

**St. Lawrence University**  
**Proposal for the Category IV Intensive Site Grant – Shortemred Version**  
**Bringing Theory to Practice - April 2007**

**Project Title:** “Transforming Pedagogy, Transforming Lives: Engaged Learning as a Source of Student Civic Development and Well-Being”

**Rationale – Why This Project is Important at this Time:** The intuitive appeal of the transformative effect of engaged learning experiences captures the imagination of those of us who have been seeking ways to enhance our students’ civic engagement and well-being. How can our students be active in the process of their learning, developing their capacities for civic participation, collaborating in the creation of knowledge and be simultaneously drinking themselves into oblivion, despairing to the point of self-destructive behaviors and disengaged from the democratic process? The triangle of engaged learning, civic development, and well-being, at the core of the Bringing Theory to Practice project, challenges us to construct a model based on empirical data that captures not only the imagination but the phenomena we are witnessing in college students today. St. Lawrence is in a position to contribute to the development of that model. As Swaner articulates, “[t]here is a temptation for those in higher education to focus solely on development of pedagogy (about which there is relative consensus) and neglect conceptual work that is still in need of attention” (p. 63). This intensive site grant provides the opportunity to do the latter while also doing the former. Additionally, one of the difficulties with the initial demonstration project was that the knowledge generated expressed the unique campus environment and thus the findings were not easily transferable from one institution to the next. This project provides an opportunity to explore a variety of different engaged pedagogies with an entire population in a stable environment generating generalizable knowledge.

St. Lawrence was honored to be the recipient of a demonstration site grant from BTtoP two years ago. In large part, our work as a member of the learning community of demonstration sites has led us to this project. We not only benefited from our own pilot work but from the approaches taken by other institutions that were part of the demonstration site consortium. Under the auspices of that grant, St. Lawrence brought together community-based learning (CBL) programs from Academic Affairs with the David Garner Center for Collegiate Volunteerism and the St. Lawrence Leadership Academy from the Division of Student Life to provide our students with a more integrated, in-depth exposure to civic engagement and leadership across all four undergraduate years. Since these programs were combined to form the CCEL, we have introduced a variety of new engaged learning opportunities in both student life and academic affairs supported by newly formed campus-community partnerships. Consequently, the number of students involved in service learning, community-based research, volunteerism, and other leadership programs has increased considerably. These changes have been exciting for faculty, staff, students, as well as our community partners, and we have created structures within the University that will sustain this work for years to come.

St. Lawrence is now well-positioned to move beyond an exclusive focus on community-based learning to the institutionalization of a variety of pedagogies of engagement. As Lynn Swaner (2005) highlights in her comprehensive review of the scholarship on engaged learning, “engaged learning” or “engagement pedagogy” has been used to refer to a large variety of learning environments and strategies. In fact, the literature is cluttered with a number of definitions of “engaged learning” that vary across disciplines, perspectives, and practices. This fact suggests that pedagogies of engagement are potentially multidimensional in nature and that multidimensionality

may predict different outcomes for student learning, civic development, and mental well-being. In addition, the use of engaged pedagogy does not necessarily translate into the experience of engaged learning. Having pursued exploratory research focusing on a single form of engaged pedagogy (i.e., community-based learning), St. Lawrence is poised to expand that exploration to the complexity of engaged pedagogies and their relationship to student outcomes.

Despite the complexity in the definition of engaged pedagogy and learning, Swaner (2005) offers a definition, based on both the involvement and the civic engagement perspectives, that resonates with us. Swaner suggests that “engaged learning” is

*optimal learning that is inherently active and integrative of experience, marked by increasing complex ways of knowing and doing, interactive with social contexts and holistic in its encompassment of multiple domains of self...[as well as] learning that has as its purpose development of students’ civic capacities for democratic participation and engagement in community life. (p. 62)*

One of the reasons we find Swaner’s definition compelling is that it emphasizes the active role of the student within the learning process. In that regard, one theoretical avenue we wish to pursue in the development of the model of the triangular relationship is a construct familiar to the field of prevention—empowerment. Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz and Checkoway (1992) define psychological empowerment as “personal control, a sense of competence, a critical awareness of the sociopolitical environment, and participation in community organizations and activities,” and they argue that “the focus of both empowerment theory and practice is to understand and strengthen processes and context where individuals gain mastery over decisions that affect their lives” (p. 725). The concept of empowerment is arguably most “compelling when focusing on the devastating correlates and costly sequelae of society’s most floridly disempowering conditions” (Cowen, 1994, p. 157). It is difficult to argue that students who find themselves within the academic buildings and residence halls of liberal arts institutions are disempowered.

However, empowerment is a construct that seems to juxtapose well with the work on engaged learning. Hawe and Shiell’s (2000) discussion of the role of empowerment in the creation of “healthy” places echoes both the promise of pedagogical environments that foster engagement and the destructiveness of those that contribute to disengagement: “people’s experience of themselves as persons with meaning, dignity, power to act on their own behalf and care respectfully for others, happens in a social context and properties of that context can either encourage human interaction, connection growth and respect or conversely foster alienation and despair” (p. 880). This description seems to capture well what those of us employing pedagogies of engagement seek in our learning environments. In addition, some recent work has suggested that the positive effects that have been found for social capital (see e.g., Weitzman & Kawachi (2000) study in which they found social capital to have a much greater protective effect against binge drinking in college than individual volunteering) may be accounted for by the concepts of psychological sense of community and empowerment (e.g., Hawe & Shiell, 2000). For example, Sanders (2001) in her analysis of data on volunteering, political involvement and distress from the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women; found that volunteer activity was not related to a reduction in distress at a later time, whereas “protesting injustice, fighting back, demanding rights, articulating claims and otherwise resisting oppression”—i.e., acts of empowerment—did act as a buffer against psychological distress later on (p. 17). The relationship between engagement, civic development, and well-being is certainly not a simple one.

This lack of simplicity was also revealed in the analysis from the first year of our own demonstration project. In our analysis, we found that those first-year students exposed to CBL pedagogies experienced greater increases in levels of civic engagement relative to a comparable group of first-year students not exposed to such pedagogies. However, those same students who participated in service learning activities demonstrated notable decreases in (measures of) leadership, empathy and self-confidence compared with modest changes (typically increases) among a comparable group of first-year students. These findings seem to reflect a complex process of self-discovery and growth encouraged by engaged learning pedagogies and seems to include a period of self-doubt and perhaps some deep soul searching manifested through declines in measures of self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership. These findings are consistent with Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning. Mezirow identified an early phase in transformative learning during which experiences led students to question their prior assumptions and become critical of those assumptions. Although such disorientation may suggest regression or a negative impact of engagement with the community, this disequilibrium is the necessary precursor to further development, if Piaget's general model of cognitive development is applied (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). These models would predict that student self-confidence will become stronger as students continue to be actively engaged and intentional in their learning over time.

What the above suggests is not that empowerment theory might be the silver bullet to understanding the complex relationship between engaged learning, well-being, and civic development nor that all pedagogies of engagement require a period of disequilibrium for students to reap positive benefits. Rather it does suggest that any next step in developing the empirical basis of this work must consider a multivariate approach to the examination of the linkages between these variables to understand the underlying mechanisms that might account for and predict positive outcomes for students (Swaner, 2005, p. 132). As those of us who have been working on the BTtoP project are aware, "despite widespread interest in the connection between political, civic, and individual health and vitality, persuasive demonstrations of these links and the mechanisms producing them are rare" (Sanders, 2001, p. 16).

Whereas the above signals our desire to contribute to a model of understanding of the triangularity that is generalizable beyond our own institutional boundaries, St. Lawrence is an institution aggressively challenging our own culture of high-risk alcohol use and depression. For St. Lawrence, this project is personal. About a decade ago we conducted the first campus wide survey of our students' alcohol use to be administered in a long time. Like so many of our peer institutions, these data revealed a level of high-risk alcohol consumption and negative consequences of that use that were distressing. Since that time, President Sullivan has funded the Wellness Initiative—a collaborative working group of faculty, staff and students who have instituted and evaluated a variety of strategies to enhance our students' wellness. Over the last 7 years, we have employed social norms programming, alcohol-free and late-night programs, an event fund accessible to students through mini-grants, friendly competition to encourage positive involvement on campus, population-level educational interventions, guest speakers, awareness weeks, and other special events. Despite this work, our students' high risk alcohol use has remained high, and we have mourned the loss of more than one student as a direct result of their excessive use of alcohol.

Similarly, like many of our peer institutions, we have seen a sharp increase among the number of students who struggle with depression. This, too, has become personal. Earlier this academic year, we lost a student who, after suffering with depression for several years, took his own life. His death made clear the complexity of the relationship between engaged learning, civic development and well-being because he was not disengaged but rather one of the most highly engaged students in his class. As a result of the impact of alcohol use and depression which we have felt directly and powerfully on our own campus, we have a deep interest in understanding the link between students' participation in engaged learning, their civic development and their likelihood to engage in high-risk alcohol use and/or to experience depression and hopefully preventing these problems and promoting our students' well-being in the future.

**Project Activities:** The proposed project has at its center three key components: (1) intensive and intentional faculty and staff development on pedagogies of engagement and diffusion of the ideas garnered from that work across the faculty and staff; (2) implementation of engaged pedagogies within FYP and FYS courses; and (3) systematic collection of longitudinal data and multivariate analysis to investigate empirically the linkages between engaged learning, civic development and student's mental well-being. This section outlines the specific project activities associated with each of those components.

Faculty and Staff Development and Implementation of Engaged Pedagogies: Foundational to this project is the intentional diffusion of pedagogies of engagement across St. Lawrence employing a required curricular program as the starting point for such diffusion. We begin through focused work within the context of the FYP. \* \* \*

The FYP was also a creation of the faculty, not the administration, and hence faculty ownership is a key characteristic of all work within the program. This project builds upon that quality by involving the faculty and staff involved with the program in both the creation and implementation of the faculty development. Although the Associate Dean of the First Year (ADFY) will act as the principal investigator for the project, her primary role will be to facilitate rather than to lead. At the center of the project design are four "pedagogy teams"—learning communities of faculty and student life staff who will be exploring a particular type of engaged pedagogy. Even though most do not engage in any classroom teaching for the FYP, student life staff will participate in the pedagogy teams in recognition of the key educational role they play within the living-learning structure of the FYP and in other co-curricular and residential venues. Each of these pedagogy teams will be lead by one or more members of the team; these individuals will be compensated for their special efforts through a reimbursement fund for books and other resources they wish to purchase for their own resource library. Although the ADFY will facilitate the activities of each pedagogy team (e.g., connecting the team with resources, arranging locations and food, making copies) and hopes to attend many of the meetings, the team leader(s) and his/her pedagogy team will determine the activities of their group.

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During the first few weeks of the fall semester, the entire FYP faculty and student life staff will participate in a whole program meeting, which will take place during the time FYP would normally meet, culminating in a luncheon. The purpose of this meeting will be to begin the conversations

concerning pedagogies of engagement and the types of pedagogies available to pursue. (This meeting will also be used to discuss other matters of interest to the members of the FYP.) Although faculty and staff interest will determine the pedagogies chosen, some possibilities are community-based learning, reflective learning portfolios, deliberative dialogues, political activism, and conceptual workshops; we will be striving for four pedagogy teams that represent the diversity of pedagogies available. Over the course of the fall semester, faculty and staff will be invited to participate in dinners, which focus on a specific type of engaged pedagogy. They will be provided with relevant readings prior to that dinner, and discussion at the dinner will be facilitated by faculty and staff with expertise in that type of pedagogy. If teaching within the FYP/FYS, these individuals may naturally become team leaders, but if not, they will serve as resources for the relevant team(s). By the end of the fall semester, faculty and staff will have chosen the team of which they wish to be a part and hence the specific type of engaged pedagogy they wish to explore. The ADFY will also have been provided with names of outside speakers the teams wish to bring to campus in the spring semester as well as any books or other resources they wish to have purchased for the team. Based on the list of speakers provided by the teams, the ADFY and the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) will coordinate a speaker series in the spring semester of Year One.

In spring semester, the four pedagogy teams will meet a minimum of 2 times. These meetings will include workshops, reading groups, and other faculty development activities. Team members will be encouraged to pilot their ideas in their courses and programming and to report back to their teams. During Year Two, the whole program will meet again during a regular class time at the beginning of the fall semesters, and the pedagogy teams will continue to meet twice a semester (with dinner provided) as they implement the engaged pedagogies they developed over the previous year. These meetings will provide an opportunity to reflect upon and further define their work as well as to provide support, encouragement, and feedback to their team members.

Grant funds will be used to support the work of the pedagogy teams in several other ways. First, in addition to the funds already available at St. Lawrence for faculty travel to attend pedagogy conference, a special travel fund will also be available during Year One to support travel to conferences that are directly relevant to engaged pedagogies. This travel fund will help to reimburse costs for individuals teaching within the FYP/FYS who are not full-time faculty and hence do not have access to the regular faculty travel budget. Second, a start-up fund will be available to cover costs associated with initiating various engaged pedagogies. For example, this fund could be used to pay for lunch with community partners for a team wishing to incorporate community-based learning into their FYP or to purchase software integral to a course project for a FYS instructor wishing to incorporate inquiry-based pedagogy. Third, an additional fund will be available for costs associated with the actual implementation of the pedagogies. For example, this fund might be used to pay for experts to train students in facilitating deliberative dialogues or to cover travel costs for a class to travel to a protest as part of an FYS that incorporates political activism.

Several strategies will be used to diffuse the work of the faculty teams within the FYP and across the entire St. Lawrence. At the conclusion of Year One of the project, each of the pedagogy teams will be encouraged to present the culmination of their year-long study to other faculty during both the FYP-specific faculty development spring retreat and May Faculty College. Over the

course of the second year, faculty new to teaching in the FYP and FYS will participate in faculty development activities created and conducted by the pedagogy teams from the preceding year. These new faculty will be encouraged to join a team of their interest and to integrate engaged pedagogies into their own courses; additional funds will be available to implement those pedagogies. At the end of Year Two, the pedagogy teams will be encouraged to present once again at the FYP-specific faculty development spring retreat and MFC but the goal will be to share the lessons learned from the first year of implementation. This intentional dissemination of faculty learning will continue into Years Three and Four through the faculty development structure already in place within the FYP as well as through faculty development series coordinated through the CTL.

Project Assessment Activities: The third component of this project is the empirical investigation of the relationship between engaged learning and students' civic development and well-being. The overall assessment design involves the collection of baseline data from the class of 2011, the longitudinal collection of data from the entire population of first-year students matriculating at St. Lawrence in the fall of 2008, and collection of data from the class entering in the fall of 2009 in their first year. Additionally, engaged pedagogy will be measured through completion of a teaching inventory by faculty teaching in the FYP and FYS. Finally, qualitative data will also be collected from both students, through focus groups and interviews, and from faculty and staff through interviews. Given the complexity and extensiveness of the data collection for this project, we have included a part-time assessment assistant for Years Two and Three of the project when the assessment is the most intense.

*Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection Methodology for Student Data:* All quantitative data will be collected from the first-year students using the same methodology that has proven success at St. Lawrence. For the last several years, we have been administering an in-house survey, called the College Success Questionnaire (CSQ), to the entire first-year class in the spring semester. \* \*  
\* Employing this methodology, we have participation rates of no less than 80% of the class, and typically closer to 85%. We anticipate just two changes to the methodology for the purposes of the present study. First, because we anticipate the measure to be longer than the CSQ, we will be asking faculty for 30 minutes of class during Year One for the collection of baseline data and 45 minutes of class during Years Two and Three. We will also be collecting data during late March/early April to capture learning that is occurring within the FYS. The administration of the CSQ will be suspended for the life of the project, with necessary benchmark items incorporated in the assessment instrument for this project.

For the last three years, we have also been administering a sophomore version of the CSQ to all sophomore students during February as well, and we will be employing the same methodology for our longitudinal data collection. During the spring semester, St. Lawrence students participate in a lottery as part of the housing process for the following year. Sophomores have been asked to submit—although not to complete—an on-line version of the CSQ to obtain their housing card by a particular date. Once again, to maintain ethical standards, we do not require students to complete the survey, and even students who never respond at all to the survey request will receive their housing card in time for the lottery. This methodology has yielded an approximately 80% participation rate each year. The present project will require the collection of data more sensitive and intrusive than the data we have collected in the past; in addition, because of the longitudinal

nature of the student, the responses cannot be anonymous. Therefore, we anticipate being even more explicit that completion of the survey is not required and that students can submit the survey without completing it and still receive their housing card by the particular date. Although we expect that this methodology might result in some attrition from Year Two to Year Three, we have a great deal of experience with on-line survey administrations and ways to encourage participation. We do not anticipate a significant decline from our current levels of participation.

For the qualitative data collection, we will employ the methodology we have been using successfully within our current BTtoP project. We will conduct 6 focus groups with first-year students using a structured protocol. These focus groups will be facilitated by the assessment assistant, who will be trained by the PIs if he or she does not have training in focus group facilitation. The groups will be drawn from across FYPs and FYs. To encourage participation, students will be provided dinner during the focus groups. A representative subset of members of this cohort will then be solicited for participation in semi-structured interviews during the late spring (i.e., after the quantitative data have been collected) of their sophomore year (Year Three). Participants in the interviews will be paid \$15.00 for a 1 ½ hour interview, which will be conducted by the assessment assistant. In addition, we will be analyzing any written work that might be produced that will be relevant to an understanding of the variables of interest, such as portfolio work, journal entries, and reflective essays. Qualitative data will also be collected from faculty and staff; this component of the methodology is discussed below under the section on assessment of engaged pedagogy.

*Assessment Instrument for Student Variables:* Our baseline data collection will consist of administrations of the NSSE, already planned as part of our Core Commitments project, to our entire first-year class during the spring of 2008; we will also be administering the NSSE to our senior class. Additional baseline data will come from the ACHA-NCHA, benchmark items that we have been collecting from the Core Survey and supplemental questions specific to the work of this project all of which will be collected campus-wide. During Years Two and Three, we will be collecting some additional baseline data through our administration of the CIRP Freshman Survey, which we give to all first-year students during orientation. We will be including on our CIRP supplemental questions some items that will allow us to look at any systematic differences that might be present between students in different FYP colleges. Because students are placed in FYP colleges based on their interest in the subject matter without any knowledge of the pedagogies to be used, we do not expect any self-selection biases. However, these data collected with the CIRP will allow us to test that assumption empirically.

The assessment measures administered in the spring of Years Two and Three to the two cohorts of first-year students in their FYS class and to the first cohort during their sophomore year will consist tentatively of the following: the ACHA-NCHA with supplemental questions derived from the Core Survey, measures of civic development including those we are currently using in our BTtoP project, a measure of engaged learning and questions regarding the students' perception of the type of pedagogy to which they were exposed during their FYP and FYS and their attitudes towards that pedagogy. We understand that one of the potential goals of the intensive site project is the development of an instrument that can facilitate the work of the BTtoP project. Therefore, as we have noted, we consider the components of our assessment instrument to be tentative at this time because we hope to be working with the BTtoP staff on instrument development as a part of

this project. We also plan to make use of the Participant Pool within the Department of Psychology during 2007-2008 to pilot any instrument. Through the Participant Pool, we can have access to approximately 200 first-year students who receive extra credit in Introductory Psychology for participation in up to three research studies. As a member of the Psychology Department, the principal investigator has access to this pool of participants, and she has already made the current coordinator of the pool aware of her anticipated need to use the entire participant pool to pilot our measures.

*Qualitative and Quantitative Measures of Engaged Pedagogies:* One of the key variables in this project is the development and then dissemination of engaged pedagogy. We will be measuring this variable through three primary means. First, faculty teaching within the FYP will be asked to complete an inventory of teaching goals and practices. The Director of the CTL will assist us in exploring the options available currently and the adaptation of any existing measure for the purposes of the project. This inventory will be completed at the end of the fall and spring semesters of Years Two and Three. These data will become part of the database that will be used to measure the relationship between engaged learning/pedagogy, civic development, and well-being. Second, the content of faculty FYP and FYS syllabi and assignments during Years Two and Three will be analyzed for the inclusion of engaged pedagogy based on a rubric to be developed during Year One. These data will also be included in the database to the extent they can be quantified. Third, two faculty and/or staff members from each pedagogy team will be solicited for participation in a semi-structured interview with the principal investigator to explore during late spring in Year Two. These interviews will explore the instructors' experiences implementing the engaged pedagogies and the impact that they perceive occurring on their students and on them as teachers. An additional 4 faculty will be interviewed during Year Three.

In addition to the above, the relationship between engaged pedagogy/learning and learning outcomes will be assessed through revisions to the evaluations used currently for the FYP and FYS courses. The current evaluations are very comprehensive and learning goal oriented instruments making them a natural venue for exploring the relationship between engagement and learning. The evaluations must be anonymous, and therefore cannot be linked to any of the above data, but they can provide some insight into the other impacts of engaged pedagogy on the learning experience of students within the FYP. \* \* \*

**Campus Project Team:** The St. Lawrence University leadership team that will oversee and implement the proposed "intensive site" project includes the University's President; Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs; Vice President and Dean of Student Life; the Associate Dean of the First Year; Director of Institutional Research and Co-Leader of the SLU Wellness Initiative Research Program; the Director of the CTL; the Assistant Dean of Student Life and Director of Residence Life; the Director of Community Based Learning Programs; and Director of the Diana B. Torrey Health and Counseling Center. The key members of the project team are **Catherine A. Crosby-Currie, J.D., Ph.D.**, Associate Dean of the First Year and Associate Professor of Psychology, **Christine Zimmerman, M.A.**, Director of Institutional Research, **Kim M. Mooney, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, **Matha Thornton, Ph.D.**, Assistant Dean of Student Life and Director of Residence Life, and **Ronald J. Flores, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Community Based Learning programs.

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