

AALAC Workshop Proposal  
**Title: "Engaged Liberal Arts"**

Location and Date: Oberlin College, Spring 2019

**Workshop Organizers**

Laura Baudot, Associate Professor, Department of English; Director, Oberlin Center for Convergence (StudiOC); Director, (starting June 2018) Center for Teaching Innovation and Excellence (CTIE)

Tania Boster, Director, Bonner Center Curricular Initiatives, Associate Director, Bonner Center; Associate Director, Center for Teaching Innovation and Excellence (CTIE); Assistant Professor, Department of History

David Kamitsuka, Senior Associate Dean, Associate Professor of Religion

Matthew Cohen, Assistant Professor, Sustainability Science, Furman University

Joshua Moses, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Environmental Studies, Haverford College

Dianna Shandy, Associate Dean in the Institute for Global Citizenship and Professor of Anthropology

Ilan Stavans, Lewis-Sebring Professor of Humanities and Latin American and Latino Culture, Amherst College

**Workshop Contact Person**

Laura Baudot, [lbaudot@oberlin.edu](mailto:lbaudot@oberlin.edu) 326 East College St., Oberlin, OH

**Invited AALAC Participants (limit 17)**

Christopher A. Grobe, Assistant Professor English, Amherst

Paul A. Schroeder Rodriguez, Professor of Spanish; Chair of Spanish, Amherst

Monica M. Ringer, Professor of History and Asian Languages & Civilizations; Chair of Asian Languages and Civilizations, Amherst

Christopher T. Dole, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Amherst

Madavi Kale, Chair and Professor of History, Bryn Mawr

Linda Susan Beard, Associate Professor of English and Director of Africana Studies, Bryn Mawr

Wes Markofski, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Carleton

Issac (Ike) Bailey, James K. Batten Professor of Public Policy, Africana Studies Department, Davidson

Karl Sandin, Associate Professor, Art History & Visual Culture / Environmental Studies, Denison

Maria Rippon, Assistant Professor, Spanish, Furman

Maria Carmen Valentin, Associate Professor, Department Chair of Spanish, Grinnell

Samuel Rebelsky, Professor of Computer Science, Grinnell

Barbara A Trish, Director of Rosenfield Program, Professor, Department Chair of Political Science, Grinnell

Kaye Edwards, Assoc. Professor of Education, Haverford

Adam Rosenblatt, Visiting Assistant Professor of Peace, Justice, and Human Rights, Haverford

Kristin Lindgren, Director of College Writing Center and Visiting Assistant Professor of Independent College Programs, Haverford  
Karine S. Moe, F.R. Bigelow Professor of Economics, currently serving as Provost and Dean of the Faculty, Macalester  
Ruthanne Kurth-Schai, DeWitt Wallace Professor & Chair of Educational Studies, Macalester  
Wang Ping, Professor of English, Macalester  
Roopali Phadke, Professor of Environmental Studies, Macalester  
Daniel Trudeau, Professor, Minority and ethnic group segregation, social welfare policy, local governance, and city planning, Macalester  
Sonita Sarker, Professor Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and English, Macalester  
Suzanne Gurland, Dean of Curriculum; Associate Professor of Psychology, Middlebury  
John Bass, Professor of Music, Director, Mike Curb Institute for Music, Rhodes  
Ginetta Candelario, Professor of Sociology and of Latin American & Latino/a Studies, Smith

### **Workshop Proposal Submitted To**

Tim Elgren, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Oberlin College

### **Description**

We propose an AALAC workshop on the theme of the engaged liberal arts. At the broadest level, the question this workshop explores is how the model of an “engaged institution” can help reimagine a liberal arts college education. More specifically, we seek to investigate models for realizing the goals of engaged learning on the level of the academic department and major.

Engaged learning bridges academic institution and the community (broadly defined), academic study and real world problems, student intellectual growth and career preparedness. In other words, it accomplishes many of the goals and ambitions of institutions of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We draw our concept of the “engaged institution” from a broad literature on the topic that has emerged over the past 20 years. The Kellogg Commission report on the Engaged Institution, a foundational study that focused initially on state and land grant universities but which has informed initiatives in a wide range of higher education contexts, offers a particularly germane definition for the purposes of this workshop: “An engaged institution is responsive to the needs of today’s students and tomorrow’s. It enriches the student experience by bringing research into the curriculum and offering practical experience in the world they will enter. It forms partnerships of faculty, students and communities to put knowledge and skills to work on today’s most critical problems.” Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution, Kellogg Commission Report, 1999

National Association of State University and Land Grant Colleges (2001). Returning to our roots: The engaged institution. In Executive summaries of the reports of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities. Washington, DC: NASULGC.

The goals of an engaged institution as described in the literature on the topic are very much in keeping with the AALAC member institution learning goals. For example, Oberlin College's general learning goals include the following:

Students who attend Oberlin:

7. Should collaborate to solve problems, generate fresh questions, create new knowledge and advance community goals.
8. Should develop an enduring commitment to acting in the world to further social justice, deepen democracy, and build a sustainable future.

At Oberlin, the Bonner Center for Service and Learning and Oberlin along with the Center for Convergence (StudiOC) are key players in this endeavor. StudiOC is a curricular program that links courses around a shared theme or social problem. The cohort of students enrolled in the learning community study an issue from multiple disciplinary vantage points in order to develop the intellectual flexibility, patience, as well as curiosity necessary for tackling complex political, social, cultural, and artistic phenomena. Students engage with the theme inside the classroom, as well as in programming that bridges the classroom and the local community. The Bonner Center for Service and Learning is the central hub for community-engaged courses in which faculty collaborate with community partners to identify community needs and goals and integrate these, through community-based research or class projects, into the academic goals of a course for the mutual benefit of the partner and student learning. The curricular outreach of the directors of the center has been enormously successful. The number of community-based learning courses has doubled over the past year. While this demonstrates a commitment to the engaged model across the curriculum, it is still the case that most courses are concentrated in a few departments. StudiOC, while making important contributions to engaged learning, reaches a relatively limited number of students. Engaged learning is simultaneously scattered, while also being unevenly distributed.

The larger institutional learning outcomes presume a model of engaged learning. Individual courses help them achieve those learning goals. The missing link is the creative focus on the design of the academic major for engaged learning. For students to achieve these learning goals they need to encounter them in their majors and in academic departments.

### **Workshop Topics and Questions:**

The key question we wish to explore in this workshop is: How might we connect the learning goals of the majors in all three divisions, across the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, to the model of engaged learning?

In this workshop we want to explore the questions and problems this goal raises as well as the practical impediments to its realization. This is not a workshop about how to get recalcitrant departments to comply and get with the program. We want skeptics as well as enthusiasts about the public purposes of academic majors. We also wish to stress that this is not a matter

of simply aligning the website of an academic major with the list of institutional learning goals. This form of superficial alignment does not engage with the thorny issues and big questions.

We want to discuss practical models and examples, as well as work through the more philosophical issues related to engaged pedagogies within academic departments and the points of contact and points of friction between a traditional conception of a liberal arts education and the experiential learning emphasis of an engaged liberal arts education.

Practical questions and potential case studies:

- Discussion of the evolving context and essential skills for the 21st Century and how they challenge the traditional learning goals of liberal arts curricula.
- Discussion and examples of the “engaged department” model. This theory of community based pedagogies is directly relevant to the goal of aligning learning outcomes of the individual departments and larger engaged learning goals.<sup>2</sup>[2]
- Discussion and examples of engaged learning as part of the general education requirements and how that can feed back into department learning goals.
- Discussion of examples of engagement across the disciplines. Could the engaged model enrich the explanation institutions offer students for the necessity of curricular exploration (i.e. distribution requirements)?
- Discussion and examples of engaged humanities departments.

The following are examples of thorny issues we want to work through:

- One of the challenges is the very fact that problem-based model of engaged learning is sometimes perceived as hostile to the idea of disciplines.<sup>3</sup> How do we create flexible

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<sup>2</sup> [Caryn McTighe Musil](#), “Departmental Designs for Civic Impact,” *Peer Review* Fall 2017, Vol. 19, No. 4. [<https://www.aacu.org/peerreview/2017/Fall/Musil>]; Kevin Kecske, “Collectivizing our Impact: Enaging Departments and Academic Change” *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning & Civic Engagement* Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 2015

<sup>3</sup> “As Beachy (2011) explains, we need to think of ourselves and our students not as pupils of particular disciplines but as pupils of problems—problems of societal relevance that, embodying the complexity of the real world, cut across disciplinary borders and thus can only be solved in disciplinary convergence zones. Such a shift requires institutions of higher education to embrace a commitment to problem-solving in curriculum and research that draws on disciplinary knowledge and methods but supports the integration of multiple perspectives for interdisciplinary collaboration and education.” Amy Patrick Mossman, “Retrofitting the Ivory

disciplines while also preserving the unique histories, methodologies, and values of each discipline? Does engaged learning, particularly in humanities departments, have the potential to give new meaning and orientation to fields that traditionally, but no longer, prepare students for graduate study? How does engaged learning conflict with or compliment the preservation of disciplinary diversity crucial for the ecology of higher education and the liberal arts?

- For students to effectively participate in engaged learning and community-based learning they need to develop an intellectual disposition that is traditionally linked to more open-ended models of intellectual inquiry: embrace of complexity, free-ranging inquiry, patience, self-reflection. The question, then, is how to bring these habits of mind—suspension of judgment and certainties, patient embrace of complexity, self-displacement, sophisticated reflection on experience—to the tackling of real world problems and to partnerships in local communities, and the global marketplace. Many of us may have experienced forms of student intolerance and lack of willingness to engage with ideological diversity. How can we balance an activist model that can be associated with engaged learning with the passion and patience for deep learning?
- Because of the presentist and future-oriented nature of the discourse advancing engaged learning, how can engaged learning also incorporate the role of institutions of higher education as preservers of the historical archive. How can history as taught in various academic disciplines inform both the practice and theory of engaged learning?

### **Workshop Format**

#### Day 1

Travel to Oberlin. Participants will arrive in the early afternoon.

Welcome and Introductions, afternoon

Keynote Address 1, evening

Dinner

#### Day 2

Panel Presentation and Discussion 1, morning

Lunch

Panel Presentation and Discussion 2, afternoon

Keynote Address 2

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Tower: Engaging Global Sustainability Challenges Through Interdisciplinary Problem-Oriented Education, Research, and Partnerships in U.S. Higher Education," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, Volume 22, Number 1, p. 35, (2018), p. 42. See also: Fitzgerald, Hiram, Bruns, Karen, Sonka, Steven, Furco, Andrew, and Swanson, Louis. "The Centrality of Engagement in Higher Education," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement [Online]*, Volume 16 Number 3 (18 September 2012).

Dinner

Day 3

Panel Presentation and Discussion 3, morning

Lunch

Reflections and Future Planning, immediately following lunch

Participants depart, early afternoon

**Potential Keynote Speakers**

1. Amy Patrick Mossman, Professor Sustainability Studies; Ecocriticism; Rhetoric; Writing Studies; Env. Communication at Western Illinois University, author of "Retrofitting the Ivory Tower: Engaging Global Sustainability Challenges through Interdisciplinary Problem-Oriented Education, Research, and Partnerships in U.S. Higher Education." *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, [S.I.], v. 22, n. 1, p. 35-60, March, 2018.
2. Randall (Randy) Bass is a professor in the Department of English at Georgetown University, the former founding executive director of the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, director of the Visible Knowledge Project, and vice provost for education. He also leads the Designing the Future(s) initiative and the Red House incubator for curricular transformation.

**Workshop Follow-up and Evaluation**

The future planning portion of the workshop will be devoted to identifying next steps for workshop participants at their respective institutions. In the Oberlin context, we anticipate a series of conversations and debates with faculty members organized and moderated by the CTIE (center for teaching innovation and excellence.) We will also discuss with participants a future date in which all workshop participants can convene via video conferencing to report on the results of our respective initiatives.

The workshop organizers Tania Boster and Laura Baudot plan to present a paper inspired by the workshop at the AAC&U conference 2020.

To evaluate the impact of the workshop, we will request that faculty write a brief reflection paper. We will ask them to describe the ideas they found most promising for their institutions, questions they have following the workshop, and ideas for follow-up activities.