

The Teagle Foundation

NEWSLETTER - FALL 2009



FROM THE PRESIDENT

"When the Work Calls for Execution"

The big news at the Teagle Foundation is that [Rich Morrill will start his presidency on January 1, 2010](#). Rich has been the president of three colleges, and is now the Chancellor of one of them, the University of Richmond. He brings to his new post long experience in higher education, a deep understanding of what "leadership" means in that sometimes puzzling world, and a strong commitment to a robust and liberal education for all students. I feel honored to have such a distinguished leader as my successor.

The transition, of course, sets in motion many thoughts and feelings. It's a time to look both back and forward, so here goes.

Looking back: I have learned a lot over the years of my presidency of the Teagle Foundation. If anything, the learning curve has become steeper in the last few months. That is surely because I have been able to listen to so many smart people who are now focusing on student engagement and learning--and not just "focusing" on it. They are doing things and getting results. Many [Teagle-supported projects](#), I am glad to say, are now maturing, contributing to our knowledge about how to improve student learning, and producing fresh and exciting results.

When I step back and look at the projects Teagle has funded in recent years, I notice a heartening development. At the outset, many of these projects--especially those concerned with finding better evidence about student learning--were tentative and exploratory. They searched for educationally valid modes of assessment, questioned whether suitable "instruments" were available, and hesitated to offend colleagues who regarded any such effort as a plague and abomination.

In the last year or so, perhaps even in the last few months, the mood has changed, in ways that echo, as Donna Heiland pointed out to me, a famous comment by Samuel Johnson in the preface to his great dictionary. After describing his efforts to produce a perfect work, Dr. Johnson goes on to admit that

these were the dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a

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FOUNDATION NEWS

New Teagle Board Member



(Judith R. Shapiro, circa 1997. Photograph by Joyce Ravid, courtesy of the Barnard College Archives.)

Judith R. Shapiro, President and Professor of Anthropology emerita at Barnard College joins the Teagle Foundation's Board of Directors

lexicographer. I soon found that it is too late to look for instruments when the work calls for execution, and that whatever abilities I had brought to my task, with those I must finally perform it (Johnson, 291).

Great efforts and large sums of money have been devoted in recent years to looking for instruments to help assess and improve student engagement--the [National Survey of Student Learning](#), the [Collegiate Learning Assessment](#), the [Wabash National Study](#) come immediately to mind. None is perfect and more need to be developed, especially in areas like civic engagement, global awareness, or personal growth, that is, the less narrowly cognitive skills which a liberal education must include. But a consensus is now emerging that the available instruments are "good enough," good enough, that is, to be put to use "when the work calls for execution."

That is the call right now, and the response has become increasingly clear in recent reports and meetings. The work the Teagle Foundation is funding is still, to be sure, "exploratory," but it is no longer "tentative." It is no longer "toe in the water" for the faculty and administrators involved in these projects. They have taken the plunge.

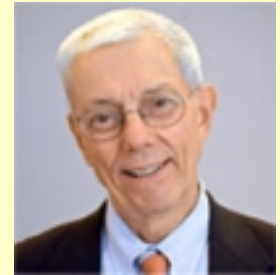
To their credit, they have done this even in the chilly financial climate of the current economic crisis. I do not wish to minimize the danger the bad economy poses to the excellence of American institutions of higher learning, but I continue to feel confident that [the improvement of student learning can be achieved even when the budget is in the red](#).

That was evident, for example, this summer when the [Council of Independent Colleges \(CIC\)](#) once again convened the leaders of more than forty colleges that have been using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to study and improve students' ability to think critically, reason analytically, and write cogently. I had attended similar CIC meetings in earlier years, and understood why questions about the instrument and how best to use it were at the center of the conversation. By summer 2009, however, the focus had shifted. The participants were eager to share what they were doing and the results they were attaining.

It's not just the CIC consortium that is changing. The CLA has itself branched out, providing "academies" throughout the country, and helping faculty use [CLA in the Classroom](#).

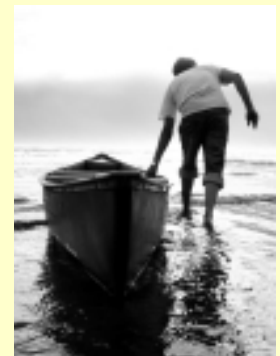
In the fall, the Foundation convened the recipients of two sets of ["systematic improvement" grants for liberal arts colleges](#). The participants in this meeting, as Dr. Johnson would say, brought their abilities to the task and with them moved swiftly to perform it. The outcome of this gathering was specific and practical, a working list of

Teagle Event



Bob Connor is honored in a Teagle Colloquium on Liberal Education. Click [here](#) for more information.

Teagle Annual Report 2009



When Hope and History Rhyme: Good Work in Hard Times
Click [here](#) to read it.

Facebook



Teagle is now on Facebook. Click [here](#) to become a fan.

steps and measures that help make systematic improvement work. It will soon be on our website.

At a national level, a similar determination to get on with the work was evident at a recent gathering of fifty or so national leaders in higher education convened by the [New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability](#). This organization--of which [Teagle was the initial funder](#) is now up and running--with the [Carnegie Corporation](#) as a generous supporter, and is determined to help higher education organizations work together on an urgent responsibility: "[moving the needle on student learning](#)." The needle has been stuck too long; now is the time for it to begin moving upward again.

The success of that movement will depend on the new generation of faculty. It is not an easy job to be a junior faculty member these days, but we hear reports that this new generation is far more alert to the potential of using evidence systematically to improve student learning. Such reports are backed up by the experience of the organizers of the Teagle-funded [National Forum on the Future of Liberal Education](#).

They--Peter Struck and Sarah Igo--have scoured the country looking for exceptionally talented junior faculty and found that almost every one of them was eager to participate in this new undertaking, recognizing its importance for the improvement of student learning over the next generation.

Also in the fall, a meeting of deans and others concerned with graduate education gave us reason to believe that there will be similar receptivity among graduate students. We are testing that belief through an invitation to leading centers of graduate education to develop pilot projects that will give graduate students in the arts and sciences a chance to engage with emerging research on how people learn and bring it to bear on their own teaching. The goal here is to equip future faculty--at the very beginning of their careers--with state of the art knowledge about how they can most effectively serve the many students they'll work with over the course of their careers, and bring undergraduate student learning to the highest possible levels.

The new efforts to improve student learning depend on evidence and knowledge about how to use it. Not so many years ago, it appeared that appropriate forms of evidence were lacking. Hence, efforts at improvements were often bright hunches backed by selective anecdotes. Now, "campuses are awash in data," as Charlie Blaich of the Wabash National Study has noted. The issue is how to get these data in the hands of faculty and administrative decision makers and put them to work. That requires skill, of course, but let us not exaggerate the need for technical expertise. Expert advice is available, for example through the [Teagle Scholars](#) and through various associations and organizations such as the [Association of American Colleges and](#)

GRANTEE NEWS

New Website



Teagle Grantee New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability launches its website. [Click here to visit it.](#)

Call for Applications

Teagle Working Group on Secularity and the Liberal Arts puts out call for applications for campus workshops on "Reconceiving the Secular." [Click here to learn more.](#)

RECENT TEAGLE PUBLICATIONS

Fresh Thinking White Papers

Barnard College Working Group
[*Reacting to the Past: A New Approach to Student Engagement and to Enhancing General Education*](#)

[Universities](#). The greater need now is to build determination to ferret out the data, get the information before the appropriate campus leaders and, again, respond "when the work calls for execution."

Looking Forward: "*Sed adhuc mea messis in herba est*," said Ovid about a quite different situation. When "the harvest is still in the field," it is hard for the farm laborer to walk away and never look back. I don't intend to do that. I want to watch the harvest come in, and shout occasional words of encouragement and congratulation to those still in the field. I won't be shouting through the [Liblog](#) as I have so often in the past, but I expect to be a regular contributor to [Inside Higher Ed](#) during 2010, and lecturing and writing on higher education, classics and other interests. Stay tuned! In the meantime, you'll be able to reach me at the same email address (wrconnor@teaglefoundation.org) or if you are more adventurous, through [my Facebook page](#). Yes, I have joined the ranks of college students everywhere and joined Facebook. Check it out.

Finally, the Foundation has asked me to stay involved in its work over the next year. That engagement will not include any administrative or grantmaking responsibilities, of course, but will allow me to keep in touch with several projects that are close to my heart, including the Teagle *Collegia*, the National Forum on the Future of Higher Education, the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability, and, certainly, the ongoing effort to use evidence systematically for the improvement of student engagement and learning. There is much still to be done and I am eager to watch, and maybe even help it happen.

Bob Connor

Works Cited:

Johnson, Samuel. *Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose*. Eds. Frank Brady and William Wimsatt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Project Pericles

[*Civic Engagement in the Classroom: Strategies for Incorporating Education for Civic and Social Responsibility in the Undergraduate Curriculum*](#)

Williams College Working Group
[*Big Science at Small Colleges: A Collaborative Model for Genomics Curriculum Development at Liberal Arts Colleges*](#)

Essays by Bob Connor

[*As an Economy Measure, the Light at the End of the Tunnel Has Been Turned Off*](#)

[*Talking the Talk, Then Walking the Walk*](#)

[*When the Budget Sinks, Can Student Learning Still Rise? A Fable*](#)

RECENT GRANTS

Outcomes and Assessment

For the systematic improvement of student learning

- \$25,000 over 12 months to Sarah Lawrence College for the Sarah Lawrence Individual Direct Evaluation ([more details](#)).

Fresh Thinking

For follow-up to the "Disciplines and Undergraduate Liberal Education" initiative

- \$40,000 over 25 months to the American Academy of Religion for the assessment of long-term impacts of liberal education on religious studies majors ([more details](#)).
- \$40,000 over 20 months to the American Economic Association to pilot "Big Think Economics" and "Creativity Boot Camp" initiatives ([more details](#)).
- \$40,000 over 26 months to the National History Center for three campus projects that implement recommendations from the *History Major and Liberal Education White Paper* ([more details](#)).

For additional Fresh Thinking projects

- \$100,000 over 28 months to Project Pericles for The Periclean Faculty Leadership Program ([more details](#)).

OUR WEBSITE

Visit our website for additional resources that can help improve student learning on your campus.

www.teagle.org

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