IMPLEMENTING AND ASSESSING ATTRIBUTES OF A VIBRANT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Conceived as part of a project funded by The Teagle Foundation in 2008, this document will serve as an implementation plan, followed by a supporting concept statement, for transforming Kalamazoo College into a more vibrant learning environment. (Rationale for this plan can be found in the proposal narrative for our Teagle-funded “Transforming Kalamazoo College...” project provided as a supplement at the end of this document) We will use ideas put forth here to gauge how effectively the project helps enhance the learning ethos at Kalamazoo College.

After developing our list of “perceptible attributes of a vibrant learning environment” (see below), and discussing it with several colleagues, we concluded that using the entire list as a means of deciding that Kalamazoo College (or any institution) “makes the grade” as a vibrant learning environment is probably too ambitious and might make it difficult for our project to succeed. Instead, we will treat the attributes as possible mechanisms for creating at ‘K’ a “positive restlessness” (George Kuh) with regard to becoming a better learning environment. We also decided that our notion of having several ongoing "projects, at various levels of the college, directed at student learning. . ." was a useful operational definition of that restlessness. Finally, we will use the next four years (i.e. the duration of our Teagle-funded project) as a time for discovering which mechanisms are particularly effective (i.e. the mechanisms we would seek to maintain once the grant is over) as the primary "propellants" for the positive restlessness at 'K’. Thus, instead of committing to fostering all attributes of a vibrant learning environment from the get-go, we envision the grant period as a time for inquiry about which attributes would be particularly effective at Kalamazoo.

Thus, at the outset of our project a team of Teagle Assessment Scholars would visit campus, carry out a “culture audit,” and ask the following questions:

1. Are there projects, at various levels of the college, directed at student learning that are carried out to their completion, with public sharing of what is learned through the projects and with concrete action taken on what is learned?
2. What is the preliminary list of mechanisms (i.e. “attributes”) that the Kalamazoo Project Implementation Team (KPIT) has identified for creating the kind of environment that would foster and sustain projects like these? (These are highlighted in yellow in the “attributes” listed below.)

Then, at the end of the grant, a team of Teagle Assessment Scholars would visit campus, carry out another “culture audit,” and ask the following questions:

1. What projects, at various levels of the college, directed at student learning are being carried out to their completion, with public sharing of what is learned through the projects and with concrete action taken on what is learned?
2. What is the grant implementation team’s list of mechanisms that are effective at Kalamazoo for creating and sustaining these kinds of projects?
3. What College resources are in place to implement and sustain these mechanisms and projects?

Kalamazoo Project Short-term and Long-term Goals

Short-term – During the grant period

1. With funding provided by the Teagle grant, Kalamazoo will identify and focus on several projects, at various levels of the college, directed at student learning, carry them to their completion, publicly share what is learned through the projects, act on what is learned, and then shift attention to subsequent projects that arise.
2. Leaders of this Teagle-funded project will identify especially effective institutional mechanisms for fostering systematic improvement of student learning and then develop the means by which these mechanisms will continue to operate in the years after the grant is completed.
Long-term – The grant period and beyond

Create an ongoing sense of “positive restlessness” with regard to learning, particularly student learning, at Kalamazoo. Establish permanent human and financial resources to identify, maintain, and continually sharpen mechanisms that support intentional, on-going reflection about and action toward improving student learning.

Out of this “restlessness” will emerge an increasingly palpable ethos at Kalamazoo College of curricular innovation and experimentation, coupled with documentation of curricular effectiveness, that will help students become better educated.

PERCEPTIBLE ATTRIBUTES OF A VIBRANT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Huber and Hutchings (2005) define the teaching commons as “a conceptual space in which communities of educators committed to inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning, and use them to meet the challenges of educating students for personal, professional, and civic life.” A vibrant learning environment should, therefore, include – or should, perhaps, simply be – such a space (conceptual and physical) in which learning is an emergent property of the synergy among interacting agents (faculty, students, administration, staff, and trustees) comprising an educational institution. A key to success of this synergy is a sustained, palpable, and systemic presence of evidential (and consequential) conversations about learning. What other reliable “markers” (i.e. perceptible attributes) would lead an outside observer, or an inside participant, to recognize such an environment? The following is a list¹ of potential attributes that will serve as a catalyst for developing and sustaining a more vibrant learning environment. We intend to use this list to create scaffolding for a series of formative assessments of an institution’s “vital signs” vis-à-vis the “healthy patient” described by the list of attributes.

A useful point of departure for our list of attributes is Kay McClenny’s annotated “key characteristics” of a learning-centered institution (included as an appendix to this document). The six characteristics are:

1. The institution has clearly-defined outcomes for student learning.
2. The institution systematically assesses and documents student learning.
3. Students participate in a diverse array of engaging learning experiences aligned with required outcomes and designed in accord with good educational practice.
4. Data about student learning typically prompt – and support – the institution and individuals to reflect and act.
5. The institution emphasizes student learning in its processes for recruiting, hiring, orienting, deploying, evaluating, and developing personnel.
6. The institutional documents and policies, collegial effort, and leadership behavior consistently reflect a focus on learning.

Arising from these guiding principles, Attributes of a Vibrant Learning Environment are evident at many “levels” of the institution.

Institution

- Above all else, a delight in learning pervades the institution. Everyone at the college seeks out and enjoys opportunities to learn in a variety of settings, and finds time to reflect on and put to use what is learned. All other attributes of this learning environment are, therefore, manifestations of an insatiable appetite for learning.

¹ This list is based on an afternoon-long conversation, funded by a grant from The Teagle Foundation to Kalamazoo College, on 18 August 2008 among the following participants: Charlie Blaich, Director of Inquiries, Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts; Anne Dueweke, Director of Institutional Research and Faculty Grants, Kalamazoo College; Peter Ewell, Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS); Alex McCormick, Director, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); and Paul Sotherland, Principle Investigator for the Teagle-funded project and Professor of Biology, Kalamazoo College.
- The institution (faculty, administration, staff, students, alumni, and trustees) carefully examines data from sources such as the NSSE or the Wabash National Study, chooses high impact practices on which to focus, and then engages in “action research” (without being too “fussy” about methods – always triangulating, always acting) systematically (Bok, 2006) to improve educational experiences of students.

- The institution regularly focuses on two or three institution-level projects, as well as projects at other levels of the institution, directed at student learning, carries them to their completion, publicly shares what is learned through the projects, acts on what is learned, and then shifts attention to subsequent projects that arise. (This process should “feel” like any other effective scholarly endeavor.) As a result, an institution’s self-study would read as a well documented narrative about a series of intentional projects arising from a “positive restlessness” (George Kuh) to become a better learning environment.

- The institution has (at least) very good NSSE “scores” and, over time, the dispersion of these scores decreases (i.e. student responses to NSSE prompts cluster more tightly) as the institution addresses possible causes for variation in educational experiences of the students.

- The institution willingly shares information on student learning (e.g. from NSSE and CLA) with external constituencies.

- Information from institution-level assessment informs course-level and program-level projects. And, proposals for these (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning – SoTL) projects refer to, and use, information from “higher” level, as well as “same” level, projects. Thus, SoTL proposals and projects at all levels should be cumulative, building on what is already known, and well attuned to all available information (at the institution as well as from other institutions). (Long-term development)

- Information pertaining to all SoTL projects (particularly “exemplar” projects) – including the project proposal and final report – are maintained in an organized way and are readily available to anyone at the college.

- There are regular “how to” workshops, attended by community members from across the institution, in which lessons learned through SoTL projects are shared. (These will begin to appear in year two.)

- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is part of the institution’s identity – to such an extent that faculty value SoTL endeavors and McClenny’s Characteristic #5 is an integral part of the promotion and tenure process. That is – “SoTL stuff” should “count” when hiring new faculty, when helping faculty develop, and when making promotion and tenure decisions. A manifestation of SoTL being a part of the institution’s learning ethos is department chairs encouraging faculty to engage in SoTL endeavors. (ongoing development)

- A “point person” (or office), whose professional “self-worth” derives from the institution being a vibrant learning environment, has an administration-level appointment at the institution. While broadly-shared ownership of fostering a vibrant learning environment is essential for an institution to thrive, having a coordinator of the multifarious activities involved in this endeavor is equally important.

- There is an “innovation fund” (e.g. $25,000/yr) available for SoTL projects, especially those that use insights gained from assessment of student learning.

- The institution has a budget line (ideally endowed) to support projects focused on improving student learning.

- A (Huber and Hutchings) “teaching commons” can succeed to a greater extent by having a “presence” on campus as a physical space (e.g. a room, rooms, or a building). If having that space helps the “teaching commons” thrive, then the institution should identify and use such a space.

### Faculty

- Faculty (and all other members of the institution) gather frequently (both regularly and spontaneously) for evidential (as well as anecdotal) conversations about learning. Highly visible and highly regarded gatherings (at least annually) of this sort are essential. “How do you know?” questions are frequently heard (and expected) during the discourse occurring at these gatherings.

- Faculty view teaching – in a particular class, over an entire course, and as part of a department or program – as a serious intellectual and scholarly endeavor (Bain, 2004). (ongoing development)
- There is a consensus on learning outcomes (McClenney’s Characteristic #1), at several levels of the institution, that would be evident through an audit of course syllabi and department/program assessment plans and through conversations with students. (emerging fragments)

- There are clear connections between institutional data (including data from SoTL projects) and what is transpiring in the classroom and in other learning experiences for students. (long-term development)

- There is a critical mass (e.g. 10-20%) of faculty involved in SoTL projects at any time, even though membership of this group will ideally change over time. However, the vast majority of the faculty regularly engage in structured reflection about their teaching and continually work to improve student learning.

- Evidence used to evaluate quality of teaching (i.e. the quality of the learning environment created and how much learning takes place) is multifaceted. That is, the “toolbox” used for evaluating effectiveness of faculty/student interactions should include more than end-of-course student evaluations of courses and their professors. (long-term development)

**Administrative Staff**

- While all members of the college community are part of many of the institution-level attributes and activities, someone must be responsible for making sure that those integral features of the institution are present and run smoothly. As stewards of the college, personnel in administrative positions have that responsibility.

- Like faculty, administrators view their role in the systematic and systemic improvement of student learning as a serious intellectual and scholarly endeavor.

- Administrators are ultimately responsible for reports about this endeavor that are presented to the trustees (see below).

**Support Staff**

- Members of the college’s staff view themselves (and are viewed by everyone else at the college) as having key roles in fostering the learning environment’s vibrancy.

- While frequently serving “supporting roles” in SoTL projects, support staff also have active roles in the systematic and systemic improvement of student learning.

**Students**

- Students are aware of and willingly participate in assessment of their learning and of the environment in which it occurs.

- Students are routinely employed as sources of meaningful information about their educational environment. Students can provide this information by completing surveys or other instruments to measure whether learning outcomes are attained. They can also help gather the information by interviewing other students or participating in focus groups used to generate narrative data.

- Evidence of students attaining learning outcomes is regularly gathered, discussed, and acted upon (i.e. McClenney’s Characteristics #2 and #4), and students are welcomed participants in these activities.

**Trustees**

- As a primary part of their fiduciary responsibilities, members of the Board of Trustees are involved in academic quality assurance (Ewell, 2006). As such, they regularly request, review, and discuss reports on assessment of student learning, patterns of student flow into and through the institution, stakeholder perceptions and opinions, academic program review, and institutional accreditation.
Useful References


Ethnography of a University – University of Illinois [http://www.eui.uiuc.edu/](http://www.eui.uiuc.edu/)


THE LEARNING-CENTERED INSTITUTION: KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Kay M. McClenny

Just about every college and university would like to think -- and would like its students, their families, and the public to think -- that it is “learning-centered.” After all, learning is the business of higher education. But what would a close look at how the institution is organized reveal about its commitment to learning? Do systems, processes, policies, and day-to-day practices support or subvert the business of learning? Do resources -- time, people, and money -- serve learning?

How would someone looking closely at your campus know yours is a learning-centered institution? What are the distinguishing characteristics of a college or university that is genuinely, powerfully focused on undergraduate learning? What evidence would allow internal and external stakeholders to verify that an institution is learning-centered?

Here are six key characteristics of a learning-centered institution. With each are examples of evidence -- everyday practice -- that the institution is committed to learning.

Characteristic 1

The institution has clearly-defined outcomes for student learning.

Although it seems self-evident, a learning-centered college or university clearly articulates what its students will know and be able to do as a result of their learning experiences. The institution does not simply offer expectations about what students will study (a list of courses) or describe available activities and resources (study abroad, classroom technology). Rather, the institution explicitly and publicly states the learning outcomes for its students, and these learning outcomes are required and directly tied to certification of learning—that is, to grades assigned and degrees conferred. What does this characteristic look like in practice?

❖ The institution clearly defines clear student learning outcomes required for single courses, for programs, across programs (e.g., core abilities, general education), and for majors and degrees.
❖ The institution prominently and publicly displays, communicates, and uses its statements of required learning outcomes.

Characteristic 2

The institution systematically assesses and documents student learning.

“Systematic” is key to this characteristic: many institutions have pockets of intense assessment activity or scattered experiments underway; but ad hoc efforts, while they may helpfully spawn faculty interest in assessment, do not qualify an institution as being learning-centered. The learning-centered institution has systems in place to determine the extent to which students attain the required learning outcomes, and the institution uses information from this system to guide decisions about programs, staffing, and resources. Faculty members have an important role in designing and implementing assessments, and faculty-generated criteria provide the basis for judgment and feedback to students. In operation:

❖ Faculty members have designed, identified, and implemented an array of appropriate assessments of student learning in courses, programs, cross-curricular programs (e.g., core abilities, general education), and majors.
❖ Faculty members have developed common criteria or rubrics that are used in identifying and documenting each student’s level of attainment of required learning outcomes.
❖ Third-party judgment or validation is routinely incorporated in assessment.

Characteristic 3

Students participate in a diverse array of engaging learning experiences aligned with required outcomes and designed in accord with good educational practice.

Because people do not learn in the same ways, the faculty, staff, and administrators in effective learning environments employ a variety of approaches. They recognize that research about undergraduate learning is unequivocal on a key point: the more engaged students are -- with faculty members, with other students, with the subject matter -- the more they are likely to learn. They intentionally design learning experiences to align with required outcomes and create partnerships involving students, faculty, student development professionals, and other campus personnel. Examples of practice include:

❖ Expectations regarding students’ responsibilities in the learning process are explicitly stated and communicated to all students by faculty, counselors, and fellow students.
❖ All students have individualized learning plans designed to meet their learning goals.
❖ Students routinely participate in active and collaborative learning experiences (e.g., learning communities, team learning, problem-based learning, mentoring, and peer tutoring) that are aligned with required learning outcomes.
❖ Faculty members provide students with frequent and timely feedback on their progress in learning.
**Characteristic 4**

Data about student learning typically prompt -- and support -- the institution and individuals to reflect and act.

Introducing timely, useful data about students and their learning into the daily decision-making process is a powerful lever for sharpening an institution’s focus on learning. It looks like this in action:

- Institutional research and information systems provide systematic, timely, useful, and user-friendly information about student learning and student progress.
- The results of student and institutional assessments are used routinely to inform improvements in programs and services for learners.
- As assessment results reveal needs, the institution allocates resources to address them.

**Characteristic 5**

The institution emphasizes student learning in its processes for recruiting, hiring, orienting, deploying, evaluating, and developing personnel.

It is, after all, the people in an institution who ultimately enact its mission and values. A commitment to focus on learning requires a re-thinking of the responsibilities and priorities of faculty, staff, and administrators. It also has significant implications for employment processes, personnel policies, and professional development programs. For example:

- The roles of faculty, staff, and administrators are defined in terms of functions and behaviors that contribute to student learning.
- Reward systems evaluate and recognize outstanding contributions to improving student learning and creating more effective learning environments.
- Faculty and staff development focuses on improving student learning and is informed by the results of student and institutional assessments.

**Characteristic 6**

Key institutional documents and policies, collegial effort, and leadership behavior consistently reflect a focus on learning.

With strong leadership, both from the top and throughout the institution, a genuine and powerful focus on learning can be achieved and sustained. The work, both conceptually and politically, is too hard and the competing claims on resources too overbearing for the effort to succeed without determined leadership and an unrelenting intentionality in examining institutional purposes, policies and practices. Collaborative effort also is a critical ingredient because the institution must have at its heart a sense of collective responsibility for student learning. In operation:

- Key institutional documents (e.g., mission and vision statements, college catalogs, and program descriptions) reflect the focus on learning.
- Academic policies (e.g., provisions for registration, assessment and course placement upon entry, class changes, orientation, first-year experience, and feedback on academic progress) reflect the priority placed on learning.
- Institutional leaders demonstrate a commitment to strengthening the focus on learning-commitment that extends beyond rhetoric to action in allocating resources, designing policy, and making decisions that are based on data.

When a campus community routinely engages in critical reflection about institutional priorities and practices; when discussions and decisions are consistently informed by data; when the results of student and institutional assessments weigh heavily in planning and resource allocation; when the institution has a continuous process for learning about what constitutes good educational practice; and when assertions and biases about educational “quality” are met with the question, “How do we know?” then even outsiders can observe a “culture of evidence” and witness a learning-centered institution hard at work.

Kay McIlveney is director of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and a senior associate with The Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning.

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**A note from AAHE**

This essay’s list of characteristics prompts tough questions. How accurately does the list describe my institution? How close are we to our goal of being learning-centered? How accurately does it describe the institution that I am examining as part of a state or accreditation review?

As colleges and universities strengthen their commitment to student learning, this list of characteristics has, we believe, two especially important uses. Campus leaders can organize internal discussion, planning, and decision-making around the list. External constituents evaluating an institution’s progress in organizing for learning can apply the list in their review.

AAHE intends this essay for wide distribution. Please reproduce it as often as you wish to help you in your work.

Feedback and comments are welcomed at i&a@aahe.org.

Please cite this work as McKenney, K. (2003). The learning-centered institution: Key characteristics. *Inquiry & Action*, 1, 5-6.
Project Summary and Introduction

With a grant from The Teagle Foundation Kalamazoo College intends to attain its goal of transforming itself into a more vibrant teaching and learning environment wherein faculty and other College personnel regularly apply insights gained from assessment of student learning. We will accomplish this by fostering a College-wide and sustainable presence of scholarship of teaching and learning that will build on our nascent iterative and multi-layered approach to applying lessons gained through assessing student learning at the course level, the department level, the program level (e.g. Service-Learning or Study Abroad), and the College level. Through annual mini-grants to faculty operating in these “layers” and through an annual Symposium on Teaching and Learning, we will entrain a regular pulse of query, exploration, documentation, and conversation about student learning and what promotes it best. Teagle Assessment Scholars will monitor the presence of this regular pulse at the beginning and end of our project as a means of evaluating the degree to which the College has been transformed. We anticipate that our Teagle-supported work over the next four years will lead to a palpable ethos at Kalamazoo College of curricular innovation and experimentation, coupled with documentation of curricular effectiveness, resulting in better ways of enhancing the cognitive development of our students.

Learning communities, vibrant teaching and learning environments in which everyone benefits from a pervasive “constant of intellectuality,” are ideal settings for undergraduate education and therefore represent the type of environment Kalamazoo College strives to become. The Kalamazoo College faculty recently, and resoundingly, endorsed a commitment to improve student learning through iterations of curricular innovation, experimentation, and assessment. Our President, Dr. Eileen Wilson-Oyelaran, provided clear guidance for making this commitment when she stated, “Faculty and administrators are accustomed to scholarly endeavors in which they must provide supporting evidence for assertions made; we should expect to do no less when making claims about degrees to which students become better educated through an institution’s curriculum.” With faculty commitment and administrative leadership, along with Kalamazoo College’s “saga” of a “Fellowship in Learning,” a history rich in curricular innovation, and groundwork laid through our current grant from The Teagle Foundation, the College is poised to “tip” toward becoming a much more vibrant teaching and learning environment. We will transform Kalamazoo College into an institution where systematic and effective use of assessment improves student learning and engages members of the Kalamazoo College learning community more fully in a shared endeavor of educating undergraduate students.

Background

Transformational learning is a key component of fostering cognitive development (of individuals and, we will argue, of institutions). Unfortunately, the phrase “transformational learning” has become almost meaningless because it is used so often and in so many different ways by institutions of higher education. In light of the centrality of transformational learning in our curriculum, and in our proposed project, we will describe what we mean by this phenomenon.

Transformational learning is frequently initiated by a “disorienting dilemma,” enhanced by reflecting on what was learned from the experience, and results in a change in one’s frame of reference. Our view of transformational learning grows from insights described by Mezirow, who found that transformational learning is typically initiated by “a critical incident or event (i.e. a disorienting dilemma) that acts as a trigger that can, under certain conditions (i.e. opportunities for reflection and dialogue, openness to change, etc.), lead people to engage in a transformational learning process whereby previously taken-for-granted assumptions, values, beliefs, and lifestyle habits are re-assessed and, in some cases, radically transformed.” Drawing on Mezirow, Kiely found that experiences of “high intensity dissonance” – situations in which one’s existing knowledge is not sufficient to make sense of the contradictions one is experiencing – can also, under the right conditions (again, with insight gained through guided reflection),
lead to transformational learning. Reading Erickson's recent\textsuperscript{6} integration of Mezirow's concepts with those of Kegan\textsuperscript{7} led us to realize that transformational learning and its attendant changes in perspective map onto the intellectual development taking place in college-age students described by Perry\textsuperscript{8} and Belenky et al.\textsuperscript{9} Vital to fundamental shifts in frames of reference associated with transformational learning are, for example, a change from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control of learning, or a shift from a position of “received knowing” to a position of “constructed knowing” (described by Belenky et al. and illustrated in the table, developed by Bob Grossman, Paul Sotherland, and Paul Olexia over several years at Kalamazoo College, in Appendix 1). Successfully moving from one position to another along a developmental continuum is facilitated by grappling with disorienting dilemmas and by engaging in metacognitive and structured reflection. Incremental transformations (with a small “t”) occur gradually in students as they progress along the continuum and eventually lead to fundamental shifts in frames of reference and habits of mind (Transformational learning with a capital “T”) and to self-authorship.\textsuperscript{10}

That “Big T” transformation is nothing particularly new; Perry's ideas have been around for about 40 years. However, we want to apply what we know about intellectual development to effect a similar “Big T” transformation in the College, through transformations in our faculty that will inevitably lead to more frequent and lasting transformations in our students. That is, we want to transform the College, and personnel (mainly faculty) in the College's many “layers” (i.e. courses, departments, programs, and institution) from being “accountability-driven” (external locus of control) to being "improvement-driven" (internal locus of control) in assessment of student learning and its many uses. Structured reflection - through regular and sustained engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, including presentations to and conversations with peers about what is learned through that scholarship - will play a key role in bringing about desired transformations.

Transformational learning is what the College strives for with our students, and some of our students already attain that level over the course of four years. We hypothesize that our above-expected senior CLA scores might be due, at least in part, to many of our students reaching high levels of intellectual development through experiences in the College’s K-Plan. However, we know that we can improve on this by providing more explicit scaffolding experiences (e.g., guided reflection on learning through course assignments and campus programs) to foster transformational learning in even more students. By supporting regular engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, by documenting and publicly showcasing results of that scholarship, and by sustaining those practices annually for the duration of our project, we intend to transform Kalamazoo College while improving student learning and the environment in which that learning occurs.

**Project Components**

**Foster among faculty a culture of curricular improvement through:** mini-grants supporting Scholarship of Teaching and Learning projects; a Community of Practice focused on teaching and learning; and an annual Symposium on Teaching and Learning – Although a “culture of assessment” is gradually taking hold at Kalamazoo College, we wish to speed up that process. Many faculty don’t fully understand what is meant by assessment of student learning or how to use assessment effectively to improve that learning. To encourage faculty to think explicitly about student learning and to document the degree to which that learning occurs, we propose to create the following:

- **A Scholarship of Teaching and Learning mini-grant program** with incentives (several $1000 mini-grants for assessment projects at the course or department level and one $2500 mini-grant for a more in-depth assessment project at the program or college level); guidelines for mini-grant proposals (Appendix 2); a clear reporting-back structure; and support in the form of on-campus assessment workshops and individual consulting from the Project Leadership Team. Mini-grants to faculty - designated as Teagle Learning Fellows - will be announced each spring and will support projects developed over the summer and carried out the following academic year. Faculty who are awarded
mini-grants will receive half of the grant at the outset of the project and the balance of the grant upon submission of a final report. We will dedicate a subset of mini-grants each year to projects involving the teaching of structured reflection and assessing its impact on transformational learning.

- **A Teaching and Learning Community of Practice** – Teagle Learning Fellows will meet periodically during each academic year to discuss progress and trouble-shoot problems in mini-grant projects.

- **A Symposium on Teaching and Learning** – Teagle Learning Fellows will present results of their projects to the campus community; we will invite a nationally recognized leader in assessment of student learning to give the keynote address and provide feedback on presentations by Fellows.

- **A Compilation of local white papers** (final reports by Teagle Learning Fellows) – this repository of lessons learned will be disseminated via the Web, conference presentations, and journal publications.

These four facets of our project will be repeated each year and will be the primary means of entraining a regular pulse to the scholarship of teaching and learning at Kalamazoo College. A timeline for implementing project components is provided after the narrative.

**Evaluation of Progress Toward the Project’s Goal**

During the summer of 2008, we will convene a small group of nationally recognized leaders in assessment of student learning to help us establish criteria for recognizing a “vibrant teaching and learning environment.” We will then invite Teagle Assessment Scholars, coordinated through the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, to use those criteria to evaluate Kalamazoo College before we commence and after we complete our proposed project. These pre/post reviews, along with an annual review by the keynote speaker at our Symposium on Teaching and Learning, will help keep us on task, provide transparency to our endeavor, and serve as a model for assessing institutions undergoing the transformations we anticipate. We also will evaluate progress toward our goals formatively, particularly for transformational learning, by carefully reading final reports on mini-grant projects at the end of each year to learn what worked well and what did not. We will adjust on-campus assessment workshops and mini-grant guidelines to address areas of difficulty and help faculty to be as successful as possible in implementing assessment projects. We will also publicize best practices among the faculty.
### Project Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2008</td>
<td>Establish criteria for being a “vibrant teaching and learning environment” and set up visit by Teagle Assessment Scholars for the fall. Send invitations to faculty to apply for a mini-grant to develop and carry out an assessment project at the course or department level; encourage projects on transformational learning. Invite interested faculty to a meeting in which Dr. Cunningham and Dr. Grossman describe their work on transformational learning and how best to bring it about.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug 2008</td>
<td>Review mini-grant proposals and select up to nine Teagle Learning Fellows (eight mini-grants and one larger grant) for the 2008-09 academic year.</td>
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<td>Sept 2008</td>
<td>Hold an assessment workshop for Teagle Learning Fellows. Consult with Fellows individually about their projects.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First-year students take the CLA (funded by current Teagle grant).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teagle Assessment Scholars visit campus for Pre-Project external review.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Facilitate the Teaching and Learning Community of Practice. Consult with individual Teagle Learning Fellows as necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>Send out a call for Year 2 mini-grants and a call for more in-depth assessment projects for faculty planning an academic leave. Hold assessment workshop for new applicants.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seniors who took the CLA as first-years take the CLA (funded by current Teagle grant).</td>
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<td>May 2009</td>
<td>Award up to ten mini-grants; award up to one larger grant for the 2009-10 academic year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Hold Symposium on Teaching and Learning. Teagle Learning Fellows present results of their assessment projects. Newly named Fellows are required to attend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2009</td>
<td>Review final reports submitted by 2008-09 Teagle Learning Fellows. Disseminate best practices, internally among Kalamazoo faculty, and externally to a broader higher education audience.</td>
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<td>Years 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Repeat cycle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Complete final round of SoTL projects; Teagle Assessment Scholars visit campus for Post-Project external review; write white paper; disseminate findings; administer the CLA to first-year students and to seniors.</td>
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# Positions of Intellectual Development

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<tr>
<th>Generic Position</th>
<th>&quot;Forms&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Ways&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Epistemological Reflection&quot;</th>
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<td>Red</td>
<td>Dualism</td>
<td>Received Knowing</td>
<td>Absolute Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Multiplicity</td>
<td>Subjective Knowing</td>
<td>Transitional Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Contextual Relativism</td>
<td>Procedural Knowing</td>
<td>Contextual Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Constructed Knowing</td>
<td>[Note: Colored positions typically not observed in university students]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table developed by Robert Grossman (Psychology), Paul Olexia (Biology), and Paul Sotheralnd (Biology) at Kalamazoo College.*
APPENDIX 2

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES FOR SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROJECTS

With support from a recent Teagle Foundation grant, we hope to foster more systematic and effective use of assessment to improve student learning. Mini-grants (several $1000 mini-grants for assessment projects at the course or department level and one $2500 mini-grant for a more in-depth assessment project at the program or college level) to faculty – designated as Teagle Learning Fellows – will be announced each spring and will support projects developed over the summer and carried out the following academic year. Faculty awarded mini-grants will receive half of the grant at the outset of the project and the balance of the grant upon submission of a final report. We will dedicate a subset of mini-grants each year to projects involving the teaching of structured reflection and assessing its impact on transformational learning. The proposal deadline for 2008-09 projects is Friday, 1 August.

PROJECT NARRATIVE:

In two pages, please address the following:

- Briefly and clearly state the goals of the project (bulleted items will suffice). What question(s) do you want to answer?

- Link your project goals to student learning at one of the following levels: course, department, program or college

- Describe your preparation (e.g., results of literature review, consultations with colleagues, previous experience, etc.)

- Explain the methods you will use and why they are appropriate for your goals. How will you gather information? How will you analyze the data (quantitative or qualitative) you collect?

- In what ways do you anticipate insights from your project having an impact on Kalamazoo College?

REQUIREMENTS FOR FACULTY RECEIVING SOTL AWARDS:

- Participate in Teaching and Learning Community of Practice during the academic year

- Present results of your project at our annual Symposium on Teaching and Learning

- Submit a final report (due within one month of completion of the project). The final report should

  - Describe results of the project

  - Include reflections on the following: what worked well and what did not work as well; lessons learned that will affect future teaching and learning; advice for colleagues attempting similar projects.

  - Not exceed two pages of narrative; appendices (e.g. tables and graphs, sample assignments, excerpts from student reflections, etc.) may be used to provide support for the narrative.

For more information about the Teagle-funded project, please contact Paul Sotherland.

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Endnotes