

Breaking Down the Barriers to Change: A Look at One Institution's Approach to Ensuring Engaged Learning

Mark Blackwell, Jean McGivney-Burelle, Guy Colarulli, James Shattuck, and Caryn Christensen
University of Hartford

How can faculty, staff, and administrators design a high-quality academic experience for their institution's undergraduates by adopting an established set of nationally recognized, evidence-based teaching and learning practices that promote engaged learning?

Context

- The University of Hartford is a primarily residential, midsized, private comprehensive university with approximately 4,500 full-time undergraduate students.
- It is composed of seven schools and colleges, including schools of art, music, and business; a college of arts and sciences; a college of education and health professions; a college of engineering, technology, and architecture; and a two-year college.

Goal

To ensure that all University of Hartford students were exposed to a minimum of six high-impact practices during their undergraduate experience, three of which must be writing-intensive courses.

Effective strategies

In our efforts to effect widespread institutional change, we found several strategies particularly effective.

- 1) **Focusing on teaching first.**
- 2) **Establishing criteria for high-impact practices.**
- 3) **Investing in faculty development.**
- 4) **Establishing annual campus-wide conversations about teaching.**

Unresolved challenges

While we have enjoyed several initial successes, we've also learned key lessons from early setbacks.

- 1) **Setting realistic expectations.**
- 2) **Communicating and institutionalizing the work.**
- 3) **Assessing impact.**

Conclusion

- We have formalized, supported, and elevated conversations about engaged teaching and learning on campus.
- We are ensuring that the best University of Hartford experiences are available to everyone, not just the highest-performing students.
- By spreading these experiences across a student's four years, we are providing scaffolding to help all students, regardless of their previous educational experiences.
- We have built upon the university's existing strengths in teaching and our shared commitment to student growth.
- We will continue to invest in professional development opportunities that help faculty design engaging pedagogy and practical strategies for assessing related outcomes.
- We are developing means of tagging high-impact courses in our course catalog, in our semester bulletins, and on student transcripts so that they are visible to all stakeholders (students, advisers, prospective employers) and so that we may collect and assess data about the success of our initiative.

References

- Blackwell, McGivney-Burelle, Colarulli, Shattuck, and Christensen, “One University’s Approach to Engaged Learning across the Curriculum,” forthcoming in *Liberal Education*, vol. 104, no. 1 (Winter 2018)
- Our “Strategic Planning Goal 1 White Paper” is available at <http://www.hartford.edu/academics/faculty/center-teaching-excellence-innovation/files/pub-resources/sp-g1-white-paper.pdf>.
- Our HIP criteria are available at <http://www.hartford.edu/academics/faculty/center-teaching-excellence-innovation/files/pub-resources/sp-g1-hip-criteria.pdf>.