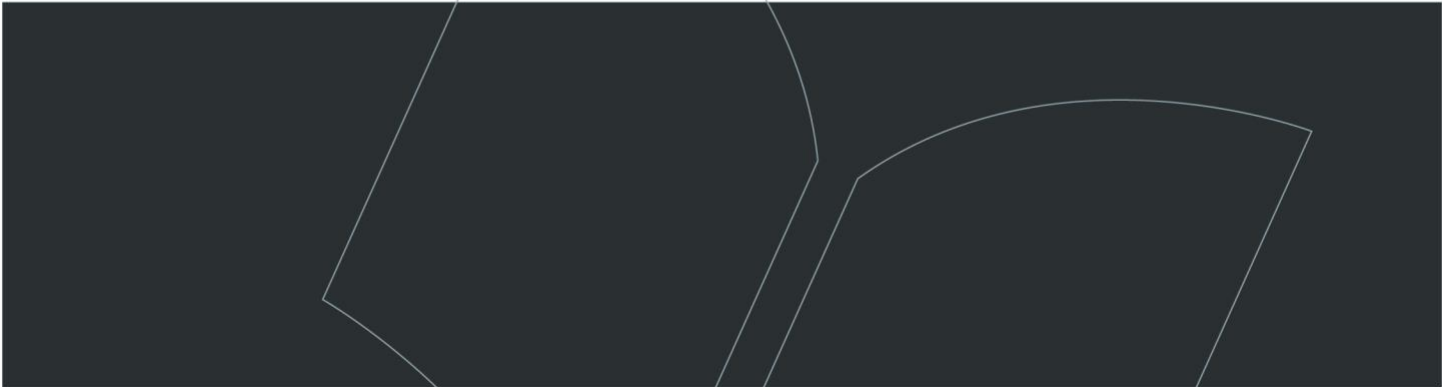




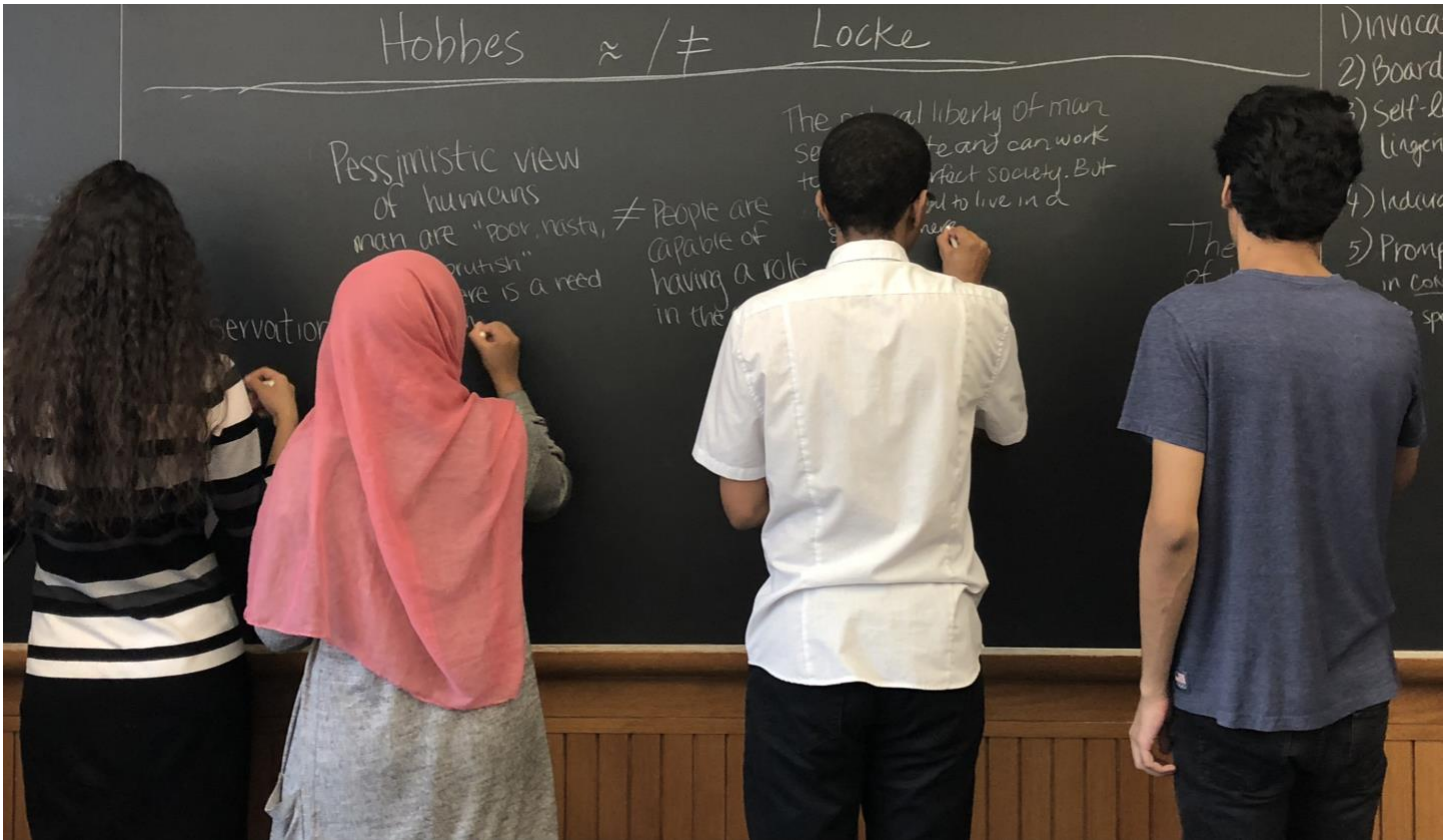
**KNOWLEDGE  
FOR FREEDOM**

A Teagle Foundation Initiative



## Outline

I: Overview of the Knowledge for Freedom Programs	2
II: Needs Assessment	3
III: Constituents, Anticipated Results, and Proven Impact	4
IV: Details of the Initiative	6



## SECTION I

### Overview of the Knowledge for Freedom Programs

Knowledge for Freedom Programs invite underserved high school students to study humanity's deepest questions about leading lives of purpose and civic responsibility. Between the junior and senior years of high school, students come into residence on a college campus, where they experience the intensity of a seminar-sized discussion taught by college professors focused on major works of philosophy and literature. Over the following year, while applying to college as high school seniors, the students engage in civic initiatives inspired by the recognition that their lives are interconnected with the lives of others.

High school students who typically find themselves shut out from opportunities available to their more affluent peers are thus provided with an opportunity to undertake college-level work in the humanities, to build meaningful relationships with college faculty and college students, who serve them as mentors, and to develop, through practice, civic skills with their peers. Knowledge for Freedom programs, as demonstrated by the flagship "Freedom and Citizenship Program" at Columbia University, dramatically improve college readiness, admission prospects, and college graduation persistence while building interest in humanistic writing and issues, as well as habits of civic engagement, that persist during and after college.

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## SECTION II

### Needs Assessment

The United States is afflicted by a grave deficit in civic participation. Fewer than half of eligible voters exercise their right to vote and high proportions of the adult population remain uninformed about the basic facts of how government is organized in our constitutional republic. The decline of civics curricula in American public schools portends a dark future: our students are becoming less informed, with **fewer than a quarter** of high school seniors reaching civic proficiency before graduation.

Among students who are low-income, nonwhite, and first-generation American, the deficit is even wider. Disparities in civic education between racial and economic groups appear **as early as fourth grade**. Beyond civic knowledge, racial and economic disparities are also found in civic skills, attitudes, and behavior. Too many young students from disadvantaged backgrounds feel disempowered and unwelcome in the American polity and reach adulthood in a dispirited state of apathy and disengagement.

*It opened me up to politics and increased my interest in civics. I am more open to having political discussions and more knowledgeable about the issues. I still think about the philosophical lessons from the summer when forming my political ideologies and beliefs today.*

—Malachi

Where public primary schools are unwilling or unable to provide civic education to their students, American colleges and universities must step in. It is no less true today than it was in 1869 when Harvard president Charles W. Eliot remarked that “whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply.”

Whether situated in an urban or rural setting, it is also true that no college can remain aloof from or only casually attentive to its neighbors. Selective colleges in particular face an urgent imperative to attract and retain more diverse populations of students and faculty, and to confront the fact that their admissions policies have the appearance, if not the intent, of exacerbating America’s inequality problem. Despite efforts to recruit more students with significant financial need, many elite colleges today enroll the same number of students from the top 1% of the income distribution **as from the bottom 60%**. College education has been shown to be a **strong factor in civic engagement** regardless of economic background. In short, the education gap is worsening our nation’s civic deficit.

Academic departments in the humanities have a particular obligation to find ways to mitigate this problem by bringing a deep and engaging civic education to underserved youth. Humanities teaches the necessary civic skills for public discourse, reading, writing, and rhetoric. Courses in the humanities teach students to widen perspective, experience empathy, and balance humility and conviction. By contrast to disciplines in which technical problems yield to clear solutions and basic questions are susceptible to right or wrong answers, the humanities-- when well taught-- expose students to the challenges of ambiguity, cultural difference, and conflicting

moral and aesthetic values that are not easily reconciled. The humanities foster an awareness of fallibility and nuance, respect for old ideas and openness to new ones. In short, the humanities are indispensable to a true liberal education—education for creativity, humility, freedom, responsibility, and hope.

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### SECTION III

## Constituents, Anticipated Results, and Proven Impact

The primary beneficiaries of Knowledge for Freedom programs are low-income rising high school seniors. But these programs, in important ways, also serve college faculty, current college students, and university neighbors.

Knowledge for Freedom programs recruit rising high school seniors who come mainly from low-income families, are first- or second-generation Americans, or attend underperforming high schools. Over the course of the program, participants gain confidence and comfort on a college campus, recognize the benefits of a liberal arts education, and feel empowered, indeed obligated, to pursue civic work in their communities.

Early data from the first program at Columbia University suggest that Knowledge for Freedom can have a profound impact on students' academic and civic success after high school. Nearly every one of the 300 graduates of Columbia's Freedom & Citizenship program has enrolled in college within six months of finishing high school, though they attended public schools where **fewer than 60 percent** of graduates advance to college. Nearly half of Freedom & Citizenship alumni have gone on to major in the humanities or social sciences in college, even though only a quarter indicate in a pre-program survey that they will major in those fields. The change is remarkable when compared with **national figures**: 25 percent of students of color across America will major in the humanities and social sciences, compared to 47 percent at F&C. Finally, alumni of the Freedom & Citizenship program have reported higher levels of civic engagement **than the national averages**. F&C alumni volunteered in their communities and participated in a political campaign at twice the national youth rate. They attended a public forum and contacted their government representative at six and seven times the youth rate, respectively, and overall more of them belong to a club, have donated to a social cause, and voted in a midterm election than their peers. The aim of the program is participation, not partisanship.

Campus faculty lead the program as seminar instructors, meeting with students for two hours a day for two to three weeks. Seminars are an exceptional opportunity for students to participate-- typically for the first time-- in a discussion-based engagement with primary sources led by a faculty member who shows concern for

their intellectual growth, encourages their aspiration for further education, and cares deeply about their future. Other faculty from across the college or university may also be invited to participate in these programs as guest lecturers. For example, in the Columbia program, classicist Kathy Eden speaks with the students about the Peloponnesian War, which they have encountered in their reading in Thucydides, historian Eric Foner speaks about the life and work of W.E.B. DuBois, whose *Souls of Black Folk* is one of their assigned readings, and American studies scholar Andrew Delbanco discusses the significance of Abraham Lincoln, whose major speeches they are studying in class. These are exciting, mind-opening experiences for the students, and faculty also count them among the most rewarding teaching experiences of their career.

*Alexis de Tocqueville and Plato had such an influence on me that I minored in history and political science. In the seminar, I was encouraged to question everything and define what a good functioning society meant to me.”*

—Brando

There is also the opportunity for undergraduates, chosen through an application process, to participate as teaching assistants. Following each seminar meeting, the High School students work in small groups with undergraduate teaching assistants who help them improve their writing and public speaking skills through further discussion of what they have been studying. At institutions with graduate programs, graduate students may also participate as managers and assistant directors for the program. They may assist in running day-to-day operations, mentoring undergraduates, and working as a liaison among the stakeholders. These positions offer graduate students a valuable opportunity to learn and demonstrate leadership skills beyond their academic specialty. In a shrinking traditional academic job market, many graduate students are looking for ways to broaden their teaching and administrative experience, which is valuable for its own sake and also helps to make them attractive candidates for work in the non-profit sector and in teaching-intensive institutions such as open-access public universities, community colleges, and liberal arts colleges.

These are some of the ways by which Knowledge for Freedom programs create a new kind of community within the broader campus community. For faculty, these programs enrich their own professional lives through teaching that is both demanding and rewarding—centered on pivotal questions about the nature of democracy, civic obligation, and human fellowship. For college students, they provide a form of summer internship and social service. For graduate students, they provide invaluable experience in the increasingly important sphere of the “public humanities.”

Finally, Knowledge for Freedom programs anchor academic departments and their colleges or universities in the central value of a humanities education for all students. They are a way for institutions to serve in an effective, rigorous, and visible way the communities in which they reside.

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## SECTION IV

### Details of the Initiative

All Knowledge for Freedom programs require intensive planning, significant time commitment, and serious support from outside experts on such topics as syllabus planning, the social dynamics of high school students, college readiness support, and writing coaching. Recognizing the value of variation across programs, the Teagle Foundation appreciates that each college or university will adapt its own version of the program to its local culture—to its particular resources, curricular traditions, surrounding cultural institutions, etc.

*The discussions that we have in the classroom stick. They are carried with us everywhere we go as they change our insight and perspective of the world around us.”*


—Nabiha

Still, the Knowledge for Freedom Initiative reflects certain features common to all programs: all programs bring low income high school students onto a college campus for an intensive summer seminar in the humanities taught by college faculty and supported by undergraduate teaching assistants. All syllabi include transformative texts in the humanities connected by ideas or questions about the nature of government, freedom, and democracy. During the following academic year, all programs offer formalized assistance with college applications and direct students in a civic engagement or public service initiative. And all programs should engage with their alumni through sponsoring events, facilitating mentorships, or by connecting them with opportunities to continue their civic engagement.

Six colleges and universities are currently running programs within the Knowledge for Freedom paradigm, funded to date primarily by the Teagle Foundation as well as by individual donors associated with participating colleges and universities, and with varying degrees of institutional support. The six institutions are: Columbia University (2009), Yale University (2016), Carthage College (2016), Newberry College (2017), University of Rochester (2019), and Ursinus College (2019). In November, 2019, the Teagle Foundation approved funding for programs at Villanova University and Miami University of Ohio, to begin in the summer of 2020. Several more programs are now in the planning phase. These programs demonstrate a flexibility inherent in the Knowledge for Freedom model that allows for programs to run in rural or urban settings and with various budgets at various levels of funding.

To expand and sustain this model, the Teagle Foundation is committed to funding the creation of new programs and to building a broad consortium of participating institutions in order to serve growing numbers of students and teachers nationwide.



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*“At a time when a lot of the talk about diminished social mobility in America is just that — talk, lip service, a wringing of hands rather than a springing into action — **this seminar represents a bold exception, worthy of applause and emulation. It assumes that these kids, like any others, are hungry for big ideas.** And it wagers that tugging them into sophisticated discussions will give them a fluency and confidence that could be the difference between merely getting to college and navigating it successfully, all the way to completion, which for poor kids is often the trickiest part of all.”*

*—Frank Bruni, “Plato and the Promise of College” in The New York Times*