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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.



AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,000 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

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.

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Bringing Theory to Practice

EXAMINING AND STRENGTHENING HOW ENGAGED FORMS OF LEARNING ARE LINKED TO STUDENT HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR AND TO THEIR CIVIC DEVELOPMENT



The Project

The **Bringing Theory to Practice Project** advocates and documents how uses of engaged forms of learning, including service-learning and community-based research directly contribute to students' greater understanding, their mental health, and their civic development.

The Project thereby encourages colleges and universities to reassert their core purposes as educational institutions not only to advance learning and discovery, but to advance the potential and well-being of each individual student, and to advance education as a public good that sustains a civic society.

The Challenges

- We have, at most institutions, adopted a form of “balkanization” of student lives, retreating from recognizing what students experience as whole individuals. Attention to the overall mental and physical health of students has been delegated to counseling professionals. Faculty and administrators are often unaware of their students' health and mental well-being and claim that the well-being of students “is not their concern or even their business.”
- Lower academic expectations color the implicit contract many faculty have forged with their students, namely...“if we don't bother you, then you won't bother us.”
- 40 to 60 percent of all students are ‘chronically disengaged’ from their academic experiences. This disengagement, the preponderance of passive educational experiences, and the “distance” between the academic and the social/developmental aspects of the student's life continues to widen on many campuses.
- A more robust sense of civic engagement is needed—one that is directly linked to learning that encourages independent judgment, teaches civic knowledge and awareness, and increases students' understanding of privilege, inequity, and injustice. Civic engagement initiatives are most effective when they help students to discover their shared obligation to act for the public good.



Toward Integrated Solutions

- Significant engagement in learning is correlated with lower risk of substance abuse and depression.
- Students who experience engaged learning in which they are valued and active contributors report satisfaction with their education, their personal choices, and their futures.
- Engaging students in active learning contexts, including service-learning courses may:
 - contribute to student resiliency and offer more positive alternatives to high-risk behaviors;
 - forge significant connections between students and their communities and reduce isolation, often a contributing factor to depression and substance use.

An Integrated Response

The BTtoP Project:

- Supports the linking of the lives and learning of students
- Calls on greater faculty involvement in adopting pedagogies that bridge the gap between academic experiences and the world beyond the classroom
- Is research-based, and sponsors exemplary investigations of the connections between engaged learning, student mental health and well-being, and civic development
- Supports innovative campus initiatives, as well as the research and evaluation needed to give them an evidentiary basis and credibility within the academy
- Encourages the reassertion of the core purposes of our colleges and universities to attend to learning, to the realization of the full promise to each student, and to the connection of education to the public good



BTtoP Mission

The **Bringing Theory to Practice Project** explores and promotes how engaged forms of learning, requiring active student involvement and reflection, contribute to the resiliency and health of students, and their civic development.

The BTtoP Goals

Goal 1: To explore the connection of forms of engaged learning to the health of students with the objective of increasing the full and healthy development of each learner, and the fostering of productive interrelationships among learning, individual realization, and the forming and sustaining of a civic society.

Goal 2: To increase the number of campuses that effectively address these issues; to provide resources to help them to do so; and to assist campuses as they consider additional ways to prevent or intervene in responding to incidences of student mental-health related problems and abusive behaviors.

Goal 3: To encourage greater utilization of the fundamental academic strengths of institutions to address the intellectual, emotional, and civic development of students. To encourage cross-campus discussions and the valuing of the interdependency of student affairs and academic affairs.

Goal 4: To increase the involvement of faculty in changing the practices and culture of the academy to focus on teaching and learning methods that contribute to students' success as well as to their health and civic development.

Goal 5: To increase the involvement of students in bringing about these changes—on campuses and in the communities that they will form and affect.

Goal 6: To increase institutional attention and commitment to the linkages the Project addresses and to create systems of support, reward, and maintenance that value them.

For information regarding any aspect of the **Bringing Theory to Practice Project**, or to get your institution involved, please contact the Bringing Theory to Practice Project at AAC&U (202.884.0815) or visit the Project Web site at www.bringingtheorytopractice.org

