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Inside AM

Liberal arts colleges may have a unique advantage in preparing students for the Creative Economy. Read about a multi-year study of the Five Colleges of Ohio funded by the Teagle Foundation and other academic endeavors involved in teaching, learning, and assessing creativity.

As part of a series of interviews for the Teagle project with individuals working in the academic creativity realm, Professor Nancy Grace talked with Steven Tepper, Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy of Vanderbilt University in January 2007. Read excerpts of her interview, including how the Teagle Project of the Five Colleges of Ohio has informed and transformed his teaching.

What is the Higher Learning Commission? is the question explored in *AM* for Students. As debate on academic accreditation intensifies at the federal level, today’s response to the question of what is the HLC will likely change tomorrow. Are you paying attention?

Creativity – the Heart of Higher Education

A growing number of scholars today assert that cultivating creativity is essential to the development of successful individuals, institutions, cities, and nations in the evolving technology-driven, knowledge-based, and globally competitive Creative Economy. The idea of cultivating creativity in post secondary education is not novel. Two decades ago in a Carnegie Foundation Special Report, Frank Newman noted that the challenge for higher education in an increasingly technological, global, and dynamic economy is to embrace change, particularly a cultural shift on campus where classrooms become places where new ideas are encouraged and self confidence is nurtured. College graduates will be required to have the ability and desire to be creative, entrepreneurial, and civic-minded. This report may have spawned many of the ideas leading to the nascent creativity-related projects, studies, Centers, and experiments being undertaken on college and university campuses today.

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Creativity in Higher Education – continued from page 1

As part of a three-year collaborative study of the Five Colleges of Ohio funded by the Teagle Foundation, a creativity working group headed by Nancy Grace, Professor of English at The College of Wooster, is developing and implementing tools to measure creativity, and using the results to improve pedagogy and student learning at liberal arts colleges and universities. This project is an exciting opportunity for the Five Colleges of Ohio to probe ways in which liberal arts institutions may have a unique advantage in preparing students for the Creative Economy. Iain Crawford, Vice President of Academic Affairs at The College of Wooster, is Principal Investigator, with Lori Bettison-Varga, Associate Dean of Research and Grants at The College of Wooster, directing the project.

Consulting on the project are Joseph Trimmer and Steven Tepper. Dr. Trimmer is the Director of the Virginia B. Ball Center of Creative Inquiry at Ball State University in charge of its intellectual mission and cultural activities. Steven J. Tepper is Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy and Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Vanderbilt University. Drs. Trimmer and Tepper have previously collaborated in a study that asked, “what would the creative campus look like?” Students at Vanderbilt and Ball State Universities completed surveys in which they identified creative organizations, people, classes, events, and activities and listed creative hot spots on campus. Professor Jennifer Lena, a sociologist at Vanderbilt, is using network analysis to portray graphically how creative work on campus develops, revealing artists, artistic brokers and arts enthusiasts as well as the links between people and events. Instead of focusing on input or output measures, the survey focuses on the creative and artistic links on campus that can be visually displayed as a way to identify where creativity is flourishing and where it is languishing.

Drs. Trimmer and Tepper have been involved in the meetings of the creativity working group of the Teagle project, assisted in the design of pilot surveys on perceptions of creativity and critical thinking of faculty members and students at the Five Colleges of Ohio, and

participated in personal interviews with Professor Grace. The surveys will be given to faculty members, and senior and first-year students at The College of Wooster, Denison University, Kenyon College and Ohio Wesleyan University during spring semester 2007. A longitudinal study of students’ perceptions of creativity over time is planned as a follow-up to the pilot surveys. Excerpts of Professor Grace’s interview with Steven Tepper are included in this issue of *AM*.

Professor Grace and Simon Gray, Associate Professor of Computer Science at The College of Wooster and a member of the creativity working group, have also met with Robert J. Sternberg, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Tufts University. Officials at Tufts are hoping to improve the identification of future leaders, the prediction of college grades, and diversity among students by admitting applicants who do well on an experimental creativity assessment as part of the admissions application process. Dr. Sternberg developed the assessment, and heads the study known as the Rainbow Project. Results from an initial study, based on 800 students across the country, indicate that the assessment diminishes much of the gap based on racial and socioeconomic groups on traditional standardized tests, and that the test along with SAT scores predict students’ grades during the first year of college better than standardized test scores.

Steven Tepper has noted that creativity is not included in rankings and assessments of colleges and universities. Moreover, creativity was omitted in the recent report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education of the Secretary of Education. A study in England found that a majority of teaching fellows held the view that students’ creativity is important and that it should be developed, but only a minority of them assess students’ creative work formally or informally. One of the major conclusions of the report is that assessment of creativity in higher education needs to be addressed.

This gap is one that the creativity working group of the Teagle project is addressing, especially as it relates to liberal arts colleges and universities. Assessing creativity in the admissions process, mapping the creative campus by visually displaying the creative and

artistic links on campus, and assessing students' creative work in order to improve teaching and learning may contribute to an understanding of the role of creativity in higher education and its link to the Creative Economy, assist colleges and universities in ways to foster and assess creativity in higher education, and promote the inclusion of creativity in the national debate on accountability and assessment in higher education.

For more information on the Teagle creativity and critical thinking assessment project of the Five Colleges of Ohio, visit its website at <http://www.wooster.edu/Teagle> . Working group leaders Sarah Murnen of Kenyon College and Nancy Grace of The College of Wooster will be hosting project orientation workshops for interested faculty at The College of Wooster, Denison University, Kenyon College, and Ohio Wesleyan University in May and August 2007.

Nancy Grace Interviews Steven Tepper

In January 2007, faculty members from the Five Colleges of Ohio who make up the creativity and critical thinking working groups of the Teagle project met at Kenyon College. Prior to the group meetings, Professor Nancy Grace of The College of Wooster, who heads the creativity working group, met with Steven Tepper and discussed his views on creativity and his experience in creativity studies and other creativity-related endeavors. Dr. Tepper is the Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University and a consultant on the Teagle creativity and critical thinking project of the Five Colleges of Ohio. The following excerpts are from their January interview and subsequent communications.

Grace: You mentioned when you were at Wooster [Feb. 24, 2007] that your work with the Teagle-funded

Creative/Critical Thinking Assessment Project has influenced your own thinking about and teaching of creativity. How so?

Tepper: First, the Teagle project has helped me realize that you have to embed creativity as a specific expectation into assignments. You have to write assignments that ask students to be creative – to extend an argument, develop alternatives, reason through analogy, make unusual connections, add their own creative voice. You also have to let students know, explicitly, that they will be assessed on these traits. Another strategy is to encourage “collaborative circles” - group projects that force students to work together to define a collective vision or to come up with a non-routine solution. In my experience, these collaborative circles, if done right, have been one of the most rewarding experiences for students.

Grace: Are there ways in which liberal arts schools are better positioned to enable that [creative] habit of mind compared to other institutions of higher education? That idea certainly characterizes our rhetoric.

Tepper: Right. I haven't spent enough time at liberal arts colleges, but I can certainly compare them to what I do know, which is the larger research schools. The reason the liberal arts schools are in a good position is because cultivating the creative mind is not just about targeting individuals, but it's about creating the right culture and climate. Liberal arts institutions have a collective vision and commitment to their students and what constitutes a valuable and meaningful college experience. With big universities, it's very hard to disseminate that vision so that when you are walking down the quad and you look to your left and your right and you walk into a class that vision is manifest. There are greater possibilities for that at a smaller school, where there is also a greater collective buy in. From my experience at liberal arts colleges there is a tent revival feeling: we are here to change these kids' lives, not to advance, necessarily, are own professional interests. It's not about a bunch of individuals collectively connected in pursuit of their own interests. It's a little bit more of a sense that we are all in this together for a purpose.

That kind of spirit can help a campus cultivate the climate, make the changes necessary so that creativity is being reinforced in multiple areas, leading to a kind of a totalizing feeling.

Grace: That's clearly a challenge for us – as both educators and parents. If I had a child looking at colleges right now and wanted the most creative college environment, which ones would you recommend? CNN recently reported a ranking of the best values for colleges, actually the top one was UNC Chapel Hill, and William and Mary was in the top five. But they weren't evaluating creativity; they were looking at cost, professorial reputation, etc. That's great, but if I really want this other kind of education for my daughter, which ones would you recommend? Are they out there?

Tepper: My instinct tells me, although I was not a child of the liberal arts, that if you want your kids to have a creative education, you should seriously look at the liberal arts college as an alternative. But I am not going to say which one.

Grace: But that type of school. And why?

Tepper: When I compare Princeton and Harvard they both draw on the brightest students. I mean, the brightest students in the country can go to either of those schools: they'd probably get admitted, and there is a lot of overlap in the admissions pool. I was at both institutions, and they're both good for different reasons, but I will say that Harvard probably attracted more creative students because it was in an urban environment, and if you're a creative kid, you can either go to a pastoral campus where you are an hour from any major city, or you can go to Cambridge – which would you chose? To the extent that Harvard might have been more creative than Princeton, it wasn't because of the faculty, and it wasn't because of the organizational structures. It had a lot to do with where the school was located and the kinds of students that would be attracted to one or the other location. So an urban environment provides the opportunity for kids to stimulate themselves with lots of interesting external

events, people, and activities. So that would be one thing to consider.

The arts are only one part of creativity, but the schools that have created positions that are supposed to integrate the arts across campus or places that seem to invest in the arts are likely creative places to study and live. So if the long range plans for the campuses focus on building three new sports arenas, versus spending considerable dollars to integrate or amplify the arts, it might give you a sense of which school you want to commit to.

Grace: What if that college president said we're going to build a new field house, but the dance program will have access to it or be housed there as part of the conversation? Might that be a sign of a creative campus as you conceptualize it?

Tepper: Right, so you could easily look at these interdisciplinary programs, places, centers. You could look for the most unusual mismatch of them, and that would be a good sign. Dance and football might be a good sign. Why not?! Right, a lot of unusual mismatches, yes, unusual mismatches in course titles and centers, even student organizations – that's a pretty good sign that there's something creative happening on that campus.

Grace: What about the ways that a First-Year Seminar program is taught? How would you teach one?

Tepper: I would have the students work in groups on a single creative project. Design a better grocery cart; write a parody of a classic novel; compare 15th century Florence and 21st century New York and decide which is more creative; design a new site where the World Trade Centers once stood; etc. The students would need to solve puzzles, situate their work in history; think about social dimensions, practical dimensions – it could be a life-changing experience.

Grace: Anything else that a parent or prospective student should look for?

Tepper: You want to look at how much independent work is available and how much is encouraged. I mean “independent” in that it’s something you do by yourself, like the production of a paper or project not part of the standard course requirements, a senior project, a thesis, of some kind.

Grace: Required of everyone or electives?

Tepper: I think it should be required. A school that requires its students to write a thesis, or do a senior project – and that senior project could be collaborative, it doesn’t have to be individual – that kind of capstone learning experience requires so many of the fundamental dimensions of creativity.

Grace: Talk a bit about those specific dimensions.

Tepper: Well, it requires conceptualizing the project, figuring out what you want to do, brainstorming what you could do. It requires the generation of multiple hypotheses. It requires critical thinking skills as well as creative thinking. But having to build something from nothing, whether it’s an intellectual idea or a program, is going to force students to engage in many dimensions of the creative mind that will well prepare them for the future. So, the fact that every student had to write a thesis at Princeton was key. As I watched them go through this process, starting in their junior year, doing two junior year papers that are supposed to lead to a senior thesis and then spending a whole year working with a faculty member It’s a four-semester project at Princeton and one of the things that leads to creativity is all the dead ends that they encounter along the way. When you watch these kids have to start something from scratch and thrash around and have all these small failures on the way to success – every one of those failures, every one of those dead ends, forces them to be creative about generating another approach.

Grace: How do we, and I see this all the time with Wooster’s Independent Study program and I am sure my colleagues at other schools with similar elective or required programs do as well, how do we in an institution that uses grades as a reward nurture the kind

of risk taking that will encourage students to thrash around like that? The greater culture expects grades, and our students do as well. How do we work within existing constraints to foster creative independence in our students?

Tepper: Independent, long-term work helps, but you still have to grade a thesis, although ideally they would all get A’s on their thesis. But it’s impossible to go through that process, to meet with a faculty member every week – if you complete the project, you should probably get an A because you have done all the learning. Granted, there may be some theses that are better than others, so if you care to differentiate between them, the lowest grade could be a “B.” But the long process, the depth of engagement, is more than the grade.

Grace: Are there other current practices or trends in higher education that discourage creativity?

Tepper: We clearly need to rethink our pedagogy. Many teachers still teach as if there is a “body of knowledge” – specific facts or ideas – that they have to impart over 16 weeks. If this is your notion of education, then the traditional lecture is often the most efficient way to “deliver knowledge.” But if we think of our role as intellectual and creative coaches, then our approach to teaching is completely different. Education becomes more project based, with faculty members trying to help students through the “process” of discovery.

I also think the current move to “assessment” might discourage creativity if we don’t assess properly. If assessment is only about content knowledge or basic skills – like writing and math – then we will not create the right incentives to teach creativity, to allow students and faculty to take risks together, to focus on process, not just easily measured results.

Grace: Do you find that academia is responding or not responding – or slow to respond – to the creative economy?

Tepper: I think academia and government are slow to respond. For example, the recent Spelling's Commission report on higher education reform did not, in its more than 100 pages, mention "creativity" even once. On the other hand, we see some encouraging signs on individual campuses. Harvard recently announced that aesthetic understanding would be a core component of its curricula and that extra-curricular activities, where a lot of creativity happens, will be more integrated into the classroom. Similarly, Georgia Tech has made creativity and the arts a core part of their strategy to recruit students and for nurturing the type of environment that will stimulate those students to become brilliant inventors, scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs.

Grace: So how do we move forward from here? Generating income to actualize these creative spaces? What can smaller liberal arts institutions like Wooster do in terms of creative fundraising, capital investment to get moving?

Tepper: First, mobilize the assets and spaces already available to you. Do an inventory of your creative assets and make sure they are all being employed to their maximum value. Second, dream up the most interesting, daring, dynamic spaces and see who wants to get on board, who wants to partner in sponsoring such spaces/projects – whether such partners are local businesses or national media and technology firms. If the big idea doesn't sell – although I think it will – then work on incubating and integrating smaller initiatives. Potential funders want to be part of something really big and transformative – not just incremental program improvements. Think boldly first!

AM for Students

What is the Higher Learning Commission?

Founded in 1895, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges is The College of Wooster's accrediting agency. The College must meet five criteria to merit

accreditation every ten years; each criterion has several core components, defined by the HLC. The third criterion is student learning and effective teaching, and the first core component of this criterion is, "The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible." One specific type of evidence that colleges may use to demonstrate that they have addressed this component is that the results obtained through assessment of student learning are made available to students.

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges is one of six regional accreditation organizations; there are also national and specialized accrediting agencies. The HLC has geographic jurisdiction in the 19-state area of Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming. HLC is the largest of the regional accreditation organizations in terms of number of member institutions and geographic scope.

The regional accreditation organizations review nearly 3,000 institutions of higher education, most of which are traditional, nonprofit, degree-granting colleges and universities. The six regional accreditation organizations compose the private accreditation and self-regulation system that was designed to ensure quality in higher education through a peer-review process of programs and institutions.

Since the 1950s, the federal government has relied on this private accreditation system to determine eligibility of higher education institutions to receive federal student financial assistance and other federal funds. The Office of the U.S. Commissioner of Education produces a list of federally recognized accrediting organizations. The HLC is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). This recognition process and the quality standards used in the process were put into federal law in the Higher Education Act

(HEA) as amended in 1965. The link between accreditation and federal funding motivates institutions of higher education to become accredited by a federally recognized accreditation organization. Accreditation is entirely voluntary, but without accreditation there is no federal financial aid. It also cemented the relationship between the federal government and accrediting agencies.

Currently, academic accreditation is being debated extensively at the federal level. Altering the accreditation landscape is viewed by some as a means of implementing the recommendations of the Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Ironically, the Commission's report excluded a recommendation for dismantling the current system of six regional accreditors in favor of one national agency that had been proposed in a discussion paper of the Commission prior to the final report. Some view the central question of the accreditation debate as whether the Education Department should demand that accrediting agencies set minimum standards of student learning or whether individual institutions should establish them. Colleges and accreditors argue that having the accrediting agencies set standards would be the equivalent of a system of federal standards and intrusion on academic policy making at the federal level. Other organizations and individuals have proposed far more extraordinary change, such as repealing the law that binds federal aid funding to accreditation and creating a free market system of accreditation. Given the intensity of the debate, the response to: "What is the Higher Learning Commission?" will likely be different in the near future from what it is today.

For more information on the Higher Learning Commission, you can visit its website at <http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/>.

See the article *Informing the Public About Accreditation* for the more general topic of accreditation.

http://www.chea.org/public_info/index.asp

Assessment Briefs

Department/Program Assessment Plans

Throughout the year, academic departments and programs have submitted components of their assessment plans: student learning goals, methods of assessment, and a description of the feedback loop to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. The Assessment Committee provided feedback on each component. The integrated assessment plan that includes the three components and a matrix mapping goals and measures is due at the end of April.

Exemplars

Exemplar departments in assessment completed their integrated assessment plans prior to the April deadline, and have been collecting data and information based on their measures. The Biology, Education, Geology, Philosophy, and Spanish Departments will complete assessment reports with findings and action items by June 22, 2007. All other departments will submit their first annual assessment report at the end of next year.

Assessment Committee News

Annual Report 2006-07

The Annual Report of the Assessment Committee will be presented by John Neuhoff, Chair of the Assessment Committee, at the May 7 faculty meeting. Following this presentation, it will be posted on the assessment website. The report provides an update of the progress in assessment of student learning in academic departments and programs and in the general education curriculum.

Faculty Assessment Reception

Iain Crawford, on behalf of the Assessment Committee, has invited all faculty members for drinks and hors-d'oeuvres on Thursday, May 10, at the Wooster Inn, from 4-6 p.m., to celebrate the end of the year and all of the hard work on learning outcomes assessment! Entertainment will be provided by *The Hear and Now* duo, featuring Matt Dingo on guitar and Andy Loess on trumpet.

Assessment Calendar

Assessment Matters Brown Bag Lunch Series Spring Semester, 238 Kauke Hall

Apr 11, 2007 Assessment Data Issues
Guest Speakers:
Anne Gates, Education
Nancy Grace, English
John Neuhoff, Psychology
Megan Wereley, Education

For further information contact :
John Neuhoff, Assessment Committee Chair

Meetings & Events

Five Colleges of Ohio Teagle Project

Apr 6, 2007 Teaching Matters: "Creativity and Critical Thinking: Kissing Cousins?"
Nancy Grace and Simon Gray
College of Wooster, Wooster, OH

May and Aug 2007 Teagle Project Orientation Workshops:
Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH
Kenyon College, Gambier, OH
Denison University, Granville, OH
The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH

Department and Program Assessment

Apr 27, 2007 Integrated Assessment Plan due to VPAA

May 10, 2007 Faculty Assessment Reception
The Wooster Inn, 4-6 p.m.

Conferences & Training Programs

Apr 20-24, 2007 HLC Annual Meeting
Chicago, IL

Assessment Committee Members, Spring 2007 John Neuhoff, Chair, Psychology

Lori Bettison-Varga, Geology	JaQuan Bryant, student
Iain Crawford, VPAA	Theresa Ford, Assessment
Anne Gates, Education	Nancy Grace, English
Simon Gray, Computer Science	Elys Kettling Law, Library
Abigail Kline, student	Henry Kreuzman, Philosophy
Richard Lehtinen, Biology	William Macauley, English
Michael Thompson, Institutional Research	
Thomas Wood, Music	

Submissions to *Assessment Matters*

We are accepting submissions for consideration to be included in *AM*. If you have assessment news that is timely; assessment innovations in the liberal arts; assessment issues that may affect the liberal arts; and commentaries. Please submit materials to appear in *Assessment Matters* to Sarah Sidor (ssidor@wooster.edu). Materials should not exceed 400 words.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Nancy Grace for reviewing this *AM* issue.