

Final Report to the Teagle Foundation on St. Lawrence University's Project:

Developing a Process Model for Systematically Assessing and Improving Liberal Education: The St. Lawrence University Diversity Requirement as Case Study

February 2013

Project Overview—From Original Proposal to Key Findings and Outcomes

The main focus of our original proposal was to use St. Lawrence University's two-course diversity requirement as a case study in assessing liberal education outcomes. At the time the grant was awarded by the Teagle Foundation in 2008, St. Lawrence was beginning to move toward a new general education curriculum. We had just finished a Middle States Re-accreditation review and realized that we needed to do more with assessment, particularly in the area of general education. St. Lawrence had also begun a cycle of departmental assessment that involved creating learning goals for majors and minors, but lacked a model of direct outcomes assessment for more general liberal learning. We were fairly certain that the diversity requirement would survive the curriculum review process, though it might be modified. In addition, we saw diversity learning in its ideal form as a model of the directions we hoped the new general education curriculum would take in several key respects: spanning the entire four years of an undergraduate education; being taught across the curriculum; incorporating academic and experiential learning; being offered through on-campus and off-campus programs, and cutting through the silos that exist between our academic departments and our student life services. In addition, survey data from graduating seniors made it clear to us that many of these ideal aspects of diversity learning were not taking place. We also believed that the learning goals and criteria for diversity courses were too vague and general, being the product of a highly political compromise in the late 1990s.

The most important "lesson learned" early in the grant project emerged from the project directors' meeting at Duke University in 2008—the admonishment by former Teagle President W. Robert Connor about "Closing the Loop." St. Lawrence had been doing direct learning assessment, but by the time the assessment work itself was done, it was filed away. Few faculty members thought about what should be changed in the curriculum or their pedagogies to improve student learning. While this now seems obvious, it was not so at the beginning. Initially, assessment seemed to be an end in itself.

Our primary approach involved focusing on course-level direct assessment during the first two years of the project, then moving onto assessing study abroad, which also serves the diversity requirement. The final phase centered on examining diversity learning outside the classroom.

Over the four years of the Teagle grant at St. Lawrence, we have investigated and used multiple methods of assessment, indirect and direct, qualitative and quantitative. We hosted several speakers on campus and sent faculty and staff members of our project team to training seminars, notably the Intergroup Dialogue Program at the University of Michigan. Our first task was to engage faculty who taught diversity courses in two learning communities. In these learning communities, faculty participants reviewed their courses, formulated a shared vision of learning goals that could be assessed, shared their challenges and pedagogies, and finally created pre- and post-tests to assess their students' learning in relation to diversity goals. The second learning community also explored

the relationship between critical thinking and diversity learning and incorporated those elements into their pre- and post-tests.

Our next major undertaking was the investigation of existing national instruments for assessing both direct and indirect learning related to critical thinking and diversity. After reviewing a number of assessment instruments, we selected Larry Braskamp's Global Perspectives Inventory and used it in several cycles to assess students' learning in off-campus study as well as to assess the global perspective of one senior class. In the final two years of the project, we focused on students' engagement with diversity both inside and outside the classroom. This process included analyzing the results of national survey data and conducting focus groups with eight different groups of students.

After four years of using our institutional diversity requirement as a "case study" to assess and improve liberal education at St. Lawrence, our key findings include: study abroad and community-based learning have a major impact on students; diversity courses have mixed results and are difficult to assess; and students in focus groups reinforce institutional survey data, namely that the main interaction among students of different racial and ethnic groups happens because of class assignments and does not carry over into social spaces and activities. These findings have played a crucial role in guiding our efforts to achieve meaningful change in how we teach "diversity" to our students, how we conduct assessments, how we facilitate dialogue across difference, and even how we organize residential arrangements for our incoming students. We are deeply grateful to The Teagle Foundation for making this important work possible.

Project Activities in Year Four (June 2011-May 2012) and Grant Extension Period (June 2012-January 2013)

Follow-up Focus Groups on the First-Year College Clusters

One of the primary activities during the final year of the project involved conducting follow-up investigation into social relations in the First-Year Program (FYP) colleges for students of color through two additional focus groups. In the first round of focus groups, we discovered that there were quite a few serious complaints from students of color who felt isolated and marginalized in their FYPs. Since the FYP is a living-learning community that includes academic advising and comprises 1.5 units out of 4.5 in the students' first semester, it represents a major part of their introduction to St. Lawrence and their adjustment to the social and academic sides of college. Students submit their top choices for FYP topics, a process that results in colleges occasionally having only one student of color. After the focus groups in 2010, the Teagle Steering Committee asked the Associate Dean of the FYP to try clustering students of color where this was possible without denying them one of their top choices of topics. The survey data from the College Success Questionnaire and the two follow-up focus groups suggest that the clustering is working, so we have decided to continue with this approach. This unanticipated policy change shows how assessment can be used to modify our policies and procedures in response to data. The Teagle Committee worked together with the Associate Dean of the FYP and the University Assessment Committee to interpret these findings and to make these decisions.

Follow-up Workshop to Assess Pre- and Post-tests from Diversity Courses, Spring 2012

During the spring semester of 2012, we organized a workshop for members of the Teagle Steering Committee and faculty volunteers to perform direct assessment on pre- and post-tests for diversity courses. Using the rubric that we developed earlier in the project, we found that students showed

improvements in the period between the pre-test and the post-test. Since this methodology for course-level assessment is quite labor-intensive and cumbersome to practice regularly, the campus assessment committee and Academic Dean's office are experimenting with simpler models of course-level assessment.

Training for Intergroup Dialogues, Summer 2011 and 2012

Four faculty and staff representatives from our campus Teagle Steering Committee attended the Intergroup Dialogue Program at the University in Michigan during the summer of 2011; a staff representative participated in 2012. The program seeks to teach participants how to develop strategies that establish and implement intergroup relations programs on their home campuses. St. Lawrence introduced our first Intergroup Dialogue Course in the spring semester of 2012 (see summary, below).

First Intergroup Dialogue Course, Spring 2012

The Spring 2012 Intergroup Dialogue Course was co-facilitated by Associate Dean of Students, Matha Thornton and Associate Professor of History Mary Jane Smith, making it possible to cross the boundaries between student life and academic affairs. The course involved readings on identity and difference (race, religion, gender, class) and devoted half of each three-hour session to exercises designed to help students understand their own identities in depth and to communicate across differences. The unique element of this new course, in comparison to previous diversity classes on campus, is its emphasis on experiential learning through dialogue. Based on the evaluations of the ten student participants, the course was highly successful.

Workshop on Implementation of New Diversity Learning Goals, January 2013

As described in our extension request to the Foundation in May 2012, the Teagle Steering Committee and the Academic Dean's Office believed it was critical to include a workshop session on the new diversity learning goals in our Winter Institute, one of two major faculty development series held annually. Facilitated by Teagle Project Director Eve Stoddard and Professor Mary Jane Smith, this workshop session was designed to help faculty who teach diversity courses to reflect upon the modifications they would need to meet the new diversity learning goals. Drs. Stoddard and Smith presented an overview of the changes from the existing diversity criteria for courses to the new requirements and discussed the implications for changing pedagogies. Workshop topics included the kinds of assignments that could be used to meet the new guidelines, especially the requirement related to student critical self-reflection. The 20 faculty members in attendance included Academic Affairs Committee members, who discussed key points such as what should be included in syllabi and how to make explicit adherence to the new learning goals—in particular, the need to clearly state the learning goals on course syllabi and to demonstrate which parts of the course meet the guidelines.

Dissemination of Results

At St. Lawrence, the results of the Teagle Project have been disseminated in open faculty and staff meetings held in the first and last years of the grant, as well as through smaller committee meetings such as those of the Academic Affairs Committee, the Center for International and Intercultural Studies, and the campus Assessment Committee. On a national level, our diversity learning goals and rubric have been shared through Dr. Stoddard's service on the Shared Futures Project advisory board and through meetings of the Association of American Colleges and Universities related to diversity and global learning. We have also disseminated findings through Director of Institutional Research

Christine Zimmerman's conference presentations on assessing the impact of study abroad. For example, Ms. Zimmerman's presentation at the June 2012 Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium Conference in Minneapolis sparked the interest of several other institutions in using the GPI instrument.

Major Outcomes of the Teagle Grant Project

The Teagle Grant for Developing a Process Model for Systematically Assessing and Improving Liberal Education led St. Lawrence to not only make critical modifications to diversity courses—our main focus—but also to the residential aspect of the First-Year Program. The project gave us much more data to reinforce an important finding from senior surveys: that students were not interacting across differences except when forced to do so by group class assignments for classes. In addition, the Teagle Grant illuminated the ways in which study abroad affects our students both intellectually and personally and how wide the range between different abroad experiences can be, not always in ways one would have predicted. Finally, the project taught us a great deal about assessment itself. Much of this we learned the “hard way,” through trial and error. Our connection with Wabash Study proved to be helpful, because we learned the benefits of incorporating time-effective and pragmatic methods, particularly with focus groups. The major results of those investigations included implementing new curricular guidelines for diversity courses, introducing changes in how students were grouped within our residentially-based First-Year Program, and creating a modified version of the University of Michigan's Intergroup Relations Program.

New General Education Requirement in Diversity

One of the most challenging aspects of the Teagle Grant project was the assignment given to the two faculty learning communities (faculty who teach diversity courses) and the Steering Committee to devise a set of learning goals that could do justice to our vision of what diversity learning should be. We are pleased to report that the St. Lawrence faculty body has approved new learning goals that reflect this vision. This will necessitate the revision of many courses that currently count for the diversity requirement. The new guidelines will go into effect in fall 2013 for the incoming first-year class. The guidelines are:

- a. a capacity for critical self-reflection on social location designed to locate their multiple identities as active members of the United States and/or global community and to recognize that differential perspectives on knowledge and power derive from particular social locations; and
- b. a recognition of diversity within and among groups and an awareness that these differences affect individuals' life chances, behavior, and ways of knowing; and
- c. an understanding of the dynamics of power and justice within and/or among groups or societies and an ability to reflect on their responsibilities toward others as citizens at the local, national, and global scales.

These learning goals will be linked to course-based outcomes assessment as part of a cycle of assessment to be conducted by the University Assessment Committee. The rubric developed by the Teagle participants will continue to be used for assessment in the future.

Implementation of the Intergroup Dialogue Course

The eight focus groups conducted over a two-year period further reinforced what we learned from survey data about a lack of cross-racial social interaction on campus. For the class of 2014, according to the *Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)* survey, 94% of white students grew up in neighborhoods that were mostly or entirely white, and 50% of students of color grew up in non-white neighborhoods. According to 2011 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data, 40% of St. Lawrence First-Year students and 48% of our seniors reported never or sometimes having serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity over the course of a year. Our Teagle focus groups in 2011 included 50 students from all four class years. They confirmed survey data showing that the most meaningful exchanges across racial and ethnic identities happen because of class assignments. Even football team members, who represent a large group of racially diverse students, reported that while they get along well, there are sub-groups of close friends that tend to be relatively homogeneous.

As noted above, we offered the first Intergroup Dialogue course in spring 2012. We were not able to offer it during the current academic year due to the departure of the Associate Dean of Students. However, we will offer two sections of the course in fall 2013.

Provisional Change in Assigning Students to First-Year Colleges

During the period of the grant, St. Lawrence has averaged between 10% and 11% U.S. students of color as well as a small percentage of international students of color. Our residentially-based First-Year Program plays an important role for new students, both in terms of their social adjustment to college and as the structure for a major academic course. Incoming students submit their selection of first choices for their course. For at least a decade prior to 2011-12, students of color were assigned to FYP courses like everyone else, with the result that often there was only one student of color in a residential college of 30 to 35 students. While the majority of students find the residential aspect of their first year to be very satisfying, the focus groups we conducted in 2010-11 brought out a number of stories about the alienation and unhappiness experienced by students of color among the much more content majority students. The Teagle Steering Committee met with the Associate Dean of the First Year and asked that she try “clustering” students of color while still giving them one of their top choices for their course. After she agreed to take this new approach, we conducted follow-up focus groups in 2011-12 with first-year students and followed up with specific survey questions to first-year students in the spring. Based upon the promising results we received, this practice will continue in the foreseeable future.

Study Abroad

The Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) results provided us with important insights about the impact of off-campus study on our students and the differential impact of various programs. Responding to the data will be a long-term project for the campus Center for International and Intercultural Studies. Fifty-one percent (58% female and 40% male) of St. Lawrence students of the graduating class of 2011 spent at least one semester in an off-campus program. This represents a significant investment for the University and a major portion of a student’s education. Thus it is important to assess the outcomes of the experience. The GPI is a complex instrument that assesses global perspective as a multidimensional, developmental process, including cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions (<https://gpi.central.edu>). We administered a pre/post test in spring 2010, fall 2010, and spring 2011 for all students who studied abroad in those semesters. The GPI was also administered to all seniors in spring 2011. There were a total of 306 valid pre-tests, 363 post-tests, and 485 total senior replies. Out of six dimensions, students showed gains in all but “responsibility,” and the gains in their sense of identity were minimal. Most importantly, the gains students made while abroad were

retained through the end of their senior year except for interaction with those of different cultural backgrounds. This reinforces the findings from our focus groups and emphasizes the need to promote greater social interaction across differences on our campus. While intergroup dialogue is one method that we will use, as a campus community we need to do more. An important step in this direction is the Commission on Diversity recently convened by St. Lawrence President William Fox (see description, below).

The GPI also revealed significant differences in outcomes for students enrolled in different programs. Students in the majority of programs made major cognitive gains, but there were significant differences among programs on other dimensions. In particular we found that programs conducted in a language other than English had significant impacts in the area of student development of a global perspective, results also seen in our off-campus program in Kenya.

President's Commission on Diversity

In January 2013, St. Lawrence President William L. Fox announced the appointment of a Presidential Commission on Diversity. Led by University Trustee Marion Roach Smith '77, this group of faculty, staff, trustees, students, alumni, and community members is charged with examining every aspect of the University's principles, policies, and actions. In the coming months, the Commission will invite wide and inclusive participation within the campus community, paying particular attention to the academic program as a core theme of the project. In addition, the many dimensions of student life and alumni engagement will be fully considered. The Commission held its first major event, an organizing workshop featuring a keynote address by noted multiculturalism and diversity expert Dr. Carlos Cortes, in early February. The Commission's work is supported by a recent grant award from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Although the Commission on Diversity is not a direct outcome of the Teagle Grant, it will build upon the important findings of our campus-wide assessment project and advance our efforts to build a more diverse and pluralistic campus community.

Conclusion

Over the past four years, the Teagle Grant Project has been a sustained experiment in using multiple methodologies to assess the liberal learning associated with one general education goal. After investing significant time and work in creating new learning goals that could be agreed upon by the entire faculty body and evaluating many national-level assessment instruments, we have learned the importance of being more nimble in our approach to assessment and in the implementation of changes based on results. Through our participation in the Wabash Study, we also learned that it is more effective to garner some results and experiment with them, rather than to seek the most "perfect" methodology and then take years to achieve implementation. Another notable "lesson learned" was involving faculty from many different departments in the process of designing new learning goals, which created a sense of ownership and purpose.

With the timely and generous assistance of the Teagle Foundation, we have been able to design and implement new learning goals that reflect our deeper understanding of diversity, to enhance the residential component of our First-Year Program for students of color, and to offer intergroup dialogue courses on our campus. We are very grateful to The Teagle Foundation for supporting this meaningful project at St. Lawrence.

Final Project Budget Report

Grant Period June 2012 – February 2013

Budget Component	Budget	Actual	Difference
Stipends	\$ 19,500	\$ 18,301	\$ 1,199
Travel	\$ 5,000	\$ 7,306	\$ (2,306)
Meetings/Supplies	\$ 726	\$ 974	\$ (248)
Assessment	\$ 1,600	\$ 1,098	\$ 502
Faculty Development	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,147	\$ 853
Total	\$ 28,826	\$ 28,826	\$ -

Difference between Budgeted and Actual Amounts

The most significant difference between the projected grant budget submitted to The Teagle Foundation in May 2012 and actual expenditures incurred during the final grant period relate to travel costs for project team training. Actual travel expenditures for Teagle Steering Committee members to attend the Interdialogue Training Program at the University of Michigan were higher than originally anticipated. These costs were offset by lower than anticipated expenses in the Assessment and Faculty Development (Winter Institute) budget lines.