Jesuit University and Humanitarian Action Network (JUHAN); Jan R. Liss of Project Pericles; and Noah Silverman from Inter Faith Youth Core (IFYC). Loni Bordoloi from the Teagle Foundation moderated the panel and asked three questions that focus on the core values of the foundation: What were the projects able to accomplish collectively that they could not working individually? How were the projects structured to enable faculty engagement? And how do the projects intend to sustain or institutionalize the gains from their work beyond the life of the grant?



### Collaboration

Critical to the progress and success of each project to date has been collaboration on campus and across partner campuses nationwide, though modes of collaboration varied. A central component of the CCNCCE and JUHAN projects has been incorporating big questions into regular pedagogical practice. Faculty across the community colleges and Jesuit institutions represented in these projects collectively devised the questions even as they were implemented uniquely at

each campus. Jointly creating focused yet flexible questions has allowed both projects to meet the needs of the partner campuses within their local context. Accomplishments to date include statistically significant gains in student learning related to civic engagement at the community colleges and the continued integration of service learning to further humanitarianism into academic programs at the Jesuit campus partners.

Collaboration has looked different for IFYC and Project Pericles but still remains central to the projects' advancement. Both of these projects have distributed mini-grants to faculty at participating institutions. IFYC gave ten institutions grants to develop interfaith studies programs, courses, and course sequences on their campuses, while Project Pericles provided support to 26 campuses to evaluate and map their curricular and co-curricular Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility (CESR) programming. While the mini-grants were quite modest, a significant amount of progress has been accomplished to date due to the high level of faculty commitment and collaboration. With the right – and not just financial – support, small grants can go a long way in advancing civic learning and interfaith dialogue on college campuses. Collaboration poses its own challenges (e.g. coordinating across time zones), but participants were encouraged by the cross-fertilization of ideas thus far.

### **Faculty Engagement**

All of the projects represented on the panel (and indeed, in the initiative) require widespread support from faculty. Cross-campus faculty learning communities provided a useful structure to share pedagogical approaches that are relevant to their local context and yet are broadly transferrable. The CCNCCE project alone has over 50 faculty members at six institutions incorporating big questions into classroom instruction. Faculty across these community colleges have been able to compare their teaching practices and make improvements through shared assessment and benchmarking. Similarly, the mapping efforts of Project Pericles have provided faculty and campuses with deeper insight into the variety of curricular and co-curricular structures on their campuses for civic engagement programming, and a better sense of the opportunities to fill gaps and integrate offerings.

While progress has been made by the institutional mapping, curriculum development, and programming efforts, many panelists remarked on how slow institutions can be to implement change. The desired changes require hard work and commitment because the challenge is not only structural but cultural. Some faculty members have encountered push back, skepticism, and resistance from their colleagues. For example, IFYC expected to realize interfaith studies programs on many of their participating campuses, but faculty members often encounter resistance as their interfaith projects can be seen as competing with established programs and launching a new major, minor, or program can take years. The mini-grants provide a good starting point but the continued commitment of faculty is needed to see these efforts sustained in the long term.

### **Sustainability**

The creation of civic engagement and social responsibility pathways, scholars programs, course requirements, certificate programs, faculty workshops, majors, minors, and more are deepening the roots and extending the reach of these projects. For example, the community college faculty

participating in the CCNCCE have been strategizing on how to recruit and retain colleagues to further the project's goals, leverage internal and external funding, align engagement and learning with degree completion, and generate publications to share their progress and knowledge with other community colleges. The JUHAN project has focused on embedding humanitarian action components into existing courses and programs to complement existing efforts. Project Pericles has prioritized programs that could be continued without external support, with each institution that was given a mini-grant charged with creating an action plan to further strengthen their CESR programming. IFYC has leveraged strong interest in developing interfaith studies, as evidenced by a recent conference they organized; they had expected 30-50 attendees but had over 120 faculty from 48 institutions participate. Participants noted that cross campus collaboration and information exchange fostered enthusiasm for the work, but in the long run, sustainability will depend on the quality of assessment to document impact and encourage appropriate allocation of institutional resources.

### **Building Bridges: Challenges, Surprises, and Considerations for the Future**

The convening culminated with small group roundtable discussions where participants reflected on their projects, next steps, and hopes for the future. The activity involved the visual of a bridge representing where they have started, the process underway, and their end goals. The visual metaphor represented and reiterated many of the convening's major themes – the need to bridge the gap of curriculum and co-curricular activities, the gap between faculty and staff in academic and student affairs, and the gap between what is happening on college campuses and how it is being perceived by the public. The bridge was filled up with commentary by grantees from which key commonalities emerged.





## **Curricular & Co-Curricular Integration**

Bridging the gap between curricular and co-curricular activities was a significant concern expressed by participants. Civic education and engagement opportunities are often seen as an “add-on” or “extra” rather than an integral aspect of coursework. However, if civic purposes are to remain in the mission of the majority of institutions, this outlook must shift. For instance, the creation and revision of civically-oriented majors, minors, and certificate programs must be coordinated with revitalized civic engagement centers, pathway programs and strategic plans to embed civic engagement effectively across institutions.

## **Faculty and Staff Collaboration**

While great strides have been made in getting diverse faculty invested in the efforts of the Larger Vision initiative, projects have also been challenged by resistance and campus politics. Strong leadership and cross-campus support is necessary to see civic engagement efforts implemented. While the work involves a great deal of energy and time, the faculty and staff present at the convening noted it was also invigorating and rewarding. To see increased curricular and co-curricular integration, faculty and staff within and across institutions should continue to work together to gauge practices and opportunities to deepen student learning over time.

## **Higher Education and the Public**

A major theme emphasized throughout the convening was the importance of communicating the work accomplished on college campuses and shaping public perceptions of its relevance for our democracy. Translating meaningful stories and experiences into quantifiable metrics is challenging (and some might say unfeasible), but at the same time it plays an important role along with qualitative data to capture the real-world impact of this often inspiring work that can otherwise be difficult to convey. Opportunities to convene and learn from one another allow this impact to spread. With a better understanding of the shared interests of our peers, we have a stronger voice to counter public perception that is hurting the liberal arts.

