

Graduate Student Teaching in the Arts & Sciences: A Teagle Foundation Initiative

The Teagle Foundation invites proposals for pilot projects designed to help graduate students in the arts and sciences engage—and use (or prepare to use) in their own teaching—new and emerging research that has the potential to help bring undergraduate learning to the highest possible level. The Foundation is prepared to fund 5-7 pilot programs at this time. The maximum award is \$35,000 over 18 months.

Background and context for this RFP: The central goal of the Teagle Foundation’s work over the last several years has been to strengthen liberal education (especially in its focus on the development of students’ cognitive abilities), and still more specifically, to bring undergraduate student learning to the highest possible level. Especially relevant to this work has been emerging research across a range of fields—including cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and education, especially in its focus on student engagement and assessment of learning outcomes—and the Foundation has supported a variety of initiatives designed to explore this new knowledge and bring it to bear on classroom practices.

The Program and its Goals: Because the results of these initiatives have been encouraging, this new program seeks to determine how this emerging knowledge about student learning can best be made accessible to future faculty members, that is, to current graduate students in the arts and sciences. The Teagle Foundation invites selected institutions to apply for modest grants of up to \$35,000—usable over 12-18 months—to plan and pilot experimental programs for graduate students in the arts and sciences aimed at helping them engage with this new knowledge and develop ways of using it in their teaching. Ideally these pilot programs will experiment with possibilities that could be applied more widely and/or become a regular part of graduate education.

This program as a whole aims to prepare graduate students across a range of disciplines in the arts and sciences for successful teaching careers by:

- 1) Facilitating their engagement with—and education in—the knowledge that is being generated about how undergraduate students learn (in fields such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and in the literature of assessment of student learning) and on subjects relevant to the overall project of undergraduate education (liberal education, general education, disciplines and majors).
- 2) Helping them develop genuinely collegial “communities of practice” (these might include graduate student peers, as well as faculty and administrative colleagues / mentors) focused on developing strategies for applying this knowledge to their teaching, with the aim of improving undergraduate student learning.
- 3) Giving them a chance to put theory into practice, “translating” their learning in the above fields into their classroom teaching.
- 4) Encouraging awareness of the strengths and limits of systematic assessment of student learning in undergraduate education, and how to use appropriate forms of evidence not only to know how their students are doing, but to make decisions about how to teach their classes most effectively.
- 5) Determining what structures might best provide ongoing support for such work.

Eligibility: This invitation is being extended to ten universities with highly regarded graduate programs and four organizations working to strengthen graduate education at the national level.

Means: We are open to a wide range of designs, provided they bring together graduate students with faculty and/or administrators, draw on the recent research on student engagement and learning, and test (or develop a strategy for testing) such knowledge by putting it to work in classes or program design. We hope to fund new projects, or projects that significantly build on or extend existing efforts in this area.

Leadership: In our experience, projects succeed when senior academic leaders make clear their support for the venture and when a highly respected and deeply committed individual takes on the leadership of the project. Successful proposals will be very explicit about the leadership of the project.

Resources: The Teagle Foundation's website (www.teagle.org) provides bibliographical and other resources on student learning, assessment, liberal education, etc. Especially valuable might be:

- The work of the Teagle *Collegia* on Student Learning (<http://www.teagle.org/grantmaking/grantees/collegiaru.aspx> and <http://www.teagle.org/grantmaking/grantees/collegialac.aspx>)
- A Teagle project on assessing student learning outcomes within the context of the disciplines, based at Northwestern University (<http://www.teagle.org/grantmaking/grantees/aifull.aspx#northwestern2008>)
- The Teagle White Papers on the Disciplines and Undergraduate Education (<http://www.teagle.org/grantmaking/grantees/disciplines.aspx>)
- A Teagle White Paper on preparing future faculty, produced by the Graduate Theological Union (<http://www.teagle.org/learning/publications.aspx#gtu>)
- A Teagle White Paper on “Scholar-Teachers and Student Learning,” produced by the American Council of Learned Societies (<http://www.teagle.org/learning/publications.aspx#acls>)
- Teagle's “Additional Resources” page (<http://www.teagle.org/learning/resources.aspx>).

Hypothetical Examples:

- 1) A faculty-graduate student team whose members come from the departments of Italian, English, Philosophy, and Religion start meeting prior to the fall semester. They read 3 key texts: Derek Bok's *Our Underachieving Colleges*; John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown and Rodney R. Cocking (eds), *How People Learn*; and George Kuh's *High-Impact Educational Practices*. Over the course of the semester, the group's discussions move from consideration of the readings themselves to questions about how to “translate” key points in the reading into one's classroom teaching. Each member of the team focuses attention on an issue of particular importance to student learning in his or her discipline, and works with the group—and the Teaching and Learning Center on campus—to develop a specific strategy for strengthening student performance in that area. While a full-scale implementation of the strategy will have to wait for a future semester, group members devote two weeks to testing—in very specific ways—what they want to do and assessing its effectiveness according to criteria established ahead of time (some qualitative measures and some quantitative). By the end of the semester, they have learned enough to develop a strong proposal for a full scale implementation of their strategies—and assessment of their effectiveness—over a longer period and apply for a grant to fund this larger project.

- 2) The history department faculty agree that their graduate students would do better on the job market if they could demonstrate an understanding of recent research on liberal education and its goals, of what cognitive psychology and other disciplines have to say to classroom teachers about how people learn, and of the ongoing national debates about educational accountability and the forms it should take. Helped by small amount of funding for this purpose, a senior faculty member puts together a small committee consisting of another senior colleague, and junior colleague and two graduate students and together they design a departmental seminar that centers on a series of talks given by invited speakers over the course of a year. Each month, a recognized national expert in a topic related to student learning comes to campus to give a lecture that all seminar members attend, and that others on campus are encouraged to come to as well. Guest speakers suggest texts for seminar members to read in advance and discuss those texts both in their lectures and in working meetings of the seminar that take place day after their talks. Seminar members are encouraged to test speakers' recommendations for how to improve student learning in their classes where possible and to report back to the group on the results. The year's work goes so well that departments approaches the American Historical Association about replicating this model at other institutions, and works with the AHA to develop a full-scale proposal
- 3) A group of three departments comes together to devise a system of peer review for teaching, with their efforts initially focused on working with graduate students in their departments. A pilot system is devised that assigns each graduate student a teaching advisor and small committee with whom to consult over the course of the semester. Prior to teaching his or her assigned course, students do research in the area of teaching and learning and submit to their committee a short statement discussing goals for the course, methods of achieving them and of assessing the degree of success with which they have been met (here recent work by Robert J. Thompson Jr. and Matt Serra, on the "Use of Course Evaluations to Assess the Contributions of Curricular and Pedagogical Initiatives to Undergraduate General Education Learning Objectives" is especially helpful), and situating their work in the context of research on student learning. The graduate student meets with his or her committee throughout the semester, and all students and committees doing this work come together twice a semester to share what they are learning. Graduate students compile teaching portfolios over the course of the semester and round out the term's work with two things: a final report to their committee on the success of the course and a short, scholarly article that places the student's teaching in the context of other work on teaching and learning, and is submitted for publication to a relevant journal. Assessing the results of this project, the departments involved see enough evidence of improved teaching—and enhanced undergraduate learning—to want to see the program expanded to all departments in the arts and sciences, and as a next step, develop a full-scale proposal to support that work.
- 4) Recognizing that many universities already award certificates to graduate students who have developed a high level of teaching skills, a national organization concerned with higher education uses the Teagle grant to survey existing certificates and to convene the people best informed about them to explore the idea of a nationally recognized certification that would emphasize both traditional pedagogy and mastery of the new literature on student learning and its assessment.

From this meeting comes a proposal to develop voluntary criteria for such certificates and wider recognition of their importance.

Application Process: The Foundation is open to considering two cycles of applications, with funding decisions to be made at its February 2010 and May 2010 Board meetings. We will solicit full proposals based on successful pre-proposals (see details below).

- For consideration in February 2010, pre-proposals are due by October 30, 2009. Full proposals (if invited) are due on January 15, 2010.
- For consideration in May 2010, pre-proposals are due on January 15, 2010 and full proposals (if invited) are due on March 31, 2010.

Pre-Proposals: To respond to this RFP, please send a pre-proposal of 250-500 words describing the overall goals and general design of your project to proposals@teaglefoundation.org. After the Foundation has had the opportunity to review your pre-proposal, we will let you know (by email) whether or not your organization 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 email or phone exchanges.

Full proposals must include:

- A 3-4 page narrative proposal that outlines the project as specifically as possible and includes criteria for judging its success
- A one-paragraph abstract of the project, suitable for posting on the web.
- The contact information and c.v. of the person in charge of the project.
- A letters of endorsement from a senior academic officer, ideally the Dean of the Graduate School.
- A 1-2 page budget, based on July 1 – June 30 operating years. The maximum grant is \$35,000 payable over 12-13 months, and funds may be used for all direct, but no indirect, costs of the program. Appropriate expenses include stipends for the projects leader (s) and participants, travel and meeting expenses, meals for working dinners or similar occasions, reasonable honoraria or fees for visiting experts or consultants, office and research materials and assistance, and the costs of support staff.

Please show cost-sharing where possible. Institutional cost sharing should both for indirect costs and for those direct costs borne by the university.

An electronic copy of the final proposal (as a single PDF if possible) should be sent to proposals@teaglefoundation.org. In addition, one hard copy of the final proposal should be sent to:

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