President’s Teaching Scholar Program

Big Ideas Program: An Experiment

PTS are full of… Big Ideas. Many of them have had significant impact. To cite two examples, the new model for tenure at the Springs, and the system’s exploration of the Coursera MOOC consortium owe a lot to the efforts of PTS. Can we have more Big Ideas? Can we develop more of them, and can they have bigger impact?

As an experiment, we’re going to try to push the idea process at this year’s Fall retreat, and thereafter. We’ll take some time for the first two phases of a process, during the retreat, and then set in motion an ongoing online interaction (if there is interest in doing so.)

Phase I of our process is taking stock. What germs of Big Ideas are we all carrying around? Are their past or current projects we can build on? We'll do this stock taking in a “speed dating” process, in small groups, so we aren't all jockeying for the microphone at once. In Phase II we'll gather the ideas that emerge from the small groups, and see which (if any) of them command the interest of the group, or a meaningful part of it. If we find we have some germ Big Ideas that we want to develop, we'll then discuss how to carry on after the retreat. A possible approach would be the creation of one or more Google Docs that can be shared among those interested, and jointly elaborated. Or email may work. We’ll see.

What’s a Big Idea? As already suggested, Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered, and its application to tenure evaluation, is one, and Massively Open Online Courses is another. What we are looking for is more ideas that will make a difference to learning and teaching.