REQUEST FOR TYPE II PROPOSALS: TRESTLE

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION, SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING EXCELLENCE

---

**Date:** November 2, 2015.
**To:** Department Chairs and Science Education Initiative points of contact
**From:** Stephanie Chasteen, Science Education Initiative (SEI) & Center for STEM Learning (CSL)
**Contact:** chasteen@colorado.edu.
**Proposal Deadline:** December 2nd, 2015
**TRESTLE Website:** [https://www.colorado.edu/csl/TRESTLE](https://www.colorado.edu/csl/TRESTLE)

---

**SUMMARY**

TRESTLE supports the transformation of courses to include evidence-based teaching practice, such as active learning and assessment-driven instruction. The intent of the project is to build on prior gains in teaching excellence, and help initiate additional departments and faculty into STEM educational scholarship at CU Boulder. We invite proposals from STEM departments and faculty as follows:

- **Type I: TRESTLE Scholar Program.** Departments and faculty who are relatively new to evidence-based teaching practices, wishing to develop departmental expertise. *(See separate document)*
- **Type II: Course Development Awards.** Departments and faculty who have existing expertise which can be leveraged to undertake major course design projects. Available resources: Grant up to $10,000, faculty learning community, educational advisors.

Unsure whether to pursue Type I or Type II proposals? See the graphic on the TRESTLE website, and/or contact Stephanie Chasteen (chasteen@colorado.edu).

**Type II proposals (Course Development Awards) are for departments and faculty who have previously engaged in course transformation activities** or have sufficient expertise in-house to lead a course transformation project. This is intended to be an opportunity to build upon and deepen STEM education expertise on campus, including facilitating community-building and information-sharing within and between departments. One proposal per department, please.

The Course Development Award is for a period of one year, beginning in January 2016, though a later start-date may be requested at the time of submission. The deadline for submissions is December 2nd. We recognize that this is a short deadline – another RFP will be open later in 2016, and the Chancellor's Awards RFP is in the Spring. This is the first of at least three RFP's over the three-year span of the grant.
BACKGROUND

There is a substantial and growing body of research, both from cognitive psychology and from college-level STEM classrooms, that has identified several pedagogical approaches that are significantly more effective than the traditional lecture-based format used in most STEM teaching today\(^1\),\(^2\),\(^3\),\(^4\). The STEM pedagogies that have been shown to be effective emphasize student-centric practices that stress active learning, with much more interaction among students, and between students and instructors, than in the traditional lecture-based format. These methods emphasize building a course backwards from carefully articulated learning goals for the course as a whole, and incorporate fine-grained, real-time assessment of student learning in relation to the learning goals. Active-learning in particular has been shown to dramatically decrease student failure rates in STEM courses, as well as to improve student learning outcomes and conceptual understanding.

Here at the University of Colorado, we have engaged in major initiatives to improve undergraduate STEM education – the Science Education Initiative (SEI) (initiated by Dr. Carl Wieman, the SEI funded postdoctoral fellows in 7 STEM departments over 8 years, including APS, PHYS, EBIO, IPHY, GEOL, MCDB and CHEM), and the Association of American Universities (AAU) STEM Initiative (currently active on campus). These campus initiatives have led to many improvements in our undergraduate courses\(^5\), and departments.

However, there is much more to be done. Some of these course improvements require further attention, or faculty would like support in continuing work on educational improvements. More departments would like to get involved. We have an opportunity at CU-Boulder, if we act now, to leverage this national interest and our growing local expertise to develop high-quality course experiences for our students, increasing learning and outcomes for all students and making teaching more deeply rewarding and fulfilling. The Chancellor has recently identified persistence and retention as a campus priority – a challenge well-aligned with curricular improvements.

The current grant (TRESTLE) is a project of the Center for STEM Learning (CSL), and was developed as part of a multi-institution consortium (the Bay View Alliance) interested in improving teaching and learning at their respective campuses, with the Science Education Initiative as one strong model for how this might be accomplished. The TRESTLE grant is intended to build on the expertise of CU Boulder’s campus in STEM education transformation.

\(^3\) Freeman et al., (2014) "Active learning increases student performance…," PNAS, 222, 8410-8415.
\(^4\) For more detail, see the reference above and [http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/course_transformation.htm](http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/course_transformation.htm).
THE PROPOSAL

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE SUPPORTED

The main activity of a Type II proposal is an undergraduate STEM course transformation effort. This could include course redesign, design of a new course, sustaining or extending changes made during a previous effort, or developing components of a course (e.g., clicker questions, assessments, recitation or lab materials). The proposal process also allows applicants to request support to further their own learning – such as individual consultations and faculty learning communities. Since the intention is to increase and disseminate expertise on-campus, proposals which have the potential to impact additional faculty and/or departments are preferred.

While there is no formal pre-submission process, we strongly recommend setting up an appointment with Stephanie Chasteen to discuss the proposal, and/or inviting Dr. Chasteen to introduce the project at a faculty meeting. Proposals must be sanctioned by the Chair, and only one submission is allowed per department. Proposals representing departmentally-coordinated efforts are preferred, though well-reasoned proposals from individual faculty with the potential for broader impact are welcome.

THE WRITTEN PROPOSAL (3-7 PAGES)

Please address the following questions in your proposal, using the headings below. Submit your proposals online at https://www.colorado.edu/csl/TRESTLE by Dec 2nd.

1. Project title and person submitting. What is a descriptive title for your project? Provide name, title, and department of person submitting the proposal, including contact information. Only CU Boulder STEM faculty and staff are eligible to apply.
2. Courses to be changed and rationale. What courses will be changed, and what are the changes being contemplated? How will this course transformation improve student learning, or contribute to the teaching and learning needs in your unit or in your college?
3. Course development plan.
   a. Timeline. What is the approximate timeline for making these course changes? What are the staffing plans for those courses (who will be teaching the course, and when?) Note: The TRESTLE grants are intended to be one-year grants.
   b. Leadership plan. Who will lead the project, including oversight of timelines and deliverables, and supervision of any personnel (e.g., graduate students or postdocs) who might be hired? How will you ensure that commitments made in this proposal are fulfilled?
   c. Assessment plan. How will you assess whether the course changes have the impact you desire (e.g., concept tests, exam questions, student surveys, etc.)? Will you assess impact on student retention and engagement, if such impact is expected?
   d. Faculty & instructor involvement. How will other faculty/instructors be involved in this work, and to what extent. How will that faculty effort be recognized or rewarded?
   e. Sustainability. How will changes in this course be sustained, especially if new instructors will be teaching it in the future? Be specific about these plans, as this is a common failure-point for course transformation efforts.
f. **Coordination across the department.** How do changes in this course relate to the curriculum as a whole? Are there ways that this effort will be coordinated with other courses or instructors? At a minimum, the proposal should include a letter from the Chair supporting the work.

4. **Broader impacts.** Are there ways in which this work will impact faculty and practices in your department, or other departments? For faculty who are proposing a project solo, without strong departmental integration, this is an excellent place to argue how your project will likely have impacts beyond your own personal professional development.

5. **Evidence of expertise.** What prior experience do the faculty leader(s) have in course transformation that will be leveraged for this proposal? How will the proposed work further their learning?

6. **Resources requested:**
   a. **Budget.** How will funds be used? A maximum of $10,000 is available, which may be used for course buy-out to facilitate faculty time spent on course development or team teaching, summer salary, graduate teaching assistant or postdoctoral fellow time; learning assistants, equipment, etc. Travel, food, and administrative salary are not allowable. The budget needs only to include project expenses; benefits and overhead charges incurred will be covered separately by TRESTLE.
   b. **Non-financial resources requested.** Project participants do not need to have all the expertise required to successfully undertake the project, CSL expects to provide additional learning opportunities for participants. Broadly speaking, what non-monetary support would be helpful? For example, we can provide (1) facilitation of a learning community – a group of faculty/instructors (within or across departments) meeting regularly to get real-time feedback as they work on course development and educational projects -- and (2) [CSL educational advisors](http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/STLF-develop.htm) who can consult on the project individually in a variety of areas.

7. **Resources leveraged.** Grants that propose leveraging existing internal or external resources are preferred – such as financial resources, awards, or collaborations with other units or programs. If you request a faculty learning community, will participating faculty be provided with incentive (such as committee or service release), and can the department supply modest refreshments?

8. **Agreement to expectations.** Do you agree to fulfill the “expectations of successful applicants,” as described below?

**Review Criteria**

1. Proposals will be reviewed by the TRESTLE advisory board, with funding decisions to be provided in mid-December.

2. Critical elements include specificity of the proposal; feasibility of the scope, budget, and timeline of the work proposed; scale of impact; evidence for the capability of the team leading the work; a focus on evidence-based teaching practices; clear leadership and oversight plans; and potential for the project to positively impact faculty and/or courses in this or other departments.

3. Elements which are preferred include leverage of other resources and collaborations, and support and coordination by the department as a whole.

---

6 Some projects require time from graduate students or postdocs. If you need assistance in identifying such non-faculty experts, contact Dr. Chasteen. For details on how such staff have been productively used in the SEI, see [http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/STLF-develop.htm](http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/STLF-develop.htm)
EXPECTATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

1. **Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** agreeing to the project expectations and timeline.
2. **Submit annual report and participate in project gathering.** Project leaders will submit an annual report on the project outcomes, and attend an annual gathering of all TRESTLE project participants.
3. **Participate in faculty learning community (optional).** Project leaders will be strongly encouraged to engage in a faculty learning community (i.e., a group of faculty undertaking similar course transformation experiences, meeting every two weeks) to support the work.
4. **Participate in national meeting (optional).** Project leaders will have the opportunity (and be strongly encouraged) to attend a national meeting of leaders across all TRESTLE campuses (Jan 21-23, 2016, Kansas).
5. **Complete evaluation measures.** Faculty teaching the transformed courses will complete a survey about their teaching practices before and after the course transformation. Classroom practices may be observed using a structured observational tool, and faculty will be asked to submit their syllabus and report on basic statistics relevant to the transformed course. The department as a whole may be asked to complete a survey (it is recommended that this be encouraged by the Chair).
6. **Share expertise.** Faculty leaders will be requested to provide some support to other faculty (within or outside their department) in similar course transformation efforts, either by providing short individual consultations, giving a workshop, or leading a faculty group, as their time permits. We strongly encourage awardees to present at the [DBER seminar](http://www.colorado.edu/sei/about/funding.htm) at the beginning of the project (to solicit feedback) and at the end (to disseminate results).

Our grant competition is modeled closely after similar, larger-scale competitions run by the Science Education Initiatives at the University of British Columbia ([CWSEI](http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/about/funding.htm)) and at the University of Colorado at Boulder ([SEI](http://www.colorado.edu/sei/about/funding.htm)), which have materials useful for preparing proposals. The winning proposals at UBC and CU can be found at [http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/about/funding.htm](http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/about/funding.htm) and [http://www.colorado.edu/sei/about/funding.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/sei/about/funding.htm).