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The Group Approach

By KAREN W. ARENSON

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AS a classics professor at [Princeton](#), W. Robert Connor did not think much about proving to others that his students were learning. But as president of the Teagle Foundation, a New York City institution with \$160 million in assets, he is coming to terms with what he calls “a national cult of accountability that runs through all of education.” “But I also think there is a terrific opportunity for colleges to push student learning to a higher level,” he added.

Working with the Council of Independent Colleges, Teagle is supporting 33 colleges experimenting with the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a recently developed test to assess student proficiency in analytical reasoning, critical thinking and writing.

Teagle has also encouraged campuses to develop their own approaches to assessment, and is

financing 53 colleges that are working together in 11 small collaborative groups. One such college, Carleton, is concentrating on writing assessment. Elizabeth J. Ciner, an associate dean at Carleton, said the process allowed the college to spot students who needed help. It also helps the college strengthen its general instruction.

She said she particularly liked Teagle’s group approach because it meant that while Carleton concentrated on writing, it was collaborating with colleges focused on other areas: Macalester in quantitative reasoning, Grinnell in global understanding and St. Olaf in off-campus education programs.

Dr. Ciner also said that Teagle’s view of assessment had helped faculty members “see assessment not as something done to them or around them, but as something useful for improving teaching and learning.”