The foundational assumption of this project was that for departmental-level assessment to be effective and sustainable, faculty would have to directly appreciate its value for themselves. Anecdotal evidence as well as the following data from the faculty survey after following the Fall 2011 retreat suggest that the project succeeded in this respect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Combined &quot;agree&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articulating departmental learning goals for student learning is a valuable exercise</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting assessment of student learning benefits my department and / or my teaching</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department learned something worthwhile from my particular assessment project</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What were the conditions that supported that accomplishment?

Incentives for individual faculty participation and engagement:

- Financial incentives / obligations ($1,500 / per year over three years)
- Performing "service" responsibilities (for tenure and promotion review)
- Early adopters develop good will of Provost's office

Institutional supports and resources for faculty and departmental participation and engagement

- Pre-existing requirement of departmental assessment plans as response to Middle States review
- Grant raises visibility of departmental assessment efforts
- Provision of broad training as well as focused departmental support from institutional research offices through the grant
- Regular opportunities for interdepartmental dialogue and discussion: essentially the creation of time and space for 2 on-campus meetings, 2 retreats, one on-campus "reporting-out" per year
- Tri-college interaction creates positive peer pressure / healthy competition
- Limited focus on just three programs permits Provosts and IR offices to provide sufficiently substantive leadership and expertise to departments

Any one or two of these rather weak faculty incentives and institutional supports would probably not have been sufficient to yield the percentages shown in the table above. Though we lack a control group to test the proposition, it seems a good bet that it was only a combination of incentives and institutional supports was sufficient to get faculty "over the hump" of their initial skepticism about the value of this work.

With the grant coming to a close, a number of these incentives and institutional supports will be eliminated unless a conscious decision is made to sustain them. Thus, the incentive / support structure
in which our colleges will be attempting to continue or scale up their efforts to get new departments over their own "humps" of initial skepticism about assessment work looks like this:

**Incentives for individual faculty participation and engagement:**

- Performing "service" responsibilities (for tenure and promotion review)

**Institutional supports and resources for faculty and departmental participation and engagement**

- Pre-existing requirement of departmental assessment plans as response to Middle States review

This was essentially the incentive / support structure for departmental-level assessment that was in place prior to the Teagle grant. At that time, in preparation for upcoming Middle States reviews, our colleges had begun to ask departments to participate in assessment. At Bryn Mawr, departments were asked to develop goal statements and associated assessment plans; Haverford's efforts were focused on articulating institution-wide learning goals, and Swarthmore had asked departments to conduct annual assessment "progress reports." As we noted in the original proposal to Teagle,

...these efforts do not uniformly exemplify the ideal we seek: they revolve around idiosyncratic interests of individual faculty or courses within the department; they are focused on peripheral aspects of the major; they focus on "satisfaction" as opposed to direct measures of student learning; they were grant-funded and organized as one-off rather than sustainable assessment efforts, and so on.

It is probably fair to say that this statement is still descriptive of the department-level assessment work of the vast majority of the non-Teagle faculty and departments on our campuses, and moreover that, if the incentive / resource structure is not altered, there is no reason to expect a different result going forward. This is a rather long-winded and painfully concrete way of posing the question: have we learned anything from the Teagle project that would cause us to want to alter the pre-Teagle faculty incentive and / or institutional resource structure for department-level assessment on our campuses?

**Department-level assessment as compliance: Revert to status quo**

One way forward is to revert to a compliance-oriented approach. Will the goal statements we have asked (or will be asking) all our departments to develop, and the typically indirect, often incomplete assessment of the learning goals within those statements satisfy the Middle States expectation in this area? The answer to that is probably, with a little more effort to support more reluctant departments, a qualified "yes." If we choose to, our institution could likely shepherd all of our departments toward department-level student learning goal statements of a standard that would satisfy Middle States before our next decennial periodic review.

A key finding of the Teagle project (see table above) was indeed that the development of department-level statements of learning goals, even in the absence of actual assessments of student performance with respect to those goals, was a valuable exercise for faculty. But the question arises: Would the Teagle faculty have experienced that value had they developed their learning goals without the
expectation that they would need to demonstrate their linkages with pedagogy in their department and would need to measure how well students actually achieve them?

Put another way, did the expectation of eventual direct assessment and "closing the loop" impose a sense of discipline, utility, and empirical groundedness to the departmental goal statements that would otherwise have been lacking in many cases? It is true that the measurement strategies and resulting data collection were not always definitive across the participating Teagle departments, but it is also true that the framework of the four-stage assessment process (goals → measures → data collection → closing the loop), implemented over a long period of time, certainly imposed a sense of discipline and seriousness about the task of stating goals.

In other words, even if the Teagle project has led us to the conclusion that well-formed, empirically testable statements of learning goals are the highest cost / benefit element of the assessment process, it seems clear that the benefit of this task is fully realized only in a context that assumes those learning goals will at some point be empirically assessed. This means that making assessment sustainable and effective will mean going beyond the pre-Teagle status quo, and allocating more incentives and / or institutional resources to the task of providing such a context.

**Department-level assessment as a faculty resource: Continuing the Teagle model**

One option in this direction would be to simply continue the Teagle model in a three-year rotating cycle. The primary additional resource required here would be to replace the funding supplied by the grant (about $10,000 per year per institution, plus the not insignificant value of faculty, provostial, and IR staff time). Institutionalizing such an approach would remove two incentives and resources from the matrix of support for this work that were related to the grant, but probably two of the weakest: the benefits of being an "early adopter" and the "visibility" provided by the grant.

This work could likely be sustainable over several years, but has at least one major drawback. Given that each department takes three years to work through the cycle – and between the need for training, goal development, developing measures, collecting information, assessing results and closing the loop, this time scale cannot be much compressed without compromising the result – this would take about 35-40 years to work through all departments. This would probably not satisfy Middle States' expectation of conducting "regular" department-level assessment within their ten-year periodic review.

The time scale might be compressed somewhat, and our Provostial and IR staff might be able to accommodate a few more departments than three at a time. But even an aggressive time scale of two years, while supporting as many as five departments working at any one time, would still only permit our institutions to work through about 2/3rds of our departments in our accreditation cycle.

Thus a Teagle-based plan for conducting department-level assessment as a strategy for satisfying Middle States' expectation would require the commitment of more resources to support the administrative aspects of the work (whether these administrative functions are provided by faculty, departmental assistants, IR, or Provostial staff) than were afforded within the Teagle grant itself.
In support of this is the observation that the current Teagle participants were selected from among those most intrigued by and well-disposed toward the concept of assessment. Working through the remaining departments on our campuses would inevitably mean encountering greater initial resistance. Eventually, in theory, enough departments would have experienced the value of assessment from "the other side" of their initial resistance to it, and this would create a positive cultural momentum that would offset this resistance factor somewhat. But critical mass is a long way off, and so at least for the next several departments we could expect that the initial resistance would be greater than that encountered from departments within the Teagle grant, and thus that the resources (incentives and institutional resources) needed to overcome it would be accordingly greater as well.

**Department-level assessment as a basis for resource allocation: Periodic departmental reviews**

Resources at the departmental level of our institutions primarily revolve around faculty lines, so the obvious place to think about aligning departmental assessment of student learning would be in the processes associated with the allocation of those lines. While it is probably unrealistic to try to integrate department-level assessment into the regular annual procedures for requesting new or replacement faculty lines, a more natural place would be in the periodic external departmental reviews and associated self-studies that form the backdrop for such requests.

Such a proposal would have the added advantage of making a “Teagle-like" effort staggered and thus more manageable across the full set of departments, as only 3-5 departments come up for review in any given year. Presumably the assessment activities would precede the actual self-study and review by several years at least, occurring perhaps at the midpoint between their last self-study and their next upcoming one. Such a separation in time and space would be essential to maintaining the kind of open, self-critical, exploratory spirit that was so important to the substance of the Teagle projects.

In effect this would be like applying the Teagle model, but within an existing evaluation structure that would be scheduled to rotate through all departments within the Middle States' 10-year review cycle. More importantly, it would provide an important example to Middle States of how our assessment of student learning is integrated into our "normal" processes for resource allocation.

**Planning for department-level assessment: Where do we want to go?**

The options outlined above are not mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. The approaches can be combined in various ways, and within each kind of approach – compliance, faculty development, linking to resource allocation – there are surely other ways of organizing our work. But, as we enter the final phase of the Teagle grant, we are at an appropriate moment to be more declarative about the overall plan we will adopt if we intend to continue or scale up the effort beyond the pre-Teagle status quo. This is an appropriate moment for at least three important reasons:

- Faculty need and deserve to clearly understand the context within which they are being asked to devote their time and effort. Apart from general allusions to Middle States expectations, to date we have been deliberately and with good reason somewhat vague about the rationale for department-level assessment work. Successfully scaling up the effort in any way, however,
would seem to depend on being able to answer the legitimate faculty question of "why?" with respect to this work.

• Whether in the form of course release for faculty, additional administrative staff, or financial incentives, resources will need to be carefully allocated to any effort beyond the status quo, as outlined above. Whether in the form of time or money, resources are limited, and so we will need to be guided by a clear plan so that we receive the highest benefit from any such investment.

• The Teagle grant itself has created important resources – nine faculty with a favorable attitude toward this kind of assessment work, an institutional research staff with a working relationship across the Tri-Co that has developed expertise, resources, and examples to better support this work, and three Provosts with a clearer understanding of what the work is and what it requires to be successful. The final year of the grant presents our institutions with an opportunity to leverage these resources toward framing and implementing a more specific plan for department-level assessment on our campuses.

While it is thus clear to us that developing a plan for assessment of department-level learning outcomes is essential to making this kind of assessment work effective and sustainable, it is equally clear that this planning work is beyond the purview of the IR offices on each campus.

We also recognize that each campus will probably want to develop a plan that is consistent with its own institutional culture, and so that while there may be advantages to aligning some aspects of these plans across the Tri-Co (e.g., opportunities to share faculty expertise, coordination of institutional research, and so on), it is likely that many aspects of the plan will be unique to each institution.

We hope that this framing is helpful, and look forward to developing such a plan with you.