

Seeking High-Quality, High-Impact Learning: The Imperative of Faculty Development and Curricular Intentionality

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In 2008, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) published *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* by George D. Kuh. This publication prompted dialogue across the country on the use of certain educational practices that research demonstrates have an impact on student learning outcomes and progress toward graduation. These practices—now commonly known as “high-impact practices” or HIPs (see chart on page 5)—include such things as first-year seminars, service-learning, writing-intensive courses, learning communities, undergraduate research, and capstone experiences. Increased attention to these practices also has sparked new interest in faculty and staff professional development to prepare faculty to implement the practices. An array of evidence points to the value and utility of HIPs in providing an improved learning experience for all students. In fact, HIPs can provide students exactly the kinds of active and engaged learning experiences that help them develop the skills and knowledge essential for success in work, life, and citizenship.

To truly take advantage of the promise of HIPs, however, we must invest in developing all faculty members’ capacity to implement HIPs in effective ways and for more students. Through its Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, AAC&U has sought to work with faculty in a variety of institutions and disciplines to bring HIPs more broadly and intentionally into the undergraduate experience.

As Kuh observes, the use of HIPs, is not new. Learning communities, for example, were first developed in the late 1970s. For decades, many colleges and universities have been engaging undergraduates in research. What changed after 2008 was the collective effort to document the impact of these practices and the effort to see them as part of a larger “sea change” in undergraduate education. Institutions and systems involved in AAC&U’s LEAP initiative have, indeed, made much collective progress in advancing

HIPs, but there is still much work to be done—and developing more faculty capacity is key to future success. Our campus colleagues tell us that we no longer have to convince them of the value of HIPs. They are asking us to focus instead on practical means and methods to engage faculty with implementing HIPs in appropriate ways. The stories in this issue all illustrate a variety of ways through which faculty are implementing the HIPs and/or pedagogical foundations that lie behind why these practices actually produce the outcomes they do. There is nothing magical about the HIPs, but, as Kuh’s research suggests, they all share certain common characteristics that seem to be key to producing better results (see chart on page 3). Quality in implementation of HIPs is paramount and these common elements all contribute to increasing the quality of HIPs results.

FREQUENCY, EQUITY, AND HIGH QUALITY

While Kuh has documented widespread positive impact of HIPs, he reminds practitioners that, “to engage students at high levels, these practices must be done well” (2008). Further, for greatest impact, students must also experience these practices more than once. Many institutions are working to enable students to experience HIPs and HIP-like practices frequently throughout the curriculum. While calling for high-impact learning experiences for all students, Kuh also emphasizes the heightened benefits received from these practices by students from underserved populations. AAC&U continues to recommend multiple high-impact learning experiences for all students and to stress the importance of equitable access. Our society can no longer afford to reserve “islands of innovation” for a select group of students while others, often students traditionally underserved, receive an education more suited to the industrial age.



INTENTIONALITY

Institutions need to be intentional in the design, implementation, and scaling of HIPs. One size does not fit all, nor will a sprinkling of HIPs or a suite of boutique programs make a durable impact on campus-wide outcomes. The design of high-quality HIPs must begin with attention to the learning outcomes sought and with recognition of the academic and developmental needs of particular student cohorts as well as the particularity of institutional context and culture. Before campus leaders or individual faculty members or departments select a high-impact practice and discuss how it should be implemented, they should first ask who is or is not succeeding in the existing educational environment and why or why not. Through institutional assessment and analysis of data on student subgroups, campuses can intentionally target high-impact practices to the neediest students. The second question should address why a particular high-impact

practice is the right choice based on the academic and developmental needs of these students. As a colleague at the 2012 Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success concluded, high-impact practices should not be “a solution in search of a problem.” Developing a purposeful implementation plan is key. As such, identifying which HIPs should be put in place and for whom will increase the chances of HIPs having significant impact.

INNOVATION

For HIPs to spread, faculty members need development and encouragement to innovate in the classroom. They need the right tools and a conducive environment to develop high-quality high-impact practices. Where the majority of faculty are teaching part-time or on contingent contracts, there are particular challenges for institutions to foster innovation and adoption of HIPs by more faculty. However, we see faculty innovators at work across all institutional types, including

broad-access public institutions. From their experiences, as highlighted in this issue of *Peer Review*, we can identify the following practices that support innovation and productive faculty development:

- Professional development opportunities for *all* faculty (full-time and part-time) to introduce them to high-impact practices, assessment, and course design
- Individual faculty mentoring for collaborative teaching
- Faculty reward structures that support innovation in the classroom, including the use of technology to facilitate collaboration
- Partnerships between staff and faculty across disciplines to promote curricular and cocurricular learning throughout a student’s educational experience

A crucial element beyond these recommendations is each faculty member’s personal motivation to provide an educational experience for all students that will inspire creativity, stimulate problem solving, and foster a level of engagement that transcends the classroom and fosters lifelong learning. The development and delivery of high-quality high-impact practices depends on both institutional support and faculty dedication.

One of the driving principles behind the LEAP initiative is the need to challenge the traditional practice of providing liberal education only to some students while providing narrow training to others. In 2012, institutions are making far-reaching educational changes to help all their students achieve a set of Essential Learning Outcomes fostered through a liberal education. The use of HIPs is a centerpiece of this educational reform effort, and wide-scale implementation has the potential to foster significant change and improve student success. At AAC&U, we call that Making Excellence Inclusive. ■

REFERENCES

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 and Universities.

High-Impact Educational Practices: A Brief Overview

The following teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts. On many campuses, assessment of student involvement in active learning practices such as these has made it possible to assess the practices’ contribution to students’ cumulative learning. However, on almost all campuses, utilization of active learning practices is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning. These practices are:

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Common intellectual experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing-intensive courses
- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Undergraduate research
- Diversity/global learning
- Service learning, community-based learning
- Internships
- Capstone courses and projects

These practices were first described as a family of “effective educational practices” in AAC&U’s 2007 publication, *College Learning for the New Global Century*. George D. Kuh’s *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, also published by AAC&U, presents research on why these practices are effective, which students have access to them, and, finally, what effect they might have on different cohorts of students.

In the 2010 publication, *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality*, authors Jayne E. Brownell and Lynn E. Swaner examine what educational research reveals about five of these practices. For more information about these publications, see <http://www.aacu.org/publications>.

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