CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, STUDENT AGENCY, AND WELL-BEING: CAMPUS RESEARCH PROJECTS

Julie Owen
Associate Professor, Leadership & Integrative Studies
George Mason University

Joyce Stern
Dean for Student Success & Academic Advising
Grinnell College

Patrick Connelly
Dean of Students & Director of Student Engagement
Landmark College

AAC&U Annual Meeting
January 27, 2017
BTtoP Research Grants

- 15 grantees – Aug. 2015-Dec 2017
- Projects intended to address: the connections of learning opportunities and the well-being of traditionally underserved students
Center for the Advancement of Well-Being
http://wellbeing.gmu.edu/

Social Action & Integrative Learning
http://sail.gmu.edu/

Bringing Theory to Practice

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
School of Integrative Studies

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
University Life

SAIL
SOCIAL ACTION & INTEGRATIVE LEARNING
What underserved population does your research address?

First generation students are those students whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s): (1) did not receive or complete any level of post-secondary education, (2) enrolled at or earned a two-year degree from a community college, and/or (3) earned any level of post-secondary education outside the United States. These students may have older siblings who have completed a degree. A parent may refer to a student’s biological mother and father, or it may include stepparents, adoptive parents, guardians, foster parents, grandparents, or others.
Constructs

**Well-Being**
*Building a life of vitality, purpose, resilience, and engagement.*
Enriched by diversity and characterized by thriving across a range of domains, including physical, career, social, community, psychological, and financial. Characterized as being satisfied with one’s life and regularly experiencing curiosity, hope, meaning and joy.

**Civic Engagement**
Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the *combination of civic knowledge, skills, values and motivation* to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

Model

First Generation Status

Demographics

Civic engagement activities
Well-being activities

Well-Being
- Purposefulness
- Flourishing
- Self-Realization

Student Engagement
- Belonging
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Resilience

Model
Research Questions #1: To what extent does participation in civic engagement activities (civic values, civic engagement, civic action) enhance the well-being (purposefulness, flourishing, self-realization) of first generation students? To what extent does participation in civic engagement activities enhance moderators of well-being such as sense of belonging, development of interpersonal relationships, and resiliency? Are first generation students who participate in civic engagement activities more likely to flourish (as defined by Keyes) and graduate?

Research Questions #2: To what extent does participation in well-being focused activities enhance the well-being (purposefulness, flourishing, self-realization) of first generation students as measured by the Gallup well-being student survey? To what extent does participation in well-being focused activities enhance moderators of well-being such as sense of belonging, development of interpersonal relationships, and resiliency? Are first generation students who participate in well-being more likely to flourish (as defined by Keyes) and graduate?

Research Questions #3: What differential pathways exist for first generation students navigating campus and community involvement options? Which campus programs and interventions are most effectively promoting student flourishing and success for first generation students?
Why is this research relevant for your institution? Why now?

A Well-Being Campus:
https://youtu.be/8RLB3cymsfl

Need to match data with stories; to educate campus on FG issues

Increased hope and resilience
→ Student success and flourishing
Three insights thus far...

Diverse conceptualizations and definitions of first-generation status lead to an increasingly critical approach to our work (see Seider, Clark, & Soutter, 2015, *Journal of College & Character, 16* v4).

Asset versus deficit approach to contributions of first-generation students. Commitment to supporting students throughout college career.

Transformative power of research process itself – interviews, story sharing, creating a culture of support.
For more information

**Research Team Members**

*Misty Krell, Director of Student Services*
School of Integrative Studies, George Mason University
mkrell@gmu.edu

*Duhita Mahatmya, PhD, Assistant Research Scientist*
College of Education, University of Iowa
duhita-mahatmya@uiowa.edu

*Julie Owen, PhD, Associate Professor*
School of Integrative Studies, George Mason University
jowen4@gmu.edu

*Graziella Pagliarulo McCarron, PhD, Assistant Professor*
School of Integrative Studies, George Mason University
gmccarro@gmu.edu

*Lewis E. Forrest, II, M.Ed, Associate Dean*
University Life, George Mason University
lforres1@gmu.edu

**Doctoral Students**

*Diane (Beth) Dalbec, Higher Education*
ddalbec@gmu.edu

*Sharrell Hassell-Goodman, Higher Education*
shassel3@uiowa.edu

*Christian Suero, Public Sociology*
csuero@gmu.edu

**Undergraduate Researchers**

*Rebecca Carter*
rcarte11@gmu.edu

*Jeffrey Young*
jyoung34@gmu.edu
Stress Management and Resiliency Training for Students with Learning Disabilities

Patrick Connelly, Dean of Students
First year students with learning disabilities and learning difficulties. Landmark College defines first year students as those students entering college directly from high school as well as transfer students.

Which Underserved Population is Served by Our Research?

disabilities and learning difficulties.
Specifically serve students with diagnosed learning differences

- Language-based learning disabilities
- Attention Deficit Disorders (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

- One of only two institutions specifically serving this population in the United States
- Associate & Bachelor degree programs
- Student body of under 500 students
Our Research

• Research the effectiveness of the **Stress Management and Resiliency Training (SMART)** program and better understand both short-term and long-term impact on student wellbeing, as well as any corresponding academic outcomes.
  • Developed by Dr. Amit Sood of the Mayo Clinic

• Pilot program initiated in spring 2014
  • Counseling Services introduced SMART curriculum to all first-year students
  • Resiliency skills were explored and reinforced in classes over the course of the semester.
  • Research Goals were to build out programming components and research the effectiveness of the program on student wellbeing and corresponding academic outcomes.
Research Questions

• Do Students who participate in SMART programming show a greater level of resilience skills?

• Does strengthening resilience skills lead to higher levels of student wellbeing?

• Does bolstering resilience skills translate to academic outcomes?
Why Resiliency Training?

• Well suited for college students with LD who are historically underserved within higher education.

• SMART Project Rationale
  • In general college students present with higher levels of anxiety and stress
  • College students with learning differences are more at risk for anxiety, stress and self doubt (Unwin et al., 2013)
  • Resiliency education has potential to increase well-being (Hall & Webster, 2008)
  • Resiliency also aligns with student persistence and success (Hartley, 2011)
Evaluating Curriculum Efficacy

measures of reliance, affect, self esteem, stress and well being using online surveys.

- Connors-Davidson Resilience Scale
- Child and Youth Resilience Measure
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scales
- Perceived Stress Scale
- Personal Well Being Index

- Three semester data collection process
Challenges and What We've Learned

• Students with LD reported very low levels of resiliency, significantly lower than the mean reported by the general US population.

• Low number of students with both pre and post tests and timing of post test may have overshadowed potential positive affects.

• Students reported regularly using the techniques and skills despite initial results.
Contact Information

Rick Bryck, Ph.D., Senior Academic Researcher
rickbryck@landamrk.edu

Patrick Connelly, Dean of Students
patrickconnelly@landmark.edu

Debbie Gassaway-Hayward, Chairperson, Education Department
dhayward@landamrk.edu

Jackie Mills, Director of Health, Counseling & Wellness
jacalamills@landmark.edu
References


• Unwin, B.K., Goodie, J., Reamy, B.V., & Quinlan, J. (2013). Care of the College Student. American Family Physician, 899(9), 596.
Promoting Belongingness Through a Social-psychological Intervention

Joyce Stern, Dean for Student Success & Academic Advising, Grinnell College

Belonging Study Committee

Joyce Stern, Dean for Student Success & Academic Advising (co-PI)

Narren Brown, Executive Director of Research and Institutional Effectiveness, South Central College (co-PI until Oct ‘16)

David Lopatto, Professor of Psychology & Director, Center for Teaching Learning and Assessment

Mark Schneider, Professor of Physics

Laura Sinnett, Associate Professor of Psychology

Randy Stiles, Associate Vice President for Analytic Support and Institutional Research

Kaitlin Wilcox, Associate Director of Analytic Support (co-PI)
Grinnell College

- Grinnell, Iowa - rural
- Small, private, selective residential, liberal arts
- 1650 students (undergraduate only)
- 9:1 student/faculty ratio
- Diverse:
  - 49 states, 47 countries
  - 25.5% domestic students of color
  - 18% international students
  - 20% Pell grant recipients
  - 16% 1st gen students
Institutional Context

Why this study? Why now?

Observations of over-representation of students of color on “Docket”

Grinnell-specific data on grade disparities

Residential Learning Task Force: “Thrive not just survive”

Retention/Graduation focus for Quality Initiative (2018 HLC accreditation review)

Re-imagining supports for students of color
Theoretical Framework

Hypothesis: If new students are exposed to the idea that all students struggle in college, then marginalized students won’t interpret negative events as resulting from not belonging at Grinnell. Therefore domestic students of color will demonstrate higher GPA (Walton & Cohen, 2007; 2011).

Goal: to enhance wellbeing — both hedonic (e.g., stronger sense of social-belonging) as well as eudaimonic (e.g., flourishing as evidenced by higher GPA) — through a stealth intervention.
Model basics

Group
- DSOC White

Attribution for Negative Events
- Internal Attribution
- External Attribution

Behavioral Mediator
- Decreased Help Seeking/Interaction
- No Change/Limited Change in help seeking/Interaction

Outcome (Cyclical)
- Negative Outcomes (GPA, Health, etc.)
- Neutral or positive outcomes (GPA, Health, etc.)
Three Study Administrations

1. May 2015 – Baseline Study of Upperclass Students
   179 participants from classes of ’15 – ‘17; 572 invited 31%

2. January 2016 - Class of 2019 Intervention
   39 participants; 432 invited 9%

3. August 2016 - Class of 2020 Intervention
   65 participants; 80 invited 81%
May 2015 Baseline Study

1. **Quantitative Data** – items adapted from “Sense of Social and Academic Fit” and “Belonging Uncertainty” scales (Walton & Cohen, 2007)
   - I fit in well at Grinnell College.
   - I am similar to the kind of people who succeed at Grinnell College.
   - I feel comfortable at Grinnell College.

2. **Qualitative Data** – students read 3 example essays about adjusting to college (adapted from Walton & Cohen, 2011), then wrote their own
Intervention 1 – Class of 2019

1. Read summary of quantitative data from Grinnell students indicating that college is difficult at first but then gets better.

2. Read 9 essays written by Grinnell students from the Baseline Study – theme: any social or academic adversity that they might experience is common in the first year and temporary.

3. Responded to essay prompt (self-persuasion; cognitive dissonance)
Lesson learned

Very low participation rate:
39/432 students participated = 9%

Sigh.

Back to the drawing board...
Intervention 2 – Class of 2020

Targeted new students participating in pre-orientation (early arrival) programs for historically underrepresented students

Same study protocol with two changes:

- essays included an audio file (new student could hear the essays being read aloud)
- invited to make a video of themselves reading their essay
Example video

I think for most people, being put in a new, unfamiliar spot slightly or highly frightens us. Of course there are people who easily socialize and meld into a new environment, but some have to push a little harder than others. The high school mindset of cliques and popularity do not define Grinnell College which people start to experience as they proceed through their college journey. For me, I could sense the warmth and the genuine care Grinnellians feel for others. Personally, I am shy when it comes to meeting new people, and I am introverted so socializing can get very tiresome. But this community has a way of noticing how you are doing and supporting you if you are down. I do not know how to fully explain it. I have felt a similar community but not at such a large scale. Although classes have not started, yet, for me, I do not fear failing in a class because I sense that the academic support for students is so strong.

I think the best way to experience Grinnell is to take in as many opportunities as you can. If you need help, do not feel lesser for asking for help. That was a fear I once had (I still do but it has decreased significantly), but I am realizing that strength does not come from independence but from community.

Male, African-American student
Early Findings

From the Baseline Study...

1. Across group retrospective differences in social and academic fit
2. Within group changes in social and academic fit
3. Relationship of essay tone and GPA
4. Relationship of essay tone and class year
Next steps

- **Analysis of outcomes:**
  - Baseline study – further examine students’ lived experience
  - Fall 2016 intervention – did it work?

- **Discuss with key campus constituencies:**
  - Faculty
  - Student Affairs staff
  - Academic Advising staff
  - Council on Diversity and Inclusion
  - Task Force on Residential Learning

- **Repeat intervention with entering class in Fall 2017?**
Thank you!

- Collaborators
- Bringing Theory to Practice


Popular press:
