Back in the fall of 2004, when The Teagle Foundation held a “Listening” on the Blue Ridge to help set a course for the foundation and its grant recipients, George Kuh asked, “What distinctive imprint do we leave on our students, and how do we know?” That question has helped guide the work carried out by colleagues at Colorado College, Earlham College, and Kalamazoo College – separately and as a collaborative – and supported by a grant from The Teagle Foundation over the course of four years, from June 2005 through December 2009. A similar question, “What distinctive imprint did the grant and work it supported leave on the colleagues and their colleges, and how do we know?” is one that we will attempt to answer in this final report.

Much of what we accomplished over the past four years appeared in our annual reports, so we won’t recount everything we did and learned. Instead, we will summarize what took place, highlight what happened to and at the three colleges, and provide a glimpse into the future.

**Summary of Activities**

**Year 1 – 2005-06**

- All three colleges began the CLA longitudinal study by administering the full CLA battery to first-year students (fall 2005)
- All three colleges administered the CLA to seniors (spring 2006) to obtain a cross-sectional view of gains in abilities of students over four years
- The collaborative spent time getting comfortable with sharing and talking about data (meetings at CC in fall 2005 and EC in spring 2006)
- All three colleges engaged in lots of intra-institutional gathering and sharing of data (especially CIRP, CLA and NSSE)
- EC and KC began “targeted assessment” projects; CC engaged the campus in deciding what their project would be

**Year 2 – 2006-07**

- CC, EC, and KC faculty met at KC to read and evaluate student writing as part of EC’s targeted assessment project (summer 2006)
- The collaborative analyzed CLA data in anticipation of the fall data-sharing meeting at KC
- All three colleges administered a post-CLA survey to the 2006 seniors and conducted follow-up phone interviews to gain a better understanding of factors that might have affected performance on the CLA
- The collaborative held its fall data-sharing meeting at KC with a focus on CLA and NSSE results; Jillian Kinzie attended as an outside observer
• The collaborative met and gave a presentation at the AAC&U General Education Assessment meeting in Miami (winter 2007)
• KC and CC administered the CLA to a second cohort of seniors to see if results change or stay the same from year to year (winter/spring 2007)
• KC gave a presentation on using CLA results for assessment at the Higher Learning Commission’s Annual Meeting (April 2007) and published a paper on the same topic in *Peer Review*
• Targeted assessment work continued
• The collaborative held its spring data-sharing meeting at the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts (CILA)
• The collaborative decided to change its language from “targeted assessment” to “focused inquiry,” reflecting a transition to a new approach to investigations into student learning

**Year 3 – 2007-08**

• The collaborative organized a summer CLA data-sharing meeting at CILA which included about a dozen institutions (expanding concentric conversation circles)
• KC faculty visited CC to learn about teaching on “The Block” (late fall 2007)
• The collaborative held its spring data-sharing meeting at CC
• Two KC faculty attended a workshop on CLA in the Classroom
• KC held its first symposium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning with Charlie Blaich as keynote speaker (spring 2008)
• Focused inquiry projects continued

**Year 4 – 2008-09**

• KC and EC administered the CLA to first-years for additional cross-sectional data and to set up another longitudinal study (fall 2008)
• All three colleges administered the full CLA battery to seniors (the 2005 first-years) to complete the longitudinal study (spring 2009)
• All three schools submitted (either individually or as part of another consortium) proposals to The Teagle Foundation for the next stage in their assessment work
• The collaborative held its final data-sharing meeting (sharing of CLA and NSSE longitudinal data) at KC (fall 2009)
• We organized and held (December 2009) “Triangulating Outcomes of Undergraduate Education: Using Evidence to Enhance Student Learning,” a data-sharing workshop at CILA that included seven colleges and universities as well as representatives from CLA, NSSE, and SSRC (more expanding concentric conversation circles)
What happened to us?

- The many, many conversations during our collaboration have helped all of us challenge (eschew?) simplistic explanations for phenomena at our colleges.
- Much, frequent, and intentional “friend raising” (Bob Southard, Earlham) took place at the outset and throughout our project.
- Instead of looking over the fence, we are now more interested in doing better in our own way. Honest, frank conversations with “critical friends” (Bob Southard, Earlham) among (and within) colleges helped catalyze that change and a rapid dissipation of competitiveness. “Benchmarking” among the three colleges helped with this.
- Allocating time and resources to learning about each college, genuinely focusing on who “we” are and who “they” are, helped raise friends and helped those newfound friends feel comfortable being constructively critical of what they observed.
- Our assessment literacy has been raised by project components and by the collaboration.
- Time spent preparing for and administering the CLA and then analyzing, disseminating, and comparing the results consumed a sizeable proportion of our time and effort during the past four years and helped us become well informed CLA users.
- Each college now has a core-group trying to make sense out of institutional data.
- The four-year collaboration catalyzed a change in the nature of conversations at all three colleges.
- We learned to tailor assessment of student learning to unique campus cultures.
- We learned that use of qualitative stories are just as important (at times even more important) than quantitative data.
- We learned to incorporate students – as sources of information and as gatherers of information – into our investigations about our colleges. While this important insight makes perfect sense in retrospect (as do most true insights), we found this insight to be particularly moving.
- About halfway through our project we changed what we called our mini-projects from “Targeted Assessment” to “Focused Inquiry.” This was an important change and indicative of a shift from simply assessing to seeking answers to meaningful questions (Ken Bain noted in “Understanding Great Teaching” (http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp09/prsp09_bainzimmerman.cfm) that “human beings are most likely to learn deeply when they are trying to solve problems or answer questions that they have come to regard as important, intriguing, or beautiful.”). At about the same time, we realized a significant shift from a focus on using assessment data to “prove” to using assessment data to improve.
- As a result, our attitude about using data has changed (improved). We now see how data can lead to new questions in addition to telling us something about the college. Making inter-institutional comparisons – a group effort – helped catalyze this shift in attitude/outlook and helped foster a “positive restlessness” (Kuh) at all three colleges.
• We learned, again and from first-hand experience, that path-dependence and contingency influence what happens, and what can happen, at institutions. Getting from “here to there” can be difficult when institutional culture creates momentum heading in a direction different from a “desired” trajectory. And, the tragic loss of Bob Southard caused an unexpected change in the culture, and probably trajectory, of our project.

What lies ahead?

• Liberal arts colleges need to take the moral high ground, truly making attempts to change the world, make it a better place, by helping our students become those change agents. (Larry Stimpert, CC) How does what we’re doing in our project (and at our institutions!) connect with that broader mission? We need to attend to the moral underpinnings of what we are trying to accomplish.

• We need to remember that “we are the work as we do the work” (Tim Fallon, KC)

• We have asked ourselves, do we have to end now? What about taking another look at the three institutions down the road? Might we collaborate on a survey of our alums? “Since you graduated...?” questions would be well worth asking alums. How can we continue to keep the conversations going?

• We’re now trying to figure out how to put into action what we’ve learned.

• Having our new outlook on assessment of student learning permeate the colleges is facilitated by seizing opportunities when they arise, being constantly on the lookout for overlap between assessment activities and other endeavors at the college, being “subversive” when necessary, having a “maven” actively in the mix, and consciously working toward a “tipping point.”

• How do we now expand the conversation circles, what we initially referred to as “expanding circles of inclusiveness” within and among colleges? An initial step will be to administer mini-grants to the institutions that participated in the December 2009 “Triangulating” workshop (and thereby FINALLY expend the remaining funds in our grant ☺. Please see budget summary on the following pages.)

We close with a simple thank you to The Teagle Foundation. Thank you for the many opportunities - to collaborate, learn through that collaboration, and improve through that learning - that we have enjoyed as a result of your generous support. We are better individuals and institutions as a result of our collaborative endeavors. As noted by Anne Dueweke at the final meeting of our collaborative, “The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The Teagle Foundation (and we!) got more out of one $300,000 grant to the collaborative than what would have emerged from three separate $100,000 grants.”

Cheers, The CC-EC-KC Collaborative
Final Budget
Expenditures in year four and summary of funds received and expended

Budget Report July 2008 - December 2009 (Year 4)

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<th>Teagle Project Budget - Year 4</th>
<th>Colorado</th>
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Funds received from The Teagle Foundation

| Year 1 | 125,500.00 |
| Year 2 | 62,500.00 |
| Year 3 | 112,000.00 |
| **Total** | **300,000.00** |

Funds expended by the collaborative

| Year 1 | 84,632.83 |
| Year 2 | 62,571.50 |
| Year 3 | 48,990.02 |
| Year 4 | 62,651.21 |
| **Total** | **258,845.56** |

Funds remaining as of December 1, 2009: 41,154.44

"Triangulating " Workshop at CILA (Dec 11-13, 2009) -16,196.33

Funds remaining for mini-grants: $24,958.11