

Diversity- Conscious Student Engagement

By: Theresa Harrison

Educational research suggests that high-impact practices (HIPs) increase rates of student retention and student engagement (Kuh, 2008). Traditionally, it has been assumed that the effects of participating in high-impact practices are positive for all types of students and that historically underserved students tend to benefit more from engaging in educational purposeful activities than majority students (Kuh, 2008). However, recent evidence suggests that some of the effects of high-impact educational practices may be conditionally based upon students' race/ethnicity (Seifert, Gillig, Hanson, Pascarella, & Blaich, 2014). Why is this and what if anything can we do about it?

NSSE 2016 results show that while 53% of White seniors completed an internship, only 41% of African American students had done so. We know that some groups of historically underserved students are less likely to participate in high-impact activities, those first in their family to attend college and African American students in particular (McCormick, 2017). One suggestion is that variation in the structure and experience of HIPs for different groups of students may influence their effectiveness, while deficit-minded campus practices can be barriers to participation by underserved students (Finley & McNair, 2013). For example, underrepresented students could be steered away from HIPs by faculty and staff because of hidden biases about who should participate (McCormick, 2017). Concerns have also been raised that HIPs may create opportunities for impactful but highly negative experiences for students of color by creating situations in which students are exposed to microaggressions and other racist behaviors (Patton, Harper, & Harris, 2015).

In light of this, what if we reframe the question, 'Why don't first-generation and African American students participate in our programs?' and ask instead, 'What can my office do to make sure all students feel welcome engaging in these opportunities?' as well as consider, 'What responsibility does my office have in making sure opportunities on and off-campus provide a safe and nurturing environment for our participants?' Understanding the potential positive impact that HIPs can have on students, but also the barriers that some underrepresented students may face, administrators that coordinate experiential opportunities should make it a priority to not only examine their own practices more closely but be ready to advocate for changes if necessary.

A few things to consider:

Replicate what works.

For example, the Study Abroad Office on U of SC's campus has seen success with increasing student's interest in studying abroad by partnering with Black & Abroad. While fully recognizing that there are common misconceptions about studying abroad there is also a responsibility to educate all students, while also being mindful of their concerns and fears. This concept has spawned other partnerships to target other underrepresented populations like LatinX & Abroad and LGBTQ & Abroad by addressing their specific needs and considerations when choosing locations abroad.

Campus partners

Consider partnering with other experiential education offices on campus. While we all want students to engage in our respective opportunities we have to recognize that community service or undergraduate research isn't for everyone. It's more important to help students find their niche and be successful than simply increasing our numbers; therefore offices should partner to expose students to new opportunities. Ex. The Leadership and Service Center and the Office of Undergraduate Research could host a joint workshop on community-based research in collaboration with academic departments most engaged in that type of work. Furthermore, is there an opportunity for experiential educators on campus to come together periodically to share best practices such as tools to help students reflect on meaningful experiences?

Professional Development for everyone

Use your social and political capital on campus to advocate for educating students, faculty, staff, and community partners on the importance of diversity in your experiences. Set expectations for how you want students to be treated on and off campus while engaging in educational purposeful activities. Be mindful of biases that may exist and take initiative to combat them by ex. Hosting student panels featuring underrepresented students that have had successful internship experiences and encourage or reward faculty and community partners who include underrepresented students in their experiences.

Resources

The following list of resources may be useful to others engaging in this work. There are many practitioners committed to working across silos to increase opportunities for all students on our campuses. We encourage you to consider how you might incorporate some of these processes in your own work.

Association of American Colleges and Universities, [A Vision for Equity](#) (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2018).

Finley, A. & McNair, T. (2013). [Assessing underserved students' engagement in high-impact practices.](#) Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Harper, S. [Race-Conscious Student and the Equitable Distribution.](#) Association of American Colleges and Universities. *Liberal Education.* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009).

Kuh, G., Cruce, T., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., and Gonyea, R. (2008). [Unmasking the Effects of Student Engagement on College Grades and Persistence](#) " Journal of Higher Education 79 540-563.

Kuh, G. (2008). [High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter.](#) Washington DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities.

McCormick, A., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. (2017). [High-Impact Practices: Is the Impact Positive or Negative for Students of Color?](#) Association for the Study of Higher Education in Houston, Texas, November 11, 2017.

Patton L. D., Harper, S. R., Harris, J. (2015). Using critical race theory to (re)interpret

widely-studied topics related to students in U.S. higher education. In A. M. Martinez Aleman, E. M. Bensimon, & B. Pusser (Eds.), *Critical approaches to the study of higher education* (pp. 193-219). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Seifert, T., Gillig, B., Hanson, J., Pascarella, E., & Blaich, C. (2014). [The Conditional Nature of High Impact/Good Practices on Student Learning Outcomes](#)

.
The Journal of Higher Education. 85(4),
531-564. Doi:10.1080/00221546.2014.11777339.