NSSE
national survey of
student engagement

FSSE
faculty survey of
student engagement

Exploring perspectives on culturally inclusive practice: Institutional emphasis of diversity, inclusive coursework, and student gains.

In the last few decades, diversity, inclusion, and equity goals have proliferated across institutions in the United States, and decades of research point to the benefits of culturally inclusive content and pedagogy on student outcomes. Despite these findings, it is not sufficient to know if students are exposed to these experiences; rather, we must understand how students interpret and perceive them as they relate to the institution's commitment to inclusion.

Theoretical framework

Researchers framed this study using a culturally relevant pedagogy framework. Culturally relevant pedagogy includes three elements that work together to aid in the overall success of students. The three elements are (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. Three functional dimensions of cultural relevant pedagogy—institutional, personal and instructional—emphasizes the role of educators for implementing cultural responsiveness in courses and the environment for learning. Culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on the academic, personal, and social development of students so that they may then be critical of the social structures that affect their daily experiences.

Ginsberg, M.B. & Wlodkowski, R.J. (2009). Diversity & Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching in College. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. American Educational Research Journal, 32(3), 465-491.

Data

The data for this study come from the 2017 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). NSSE asks students about the time and effort they put towards educational activities, and FSSE, a complimentary survey to NSSE, asks faculty about their use of educational practices that are empirically linked with student learning and development. Institutions can choose from among a variety of additional item sets, called Topical Modules, to append to the end of their NSSE and FSSE administrations. The focus of this study is on the NSSE and FSSE Topical Module, *Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity* (ICD). This set was administered to 132 NSSE institutions and 30 FSSE institutions, resulting in 55,305 student and 4,095 faculty responses.

Measures

For students, the ICD items examined in this study asked about how much their coursework emphasized inclusive and culturally engaging activities, how much their institution emphasizes various aspects of inclusivity, and how much their institution provides a supportive environment for various forms of diversity. Another set of variables of interest come from the core NSSE survey. These questions ask students how much their experience at their institution has contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in (a) working effectively with others, (b) developing or clarifying a personal

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code of values and ethnics, (c) understanding people of other backgrounds, (d) solving complex real-world problems, and (e) being an informed and active citizen.

For faculty, the ICD items in this study asked about how much their courses emphasize inclusive and culturally engaging activities and how much their institution emphasizes various aspects of inclusivity. These questions ask faculty how much they structure their courses so that students learn and develop in the five areas of personal development above.

Selected Results

1. **How does an emphasis on inclusive and culturally engaging coursework relate to student perceptions of gains in personal and social development?**

All the individual items asking about students' coursework emphasizing inclusivity and engagement with cultural diversity were positive and notable ($p < .01$) with correlations ranging from .308 to .529. The strongest relationships were between inclusive and culturally engaging coursework and students' gaining an understanding of people with different backgrounds and being an active and informed citizen.

2. **How does an emphasis on inclusive and culturally engaging coursework relate to faculty course goals for increasing students' personal and social development?**

All the individual items asking about faculty emphasis on inclusivity and engagement with cultural diversity were positively ($p < .01$) related to faculty course goals for social and personal development with correlations ranging from .152 to .766. The strongest relationships were between inclusive and culturally engaging coursework and goals for students to develop or clarify a personal code of values or ethics and understanding people of other backgrounds.

3. **What is the relationship between an institution's emphasis on inclusivity and engagement with cultural diversity and students' perceptions of and faculty goals regarding inclusive and culturally engaging coursework?**

Controlling for a variety of student demographics and characteristics, there are strong and significant relationships between students' perceptions of an institution that emphasizes an inclusive environment (FY: B = .596, $p < .001$, SR: B = .591, $p < .001$) and anti-discrimination practices (FY: B = .498, $p < .001$, SR: B = .490, $p < .001$) and coursework that emphasizes inclusive and culturally engaging activities. Controlling for a variety of faculty demographics and course characteristics, the relationship between an institution's emphasis on an inclusive environment (LD: B = .110, $p < .001$, SR: B = .152, $p < .001$) and anti-discrimination practice (LD: B = .063, $p < .05$, SR: B = .120, $p < .001$) and culturally engaging coursework is still positive, but less strong.

4. **What is the relationship between an institution's emphasis on inclusiveness and engagement with cultural diversity and student perceptions of support for various forms of diversity?**

Students who perceive their institutions more strongly emphasize inclusive environments and anti-discrimination practices feel their institutions are more supportive of various forms of diversity ($p < .01$). The strongest relationships are between support for diversity in racial/ethnic identifications and *Inclusive Environment* (FY: $r = .679$, SR: $r = .703$) and *Anti-Discrimination Practices* (FY: $r = .641$, SR: $r = .671$). Although still positive and moderately related, the lowest correlations are between support for diversity in political affiliation and *Inclusive Environment* (FY: $r = .473$, SR: $r = .527$) and *Anti-Discrimination Practices* (FY: $r = .460$, SR: $r = .509$).