High-Impact Educational Practices

High-Impact Educational Practices: A Brief Overview. The following practices have been widely tested and shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take different forms, depending on learner characteristics, institutional priorities and contexts. On many campuses, assessment of student involvement in practices such as these has made it possible to assess the practices' contribution to students' cumulative learning. However, on almost all campuses, utilization is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning. Below are brief descriptions of high-impact practices that educational research suggests increase rates of student persistence and student engagement.

First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized gen ed program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community. Programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology & society, global interdependence—with curricular and co-curricular options.

Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through different disciplines.

Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences and disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and, so on.

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

Undergraduate Inquiry and Creative Activity
Many colleges and universities now provide research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, is most prominently in science. The goal is to involve students early in courses and through other activities with systematic inquiry approaches with contested questions, empirical observation, technologies, and the enthusiasm that comes from working to answer questions or create new formulations through literary or artistic endeavor.

Diversity/Study Away/Global Learning
Many colleges and universities now offer courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
Field-based applied learning with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a course requirement. The goal is for students to directly experience issues they are studying and engage in ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity to both apply learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on service experiences. These programs model that giving back to the community is an important college outcome and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

Internships
Internships are increasingly common form of applied, experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

Capstone Courses and Projects
Whether called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.

ePortfolio
ePortfolio is a portable, expandable, updatable vehicle for accumulating and presenting evidence of authentic student accomplishment including the curation of specific proficiencies and dispositions at given points in time. Done well, ePortfolio it is also a powerful pedagogical approach that requires meaningful student reflection and deepens learning while making achievement visible – to students themselves, to their peers and faculty, and to external audiences.

Sources
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