

Promoting High Impact Practices at Austin Peay State University

Faculty Staff Explore Experience Excel, Class of 2015

Austin Peay State University

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Abstract

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) identified five “high-impact practices” (HIP’s) that promote substantial gains in student engagement, learning, persistence, and retention and graduation rates: learning communities, service-learning, study abroad, undergraduate research, capstone courses, and internships (AAC&U, 2008). Unfortunately, the AAC&U also identified that about 25% of students participate in HIP’s before graduation (ibid). Austin Peay State University offers HIP’s to students through learning communities, service-learning, study abroad, field experiences (i.e., practicums, internships, co-ops, clinicals, etc.), undergraduate research, and capstone courses. Still, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2014 data revealed that the percentage of seniors who perceived they participated in HIP’s was lower at APSU than at peer institutions. The 2015 Inaugural Class of Faculty and Staff Explore Experience Excel recommends a campus-wide showcase to raise HIP awareness and visibility, as well as an HIP placeholder course to document student experiences for prospective employers and incentivize HIP’s for career-minded students.

Research shows that high-impact practices (HIP's) increase student retention (AAC&U, 2008; Kuh et al., 2013; McMahan, 2015; Santiago, 2011; Schneider, 2015). Based on this research, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has focused on ten HIP's for institutions of higher learning to implement: first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, common intellectual experiences, diversity/global learning, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, community-based learning, service-learning, undergraduate research, and capstone projects, and internships (Kuh et al., 2013). Unfortunately, Austin Peay State University fell below the national average on student engagement in HIP's (NSSE, 2014).

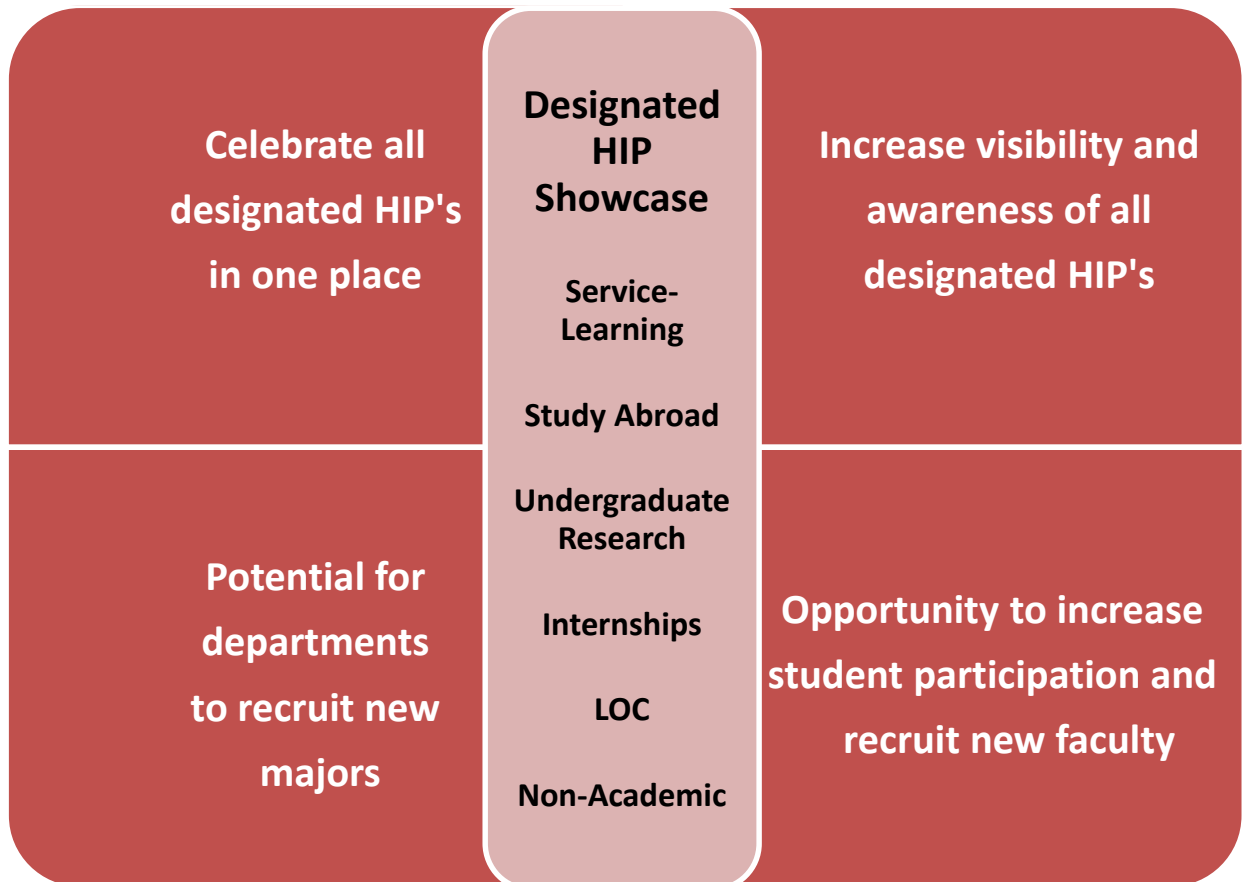
APSU does offer diverse opportunities for students to participate in HIP's, so the NSSE results warrant questioning. It is possible that APSU students do not associate their HIP experiences with the words "high-impact practice." In other words, surveyed students may have experienced HIP's without understanding the terms in the survey questions. Another possibility is that there have been insufficient HIP course offerings. A third possibility is that many APSU students have not engaged in HIP's because most HIP's are electives or not-for-credit and the typical APSU student is degree-driven. Finally, APSU students might be reluctant to participate in HIP's because they lack adequate documentation of their participation for prospective employers.

APSU is focused on increasing student retention and graduation rates, and HIP's have reached the national spotlight as a means to increase retention rates. APSU is already in the process of increasing the visibility of HIP's for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), "Experience Explore Excel" (E^3), in satisfaction of the accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). E^3 focuses on identifying and defining the HIP's

that the University currently offers and increasing HIP's through a variety of institutional grant opportunities. These internal grants incentivize faculty, staff, and students to collaborate and co-develop additional HIP's.

We the 2015 Inaugural Class of Faculty and Staff Experience Explore Excel (FSEEE) recommend that the University focus on increasing marketing and exposure to already existing HIP's at APSU. Better student understanding of HIP's and how to sell their experiences would benefit both institutional reporting purposes and student marketability. To improve HIP marketing and exposure, the Class of 2015 recommends a campus-wide HIP showcase to encourage not only student participation, but also faculty participation. The Class of 2015 also suggests the development of a placeholder course. A placeholder course would allow students to document their experiences for employers, who currently rely on transcripts.

Campus-Wide HIP Showcase



Although showcases exist for two of the existing HIP's on campus, the FSEEE Class of 2015 proposes the creation of a singular showcase, starting in Spring 2016, to highlight all designated HIP's on campus from the previous semester. The proposed showcase would occur in the fall and spring of each academic year and be open to all students, staff, faculty, and community members. Celebrating all of the designated HIP's on campus would raise awareness of existing HIP's, cultivate healthy competition between departments in the development of HIP's, and potentially increase student participation in HIP's.

The Class of 2015 discussed several promising venues for an event of this scale, including the Foy, Dunn Center, MUC Plaza, AP Bowl, and the Browning Lawn. Several class members speculated that the Browning Lawn, due to its iconic status and visibility from off-campus passersby, would elevate the event's status. Others emphasized the benefits of using locations that students frequently traverse and already populate, such as the MUC Plaza or AP Bowl.

The goal would be to create a celebration with a "fair-like" atmosphere. Each department or college would have tables with representatives for each designated HIP: service-learning, study abroad, undergraduate research, internships, and extracurricular or co-curricular HIP's under the Learning Opportunities Center. The showcase could host off- and on-site activities to garner student interests. Students in the PR Campaigns course, for instance, could compete to create a campaign for the event. On-site, students could acquire a card to stamp at each HIP booth; after accumulating sufficient stamps, the students could enter a drawing to win electronic-portfolio fees paid for one year. In keeping with the celebratory "fair" concept, students could receive different free promotional material each hour, from APSU T-shirts to vendor-provided food or drinks. The showcase also could host an awards ceremony for the "Best of the Best" HIP's, as an incentive to increase faculty, departmental, and collegial participation. Obviously, the showcase's duration would be at the discretion of the event planners and could range from two days to a three-hour window on Study Day.

The Class of 2015 recognizes the showcase would serve as a small step in the path to increasing campus participation in HIP's. However, we believe it is a solid step. It provides much-needed recognition, increases visibility and awareness, draws new faculty and student participants alike, and serves as a departmental recruitment tool for academic majors.

Assessment of Showcase

According to NSSE 2014 data, the percentage of seniors who perceived they participated in two or more HIP's was lower at APSU than at peer institutions (see Table 1). Moreover, the percentage of seniors who believed they participated in at least one HIP also was lower at APSU. These disparities spanned the categories of service-learning, research with faculty, internship or field experience, and culminating senior experience.

(Table 1. Statistical Comparisons from the NSSE 2014 High-Impact Practices Report)

	Austin Peay		THEC Peer Group		Southeast Similar		NSSE 2013 & 2014	
	%		%	Effect size ^a	%	Effect size ^a	%	Effect size ^a
<i>First-year</i>								
11c. Learning Community	12		14	-0.07	16	-0.10	15	-0.09
12. Service-Learning	49		48	.00	50	-.03	51	-.06
11e. Research with Faculty	5		6	-.03	5	.02	5	-.01
<i>Participated in at least one</i>	52		55	-.05	58 *	-.12	58 *	-.11
<i>Participated in two or more</i>	11		11	-.01	10	.02	12	-.03
<i>Senior</i>								
11c. Learning Community	22		26	-.08	22	.00	24	-.05
12. Service-Learning	48		65 ***	-.34	61 ***	-.28	61 ***	-.26
11e. Research with Faculty	15		21 **	-.15	20 *	-.12	24 ***	-.23
11a. Internship or Field Exp.	36		45 ***	-.18	44 **	-.16	50 ***	-.28
11d. Study Abroad	8		9	-.03	7	.03	14 ***	-.20
11f. Culminating Senior Exp.	22		38 ***	-.34	44 ***	-.46	46 ***	-.51
<i>Participated in at least one</i>	65		84 ***	-.42	83 ***	-.41	85 ***	-.47
<i>Participated in two or more</i>	40		56 ***	-.32	57 ***	-.33	62 ***	-.43

Note. Percentage of students who responded "Done or in progress" except for service-learning which is the percentage who responded that at least "Some" courses included a community-based project.

a. Cohen's *h*: The standardized difference between two proportions. Effect size indicates the practical importance of an observed difference. An effect size of .2 is generally considered small, .5 medium, and .8 large.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (z-test comparing participation rates).

While the practical significance of these differences is small to moderate (the effect sizes ranged from .15 to .42), the data do provide useful baselines for measuring future student perceptions of

their involvement in HIP's. NSSE data would serve as an adequate starting place for measuring the impacts of the HIP showcase and other efforts.

Additionally, an assessment team could randomly sample either students stratified by degree progression or the entire student population before and after the showcase or other efforts for repeated measures comparisons. This pre-post survey should include questions in the NSSE survey that relate to the targeted areas for improvement. If the showcase is to be assessed alone, then surveys should be administered right before and after the showcase. If all improvement efforts are to be assessed, then surveys could be administered on an annual basis, e.g., as a preliminary step to spring course registration.

Placeholder Course Option to Document Student HIP Participation

Many colleges and universities are attempting to increase student participation in HIP's. Most HIP's are tied to a course. Often these courses are based on the standards from the National Society of Experiential Education (NSEE) (see table 2). Currently, we have 27 service-learning courses, 64 internship (co-op, clinicals, practicum, etc.) courses, and 80 study-abroad courses. APSU students participate in undergraduate research, but there is no clear way to document their participation on transcripts at this time.

Purdue University, Elon University, Mississippi State, University of South Carolina, The University of Tennessee, Northern Indiana University, California State University, University of Massachusetts, University of North Carolina, and Lipscomb University have developed course offerings to track HIP's. Some offer experiential-learning courses that their respective areas, such as the Office of Service-Learning, label and track. Others provide courses that each academic department labels and tracks. As a common thread, all courses include the Eight Standards for Experiential Education recommended by the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE).

Placeholder Option 1: Experiential Education Course

The University of North Carolina Charlotte offers a zero-to-three credit or a non-credit option for an experiential-education course. The Experiential Education Office can add the designation to any academic course to document an HIP. The designation is pass/fail and priced according to credit hours. When students request zero credit hours, they accrue no additional cost, but the HIP still appears on their transcripts (Gonzalez, 2015).

Placeholder Option 2: University College/ General Education Course Placeholder

Purdue University offers a general-education credit, housed under the University College. Students register for the credit hour as needed to document HIP's not required by their majors. The credit hour also enables coding attributes to designate the type of HIP. The placeholder course is pass/fail and can be adjusted from one to three credit hours, with pricing contingent on the credit hour (Pellicciotti, 2015).

Placeholder Option 3: Combination of Placeholder Course and Co-Curricular Transcript

Elon University offers placeholder course, but their students can choose to document their HIP's instead through a co-curricular transcript. The placeholder course is similar to the one at UNC Charlotte. The co-curricular transcript enables students alternatively to document their HIP's through a portal that can be accessed by the Registrar's Office. Students can request that the Registrar's Office send both traditional transcripts and co-curricular transcripts to prospective employers or graduate programs (Heiser, 2015).

Both the experiential-education designation and the placeholder course undergo the same curricular process as would any other new course, and all three options meet the eight standards of experiential education set forth by the National Society for Experiential Education. These options would incentivize APSU student participation in HIP's while assisting the University in documenting those experiences.

Proposed Timeline for Implementation

- Spring 2016* Inaugural HIP Showcase, with new iterations each subsequent fall and spring semester.
- Spring 2017* Begin the process of creating non-credit placeholder courses, with consideration of both zero- and positive-credit courses.
- Fall 2018* Assess University infrastructure, such as staffing, to support broader HIP engagement.
- Fall 2020* Consider graduation requirement for HIPs.

Additional Considerations

Graduation Requirement

An HIP graduation requirement has potential pitfalls and would require broad campus discussion. Yes, a graduation requirement would improve NSSE results. However, it also could incapacitate the University's HIP infrastructure and possibly lower the quality of HIP's. Faculty who engage in undergraduate research, for example, might have to dedicate less time to each student in order to accommodate the number of students. Students who interpret HIP's as merely a box to check before graduation might not engage HIP's sufficiently to benefit from them. The FSEEE Class of 2015 urges the careful consideration of all stakeholders in difficult decision.

Clear Language

The chosen terms to describe our institutional values and vision are how the outside world sees the University. By specifically mentioning High Impact Practices in the mission statement and H.R. materials for recruiting faculty and staff, the University would shape strategic and programmatic initiatives, as well as attract candidates who are knowledgeable of and engaging in HIP's, which would embed HIP's into the culture and fabric of the university.

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