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 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.

Kim Cassidy
Provost and Professor of Psychology
Bryn Mawr College