

TEAGLE GRANTS FOR COLLEGIA ON STUDENT LEARNING

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FROM CONSORTIA OF LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

The Teagle Foundation, recognizing the importance of new developments in cognitive psychology, assessment and other fields concerned with student learning, is prepared to commit up to one million dollars over the next three years to help faculty members and postdoctoral students in a wide variety of fields in the arts and sciences take full advantage of this learning in their teaching and curriculum development. These “Collegia” are intended to explore this knowledge and test its applicability by putting it to use in improving student learning at the undergraduate level. We anticipate making at least a half dozen grants of up to \$150,000 each, some administered by consortia of liberal arts colleges, others by research universities.

BACKGROUND

Recent research, reflected in such books as the National Academy’s *How People Learn*, Derek Bok’s *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini’s *How College Affects Students*, Sam Wineburg’s *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, as well as in more technical articles in scholarly journals, makes it possible to understand student learning far better than was the case a few years ago, and points to new ways to help students learn. Promising new methods of systematically determining how fully engaged students are with their academic work and how they are progressing in the development of such capabilities as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and cogency of written and oral expression have also been developed in recent years. While these developments are far from complete, they raise the possibility of new ways of advancing student learning in the arts and sciences. Since exploring this knowledge and putting it to work should, in our view, be a collegial activity reaching across department, program and academic status, we use the term “Collegia” to cover the wide range of possible programs that we are prepared to fund under this program.

THE FOUNDATION’S GOALS:

1. To assist faculty and postdoctoral students in exploring recent developments affecting student learning and engagement.
2. To test the applicability of such knowledge by putting it to work and carefully evaluating its effects in individual courses and program design.
3. To achieve demonstrable increases in the engagement and learning of undergraduate students in the arts and sciences.
4. To develop case studies, bibliographical and web resources to help others interested in this knowledge and its application to student learning.

ELIGIBILITY: The program is intended for recognized and well-established consortia of colleges with strong programs in the liberal arts and sciences. Consortia are free to collaborate with institutions outside their usual membership, but applications will not be accepted from individual undergraduate colleges or universities or ad hoc consortia of such institutions. A separate but closely related RFP will be sent to research universities with strong graduate programs.

MEANS: We are open to a wide range of designs, provided they include faculty from a reasonable range of disciplines, draw on the best available scholarship on student learning and its assessment, and systematically evaluate such knowledge by putting it to work in classes or program design.

LEADERSHIP: While we expect that the conveners of the Collegia will be highly respected faculty members with a demonstrated interest in student learning, we recognize that part of the excitement of this work comes from the fact that it is not the bailiwick of any one discipline or approach. Thus traditional top-down, master-to-apprentice instruction is not expected or desired. Instead we look for leadership that can recognize important ideas and stimulate discussion of their implications and good planning for their application.

RESOURCES: The Teagle Foundation's website (www.teaglefoundation.org) provides bibliographical and other resources on student learning, assessment etc. Especially valuable may be the annotated bibliography, "Cognition and Brain Development in Students of Traditional College-Going Age," compiled by Jill Jeffery of New York University, which is available at <http://www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/report/CogAB.aspx> .

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLES: In preparing its application, a regional association of liberal arts colleges has identified two leaders and a small planning group. They have agreed that the optimal membership in the Collegium is 15, and that it would be best to have two or three participants from a small number of colleges and a limited number of fields. (Another Teagle-funded group has reached the opposite conclusion; it will be interesting to see which gets better results.) The two leaders of the Collegium and the planning committee jointly select the participants from a wide range of ranks and disciplines, including post docs from one institution. Before the Collegium convenes for two weeks a in the summer, its participants have already named several sub-groups, one working on recent MRI studies of the brain, another on memory issues, a third on assessment of cognitive development. Each develops a selective reading list for the Collegium. These readings provide the focal points of the two-week Collegium meetings in the summer. The Collegium's discussions are also enriched, however, by presentations from two visitors with special expertise in cognitive psychology. The Collegium makes such good progress that by the end of its first summer meeting, it is ahead of schedule and has started designing several experimental courses aimed at testing some of the ideas and approaches in the classrooms of the colleges from which the participants have come. The design work is continued by electronic exchanges and a weekend meeting in the fall. One of those courses is offered and carefully evaluated in the spring semester; two others after further shaping during the summer session of the Collegium in 2009. The final year of the Collegium continues this work but also draws together its findings in a report that is disseminated to colleagues and other members of the sponsoring consortium and more broadly through the Teagle Foundation website.

Another Collegium was able to establish a collaboration with a neuroscience program at a major university; a third concentrated on developing web-based modules that could serve as the core of faculty development seminars for all members of the sponsoring consortium. In each case the final reports of these groups attracted wide attention and led to significant changes in practice at several colleges and universities.

EVALUATION CRITERIA will include:

- The quality of the Collegium's leadership;
- Indications of flexibility on the part of the academic leadership of participating colleges, particularly in regard to the experiments in course and program design to apply and test the often theoretical knowledge discussed in Collegium;
- The imagination and effectiveness of program design;
- Effective methods of self-evaluation built onto the Collegium.

CONVENING: The Foundation will invite the leaders of funded Collegia to a one- or two-day meeting to share ideas and approaches and meet with leaders of higher education with expertise in this area. There may also be a conference for a wider audience at the end of the grant period as part of the effort to draw attention to the work of these Collegia.

SHARING OF RESULTS: In addition to the usual financial and narrative reports at the end of the grant, each grant recipient is expected to produce a succinct and clearly written report designed to be helpful to other institutions interested in taking greater advantage of knowledge about student learning. If desired, funds may be included in the budget to hire a professional writer to help with the writing of the report. The Foundation, after reviewing these papers, will work closely with recipients to disseminate them as widely as possible, through websites, publications and meetings of professional organizations, and perhaps special meetings or conferences convened for such purposes.

APPLICATION PROCESS: To respond to this RFP, please send a pre-proposal of 250-500 words describing the general design of your project to proposals@teaglefoundation.org no later than Friday, **September 28, 2007**. 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 are due on Friday, **January 11, 2008** and must include:

- A 3-4 page narrative briefly describing the organization of the Collegium, and the work plan for the group.
- An indication, as specific as possible, of the criteria for judging the success of the project once completed.
- Expected completion date. (If the grant is made in February 2008 projects may run as long as September 1, 2010).
- 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.
- Letters of endorsement from several academic deans of colleges participating in the consortium. These letters should provide assurance that the experimental work of the Collegium could be facilitated without undue delay on their campuses and that the findings of the Collegiums will be given every possible consideration and chance for implementation.

- If the proposal involves collaboration with an institution outside the consortium's membership, supporting letters from a senior administrator at the collaborating institution(s), and from the person there who will be in charge of the project on a day to day basis (if that person is not also the senior administrator).
- A 1-2 page budget, based on July 1 – June 30 operating years. A one or two page sheet should suffice. The maximum grant is \$150,000 payable over three years, and funds may be used for all direct, but no indirect, costs of the program. Appropriate expenses include travel and meeting expenses, office and research materials and assistance, meals for working dinners or similar occasions, reasonable honoraria or fees for visiting experts or consultants etc. Modest stipends may be included for the leaders and members of Collegia, as may charges for the time of support staff. The awards may not be used for released time from teaching.

Institutional cost sharing should be shown whenever possible.

REPORTS:

- Interim narrative and financial reports due by June 30 of each of the first two grant years. Financial reports should follow the format of the budget submitted with the original proposal.
- A final narrative report describing how the Working Group functioned and what has been learned about collaboration and institutional organization from it, along with a final financial report, again following the format of the budget submitted with the original proposal. These reports will be due one month after the project's completion date.
- A paper or web presentation useful to other institutions, as described above. Publishable texts must be submitted to the Teagle Foundation by the stated completion date of the project.

SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSALS:

An electronic copy of the final proposal should be sent to proposals@teaglefoundation.org by **January 11, 2008**. In addition, three hard copies of the final proposal (an original plus two copies) should be sent to

The Teagle Foundation
10 Rockefeller Plaza, Room 920
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Funding decisions will be made at the February 2008 meeting of the Foundation's Board of Directors.