June 10, 2011

Richard Morrill
President
The Teagle Foundation
10 Rockefeller Plaza
Room 920
New York, NY 10020-1903

Dear Dr. Morrill,

On behalf of Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges, it is my pleasure to provide this second interim report on our collaborative grant to develop best practices for effective and sustainable department-level assessment of student learning to the Teagle Foundation.

While the activities of the first year of the three-year grant were mainly planning, the second, just completed project year was marked by a focus on implementation. Faculty developed and used their surveys, rubrics, and other assessment tools to collect evidence about students learning. In addition, both faculty and administrators wrestled with questions related to the other focus of the grant: the organizational sustainability of this kind of assessment.

Year two saw significant progress on both fronts. We have had particular success in what we have come to see as the foundational goal of the grant – enabling faculty to experience assessment as an *intrinsically valuable* activity. On the other, planning for sustainability front, our primary insight this year has to do with our evolving understanding of the best role for faculty in this discussion. We are coming to view the faculty role with respect to this goal in more of an advisory capacity as opposed to a priority setting or organizational planning capacity.

The narrative report contains more detail on these activities and evolving understanding of how best to support assessment of department-level student learning goals. We look to carry the Teagle project forward into year three without any significant conceptual changes to our original plan, and anticipate another productive and educational year.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Freeman
Director of Institutional Research,
Bryn Mawr College
Beyond the Reaccreditation Self-Study:
*Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore collaborate to develop best practices for effective and sustainable department-level assessment of student learning*

The second year of the project saw faculty participants move from planning their assessment projects to implementation. Faculty participants entered year two of the grant ready to begin collecting assessment data, and spent much of the year doing so. They spent the last weeks of Spring 2011 and will spend the first weeks of the Fall 2011 semester completing their analysis the results and, in consultation with their departments, "close the assessment loop" by planning and/or implementing changes and improvements. Their assessment reports are due June 2011, with the option to extend the deadline to November 1, 2011, which many departments have taken, as their assessment data was only just collected at the end of the Spring term.

The project also generated much useful knowledge in the realm of identifying sustainable methods for continuing this assessment work beyond the grant period. Some of what we learned in this realm identified dead ends, disconfirming our initial expectations, while other insights suggested new avenues. But in all cases what we have learned has been useful, and we enter the third and final phase of the grant with a renewed commitment to further develop and systematize what we have learned about the prospects for sustaining department-level assessment of student learning goals, and of disseminating this information more widely.

**The faculty role in planning for sustainability**

As most of the first year was spent helping faculty understand the process of direct assessment and its wider context, and developing their own assessment project proposals, we used the second year
to begin engaging faculty in considering the organizational aspects of implementing this work on a larger scale. In the fall retreat, for example, we spent half of the time asking faculty to extrapolate from their own experience as assessment "pioneers" among their faculty. The second half of the retreat asked faculty and provostial representatives to consider three existing assessment processes – external department reviews, course evaluations, and new faculty orientation – in light of their potential to serve as moments for department-level assessment of student learning goals. The second half of the winter retreat was likewise devoted to creating space for faculty to react to and expand upon key themes mentioned in the "journalistic summaries" on the organizational aspects of assessment written by the three Provostial representatives and Institutional Research staff.

This was a key aspect of the design of the grant activities: having all three stakeholders "at the table", as it were, when thinking through the organizational aspects of assessment work. While these discussions did achieve the goal of helping faculty to better understand the kinds of challenges involved in supporting their work, it was not clear that faculty felt their role positioned them to make meaningful contributions to questions of organizational efficiency and resources for assessment support. Of course this is not to say that faculty were incapable of engaging usefully in this effort, or even that they didn't have thoughtful opinions about specific proposals, but rather that there was a palpable sense in which faculty seemed to respond to these strategic, organizational questions as largely outside of their professional role.

It may be that asking faculty to "think institutionally" in this way is something faculty have simply not been asked to do in the context of assessment, and that they would embrace the challenge given sufficient opportunity and experience. The Institutional Research staff certainly felt that faculty were energized by discussions of their own departmental assessment proposals, but were relatively enervated by discussions of how to scale up the effort or make it sustainable over the long term. In short, rather than expecting faculty to be directly involved in solving some of the organizational
challenges and tradeoffs in developing a capacity for sustainable department-level assessment, it may be that this task is best handled by administrators with faculty serving in an advisory capacity, reflecting and sharing on the specific institutional supports that were helpful to them in the successful completion of their projects. We will be watching this issue over the coming year, as well, but this is how our understanding is evolving. This has important implications for our efforts to develop sustainable models for department-level assessment.

Intrinsic value of planning for assessment

The most unambiguous positive to emerge from the project thus far was the sense of intrinsic value many faculty participants experienced as a result of the process of defining learning goals for their students and developing assessments. Importantly, this experience of value preceded any actual assessment of those goals. Measurement and analysis of assessment data are of course the central component to the continuous improvement "assessment loop", but many faculty found the process of being explicit about their learning goals to be transformative on its own in important ways. Some representative quotes from faculty participants:

"I have completely changed the way I teach the introductory course in my discipline as a result of the process of identifying goals and laying out the assessment of those goals in the course."

"Just the act of thinking about what I want students to learn from the introductory courses in my department has caused me to totally overhaul the [introductory] course I teach. I scaled the content way back – just got rid of whole topic areas – and spent more time focusing on the concepts I wanted them to learn."

"We don’t have our assessment results yet, but I can say that our department meetings are much more focused on teaching and on the discipline than they were before, as a result of talking about learning goals and developing rubrics. Imagine that – we’re spending our department meetings actually talking about how to teach the discipline, rather than on administrative details."
On the one hand, one can think of these examples as in some sense bypassing the assessment loop – the changes to courses were made on the basis of an obvious logical inconsistency with the statements of learning goals. On the other hand, while these examples do not meet the textbook definition of "direct assessment" as envisioned in the project, these incidental changes are clearly examples of assessment efforts leading to real program improvements.

**Value of sharing experiences**

Faculty continue to report experiencing value in the opportunities to share their departmental experiences in implementing assessment with other academic departments. As was the case in year one of the grant, faculty generally found the on-campus meetings, sharing across departments but within the same college, to be as productive – if not more so – than the Tri-college opportunities for discussion. This again has been an unexpected but useful learning – at least at one campus, faculty expressed an interest in closer communication with other colleges on the assessment question, which was why this aspect was designed into the grant for faculty in the twice-yearly retreats. But at least as far as faculty are concerned, the consensus seems to be that on-campus collaboration is just as useful.

For the Institutional Research staff, however, the context provided by other institutions, and the frequent opportunities to compare notes, communicate, and collaborate with other assessment professionals about this challenging work has been extremely valuable. Much of this work has been focused on developing the structure and content of the retreats, but that process has generated many useful insights beyond this narrow task. In that respect this collaboration has provided an important professional community for developing ideas and genuinely moving the work forward. This collaboration is something that will certainly continue beyond the life of the grant.

With respect to the benefits of the Tri-College collaboration, the Provosts and their (Associate Provost) representatives have benefitted from the retreats themselves, in that these provided them...
with some freedom within their leadership roles on this issue to objectively observe how faculty work on assessment without a high-stakes responsibility for "success" (as in the case of preparing for reaccreditation). We organized another Tri-Co provosts / Institutional Research meeting this year without the faculty present, to develop ideas for moving forward more actively on the resource / sustainability questions around assessment. One thing to emerge from that meeting this May was the observation that since questions about ideal models for supporting assessment on each of our campuses are deeply intertwined with our own distinct staff, faculty, and student cultures, the prospects for developing any unified approach to this challenge for the time being may be limited. Going forward, the focus will be on institutional conversations, but the Tri-college Provosts seemed to be interesting in a continued reporting of what's working on individual campuses.

**Dissemination**

Since many departments were collecting their assessment data at the end of Spring 2011, they, would not have had sufficient time for analysis and interpretation, and recommendations for improvement, we instituted a reporting extension to November 2011 where appropriate. The major focus of the final year of the grant will be to have faculty share and discuss the results of their assessment project with the faculty on their home campuses, as well as with faculty and administrators beyond the campus. The fall 2011 retreat will take place in November and will provide departments with the opportunity to preview the sharing of their results with their Teagle counterparts. We have several ideas in mind for the appropriate venue for external dissemination (e.g., utilizing an existing meeting of liberal arts college Provosts; using the proximity of the Middle States annual meeting to have faculty conduct a presentation), and will be hashing out the details of these early in Year 3.
Summary

In short, the goals of year two of the Teagle project have been achieved, and we enter year three with all nine original departments fully engaged, having collected direct assessment data, and planning implementation of their recommendations for improvement in year three and beyond. Internal discussions of sustainability and support for assessment are advancing. During year three the focus will shift to having faculty disseminate the results, both internally, to other departments on our own campuses, and to other campuses through a wider workshop or conference. The latter will include sharing or what we have learned about the leadership expertise, and coordination essential to successful departmental assessment of student learning.
Wages:

As explained last year, we originally planned to use grant funds to hire a professional staff member to assist Bryn Mawr’s Director of Institutional Research, who is serving as the Principal Investigator on the Teagle project, in sustaining other assessment duties while he is involved in the Teagle project. Due to the nature of the work involved, we discovered that it was not feasible to hire a temporary staff member to carry out these duties, because such a person did not have sufficient knowledge of the Office’s operations to be effective. So instead of hiring an assistant, we used grant funds to pay the portion of the Director’s salary reflective of time spent on the Teagle project.

Expenditures in the administrative support salary line exceed the amount budgeted for 2010-2011, because some charges that were incurred late in the prior year were not billed in time to include in last year’s report and are therefore included in the current report. Administrative duties included maintaining the Teagle project web site, preparing materials for the retreats and meetings, and administering the grant budget. Although we had originally planned to hire an administrative assistant over the duration of the grant, in Year 2, the coordination of grant-related activities was assumed by existing Bryn Mawr College staff. We used grant funds to pay a portion of staff salaries which were spent on the Teagle project.

Fringe Benefits:

Benefits associated with the faculty stipends were less than expected. We had budgeted full benefits at a rate of 28%, but Swarthmore included only FICA with its faculty stipends.

Meetings:

Expenditures for meals related to individual and tri-college meetings and retreats were less than anticipated.

Assessment Instruments and Resources:

We did not spend the $400 allocated in Year 2, because departments developed their own instruments instead of purchasing standardized instruments or surveys.
### A. Personnel

#### I. Wages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2009-10 Proposed</th>
<th>2009-10 Actual</th>
<th>2010-11 Proposed</th>
<th>2010-11 Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twelve faculty participants ($1,500 / year / participant)</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional staff (Principal investigator release)</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
<td>$5,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative support (avg 3.5 hrs/week)</td>
<td>$5,286</td>
<td>$1,553</td>
<td>$5,286</td>
<td>$9,019</td>
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#### II. Fringe Benefits

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<th>2009-10 Proposed</th>
<th>2009-10 Actual</th>
<th>2010-11 Proposed</th>
<th>2010-11 Actual</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>$5,040</td>
<td>$2,357</td>
<td>$5,040</td>
<td>$3,344</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional staff</td>
<td>$1,870</td>
<td>$1,870</td>
<td>$1,870</td>
<td>$1,870</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>$1,903</td>
<td>$126</td>
<td>$1,903</td>
<td>$3,680</td>
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### B. Other Expenses

#### III. Meetings

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2009-10 Proposed</th>
<th>2009-10 Actual</th>
<th>2010-11 Proposed</th>
<th>2010-11 Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>$93</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>$0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tri-Co retreat meals (rotating across three campuses)</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$1,421</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$1,168</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-campus lunch meetings (separately on each campus)</td>
<td>$900</td>
<td>$259</td>
<td>$900</td>
<td>$904</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside Expert/s</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$750</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honorarium</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>$930</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodging and travel</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$0</td>
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</table>

#### IV. Assessment instruments and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2009-10 Proposed</th>
<th>2009-10 Actual</th>
<th>2010-11 Proposed</th>
<th>2010-11 Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### V. Dissemination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2009-10 Proposed</th>
<th>2009-10 Actual</th>
<th>2010-11 Proposed</th>
<th>2010-11 Actual</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conference registration</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
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<td>Lodging and travel</td>
<td>$0</td>
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**GRAND TOTAL**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2009-10 Proposed</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$46,249</td>
<td>$32,859</td>
<td>$42,249</td>
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Appendix: Selected materials generated from grant-funded activities

1. Agendas from both September 11, 2009 and January 26, 2010
2. Participant list
3. Retreat 3: List of current assessment activities
4. Retreat 4: Topics on sustainability, gleaned from Year 1 administrator summaries
5. Journalistic summaries from IR staff and Provostial representatives.
Organizational processes for department-level assessment

[Discussion leader / introductory comments shown in brackets]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Leader(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00</td>
<td>Buffet lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-1:15</td>
<td>Welcome and orientation for the meeting</td>
<td>Connie H / Mark F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15-2:15</td>
<td>Faculty discussions of projects and processes: <em>Insights from being an assessment pioneer on your campus and in your department</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group 1: Disciplinary Focus (on research and writing)</td>
<td>Robin S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bryn Mawr: Sociology / Haverford: History / Swarthmore: English</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group 2: Course focus (embedded assessments)</td>
<td>Mark F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bryn Mawr: Geology / Haverford: Chemistry / Swarthmore: Comp Sci</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group 3: Capstone experience focus</td>
<td>Cathy F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bryn Mawr: English / Haverford: Psychology / Swarthmore: Education</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15-2:30</td>
<td>Next steps within the grant</td>
<td>Cathy F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30-2:45</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45-2:50</td>
<td>Exploration of existing organizational processes that could be used to support student learning assessment.</td>
<td>Mark F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:50-3:30</td>
<td><em>External department reviews</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30-4:10</td>
<td><em>Course evaluations</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10-4:50</td>
<td><em>New faculty orientation</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:50-5:00</td>
<td>Wrap-up, concluding remarks</td>
<td>Robin S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges  
Teagle Foundation Systematic Improvement Grant Retreat  
Sustainable Departmental-Level Assessment of Student Learning  

Retreat IV:  
*What do our assessments say, and how do we use them to improve?*  
Friday, February 4, 2011  
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.  
Dalton Hall, Room 212A  
Bryn Mawr College  

I. 9:45- 10:00 Arrival (coffee available)  
II. 10:00-10:15 Introduction [Kim and Mark]  
III. 10:15-11:15 Project Sharing [Robin]  

Discussion of a few projects, considering these points as appropriate:  

- What does your early data tell you?  
- How will the data inform departmental decisions?  
- What were the reactions of your faculty colleagues? (About both process and findings)?  
- Have you spoken with others outside your department yet? If so, in what context?  
- Will you continue on with this project or will your next assessment focus on a new issue?  
- What obstacles, opportunities, or surprises are worth noting?  
  a. Haverford – Wendy Sternberg (Psychology) – 20 mins for sharing and discussion  
  b. Bryn Mawr – Arlo Weil (Geology) – 20 mins for sharing and discussion  
  c. Swarthmore – Peter Schmidt (English) - 20 mins for sharing and discussion  

*Short Break*  

IV. 11:20-11:50 Rubrics [Cathy]  

Jim Krippner (Haverford / History) shares on the process of developing a rubric for the capstone experience. Reflections on departmental goal-setting, identifying measurable objectives, scoring and levels of success, etc. This session is meant to involve all participants, whether or not they are currently using a rubric (an important tool to have in your assessment toolbox).  

- Where do goals and learning objectives come from?  
- What are departmental issues around developing and agreeing to use rubrics?  
- How and when is a rubric used?  
- How are students made aware of it?  
- How could a grading rubric be used for an assessment of student learning outcomes?  

*Short break, get lunch*
V. 12:00-12:45 Sustainability of Assessment

Discussion over lunch, guided by handout summarizing "journalistic summaries".
- Given what you are learning through this project, how will your department sustain a commitment to assessment in the future?
- What have you identified as helpful or challenging for others/all departments to effectively engage in assessment activities? Institution-wide activities?
- IR/ Provost “Reflection pieces” from end of Year 1 reporting identified some areas of concern from their perspectives. What opinions do faculty members have about these observations?

VI. 12:45-1:00 Wrap-up and Next Steps

Points worth noting from day’s discussions (Provostial Representatives)

Next steps for Departments: MARK?

- Sharing on campus, late spring.
- Sharing further, next year (MSCHE?)
- Faculty participant reports - June 15 (Nov 1 extension, if dictated by project design) - Summary of research results (with assistance from IR as needed), with specific recommendations of curricular/pedagogical/program changes or improvements to be implemented in Year 3.
Tri-College Assessment Project
*Teagle Foundation Grant: Effective and Sustainable Department-Level Assessment of Student Learning*

**List of Project Participants**

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## Current Institutional Structures, Processes, and Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department Level</th>
<th>Bryn Mawr</th>
<th>Haverford</th>
<th>Swarthmore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department Level</strong></td>
<td>Departmental participation in Institution-Level Assessment: development of the academic strategic plan and the Educational Goals and Aspirations of a Haverford Education. The latter articulate the institutional student learning goals to be met in a variety of discipline-specific ways.</td>
<td>An annual Department Activities Form to be completed by the Department Chair is under consideration. This could include specific items related to articulation and assessment of student learning goals.</td>
<td>Goals and assessment discussed; final summary report on activities at end of each year. <a href="http://www.swarthmore.edu/x20023.xml">http://www.swarthmore.edu/x20023.xml</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Departments produce assessment plan and report annual progress on implementation of the plan each year.</strong></td>
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<td>An annual Department Activities Form to be completed by the Department Chair is under consideration. This could include specific items related to articulation and assessment of student learning goals.</td>
<td>Goals and assessment discussed; final summary report on activities at end of each year. <a href="http://www.swarthmore.edu/x20023.xml">http://www.swarthmore.edu/x20023.xml</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External reviews every 10 years. Process has only recently been regularized. <a href="http://www.brynmawr.edu/provost/documents/ScheduleofReviews_fall08.pdf">http://www.brynmawr.edu/provost/documents/ScheduleofReviews_fall08.pdf</a></strong></td>
<td>External reviews every 10 years. Process has only recently been regularized. <a href="http://www.brynmawr.edu/provost/documents/ScheduleofReviews_fall08.pdf">http://www.brynmawr.edu/provost/documents/ScheduleofReviews_fall08.pdf</a></td>
<td>External reviews approximately every 10 years. Self study recommendation includes regularizing the schedule.</td>
<td>External reviews every 8-12 years <a href="http://www.swarthmore.edu/x20064.xml">http://www.swarthmore.edu/x20064.xml</a></td>
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</table>

### Q. How are student learning goals and assessment data utilized in departmental reviews?

- **Curriculum mapping to coordinate learning goals across/between courses (?)**
- **Diagnostic student learning assessments?**
- **Senior Capstone Projects as summative assessments of student learning.**
### Benchmark assessments...GRE results?

**Alumni Outcomes**

Teagle Systematic Improvement Grant participation: Sustainable Department-Level Assessment of Student learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periodic internal reviews for targeted areas (writing, social justice requirement, the arts, new academic areas).</th>
<th>Internal reviews for interdisciplinary programs at least every 8 years <a href="http://www.swarthmore.edu/x19980.xml">http://www.swarthmore.edu/x19980.xml</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Studies is a Bi-Co program undergoing state review for teacher certification.</td>
<td>Two departments are subject to external agency review: Engineering does ABET and Educational Studies does PA State Dept. reviews for its teacher certification program.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Course Level

| Faculty members conduct primarily qualitative course evaluations using a standard, Bryn Mawr-specific form. Faculty maintain copies of their course evaluations and provide these to Committee on Appointments for tenure and promotion review. [http://www.brynmawr.edu/provost/documents/Faculty_Handbook_finalweb3.pdf](http://www.brynmawr.edu/provost/documents/Faculty_Handbook_finalweb3.pdf) (see page 199) | Faculty members routinely conduct course evaluations using a variety of forms and formats, some of which are submitted and reviewed by the Provost. The development of a more uniform system is currently under discussion (self study recommendation), with initial concepts including a core of common questions (some of which collect indirect data on attainment of course learning goals) in addition to instructor or department specific questions. | Each faculty member must conduct an evaluation of at least one course each academic year. The focus of course evaluations may be coordinated at the department level. Each faculty member shares the course evaluations and has a conversation about them with the department chair. |
| Communication of learning goals for students via course syllabi and other articulations of expectations. | Various formative assessments to monitor learning and adjust instruction. | A structure exists to enable faculty to share examples of course evaluation instruments. |
| Many faculty voluntarily conduct mid-semester course evaluations. | | |
### People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>People</strong></th>
<th><strong>New faculty orientation through the teaching and learning initiative focuses on pedagogy and virtually all new faculty participate. Focus is on faculty development as opposed to assessment of student learning.</strong></th>
<th><strong>New faculty orientation now includes enhanced emphasis on assessment of student learning (self study recommendation)</strong></th>
<th><strong>New faculty orientation continues throughout the first year, and includes discussions and workshops on pedagogical issues, including assessment.</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Annual Professional Activities Form (PAF) to include questions about student learning goals for specific courses taught.</td>
<td>Departmental Chairs’ handbook includes guidance on assessment <a href="http://www.swarthmore.edu/swat-only/provost/departmental_handbook_08.pdf">http://www.swarthmore.edu/swat-only/provost/departmental_handbook_08.pdf</a></td>
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<td>As interest and opportunities arise, assessment projects are presented at Faculty Lunches (well-attended weekly gatherings).</td>
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<td>Sections of both the Provost’s and Institutional Research’s websites provide information and links to assessment resources.</td>
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<td>Institutional Effectiveness Committee to be established (self study recommendation). Assessment of Student Learning under the purview of the Provost’s representative with support from IR.</td>
<td>An Assessment Committee includes the Associate Provost and the Director of Institutional Research (co-chairs), the Heads of the three divisions, the interdisciplinary representative, and two students. The committee provides guidance for the College’s approach to academic assessment, and may direct or undertake activities to promote understanding of assessment.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Summary of observations from Provostial representatives and IR staff

Gleaned from the Year One journalistic summaries of provostial representatives and the IR staff

- Developing departmental learning goals was intrinsically valuable experience for most faculty participants. The task of goal definition permitted some departments to immediately identify inconsistencies in specific courses or curricula, which were changed (an immediate "closing of the loop"). But at the time there was some reluctance to share this experience with non-Teagle colleagues: why?

- Would the grant have benefitted from more ramping-up time in year one concerning the literature and concepts of assessment?

- Participating departments did not consistent utilize standardized templates for the assessment project, and seemed to chafe under the expectation to standardize (culture of academic freedom?). However, the logistics of managing this project for three departments – let alone scaling some version of it up to 30+ departments – requires some degree of standardization of definitions, processes, expectations, and so on. What is the right balance between a departmentally customized approach and a centrally managed and overseen process?

- Language issues: Would assessment efforts such as these benefit from a re-branding? Is "assessment" really a dirty word?
  - Evidence based decision-making?
  - Reflective teaching?
  - Building a culture of evidence?

- Role of IR staff with respect to assessment is ambiguous and situation-specific. With respect to assessment, IR staff (and provost's offices) function as all of the following at different times and situations: Technical support staff; leaders; coordinators; facilitators; third-party (sort of) evaluators. In other words, the administrative support for assessment of student learning is ambiguously defined – from an institutional perspective is this an asset (even Middle States says "assessment is everyone's responsibility") or an obstacle to conducting meaningful, rigorous assessment of student learning?

- By the same token, the faculty role in assessment is, in many respects, still vaguely defined. Clearly the faculty role here is central, but is assessment best classified as teaching, research, or service? Or some combination of all three? Or a distinct fourth responsibility?

- No pain, no gain? Good assessment practice provides a language through which departments can have difficult conversations about resource use, curriculum design, grading, and so on. These may be simultaneously productive and painful conversations. Is it reasonable to expect anyone to endorse necessary but painful experiences without some external incentive for doing so?
• Are course evaluations a tool that can be used to support indirect assessment of student learning, or is this site "spoiled" for this purpose because of its role in the tenure and promotion process?

• It is a truism among those seeking to institutionalize assessment of student learning that "top-down" approaches to assessment, or those based on traditional incentives (salary, tenure and promotion) are doomed to failure, and that change must come from within: "Faculty must take ownership of assessment as part of their professional responsibility." True? Or are incentives necessary to initiate this shift.

• Is this a role for the department chair? Would providing department chairs with compensation/stipends for institutionalizing assessment practices more systematically in their department be helpful or not?

• Levels of analysis: What is the best way to have faculty see the value of bringing empirical data to bear on the measurement of student learning? Starting at the institutional level and working down from there? Or working up from the individual or departmental level? At what level are faculty most likely to have the capacity to respond productively to "bad news" about student learning? What about "good news"?
Mark Freeman
Institutional Research: Journalistic Summary, Year 2
Bryn Mawr College
Teagle Project on Sustainable Department-Level Assessment of Student Learning

Direct faculty experience of the value of defining goals

The most unambiguous positive to emerge from the project thus far was the sense of intrinsic value many faculty experienced as a result of the process of defining learning goals for their students and developing assessments. Importantly, this experience of value preceded any actual assessment of those goals. Measurement and analysis of assessment data are of course the central component to the continuous improvement "assessment loop", but many faculty found the process of being explicit about their learning goals to be transformative on its own in important ways. Some representative quotes from faculty participants:

"I have completely changed the way I teaching the introductory course in my discipline as a result of the process of identifying goals and laying out the assessment of those goals in the course."

"Just the act of thinking about what I want students to learn from the introductory courses in my department has caused me to totally overhaul the [introductory] course I teach. I scaled the content way back – just got rid of whole topic areas – and spent more time focusing on the conceptual learning."

"We don't have our assessment results yet, but I can say that our department meetings are much more focused on teaching and on the discipline than they were as a result of talking about learning goals and developing rubrics. Imagine that – we're spending our department meetings actually talking about how to teach the discipline, rather than on administrative details."

One the one hand, one can think of these examples as in some sense bypassing the assessment loop – the changes to courses were made not on the basis of "assessment data", but on an apparent logical inconsistency with the statements of learning goals. One the other hand, while these examples do not meet the textbook definition of "direct assessment" as envisioned in the project, these incidental changes are clearly examples of assessment efforts leading to real program improvements.

Endorsing such examples as "assessment" is a precarious stance for advocates of direct assessment. Without representative data to evaluate the curricular changes, how can one know that improvement in learning outcomes will result? If logic is a sufficient basis for assessing the benefits of curricular or pedagogical change, what then is the role of evidence and measurement? Middle States' answer is that these are examples of "indirect" assessment, and that "direct" assessment requires careful measurement of learning outcomes.
While recognizing the importance of this distinction, and appreciating that only carefully designed empirical observation can distinguish between multiple and often conflicting but "logically consistent" arguments for curricular change, I found myself weighing in this discussion the relative costs and benefits of Middle States' implicit preference for direct assessment. If faculty can experience such benefit from the relatively painless process of clarifying learning goals and specifying measures of them, and this process has obvious implications for how they spend their limited time with students, is it best that they spend their time implementing that part of the assessment process for each and every course, or is it best that they spend that time on the next element of the assessment loop, actually collecting assessment data and trying to make sense of it?

The question of whether "effective" change is the result would seem to rely on the integrity, seriousness, and willingness of the department to be self-critical, rather than on whether the process was direct or indirect in nature. Put another way: if a department is unwilling to approach the question of their effectiveness with respect to student learning goals with a spirit of humility and a willingness to change, it is unlikely that any form of assessment – even the most perfectly designed experimental study, let alone the kind of pragmatic "good enough" assessment that is almost always optimal, but which is usually less than conclusive – will lead to meaningful change and improvement.

Faculty participants are just now, and into the beginning of Year 3 of the grant, receiving the "data" from their assessment projects conducted through the course of Year 2. We will be attending closely to their experiences of the value of this part of the work: Is it diagnostic? Does it point the way toward solutions? Does it highlight areas of strength as well as weakness? Does it lead to changes in the department? When costs and benefits are weighed, do faculty finally perceive it to have been worth doing?

**Evaluating the role of faculty in assessing organizational supports for assessment**

Having spent the entirety of Year 1 of the grant focused on developing faculty expertise in assessment and getting the faculty assessment projects up and running, the Tri-Co Institutional Research (IR) directors sought to shift some of the focus of the retreats and on-campus meetings toward other half of the project's focus, that is, the organizational aspects of sustainability. The timing seemed appropriate, as the faculty assessment projects were in any case in a data collection phase, with not much new to report. From the grant proposal:

"The grant will create time and space in which the perspectives of all administrative stakeholders in assessment work – faculty, provosts, and institutional researchers – will be represented. ...having all stakeholders at the table throughout all stages of the work, by the end of the grant we will be well-positioned to identify ways to more efficiently use our existing resources and to more clearly understand where additional resources (i.e., faculty release time, reallocated or additional administrative support, reallocated or additional technological support, or a combination of these) might best be allocated to support these efforts going forward."
This was a key assumption of the grant – that having all "stakeholders" at the table would provide the best forum for working through the organizational issues involved in this kind of assessment work.

We thus spent half of the second retreat having a conversation about existing institutional processes – course evaluations, departmental self-studies, and new faculty orientation – and whether these could be adapted to include a more regularized opportunity for "doing assessment." These conversations were, on the whole, not terribly productive.

In the fourth retreat we again allocated time on the retreat agenda to the discussion of these organizational issues, this time using the less structured technique of asking faculty to respond to the IR and Provostial representatives' journalistic summaries from Year 1 that raised many organizational issues. The discussion that ensued this time was more interesting and lively, but again, did not contain hints of heading moving toward practical solutions.

Indeed the IR participants in the project emerged from those two efforts with a sense that faculty themselves did not find the exercise of thinking organizationally on this topic to be a useful one. It seemed as if faculty didn't want to have to think about the organizational / resource issues of supporting assessment, weren't able to think in that way due to a lack of familiarity with existing administrative roles and functions, and thus, given all that is expected of them in terms doing the actual assessment work in their departments, probably shouldn't be expected to engage in that kind of institution-level, organizational planning work.

This has been an unexpected learning from the project. We entered the project with the assumption that faculty would want to be intimately involved with discussions about administrative support structures and processes for their assessment work, and would have much of interest to say on the topic. But at this point it seems that faculty at our institutions may desire and ultimately be best suited for a less proactive and more advisory capacity in that respect.

The IR participants met with the Tri-Co Provosts to share this unexpected finding, and to outline the need for an additional venue for making headway on the organizational issues associated with assessment, both in order to make progress on this aspect of the grant itself, but also to help frame longer-term solutions for making this work sustainable beyond the grant period.
Teagle Systematic Improvement Grant
Sustainable Departmental-Level Assessment of Student Learning

Annual Reflections
June 2, 2011

Catherine Fennell
Haverford College Institutional Research

Originally, this three-year assessment of student learning project was envisioned to parse the assessment loop over three years. Year one involved the design of the loop and the specific assessments; year two was to be for collection and analysis of data produced by the measures; and year three was for implementation of the curricular or pedagogical changes suggested by the assessments. Over the three years, there was also to be specific attention and consideration given to the institutional supports necessary for successful assessment of student learning at the departmental level, and sharing of our findings on both fronts with increasingly wider audiences. As the primary institutional contacts, the Institutional Research Directors from the three Colleges worked closely together again in year two and with their individual participating departments as we straddled the heavy faculty project focus of year one and initial ruminations on the more nebulous institutional support piece of the project.

As year two draws to a close, I would characterize our present position as surprisingly on-target. The year two process was multi-faceted, perplexing, syncopated and ultimately fruitful on both the project-level and the institutional support sides.

It became clear early in the year that some of the Haverford faculty projects needed additional development time, particularly for the specific measurements. The History project in particular requested assistance with content development and administration of three related surveys, and the design of the rubric to be applied to the departmental Senior Thesis. The collaboration between IR, faculty, and administrative support personnel was considerable, productive, and enjoyable. Each contributed expertise or experience that, if it had been lacking, would have produced a less successful project. Part of the IR role involved preparing the IRB exemption request materials for both the History and Chemistry surveys. The openness of the History faculty participant to seek feedback from his Tri-Co faculty colleagues in a rubric critique session at the February retreat was notable and very helpful. More broadly, by the second retreat, it was increasingly apparent that the Tri-Co faculty felt “safe” sharing challenges or surprising results from their processes.

Unlike the earlier and subsequent retreats, our fall 2011 retreat did not generate the same positive “energy” evident at other times. Here we attempted to begin discussion of appropriate institutional support for department-level assessment based on both the project experience to date and on an exploration of how existing organizational processes could be better utilized to support student learning assessment. Unfortunately, many projects weren’t far enough along in the data
collection/analysis phase for faculty to be able to say that “x” was really essential to moving the project forward successfully. The think tank exercise about how external departmental reviews, course evaluations, or new faculty orientation *could* be used to encourage the articulation of student learning goals, produce evidence of student learning, or improve student learning was downright awkward. While we had previewed the topic with the Provosts in a meeting a few months earlier, and the retreat materials included a summary of Tri-Co Institutional Assessment Structures, Processes, and Activities (department level, course level, people level) as well as sample material, the Provosts were not yet ready to publicly discuss altering these processes to more directly incorporate student learning goals and evaluation, and it seemed like faculty wondered why they were being asked to consider such angles. As the results of the faculty projects became clearer over the year and were articulated at the second retreat and presented on individual campuses, the Tri-Co Provosts became more engaged in the support structure considerations. In the May 2011 Institutional Research Directors and Provosts meeting, there was sincere conversation about what could be approached from a Tri-Co perspective, and what more appropriately belonged in institutional conversations. The initial follow-up conversation at Haverford produced a “to do” list which included incorporation of assessment responsibilities in Associate Provost and Department Chair job descriptions, revision of Departmental Review Guidelines to specifically include requirements for incorporation of student learning and alumni outcomes, and FY13 budget planning in support of departmental assessment. The latter is connected to a phase-in of Department Chair compensation, and also could reflect what we learned from our History Department (if you feed them well and give faculty the opportunity to talk about assessment, it can happen!).

Throughout the year, the numerous planning and debriefing meetings between the Tri-Co IR collaborators were productive and enjoyable. Working with my Tri-Co colleagues has been an extremely rewarding experience, and together we range from metathinking to logistical detail, often within the same conversation, demonstrating the range of skills necessary to effectively engage in assessment. Leadership, expertise, and coordination activities are each critical. One of our most recent conversations produced the following “what have we learned” points:

1. Articulating learning goals is inherently valuable to faculty, even if no other steps in the assessment loop are undertaken.
2. Articulation of learning goals has the potential to transform departmental culture, making departmental meetings more substantive and focused on teaching and learning.
3. Time and space for faculty discussion of assessment is critical (and very difficult to schedule).
4. Some faculty are now realizing that it is a luxury and professional responsibility to define assessment of student learning in their own terms. In some settings, it is prescribed.
5. Training is essential. Assessment of student learning can *only* begin with the articulation of what students are expected to learn, and requires at least some direct (meaningful and measurable) assessments that evaluate those goals so that the results naturally lead to the refinement of curricula or pedagogy.
6. A supportive institutional framework or scaffolding within which faculty undertake assessment work is critical for success. The Teagle Grant provided the mechanism, accountability, and support for departmental-level assessment of student learning, and conversations must now focus on how we will sustain such efforts in the absence of the grant.
I shared these points both in the current follow-up work I’m doing with the Provost and Associate Provost, and in the second team meeting of the year with our Teagle faculty from Chemistry, History and Psychology. I believe they will guide us in this next year of the project, both in terms of institutional support for assessment and in sharing the results of our departmental evaluations more broadly.

For our part in supporting our departments collectively, the IR team developed a rubric to guide the faculty participants in the preparation of their year two reports. The articulation of these expectations was appreciated, and it only seemed appropriate given the assessment focus of our grant. Building a culture of evidence includes clearly articulated goals—regardless of the domain. I fully expect a set of thorough and thoughtful faculty reports by the fall retreat, reflecting the responsive and engaging processes taking place within our Teagle Departments.

**Tri-Co IR Planning Meetings**
6/9/2010
9/3/2010
9/9/2010
10/20/2010
11/10/2010
12/15/2010
1/18/2011
4/5/2011
5/2/2011

**IR/Provost/Associate Provost Meetings**
10/13/2010
1/11/2011
4/27/2011
5/18/2011

**Project Meetings**
Chemistry: 3/16/2011

**Faculty Reporting at Department Chairs Meeting:** 3/31/2011

**Haverford Institutional Team Meetings**
11/17/2010
5/11/2011

**Tri-Co IR/ Provosts Meeting:** 5/4/2011

**Tri-Co Retreats**
9/13/2010
2/4/2011
It is exciting to begin seeing results from the projects. Last fall I was having some concerns about our work. The fall retreat was hosted at Swarthmore in early September. In the early part of our meeting, I was pleased to hear many comments from participants about the values they’d realized from setting goals, and it was also a relief to see that the project were beginning to take shape in interesting ways. Part of our agenda included a discussion of institutional structures and processes that might better support assessment of student learning outcomes. It was a challenging discussion – enthusiasm seemed to be flagging, and we weren’t sure if it that reflected lack of interest, unfamiliarity by some with broader institutional processes, or simply poor timing of the discussion on the agenda (end of a long day). On top of that I had a difficult time trying to schedule an internal meeting later in the semester, and some objections about having another meeting. However, when the team did finally get together in October, we had a very engaging and productive discussion. Each department was at different stages of their project, and getting feedback from others was, I think, appreciated.

Throughout the fall IR provided support to each of the departments. English Literature had constructed a very thoughtful rubric for writing outcomes, and based on that we designed and administered online rating tools for the faculty instructors of first-year seminars to rate their students’ early and final papers, and end-of-semester self-ratings for students. IR also provided analysis at the end of the semester linking all the ratings together, and summarized the results for departmental discussion. IR would not be able to sustain this level of support if requested by more departments. Our support for Computer Science was primarily some advising early in the project, and then administering their class exercise for them at the beginning and end of each semester. We had a few meetings with Educational Studies to talk through possible approaches to their project, given their very unusual curricular structure. I continued to worry that their project was too comprehensive and might prove overwhelming. IR provided institutional data, and sampling of recent thesis grads for their project.

The winter retreat was our first opportunity to hear early results from some of the projects. There was good discussion, collegial feedback, and continued nods to the value of participating in the projects. It was an energizing meeting. Later in the spring the Swarthmore Team presented their work at a session at which members of each department and program at the College was invited. There was a good turnout, with both our outgoing and incoming Provosts in attendance. The presenters again shared their recognition that setting goals could be very challenging but also very rewarding. The discussion was engaging and there were good questions from those in attendance. The overall tone of the meeting was quite positive.

A meeting between the Provosts and the IR Directors in early May was a good opportunity to share thoughts. However it wasn’t clear that the IR team had been successful in securing a commitment to explicitly address questions about assessment structure and processes on each of our campuses. At Swarthmore transitions in the Provost’s Office of both the Provost and Associate Provost, who have both
been very supportive, will provide an opportunity to bring this up again very soon. All indications are
that the new Provost team will also be very supportive, but as the College enters the implementation
phase of a Strategic Planning Process, we will have to be vigilant in keeping this topic a priority.

As the year closes I recently sent reminders to participants of the reports they would need to
provide. Since the projects are still finishing up I expected Swarthmore participants to take advantage of
an early fall deadline for these reports, but was pleased to learn that each department hopes to have some
results, and departmental discussions and planning for Year 3, in time to report on before the summer.
Considering their very busy end of semester activities, I thought this was very reassuring about the
importance to the participants of this work.

IR Planning discussions
6/9/2010
9/3/2010
9/9/2010
10/20/2010
12/15/2010
1/18/2011
4/5/2011
5/2/2011

IR/Provosts
5/4/2011

Individual Meetings
English Literature – 8/13/2010; 1/13/2011
Computer Science – 9/8/2010; Also twice/semester administration of exercise in class.
Educational Studies – 12/8/10; 12/17/10

Team meetings
10/26/2010
3/25/2011 – Faculty lunch/workshop presentations

Tri-Co retreats
9/7/2010
2/4/2011
As the Institutional Representative from the Haverford Provost’s Office, I am pleased to submit this reflective report on the Teagle Learning Assessment project at the end of Year 2 of the grant.

During this second year of the grant period, the departmental representatives have worked to generate useful assessment data, through both direct and indirect assessment means. The projects have been refined by frequent meetings among the core group of faculty members, each of whom reports productive discussions and planning efforts within their home departments. Even the most reluctant departmental colleagues have begun to see the value in the projects and are looking forward to “closing the loop” by putting the results of assessment projects into action.

In my role as Provost’s Office representative to the Teagle project, I have primary responsibility for bringing the Provost into discussions regarding student learning assessment, and have made progress towards the formalization of assessment responsibilities as part of the profile of academic department chair responsibilities. Looking ahead to 2011-2012, it will be an official request from the Provost’s Office (together with the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, see below) that each academic department draft a coherent set of departmental student learning goals, to be located on each department’s website. In the long term, it will be the explicit responsibility of the department chair to oversee and report on departmental efforts to assess student learning, consonant with the department’s agreed upon learning goals (of course, we expect that reaching consensus on department wide learning goals will take some time to achieve). An ongoing effort to regularize compensation for serving as Department Chair (set to be fully integrated into the budget for FY13) coincides with our plans to enhance the Department Chair role. We believe that this fortuitous timing aligns well with the plans to enhance the responsibilities of the Department Chair.

To preview the work that will be expected during next academic year, one of the other Teagle participating faculty and I made a presentation about our student learning assessment projects at the meeting of Department Chairs that took place in March 2011. We shared the results of the Psychology project and the ongoing efforts of the History Department to construct a meaningful rubric for the senior thesis project that will allow History Departmental faculty members to assess the extent to which their students, through the summative senior thesis project, have achieved the learning goals of the department’s curriculum. The History Department members uniformly report two aspects of this initiative that were particularly valuable. First, the department benefitted from the experience of working together to craft their learning goals. Second, they found the process of having to articulate how the thesis project illustrates the achievement of standards
of excellence for particular aspirations to be a useful exercise in itself for clarifying departmental goals and objectives. In fact, a few days after the Department Chairs meeting, the Chair of the Philosophy Department reported that she had begun the conversation with her colleagues regarding shared learning goals. It continues to be our observation that despite initial reluctance, faculty members who engage with their colleagues in this sort of reflection regarding the aspirations of their curriculum, find it to be a valuable experience.

The request, moving forward, for Department Chairs to lead efforts in student learning assessment will be facilitated by the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, a newly established (Fall 2010) committee, reporting directly to the President, whose primary function is to help coordinate assessment efforts across the College. During its inaugural year, the committee focused primarily on Institutional Assessment. During the next academic year, the focus will shift towards Student Learning Assessment. Together with the “departmental learning goals” project described above, the IE Committee will take the lead on helping the Provost’s Office better utilize the end-of-semester course evaluation for student learning assessment purposes. Currently, we have no common system for evaluating courses, but believe that a more uniform process that includes crucial questions regarding student learning assessment can provide the Provost’s Office with better institutional data about student learning. We have already implemented changes in the Senior Exit Interview to better assess success in achieving some of our “College-Wide” learning goals (articulated during our Middle States review self-study).

Supporting assessment efforts continues to be a challenge, and will be even more so once Department Chairs engage more frequently in assessment projects. However, the Provost’s Office had recently re-designed a research analyst position that reports to the Provost to take on more assessment related work. With this position, together with the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, the College has significantly expanded its capacity for undertaking such projects.

In short, the steps taken alongside of the work sponsored by the Teagle Foundation are slowly making assessment a more visible and valued part of the Haverford College culture. We look forward to continuing this work in 11-12 and beyond.
During the 2010-2011 academic year, Swarthmore College participation in the Teagle project, Beyond the Accreditation Self-Study, yielded some very positive results. The three departments involved in the project, Computer Science, Educational Studies, and English Literature, carried out assessment projects, met with tri-college colleagues and among themselves to discuss progress, and shared their experiences-in-progress with other members of the Swarthmore College community. The faculty involved in the project agree that they have learned a great deal about assessment and about their own departments’ goals and programs.

The year began with a Tri-College meeting on September 13, 2010 at Swarthmore College. During this meeting, faculty from each institution met with others doing similar kinds of assessment projects (focused on research and writing, on capstone experiences, and on embedded assessment respectively) to share their plans for the year. Questions and suggestions from colleagues provided useful feedback as the department representatives prepared to implement the assessment plans designed the year before. Another session at this meeting focused on institutional processes and strategies that might be used to support ongoing assessment projects at the three colleges. While faculty seemed less engaged in this discussion, the ideas that emerged were useful for administrators concerned with sustaining assessment practice beyond the grant period.

The Swarthmore departments met again in late October to discuss project progress. Again, faculty appreciated the opportunity to get feedback, to problem solve with peers, and to figure out next steps. As reported last year, all faculty involved reported some resistance to the work involved from departmental colleagues and explained that they (with IR support) were doing most of the work on the projects. We agreed at this meeting that the three departments would report work in progress at a lunch meeting in the spring to which all Swarthmore faculty would be invited.

The Tri-College faculty and provost representatives met again at Bryn Mawr College on February 4, 2011. At this meeting, three departments, one from each institution, presented their projects, allowing the groups to provide models for the other departments and, again, to receive feedback. Given that many of the projects across the three campuses use rubrics, the meeting also included a short workshop on developing effective rubrics. The group also discussed the resources being used to support the projects, in particular the time and expertise of our institutional research staffs.

The highlight of the year at Swarthmore was a presentation by the three participating departments to a group of colleagues from across the college. All faculty were invited to join the group for lunch, and each department was asked to ensure that one member of
every department be represented. Approximately 30 people attended the presentation, including the current provost and the newly appointed provost, who will assume the position July 1, 2011. Lisa Smulyan, Associate Provost, provided an overview of the project. Each department then presented its project, describing the processes used to clarify or identify student learning goals, design an assessment to measure success in reaching some subset of those goals, and collect and begin to analyze data. All three departments emphasized the value of the process as well as the information that had begun to emerge from it; all three pointed out that the process had already led to changes in courses or programs as a result of conversations, clarifications, and initial results. In addition, all three departments pointed out the central role that the institutional research staff had played in helping them design the project and collect and analyze data. The presentation was very well received by those present, and some discussion ensued about possible structures to support an ongoing process of departmental assessment based on this model. One suggestion, for example, was the possibility of having three departments enter this cycle each year, with support from the Provost’s office and Institutional Research and reporting responsibilities to the Provost’s Office.

Next year, the three departments will conclude their studies and use the data collected and analyzed to examine current practice. We expect that this process will, essentially, close the loop on these projects and, simultaneously, suggest questions for a new round of assessments. We will work to ensure that our college Assessment Committee and the new provost are informed of our progress and make use of our findings as they consider possibilities for institutionalizing some of what we have learned about department based assessment.

Lisa Smulyan
Associate Provost
In this report, I will focus less on the details of the grant activities and more on what I consider to be some of the lessons that we learned this year.

In October, 2010 at the bi-monthly meeting for department chairs (about 30 chairs in attendance), we held a small group discussion of assessment. We divided into three groups and each group contained a member of a department that was participating in the Teagle grant. All members of the group shared with each other their department’s plans for assessment that year, but there was particular interest in the activities of the Teagle grant participants, and they wound up sharing more fully about their projects. The important developments from these discussions included:

- Thoughtful articulation of the challenge of measuring some of the most important learning outcomes in our courses, e.g., critical thinking, excellent writing and evidence-based argument construction. The discussion of these challenges was important in confirming that the point of assessment is to try to measure these outcomes and not simply reduce assessment to only the things that are easy to measure like factual knowledge. This discussion was an excellent opportunity to review/revise/remind faculty of the point or goal of assessment of student learning at our institution.

- Colleagues who expressed negative views of assessment early in the conversation because they feel it is a waste of precious time, became intrigued by the good work of the Teagle grant departments. So the skeptical colleagues began to ask lots of questions about the details of the Teagle project and what they might learn from it. What ensued was a very lively discussion of particular approaches to assessment and how they had worked in our environment. Subsequent to the meeting (and totally initiated by the faculty), faculty exchanged different assessment instruments (e.g., rubrics and mid-semester feedback forms) with one and other.

- Overall, it just seemed that as an academic community, we were much more capable of having a substantive discussion of assessment. Compared to a Chair’s meeting a few years earlier, where people simply expressed loathing for the idea of assessment without much thoughtful engagement of the topic, this discussion (while not always gung-ho assessment) felt much more like a conversation that could help us to understand how assessment needs to work at a campus like ours in order for it be useful and get faculty buy-in. There was honest dialogue about the challenges and an openness to considering the opportunities for growth, learning and improvement by engaging with the process.

During the rest of the year, I participated in several other discussions related to the Teagle grant, some involving our TriCo partners and some among the Teagle grant participants on our own campus. I offer here more observations:
Faculty report over and over and in different ways that one of the most important assessment activities is the articulation of learning goals. The mere articulation of these goals makes them more thoughtful in their approach to teaching and more deliberate in their engagement with student learning. It changes how and what they teach for the better, even if they never measure anything. Many seem to feel that this step alone makes assessment “worth it.”

The process of articulating learning goals is also useful at the departmental level. Over and over, I have heard faculty report that these were among the best conversations that they have even had within their departments. These conversations have brought clarity and focus (and revision in response) to the departmental curriculum.

Cross-departmental and cross-institutional conversations are extremely valuable. Initially I thought that a key outcome of the grant would be that we would exchange assessment practices and maybe even develop common systems, and there would be a certain efficiency in this. As expected, sharing of best practices and ideas has been very useful and important. However, these cross-conversations have also pointed out to me the strong influence of departmental and institutional cultures in shaping our approach to assessment. What works in one place, doesn’t always translate to another, and there is some resistance to that transfer. Yet, the value of the conversation about practices across institutions and department still remains. These conversations do result in growth, but not in a straightforward, transfer of practices way.

I am looking forward to next year’s grant activities and the opportunity to build on the important progress that we made this year. In particular, I look forward to using what we have learned so far to further develop our approach to assessment of student learning in ways that support it fully and make it sustainable over the long term.

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