



December 2008

## What's Inside:

The Bringing Theory to Practice Project:

An Introduction

## BTtoP Campus Highlights

California State University–Chico

Leadership Coalition Gathers 43 College and University Presidents at Symposium in Washington

**The Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP)** is an independent national effort. It is funded by the Charles Engelhard Foundation of New York, and functions in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Washington, DC.

The Charles Engelhard Foundation is a New York-based foundation whose mission focuses on projects in higher and secondary education, cultural, medical, religious, wildlife and conservation organizations.

S. Engelhard Center is a nonprofit public charitable foundation; its mission is to support projects and initiatives that affect greater and sustained commitments by educational institutions at all levels to provide effective means of addressing the intellectual, emotional, and civic development of today's students in preparation for claiming their positive future.



Association of American Colleges and Universities

## BTtoP Highlights the Student Voice in Higher Education at Third Student Conference

IN EARLY OCTOBER, THE BRINGING THEORY TO PRACTICE PROJECT (BTtoP) BROUGHT STUDENTS TOGETHER IN WASHINGTON, DC FOR ITS THIRD ANNUAL NATIONAL STUDENT CONFERENCE ON "STUDENT VOICE AND HIGHER EDUCATION: COMMUNICATING AND ENGAGING ON CAMPUS AS A 'MILLENNIAL' STUDENT TO ENRICH EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES."

The conference attracted fifty students from a wide range of campuses across the nation, largely in teams of three or more, to highlight students' own voices and ideas both within the Project and across the many grantee institutions the Project supports. The idea for the conference theme emerged from a controversial "Millennials" session at the 2008 BTtoP National Annual Working Conference. In this session, it was clear from conversation about the Millennial generation that faculty, administrators, staff, and students needed more opportunities to discuss openly generational issues within higher education. The Project's first step in organizing the October conference was to gather reactions from the students themselves.

To provide context for the first major session of the conference, "Millennial Happenings," students were presented with widely held opinions and bodies of research about the Millennial

generation. (Only one-third of the audience had ever heard of this term as a description of their own generation.) They were then asked to respond and share *their* own impressions of the "unique climate" in which higher education currently finds itself, whether politically, socially, technologically, or otherwise.

In comments following these presentations, students noted the role that such research plays in the formation of larger public dialogue and opinion. But they were divided about the accuracy of the portrayals. Their responses ranged from frustrations with their own sense of student apathy to observations that



Students discuss campus engagement

(continued from page 1)

public commentators were putting the Millennial generation into a “box” to make it easier to understand them. After the session, the students broke into smaller groups to discuss further this ‘unique climate’ in terms of the three cornerstones of the BTtoP mission: engaged learning within and outside of the classroom, civic development, and the mental health and well-being of students.

The conference continued with a panel discussion centered on barriers to campus communication among constituencies such as faculty, administrators, student affairs personnel, and students. The panel participants (including an assistant professor, a vice president of student affairs, and two students) discussed issues such as: high school students’ expectations of the higher education experience; stigmas about mental health issues; coping strategies to deal

with stress and depression; and the often unknown boundaries that define student–faculty interactions regarding academics, mentoring, and personal issues. The session ended with a discussion of ways to improve communication and ensure that students are aware of resources available to them.

The students were receptive to each of the perspectives presented, and followed up in break-out sessions to discuss their own perspectives on the panel discussion. Post-conference surveys confirmed that the students were unanimously in favor of a conference joining them with faculty, staff, administrators, and student affairs personnel. These students are craving an open conversation that allows for real discussion and the development of solutions drawing on their experiences.

Students used the second day of the conference to utilize what they had learned to craft a campus-specific plan

of action pertaining to one issue that significantly mattered to them. They were guided to think intentionally about the different resources available to them on campus, and their own agency in affecting a truly collaborative campus culture.

Finally, students were informed of their opportunity to participate in the BTtoP Project by applying for Student Programming Grants and applying to join the initial Student Leadership Coalition. This exciting new initiative will bring together approximately fifteen students who will serve as a student advisory board for BTtoP designed to address campus culture issues from a student perspective. ■

*For more details about the Student Conference, please see the Web site [www.aacu.org/bringing\\_theory/StudentConference2008](http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/StudentConference2008).*

## The Bringing Theory to Practice Project: An Introduction

The Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP) encourages colleges and universities to reassert their core purposes as educational institutions. Sponsored by the Charles Engelhard Foundation of New York City and developed in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), BTtoP explores and advocates the academic community’s support of engaged learning and its relationship to student health and civic development. The Project is guided by an interdisciplinary advisory board of scholars, researchers, practitioners, and institutional leaders.



Syracuse University



St. Lawrence University

(continued from page 2)

Bringing Theory to Practice was created to address the chronic disengagement of students from their academic experiences. National studies reveal that many students see minimal value in liberal education. Other studies also show that more than 40 percent of undergraduate college students self-report experiences of depression sufficient to interrupt their academic work, and more than 10 percent have been clinically diagnosed with forms of the illness.<sup>1</sup>

The Project aims to address these persistent challenges by fostering productive interrelationships among learning, individual realization, and the forming and sustaining of a civic

society. BTtoP provides resources and grants to colleges and universities to support their exploration and realization of goals held in common by the institution and the Project. The Project also sponsors conferences and workshops to support and promote its mission and to bridge gaps across all constituencies taking part in this important work.

Now in its fifth year, BTtoP involves more than 300 institutions and directly funds more than seventy college and university campuses. Participating institutions provide the backbone of BTtoP; they promote the Project's mission and goals throughout their campuses, extend their efforts into their communities, and contribute

to the general improvement of higher education.

Implemented in 2005, BTtoP's Demonstration Site program was the first major effort made to develop and evaluate new learning strategies. The sites ultimately served as "demonstrations" of the learning environments and type of student engagement that BTtoP strives to advance on college and university campuses.

In response to evidentiary findings from these sites, BTtoP extended the reach of the Project with another level of funding for Intensive Sites of work. Now part of the Demonstration Site program, the Intensive Sites have

worked specifically on the problem of selection bias by reaching 100 percent of a target population, such as an entire residence hall or an entire first-year class. The BTtoP Project's summary of data from the first round (implementation period: 2005–2007) of Demonstration Sites is currently available; data and analysis from the second round (2007–2009/2010) of Demonstration Sites as well as Intensive Sites will be available in 2009–2010. This information can be found online at [www.aacu.org/bringing\\_theory/campus\\_participation](http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/campus_participation).

Program Start-up grants, Mini-grants, and Student Programming grants, all of which are awarded on a rolling basis, are other major components of the BTtoP Project. Program Start-up grants are awarded to institutions that plan to implement or extend program or research initiatives on their campus. Mini-grants and Student Programming grants are generally awarded to institutions that aim to initiate or extend conversations on campus that lead to the planning, implementation and assessment of program or research projects. Highlights from these campus efforts will be shared in this and future issues of this newsletter.

In keeping with the tremendous growth of the project since its inception, BTtoP continually strives to increase the number of campuses that effectively address issues of academic and civic disengagement, whether through campus grants or involvement in conferences and workshops. BTtoP continues to bolster the fundamental academic strengths of institutions and increase the involvement of all campus constituencies to bring about real institutional change. ■

1. See [www.aacu.org/bringing\\_theory/research](http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/research).

## BTtoP Campus Highlight

# California State University–Chico “The Town Hall: Research, Reading, Writing and Engaged Citizenship”

*Jennifer O’Brien, Project Coordinator, Bringing Theory to Practice Project*

It is Friday evening at 5:00 in late November, and more than 500 college freshmen are gathered in a single auditorium at California State University, Chico (Chico). What’s wrong with this picture? It’s been five hours since the weekend began for most of these students. Shouldn’t they be out celebrating? But these students weren’t ready for the weekend yet. They were preparing to participate in the final academic event of their semester, Chico’s Town Hall Meeting.

This meeting, known simply as the Town Hall, is the culminating experience for first-year students enrolled in English 130, a course entitled Writing for the Public Sphere. English 130 is part of the Academic Writing Program (AWP) at Chico that serves 2,500 students each year, and partnering with the First-Year Experience Program, the Town Hall has grown to approximately 600 participants, including students, faculty, administrators, community members, and partners, and experts in the fields of research on which the students choose to focus. The Town Hall is open to all members of the Chico community and to the public.

Jill Swiencicki, the AWP Coordinator, explains the motivation behind the Town Hall. “The idea [for the Town Hall] came from teaching students and seeing over and over again that we asked them to do research and they had this preconceived, prepackaged notion of what a research essay was...it seemed so disconnected from their lives and it seemed so disconnected from the world they live in. So the idea came from trying to give them a real

audience and a real purpose for the work that they do.”

Students fill multiple roles as participants of the Town Hall, using their research and writing experiences in different ways. Some present to other students in small break-out sessions across campus before coming back to lead roundtable discussions in the Town Hall auditorium. Others speak to the Chico community in an outdoor exhibit—coined “the free speech area”—open

a serious focus on Chico’s campus and in its curriculum. He attends each of the Town Halls to engage with the students in the discussion of their research. With the attention of the president, and the participation of policy makers, experts, and other community members, students can contextualize their research and explore its implications for future action on the issues they are so impassioned about. At this meeting, students help create an experience that validates their academic



California State University–Chico

to Chico’s campus the day of the Town Hall. Others act as indirect participants, serving as informed and productive members of the conversations that unfold at the Town Hall reception with community members and experts.

The Town Hall participants and organizers are thankful for the vision and encouragement of Chico President Dr. Paul Zingg, who has made civic engagement

efforts in a way that is connected to real-world challenges, and exposes them to the impact of their own civic engagement.

The Town Hall is one of the activities supported by Chico’s Demonstration Site grant award from the BTtoP Project for 2007–2009. For more information and to view the video created about the Town Hall Meeting, see [www.csuchico.edu/eng/awp/townhall/about](http://www.csuchico.edu/eng/awp/townhall/about). ■

## Leadership Coalition Gathers 43 College and University Presidents at Symposium in Washington

---

With generous support from the S. Engelhard Center, the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation, Bringing Theory to Practice assembled 43 college and university presidents at the Georgetown University Marriott Conference Center in Washington, DC from November 10-11 for a Symposium on Campus Change for Learning.

The Symposium laid a foundation for shared leadership in advancing a far-reaching shift in undergraduate education, one that includes an enhanced commitment to the full range of liberal education outcomes and their assessment. Bringing Theory to Practice sees presidential leadership as a necessary condition to accomplishing this task.

### Panelists emphasized horizontal learning structures as well as improving relationships between institutions and their communities as essential to addressing the needs of the “whole student”.

The event marked the first step in developing a Leadership Coalition of colleges and universities, a community of thought and action working to strengthen campus cultures for learning. The 43 participants in the Coalition have committed to making liberal education a holistic and transformative learning experience.

The Symposium featured presentations on the latest research on learning and institutional change, and new educational models that have been ad-

opted by institutions of various types. Presenters and discussion facilitators included scholars, researchers, institutional leaders, foundation leaders, and professional leaders.

Much of the conference stemmed from the premise that improving outcomes for students requires an institutional reconstruction of priorities. Presidents discussed conceptual frameworks for defining and advancing liberal education outcomes and their translation to fit individual campus contexts. A discussion of the research regarding initial qualitative and quantitative means for assessment followed.

Symposium participants stressed civic engagement as one of several core purposes of liberal education. Much discussion focused on how to

prepare students within a multicultural student body to become actively engaged in a civic society. Panelists emphasized horizontal learning structures as well as improving relationships between institutions and their communities as essential to addressing the needs of the “whole student.”

Other presentations explored particular features or challenges to facilitating transformational change and ways to overcome them. These addressed developing new rewards sys-

tems for faculty, promoting the mental health and well-being of students, and lessons learned from campus initiatives sponsored already through the BTtoP project, including those at Georgetown University.

Presidents also discussed the financial challenges to creating campus cultures for change, as well as new budgetary obstacles that institutions will encounter amidst the current economic crises.

Symposium participants heard a presentation by Dr. Benjamin Barber, author and political theorist; distinguished senior fellow, who discussed the barriers to advancing liberal education in a globalizing world. Barber spoke of the widespread culture of specialization, privatization and “mediatization” as new challenges for modern liberal education.

The President’s Symposium was the initial step in forming a Leadership Coalition that will be sustained over the next several years. BTtoP will support the institutions involved through planning grant support and implementation assistance. Subsequently, participating institutions will serve as national models for transformative education that attends to the academic, personal, and civic dimensions of learning. ■

## Letter from the Director

Donald W. Harward, Project Director, *Bringing Theory to Practice* and President Emeritus, Bates College

Welcome to this first issue of the *Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP) Newsletter*. The primary purpose of this newsletter is to communicate with a wide audience of institutions and interested individuals about the current activities, programs, research initiatives, and new opportunities supported by the Project. Announcements of funding opportunities and requests for proposals, news of relevant scholarly work, contact information for those persons and agencies that are doing or supporting new and positive

continues to support attention to them specifically, the more basic issues and needs of which they are symptomatic have become the focus. Success in translating an early hunch into a confirmed hypothesis emerged from research, scores of campus-based initiatives, and controlled and evaluated demonstration site projects. The preponderance of evidence continues to grow and supports the reasonableness and urgency for making campus changes and re-ordering campus priorities to make a culture for student learning and develop-

are provided to campuses with the common objective of initiating and sustaining transformative change. To date, more than one hundred grants to over seventy colleges and universities have been awarded by the Project; hundreds of campus faculty, administrators, and students have attended subsidized BTtoP conferences, workshops and seminars; and support makes possible research publications and evaluative studies which are available at no cost on the BTtoP Web site. Copies of the BTtoP brochure, descriptive literature and guidelines for proposals are available on the Web or directly from Jennifer O'Brien, Project Coordinator (202-884-0815 or [Obrien@aacu.org](mailto:Obrien@aacu.org)).

### The Project is committed to transformation—institutional transformation where possible and sustainable—helping institutions create contexts for student transformation through liberal education.

work in areas of material interest, profiles of specific campus efforts, and timely announcements and previews of conferences, workshops, and seminar opportunities will all be features of the BTtoP newsletter.

An equally important purpose of the BTtoP Newsletter will be to encourage communication between and among multiple audiences. This will mean that “reports, advice, or questions” from readers of the newsletter will be included in future issues and will serve to stimulate greater interaction not only within the Project but also among institutions and interested individuals.

Five years ago the letterhead for the Project stated: “BTtoP is a Project addressing depression and substance abuse among youth (ages 15 to 25) through engaged learning and service.” It is through these “windows” into a set of issues that the Project has evolved. While the Project

ment more achievable and sustainable. To this extent the Project is committed to transformation—institutional transformation where possible and sustainable—helping institutions create contexts for student transformation through liberal education by helping campuses plan, implement, and assess their cultures for learning, with emphases on opportunities for advancing academic, emotional (well-being), and civic outcomes.

The Project is aided by a twenty-five-member advisory board comprised of educators, policy makers, philanthropists, counselors, researchers, faculty and students. Each of them has joined co-founder Sally E. Pingree and myself in helping to guide the Project.

More than \$6 million from foundations and individual donors makes possible the work of the Project; this support, in turn, has inspired an additional approximately \$5.5 million in matched support. Grants

As I direct the Project, I am inspired by two observations about education made by Dr. Benjamin E. Mays (Bates '21) who served as president of Morehouse College and was a mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Paraphrasing, the first reminds us that colleges don't “emancipate” students; they must do that for themselves. What the college must do is provide a context that encourages students to choose to be free—free from ignorance, prejudice, superficiality, and the narrowness of a single perspective and the boundaries of limited expectations. The second reminds us that aspiration is the most underrated of virtues—that “it's not failure but low aim that's a sin”.

To the extent that ideas guide actions, these observations guide the Project. We work in practical and supportive ways to help colleges and universities provide contexts for student liberation; and we champion models that lift the aspiration of students as they realize the full promise of a liberal education. ■

## In The Next Issue

---

### **Campus Highlight:**

Georgetown University:  
Model of Curricular Infusion

---

### **Letter from the Director:**

Donald W. Harward

---

### **Leadership Coalition Conference Report**

---

### **New Research Data Commissioned by BTtoP**

Cost-Study Report and Analysis  
“College and University Expenditures in Addressing Patterns of Student Disengagement”

*Co-authors Dr. Ashley Finley and  
Dr. Lynn Swaner*

---

### **College Outcomes Project Report**

*Dr. Richard Hersh*

### **Bringing Theory to Practice c/o Association of American Colleges and Universities**

1818 R Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
Fax: 202.265.9532  
[www.aacu.org/bringing\\_theory](http://www.aacu.org/bringing_theory)

#### **Donald W. Harward**

Project Director and AAC&U Senior Fellow;  
President Emeritus, Bates College  
E-mail: [harward@aacu.org](mailto:harward@aacu.org)

#### **Jennifer O'Brien**

Project Coordinator and Assistant to the Director  
Phone: 202.387.3760 ext.815  
E-mail: [obrien@aacu.org](mailto:obrien@aacu.org)

#### **Lindsay Vacek**

Project Assistant  
Phone: 202.387.3760 ext.805  
E-mail: [vacek@aacu.org](mailto:vacek@aacu.org)

## Coming Events

**Leadership Coalition Conference**  
April 19-20, 2009 | Washington, DC

---

**Faculty Workshop**  
Late Spring 2009 | Washington, DC