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Surveying Student Perspectives to Enhance Civic and Global Learning

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Surveying Student Perspectives to Enhance Civic and Global Learning

Abstract

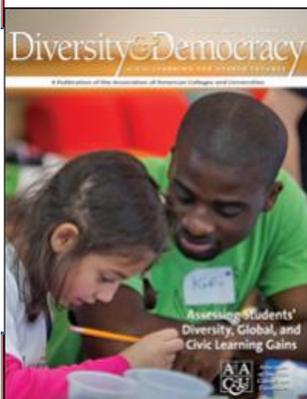
Throughout its history, American higher education has prepared students for principled citizenship in a democratic society. Yet in recent years, public critique has focused ever more sharply on higher education's role in fueling economic growth (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012). In the face of these pressures, several educational leaders and organizations, including the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), have called on colleges and universities to recommit to preparing students to become active workers and citizens. Fortunately, these are complementary goals. By helping students develop civic capacities like a sense of personal and social responsibility, higher education institutions can equip students to contribute to both civic and economic life

Disciplines

Educational Leadership | Education Economics | Growth and Development | Higher Education

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Diversity and Democracy

Surveying Student Perspectives to Enhance Civic and Global Learning

By: Robert D. Reason and Larry A. Braskamp

Throughout its history, American higher education has prepared students for principled citizenship in a democratic society. Yet in recent years, public critique has focused ever more sharply on higher education's role in fueling economic growth (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2012). In the face of these pressures, several educational leaders and organizations, including the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), have called on colleges and universities to recommit to preparing students to become active workers and citizens. Fortunately, these are complementary goals. By helping students develop civic capacities like a sense of personal and social responsibility, higher education institutions can equip students to contribute to both civic and economic life.

In this globally interconnected age, the implications of personal and social responsibility extend beyond domestic borders. Recognizing this, many colleges and universities have expanded their goals to include global dimensions of student learning, such as global perspective. Global perspective takes into account the ways in which people's worldviews and cultural traditions influence how they think, feel, and relate to others. It also acknowledges the need to empathize with persons who differ dramatically from oneself.

To advance education for personal and social responsibility that takes into account today's global contexts, educators would be wise to ask: What college experiences are most influential in fostering elements of personal and social responsibility, including global perspective? How can educators create a campus ethos and learning opportunities that encourage students' development across multiple dimensions? Two survey instruments directly address these questions: the Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory (PSRI) and the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI).

The Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory

Researchers initially created the Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory (PSRI) as part of the AAC&U initiative Core Commitments: Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility. After conducting an extensive literature review and consulting with nationally recognized experts, L. Lee Knefelkamp and Richard Hersh, with research assistance from Lauren Ruff, identified five dimensions of personal and social responsibility: striving for excellence, cultivating academic integrity, contributing to a larger community, taking seriously the perspective of others, and developing competence in ethical and moral reasoning and action. Now administered by Iowa

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State University, the PSRI assesses campus climate along each of these five dimensions by collecting and analyzing data reported by students, faculty, and staff.

Institutions that participate in the PSRI receive information about their campus climate for learning and development, along with comparison data from other participating institutions. Institutions have used PSRI data to identify and implement powerful policy changes to improve the climate for student learning and development (Glass and O'Neill 2012; Reason, forthcoming). For example, the University of Central Florida (UCF) responded to PSRI data by instituting a "Z-grade" policy that holds students accountable for academic integrity violations. Students who violate academic integrity policies receive a "Z" designation on their transcripts, which they can remove by completing an academic integrity seminar and retaking the course—an option that nearly all affected students have taken (O'Neill, forthcoming). Other institutions have used the PSRI data to inform accreditation reports or assess specific civic education initiatives.

Researchers at Iowa State University have begun to connect PSRI climate data with more objective measures of student learning outcomes, including outcomes related to openness to diversity, active citizenship, and social action taking. AAC&U's Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics offer another way of measuring students' development along dimensions related to personal and social responsibility, such as civic knowledge and engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, and ethical reasoning. By using the PSRI in combination with these rubrics, campuses can begin to connect measures of campus climate to assessments of important learning outcomes.

Global Perspective Inventory

How do I know? Who am I? How do I relate to others? These three questions provide a framework for the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) (Braskamp et al. 2012). The GPI measures students' development along cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions using six scales, focused on students' approaches to *knowing* and the degree of their *knowledge* (cognitive), their sense of *identity* and their *affect* when encountering unfamiliar perspectives and situations (intrapersonal), and their sense of *social responsibility* and the degree of their *social interaction* (interpersonal). Students who take the GPI provide information about these dimensions and answer questions about their college experiences, including the frequency and quality of global learning opportunities in the curriculum, cocurriculum, and community.

Colleges and universities use the GPI in three primary ways. They administer the GPI to first-year students at college entry to assess their initial level of global perspective taking and evaluate their high school experiences. They use the instrument with cohorts of students at all class levels to measure differences in global perspective taking and variations in students' experiences in and out of the classroom. Finally, they administer the GPI to students before and after they participate in study abroad programs to measure changes in their global perspective taking and their level of participation in a range of experiences while abroad.

Institutions draw on the resulting data to guide follow-up research or to frame discussions among faculty and administrators about pedagogical strategies to enhance global perspective taking. They use results to compare the experiences of American and international students and to compare themselves with their peer institutions. Many institutions use GPI data in their accreditation quality improvement initiatives or draw on results to make changes in their academic programs and offerings.

Conclusion

Education for personal and social responsibility in a global society has never been more important—nor has the assessment of related learning outcomes and campus climates. The PSRI and GPI are essential parts of institutions' assessment portfolios as they work to ensure that students become more open to diverse perspectives and achieve the capacities necessary for citizenship and global understanding. Now more than ever, higher education must reinvest in educating citizens, with an expanded understanding of citizenship as requiring a global perspective (National Task Force 2012).

To learn more about the *Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory*, visit www.psri.hs.iastate.edu. To learn more about the *Global Perspective Inventory*, visit <http://gpi.central.edu>.

Tips for Using Survey Instruments Effectively

1. *Prepare the campus.* Increase the likelihood that students and professionals will complete e-mail surveys by publicizing the surveys and e-mailing announcements from recognizable campus figures.
2. *Offer institutionally appropriate incentives.* To garner increased response rates, offer low-cost incentives that appeal to students, such as drawings for preferential parking spots or extra meal points.
3. *Use findings to start conversations.* The most effective use of assessment results may be to start open and honest conversations on campus.
4. *Look for data that contradicts assumptions.* The most beneficial findings may be those that contradict assumptions about what the data will show.
5. *Look at differences between different groups.* Differences in perceptions or behaviors between groups are important areas for focused discussion.
6. *Connect findings to existing data.* Institutional researchers can use personally identifiable information to explore how the data relate to important outcomes like GPA, retention to graduation, and extracurricular engagement.
7. *Be transparent about the use of data.* Share results with survey participants by referring to the data in newspaper articles or institutional memos and explicitly connecting findings to changes in policies and practices.

—Robert D. Reason and Larry A. Braskamp

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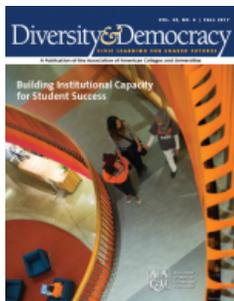
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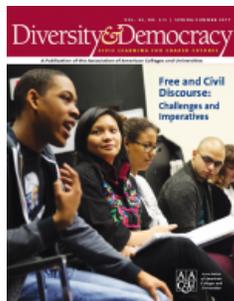


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