



Synergy

From the Communication Co-Chairs

Dear SAPAA Colleagues,

For professionals in higher education, there are many updated methods of learning probabilities and learning communities that exist on most areas of campus. Understanding the evolving roles in the Student Affairs profession, working collaboratively with colleagues in Academic Affairs has become paramount in retaining and strengthening efforts of student success and retention.

As we continue to broaden our understanding of student engagement and success, we seek updated information from colleagues immersed in researched and practitioner based comprehension. The efforts of our work align strongly with student success via collaborative interdepartmental partnership.

We encourage our readers and members to dive deeper into the topic of high impact practices and service learning.

We hope that you will take advantage of the tips offered within this *Synergy* issue and that you will reach out to authors share your thoughts in order to further your skills and contribution to student engagement and success.

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement with SAPAA!

Sincerely,

Nkenge Ransom-Friday and Jacob Isaacs, Communication Co-Chairs

Closing the Feedback Loop: Visible Learning with Intentional Reflection

By: Theresa Harrison, Jabari Bodrick, Lisa D. Camp, Amber Fallucca, Ambra Hiott, Ryan Patterson

Introduction

Student Story

Students completing the requirements for Graduation with Leadership Distinction (GLD) at the University of South Carolina have identified meaningful discoveries about themselves and about content learned in and beyond the classroom. One such student gained new perspective on her leadership philosophy through her participation in a service-learning course and in her role as a Service Saturday Site Leader.

She shared, “During the fall of my junior year I was also enrolled in an honors service-learning course entitled *Connecting Life and Leadership*...in this class we learned about servant leadership, the leadership theory in which the ‘leader’ puts the needs of others in the organization above his or her own, distributing responsibilities and fostering the growth of his or her ‘followers’ to better the organization as a whole.” Reflecting on her work as a service peer leader she articulated, “Our ultimate goal for Service Saturday is to have an impact on both the community and our volunteers, bettering Columbia while encouraging many first-time volunteers to continue serving their community. I believe that this goal is accomplished through creating a servant leadership model, in which every individual in the process feels empowered.”

Through her comprehensive experiences with coursework and beyond the classroom activities she realized, “while I hadn’t seen servant leadership in practice at the time, through working closely with the Leadership and Service Center this past year, I have seen how fruitful it could be when successfully implemented.”

Experiences like this echo similar experiences we hear from students across the University of South Carolina. While engaging in service opportunities can be extremely meaningful it is when students take it a step further and are asked to reflect intentionally that they start making connections to other experiences across campus and can become agents for change within their communities. In this particular student story we see a student engage in an experience, reflect, and then feel empowered to advocate for more student ownership and intentional reflection in her original experience. This feedback loop is a representative model of USC Connect’s larger institutional model of Graduation with Leadership Distinction, which relies heavily on our campus partners like the Leadership and Service Center to help students engage, reflect, and lead.

Leadership and Service Center

The Leadership and Service Center at the University of South Carolina offers a unique and collaborative environment where students can explore their leadership and preferred methods of community engagement. Whether it is membership or leadership in a registered student organization, participation in a leadership development program, holding a part-time job, or engagement in a one-time or long-time community service initiative, USC students learn beyond the classroom in many ways.



Leadership and Service Center

USC Connect

USC Connect is the University of South Carolina's comprehensive initiative to enhance undergraduate education through integrative learning, which is defined by AAC&U as "an understanding and disposition that students build across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus" (Huber and Hutchings, 2004). USC Connect promotes student opportunities to engage beyond the classroom and to synthesize and apply learning across experiences. It is essential to fulfilling the goals of supporting integrative learning at the University of South Carolina that USC Connect coordinates efforts across departments located within both academic affairs and student affairs in order to help facilitate this learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Graduation with Leadership Distinction

[Graduation with Leadership Distinction](#) (GLD) is the formal distinction facilitated through USC Connect which honors the broader scope of students' achievements within and beyond the classroom (BTC), and which sets them apart in ways worthy of recognition by others (e.g., potential employers, graduate schools). GLD is a voluntary program which provides scaffolding for students to choose meaningful beyond the classroom experiences that align with their purposes and passions and which helps them connect learning within the context of work and community. Students are encouraged to consider one of five GLD pathways, which align with high-impact educational practices (Kuh 2008): Community Service, Diversity & Social Advocacy, Global Learning, Professional & Civic Engagement, and Research. Beyond their alignment with high-impact practices, the five pathway areas were selected based on activities

accessible to the majority of students on campus via their involvement BTC and allows students with a variety of interest areas to find an avenue in which to explore their interest further. Students earning GLD must expend significant time and energy across one or more of these pathways.

Engagement of Student Affairs Professionals in GLD Processes

Because GLD focuses on learning from within and beyond the classroom, student affairs professionals are integral to the success of the initiative. As well as providing direct support for GLD Pathways, student affairs professionals identify strong students to whom they promote GLD in broad ways across the institution (e.g., peer leadership trainings, orientation). These individuals track and verify GLD students' engagements in approved beyond the classroom experiences to ensure strong validity measures are in place for the distinction. Student affairs professionals further serve as mentors by helping students to describe significant within and beyond the classroom learning moments to further reflect on these experiences through writing developed for students' GLD e-portfolios. In addition, student affairs professionals participate in extensive training sessions to serve as anonymous reviewers of student e-portfolios for GLD. This evaluation role is volunteer-based, and many professionals continually return to this role on a semester and annual basis. USC Connect relies on the Leadership and Service Center to provide core experiences, enhancement activities, and coursework as it relates to the Community Service pathway.

Experiential Education

The core experience for the Community Service pathway is as follows: 300+ hours of service completed in at least two different programs or experiences. Some of the primary venues students use to fulfill their core experiences through the LSC are: Service-learning courses, Alternative Break experiences, and Service Saturdays. The LSC has intentional reflection components embedded in each of these experiences.

Students must also participate in three enhancement experiences, which actively engage them in discussion or learning about a subject related to their community service interests. Appropriate enhancement experiences include workshops, lectures, conferences/presentations, and official meetings. A review of GLD student applications specific to the Community Service pathway shows that students are participating in many of LSC's offerings such as the Student Leadership and Diversity Conference, Weeks of Action (9/11 Service Week, [Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week](#), and [MLK Days of Service](#)), the [Service Leadership Program](#), and numerous service leadership opportunities (Community Service Ambassador, Service Saturday Site Leader, Impact Weekly Site Leader, Pantry Pal, Alternative Break Leader). Each of these programs and leadership opportunities offer students another opportunity to take their understanding of service and social issues to the next level by engaging students in conversations with their peers, staff, and faculty across campus. Thus, also enhancing students' knowledge and understanding of how to create meaningful service projects and explore service outside of the collegiate environment.

Integrative Learning

Analysis of Community Service E-Portfolios

A sampling of successful GLD E-portfolios provided a rich understanding of the types of experiences students describe as integral to their USC college experience. Specifically, an analysis of E-portfolios from the Community Service pathway revealed multiple beyond the classroom experiences, including service across rural communities, homeless shelters, varied cultural environments, and health settings. Referenced coursework spanned public health, psychology, and education disciplines, including service-learning courses and practicum settings. GLD E-portfolios provide an opportunity for students to describe complex connections across learning environments, and thus the synthesis of this understanding emerges through sections labeled Key Insights. One quote from an “Insight” emerging from a Community Service E-portfolio demonstrates how a student provided support at a homeless shelter while also completing psychology coursework:

“...homelessness doesn’t have a single manifestation. Although stereotypes occur, there is much more to the story...Heuristics are meant to be used on a survival level—a type of lower-level thinking. But when they are applied to more complex situations, they often fall short...If the attitude surrounding can be so false and stigmatized, it is likely that other labels and stereotypes that exist in American society are also horribly wrong.”

This example represents the critical thinking GLD students are required to articulate after engaging in impactful community-based experiences.



Students Participating in Write Nite

Staff testimonial

Additionally, staff members involved with both individual students and the overall GLD process experience an increased depth in understanding of the impact of integrative learning and are thus strong advocates, as evidenced in a recent NASPA blog post: <https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/posts/reflecting-on-the-ties>.

Conclusion

The collaborative effort between Academic and Student Affairs has truly been mutually beneficial. For example we have seen increased participation in students taking service-learning courses. During the 2016-2017 academic year, a total of 1,800 students were enrolled in service-learning courses. Service-learning courses were featured in 22 different academic departments representing 11 of the University's 13 colleges and schools. Faculty and students formed mutually beneficial service-learning partnerships with over 100 community agencies in the greater Columbia area. Additionally, we have seen significant growth in students graduating with leadership distinction in Community Service from 16 in 2015 to 86 applications submitted for review in 2018.

Yet, the most visible learning is evident in the reflection of a senior site leader's role for Service Saturdays in the LSC. In the student's final e-portfolio reflection she articulates that taking the lead with continuous encouragement from LSC staff provided an opportunity to close the feedback loop by allowing "an open dialogue... [for] Site Leaders to reflect and make their voice heard" through a site survey for Site Leaders while also allowing the students' learning to truly become transformational. The student notes that, "[a]fter [Site Leaders] fill out the survey, [senior site leaders] synthesize and disseminate their responses to the next group serving at that site, so that their input can have direct value and implement change." As staff, we must encourage intentional reflection and provide space for dialogue and deliberation. Student leaders not only need to feel empowered to advocate for change, have opportunities to lead their peers toward that change, but also see their vision implemented.

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Authors



Theresa Harrison serves as the Assistant Director for USC Connect at the University of South Carolina. She is responsible for overseeing USC Connect advisement, outreach efforts to support the development of student engagement and reflection, and leads content development for Graduation with Leadership Distinction technologies. Theresa is passionate about encouraging students to intentionally reflect on their beyond the classroom experiences and helping students see themselves as leaders for social change.



Jabari Bodrick is a student affairs educator who is passionate about creating educational environments where students can learn within and beyond traditional classroom settings. He is committed to empowering traditionally marginalized populations, alleviating generational poverty, and doing his part to create a more equitable society. Jabari earned his B.S. in Public Relations from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, his M.Ed. in College Student Affairs from the University of South Florida, and his Ph.D. in College Student Affairs Administration from the University of Georgia. As the Assistant Director for Student Engagement and Service-Learning at the University of South Carolina (USC), Jabari's primary responsibility is overseeing the development, implementation, and assessment of service-learning courses.



Lisa D. Camp serves as an Advisor with USC Connect at the University of South Carolina. She works with students pursuing Graduation with Leadership Distinction through intentional selection of beyond the classroom experiences, and making meaning of those experiences through reflection. In both her academic and professional work, Lisa is passionate about the articulation of subjective experiences and the ways in which cultures and individuals make meaning of lived experiences through narrative.



Dr. Amber Fallucca serves as the associate director of USC Connect, the office supporting the quality enhancement plan (QEP) focused on integrative learning for the University of South Carolina. She manages the assessment responsibilities aligned with the QEP and provides additional assessment support for institutional initiatives. She also serves as an adjunct faculty member in the College of Education teaching courses in institutional assessment.



Ambra Hiott serves as the Leadership and Service Center Director at the University of South Carolina. In this role, she works with the Leadership and Service Center team to advance student leadership and service through leadership coaching, student organizations, programs and services. She earned a doctorate in student affairs leadership and a master's degree in college student affairs administration from the University of Georgia and her dissertation is titled "Social Innovation in Higher Education: A Case Study."



Ryan Patterson is a Leadership Coach in the Leadership and Service Center at the University of South Carolina. In his role he provides one-on-one coaching to students and oversees various student leadership and service initiatives. Specific civic learning and democratic engagement programs Ryan has overseen include a voter registration and education initiative and a monthly community service program for students. He also coordinates an emerging leaders program, the student leadership and diversity conference, a leadership development and enrichment retreat, and the student organization re-registration process.

What is SAPAA?

The Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs (SAPAA) Knowledge Community provides a forum for interaction among student affairs professionals serving in an academic unit within their institutions and/or those who are interested in the collaboration between student and academic affairs and how this collaboration can continue and thrive in the future. It also promotes the presentation of programs and workshops at regional and national conferences on issues related to the connection between student affairs and academic affairs. In doing so the SAPAA Knowledge Community serves to enhance the professional development of the person working in this area as well as to provide an opportunity for others to become aware of, and more familiar with, these issues. Finally, the SAPAA Knowledge Community encourages research and scholarly publication in the area of collaboration between academic and student affairs as well as promising practices at institutions.

Themed Learning Communities: A Vehicle for Introducing HIPs

By: Renique Kersh, Ph.D., Gena Brooks Flynn, Ed.D., Vernese Edghill Walden, Ph.D., Laverne Gyant, Ph.D., and Oriana Flores

Higher education institutions have strategically incorporated high impact practices (HIPs) in an effort to increase student engagement and improve retention. HIPs are time-intensive experiences that result in deep learning. Kuh (2008) notes that students should engage in the first HIP within their first year, participating in at least two over the course of their college career. When students participate in HIPs like undergraduate research or learning communities, achievement gaps associated with race and ethnicity are significantly reduced essentially leveling the playing field (Finley and McNair, 2013; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup and Kuh, 2008). Identifying strategies that help to reduce inequities in achievement is an indicator of an institutional commitment to actively reducing barriers, managing expectations, and undermining implicit bias.

Making the Case for HIPs at NIU

The Association for American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (2015) identified access and success particularly for underserved students, as a national priority, citing that institutions must increase the availability and accessibility of high-quality educational programs. In order to effectively design a thoughtful and intentional strategy, institutions must seek to understand the data on retention and graduation rates and more importantly disaggregate the data to narrow down specific areas of focus. At the institution level, understanding participation rates in HIPs provides a broad overview of engagement in educationally purposeful activities outside of the classroom.

Disparities in HIP participation rates for African American students, Hispanic students and first-generation college students are a cause for concern (Finley and McNair, 2013). At Northern Illinois University (NIU), underrepresented students comprise 44% of the total undergraduate population and African American students represent 16%. The diversity of our student body is one of NIU's greatest strengths and represents an indispensable dimension of academic and cultural excellence. In 2015, NIU's senior leadership began to systematically review institutional data on student's participation in key HIPs like undergraduate research. Disaggregated data showed a slight gap for African American students, suggesting the need to increase participation in undergraduate research.

As a result, the Office of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the Center for Black Studies, and the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (OSEEL) sought to develop a themed learning community (TLC) for African American freshmen (*Hip Hop, Writing and Research*) designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of research, research methods, and scientific inquiry and to incorporate multiple HIPs (i.e., undergraduate research, learning community and freshman seminar). TLCs are small clusters of courses designed around a

common theme and connected through integrative assignments that encourage students to connect knowledge across the curriculum.

The Partnership

At NIU, we've found that our most successful work is done collaboratively and as Tinto (2012) has asserted, we believe that once we've admitted students to the University, we have an ethical obligation to provide educational experiences and support systems that facilitate retention and successful matriculation. To that end, the Director of the Center for Black Studies, the Chief Diversity Officer and Executive Vice President for Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the Associate Vice Provost for Engaged Learning and faculty members from the College of Education and Liberal Arts and Sciences, came together to design and offer a solution to the issue of equity gaps in student involvement in HIPs through the development of the TLC, *Hip Hop, Writing and Research*.

Research supports institutional efforts to address persistence concerns by creating both academic and social support mechanisms (Braxton, et. al, 2014, Tinto, 2012). Students enroll in the TLC as a cohort. The coursework is aligned and encourages students to apply what they learn across disciplines in a manner that can be replicated throughout their undergraduate course of study. In addition, students develop a peer network along with close working relationships with core faculty. This network translates into social and cultural capital, both of which facilitate the success of underserved students including first generation and underrepresented students.

Tinto (2012) asserts that institutions should focus attention on four key areas: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement. Through the NIU partnership, attention was given to each of these areas and given an academic frame, which we believe will not only encourage persistence from first to second year, but also prepare students to understand what is needed to matriculate through to graduation. In addition, the TLC also addresses racial/ethnic minority identity development through the coursework, which allows students to move through stages of racial identity development in a safe space and frames what the students are experiencing in a way that validates their feelings (Howard-Hamilton, Hinton, and Hughes, 2010).

The Vehicle: Themed Learning Community (Hip Hop, Writing and Research)

Learning communities provide students with unique opportunities to connect with faculty and peers and to engage in hands-on learning experiences. For underserved students, in addition to promoting critical thinking and the development of oral and written communication skills, learning communities provide an environment that supports the transition to college and encourages students to find their voice (Brownell and Swaner, 2009). Learning communities can also be designed to facilitate student engagement in multiple HIPs, thereby supporting Kuh's (2008) key suggestions for integrating HIPs into the college experience. To that end and given the equity gap data outcomes, the NIU team intentionally designed this TLC to support African American student's transition to the university, while focusing on introducing undergraduate research using culturally relevant methodologies. The TLC included a peer educator, who

served as a mentor to the students, and opportunities for students to learn about ways to engage in research beyond the TLC. The course cluster included a freshmen seminar (UNIV 101), a Black Studies course on Racism in American Society (BKST 200) and a newly designed special topics course that focused on using hip hop as a tool for exploring research (BKST 302).

TLCs are designed to include integrative assignments, which encourage students to link knowledge across courses within the cluster. The research paper assigned for the Special Topics course became the integrative assignment and this course served as the integrative hub for the TLC. The aim of the Special Topics course within the cluster was to expand student's research knowledge and skills, and challenge student's understanding of academic writing. Each course within the cluster was designed to include portions of the research paper throughout the semester. The topics students chose were based on topics covered in the Racism in American Society course, which included police brutality, depression in the Black community, invisible women, women in and out of the prison system, Black males in college, and sports. In addition to incorporating components of the paper's introduction, the Freshman Seminar also provided a safe space for students to engage in discussions around issues related to the transition to college.

Although many of the students had written senior papers, there were several key challenges they experienced throughout the writing process. The challenges included a lack of understanding of APA or MLA citation methods; writing too much or not enough; writing long sentences; organization; issues with paraphrasing; understanding what is legitimate research (primary sources vs. internet sources); and understanding the process of doing research. The initial assignment within the Special Topics course asked students to translate hip-hop verses and connect these verses to current events. Students were then asked to critique academic writing and to identify the proper techniques. Upperclassman were invited to the course to provide insight on how they overcame the fear of research and writing as a tool to motivate the TLC students to challenge themselves throughout the course.

A significant amount of time was dedicated to teaching students how to cite academic resources using APA or MLA and how to translate information into their own words drawing on multiple sources of information. Students were taught organizational strategies like creating outlines and identifying themes. As part of the iterative process, students were required to submit multiple drafts of their paper allowing for translation of knowledge and skills gained throughout the course and for continual and direct feedback, which is a key component of HIPs. Finally, students presented their final papers to faculty and administrators.

CONCLUSION

One primary goal of this particular TLC was to encourage underserved students to engage in undergraduate research during their college career. The TLC became the vehicle to introduce this HIP. Students were given a pre- and post- survey to better gauge their interest in and understanding of research. The outcomes of the survey indicated an increase in student's interest in getting involved in undergraduate research and in their confidence in their ability to conduct academic research. Further, students indicated a strong interest in doing research if the topic was of interest to them or if the topics were connected to their academic major. Lastly, the data showed a significant increase in student's understanding of what is involved in research. The

next step for the team is to encourage those students who expressed an interest in continuing to take advantage of the programs offered at NIU and to facilitate the connection to a faculty mentor. In general, the design of the TLC provided a unique opportunity to support, encourage and challenge underserved students in meaningful HIPs.

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Dr. Vernese Edghill-Walden joined Northern Illinois University in 2015 as the chief diversity officer and senior associate vice president for academic diversity. Dr. Edghill-Walden holds a bachelor's degree from Bucknell University in sociology, a master's degree from the University of Delaware in higher education administration, and a Ph.D. in sociology with a specialization in race, class and gender, social inequalities and urban sociology from Howard University. Dr. Edghill-Walden's area of research is race and gender equity and black women's career mobility, specifically in higher education.



LaVerne Gyant is professor in Counseling Adult and Higher Education, College of Education at Northern Illinois University. Her research includes African American women, African Americans in higher education, particularly in the area of undergraduate women, and diversity.



Gena Flynn Directs the Center for Black Studies at Northern Illinois University. Previously, Dr. Flynn directed diversity and inclusion programs at Columbia College Chicago, North Central College, and the University of Michigan. Dr. Flynn has served in higher education as an advocate for students for 17 years. She earned a B.A. in Political Science and African American Studies from DePaul University, an M.A. (ABD) in Political Science from the

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Oriana Flores is a transfer-junior at Northern Illinois University majoring in Communicative Disorders. She is also a first-generation student from Chicago, IL. She plans to go to graduate school and become a Speech-Language Pathologist for Chicago Public Schools. Oriana is an undergraduate research assistant participating in NIU's Research Rookies program.

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What is Synergy?

Synergy is the publication of the Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs (SAPAA) Knowledge Community. This publication is produced at various times of the year for the Knowledge Community as a platform to spread knowledge about issues related to our work in higher education.

As one of the largest KCs within NASPA, SAPAA boasts an incredible and diverse representation of engaged and committed members. We are excited to work with individuals who make collaborations a priority in their professional lives and in their mentoring with engagement with students.

Synergy Submission Guidelines

Article proposals may be submitted to Communications Committee Chairs Nkenge Ransom-Friday at nrf001@marietta.edu and Jacob Isaacs at jpisaacs@purdue.edu.

Please submit concept proposals one to two months in advance of the below text deadlines.

- October Issue on Community Engagement: Text due by Monday, September 17, 2018
- March Issue on Persistent Programs: Text due by Monday, February 18, 2019



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Format Guidelines

Manuscripts must be clear and concise, with a well-organized presentation of ideas. Submissions should be no more than 3-4 pages with references (not including images)

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition (2009) should be followed for general style guidelines and reference formatting.

- 12 point font
- 1 inch margins
- Single space with double space between paragraphs

Please include the following:

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