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Campus Highlight
Simon Fraser University: Making Connections to Well-Being in Learning Environments

By Rosie Dhaliwal and Alisa Stanton, health promotion specialists at Simon Fraser University

The Healthy Campus Community initiative at Simon Fraser University (SFU) focuses on creating campus environments that support well-being. The Health Promotion team, housed in the Health and Counselling Services office, is focusing on creating opportunities to positively impact student well-being through the learning environment. The team’s new collaborative project, Well-being in Learning Environments, has two key components. The first is a collection of online resources to help instructional staff apply supportive teaching practices and create learning environments that are conducive to well-being. The second is a research inquiry to investigate the effects of learning environments on student well-being, satisfaction, and engagement. This project stems from a research grant from the Bringing Theory to Practice Project and is being carried out in partnership with David Zandvliet, a professor with the Faculty of Education and director of the Institute for Environmental Learning.

Initially, a literature review was conducted to establish a rationale and evidence base for the project. The review found that within the university context, students’ health and well-being have been shown to be positively correlated with

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academic success and learning (Anasari and Stock 2010; DeBerard, Spielmans, and Julka 2004; Larsons 2000; University of Minnesota 2008). A detailed rationale document and one-page summary were created to provide an overview of the purpose of this work to key stakeholders on and off campus. An animated video intended for all campus stakeholders was also created in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division to highlight the purpose and rationale for this work. These documents and video can be found on the Healthy Campus Community website: http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity.html.

The project also established a partnership with the Teaching and Learning Centre, from which the idea of acknowledging the contributions of model instructors emerged. Nominations from student volunteers at Health and Counselling Services led to the identification of model instructors who were then interviewed to learn more about what they were doing to enhance well-being, what benefits they experienced from engaging in this work, and what evidence they had that their actions were positively affecting students. Model instructor profiles were created to provide concrete examples of actions that are currently being taken by instructors at SFU.

This information, along with the rationale document, was incorporated into a web page for the project. This page includes an instructor resources section, which highlights teaching practices that foster well-being. These practices were gathered from the literature on Universal Instructional Design, a process that considers the potential needs of all learners when designing and delivering instruction (University of Toronto at Scarborough Teaching and Learning Service 2004), as well as examples from model instructors within the university. The project web page, which links from SFU’s Healthy Campus Community website, is available at http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity/learningenvironments.html.

The next phase of the online resource development will involve seeking feedback from instructors and staff and sharing it with additional instructors through a growing community of practice to build momentum and ensure effective application and usability of the online resource. A panel presentation with model instructors and another session to highlight the online resources and enlist feedback were delivered at the annual SFU Teaching and Learning Symposium in 2012 and 2013, where instructors and the campus community gathered in a conference setting to discuss issues pertinent to teaching and learning.

The research component of this project was established to investigate the impact of learning environments on student well-being, satisfaction, and engagement. There are limited studies that specifically explore the impact of higher education learning environments on well-being despite evidence of the impact of working and learning environments on well-being in schools and workplace settings (Bond et al. 2007; California Education Supports n.d.; Hammond 2004; Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes 2002; Morrison and Kirby 2010). The research component includes the development of a survey instrument to be implemented in SFU classrooms as well as a qualitative feedback component. Specifically, aspects of the learning environment (teacher support, level of demand, flexibility, collaboration, physical spaces) within the higher education context will be investigated in terms of how they contribute to psychosocial well-being factors (emotional well-being, life-balance, self-esteem, social integration) in addition to student satisfaction and engagement. The project utilizes a participatory research design, where instructors are invited to provide feedback on the survey tool based on their experience using it in their own classrooms.

The Well-being in Learning Environments project has both practical and academic relevance. It aims to improve student well-being and learning experiences by providing instructors with tools and resources for creating healthy classroom settings while also contributing to literature regarding how learning environments can support student well-being. Well-being in Learning Environments is an important component of the Healthy Campus Community initiative at SFU. This initiative recognizes that health and well-being are critical to student learning, engagement, and retention and thus contribute to the broader goals of higher education. For more information please visit http://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity.html.

References


The Civic Series: A Video Introduction

By Margaret Salazar-Porzio, curator of Latina/o History and Culture at the National Museum of American History; former associate research scholar and lecturer, Center for Institutional and Social Change, Columbia University Law School

Earlier this year at a gathering of editors and authors involved in the publication of BTtoP’s The Civic Series monographs in Washington, DC, BTtoP interviewed some of the leading civic scholars and practitioners in attendance about their theories-in-use and some important questions driving their work: What are civic values and practices? What are the implications of civic learning? How can the civic mission of higher education lead to broad and deep democratic and inclusive attitudes and actions? How can we move forward together to accomplish the promise of higher education?

It soon became clear throughout the interviews that sharing some of these expert perspectives could raise additional interest in and awareness of The Civic Series, shed light on key topics, and spark conversations among researchers, policy makers, business people, activists, and members of the public.

The BTtoP team invited me to take a lead on the project, along with the talented graphic and video production designer Ranjan Das. Together we created a video that, in concert with The Civic Series, we hope encourages action, thought, and collaboration by raising questions and providing perspectives on fundamental issues about the civic mission of higher education, invigorating the intellectual climate and promoting public discussion, sharing bold ideas about the civic mission of higher education, and contributing broadly and deeply to theory and practice.

The video is narrated by Don Harward and Ashley Finley and the scholars featured include Peter Levine, Tufts University; Gretchen Lopez, Syracuse University; Sybril Bennett, Belmont University; and Richard Guarasci, Wagner College.

To view the “Bringing Theory to Practice, Civic Series Teaser” video, please visit the BTtoP YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/BTtoP01?feature=watch.

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Predictors of Late Teenage Substance Use, Mental Health and Academic Outcomes.” Journal of Adolescent Health 40: 357e9-357e18.


Civic Learning Outcomes at Gonzaga University
By Molly Pepper, associate professor of management, Gonzaga University

With the support of a Bringing Theory to Practice mini grant, Gonzaga University was able to survey students about their civic engagement experiences and outcomes, hold two Town Hall meetings for cross-campus discussions of the results of those surveys, and hold a faculty retreat to build faculty skills and confidence in managing difficult conversations in the classroom. Each of these efforts provided opportunities for meaningful dialogue, assessment, and transformative learning in the context of civic mindedness.

The student survey examined the relationship between civic engagement and number of years in college as well as the relationship between civic engagement and courses involving service learning, social justice, and global issues. This empirical research in spring 2012 found students’ civic mindedness does not appear to change over their four years at the university. Mean scores on civic mindedness are essentially the same for first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However, when the data is broken down by coursework, a different pattern emerges.

Students who took courses involving service learning, social justice, or global issues showed higher levels of civic mindedness than students who did not take courses that included these elements. Using Eyler and Giles’ (1999) civic mindedness scale and Sessa and Grabowski’s (2012) frequency of participation in civically-oriented activities scale, a survey of 550 students found that student scores increased with one course that incorporated service learning, social justice, or global issues. Student scores further increased with two or more courses involving social justice or global issues. However, students who took two or more service-learning courses did not increase their civic mindedness scores beyond the score for taking one course.

A plethora of research shows a positive relationship between service-learning courses and civic learning outcomes. For example, service-learning type coursework has been linked to social justice learning (Mayhew and Fernández 2007), habits of mind (DeAngelo and Hurtado 2009), and pluralistic orientation (Hurtado, DeAngelo, and Ruiz 2011). This research looks to extend that work to include other types of courses and to continue to explore the effect of coursework on student civic engagement. Research is in progress at Gonzaga to examine the differences and similarities in social justice and service-learning courses to further examine their effect on civic learning outcomes. Because this research was cross-sectional in nature, a longitudinal study also is needed to explore the long-term effects of coursework on civic learning outcomes.

Additionally, the survey included questions about the climate for diversity on campus. These were included as a measure of student well-being. Three important results emerged from this portion of the survey. First, students rated their perceptions of how the campus environment supports diversity lower than their perceptions of the importance of a supportive climate for diversity. In other words, there is a gap between how much support students believe is needed and how much is provided. Second, student responses indicated a lack of confidence in the university’s bias incident reporting system. When asked, students also indicated that they had heard faculty mem-

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bers make insensitive or disparaging remarks about women and persons of particular religious backgrounds. While disturbing, these results are common on college campuses (e.g., Hurtado 1992). By discussing the results of the survey in a Town Hall forum, the problems can be addressed and campus climate improved (Echols, Hwang, and Nobles 2002).

Two Town Hall meetings for students, staff, and faculty were held to discuss the results of the survey. These meetings, sponsored by the Campus Climate Committee, invited students, faculty, and staff to come together for a presentation of the data from the survey, small group discussions, and large group reports and discussion. It was hoped that the Town Halls would provide a model and practice for engaging in civil discourse. For both events, initial reactions on post-meeting evaluations indicated students generally found the Town Halls to be effective and believed they demonstrated that the university is committed to intercultural understanding.

Gonzaga University held a retreat in May 2012 at which eleven faculty members discussed ways to create “productive discomfort” in the classroom. Retreat participants shared their stories and ideas for discussing difficult topics and modeling civil discourse in their classrooms. During the retreat, these conversations were captured in a “tool kit” of techniques for the classroom, and faculty members spent some time practicing the techniques on one another. The tool kit, which includes case studies, scenarios, syllabi statement templates, and ideas for creating a productive classroom environment, is available to all faculty members at the university who are seeking ideas for improving civil discourse in the classroom.

The retreat increased the confidence of faculty members in their ability to manage productive discomfort in the classroom. As a group, confidence rose from 3.94 to 4.48 on a scale of 1 to 5. In the academic year following the retreat, the cohort of faculty held three reunions to continue sharing their stories, ideas, and techniques. The retreat created a learning community that will hopefully increase the civil discourse at the university and beyond. This cohort will continue to meet in the upcoming academic year and to mentor one another and others who were unable to attend the retreat but are interested in thoughtfully creating productive discomfort in the classroom.

References


There are abundant examples in our work, and that of your campuses, where we use the expression of “moving from theory to practice.” Given the importance of this tag line to our identity, we should be wary of overusing that phrase. It can become numbing or obscuring of something more important to notice.

While aware of the concern, I find the phrase does have on occasion an important, accurate, and apt use—appropriately describing a special experience. This hit home when I was invited to be a jurist for an interdisciplinary seminar at Georgetown University led by Randy Bass (executive director of the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship and associate provost and associate professor of English at Georgetown) and Distinguished Visiting Professor Ann Pendelton-Jullian (former director of the Ohio State University School of Architecture and faculty member at MIT and Cornell University). The seminar modeled the technique of “studio crits”—students made frequent group presentations to each other, as well as to contributing faculty, and invested equal energy in understanding and critiquing one another’s developing analysis. Individual teams of four students each identified a dimension of a common problem, designed the approach to the problem, and then learned to develop visual and technological means of expressing the analysis.

The interdisciplinary seminar “The University as a Design Problem” aimed to help participants envision the university as a learning-focused ecosystem.

Could the use of various types of design theory and gaming theory (each more broadly seen to apply to constructs beyond mathematics and the social sciences) be linked to the practical resolution—expressed visually—of specific issues (digitization, globalization, urbanization, and cultural diversity) in higher education? It was an approach unknown (in an academic context) to all of the participants. The result was the clearest form of what a “problems-based” educational experience could mean. If one tries to consider approaches to a general problem such as “How to fairly distribute limited resources in a complex and diverse world?” we are stymied because the framing of the question seems so broad and nebulous that we aren’t aware of any approach we could use to attempt to resolve it. However, if we could identify discrete dimensions of the problem, each limited in scope, these dimensions could be approached and analyzed. Methods of economic analysis or political structural analysis would be the likely approaches.

But what if the task was (instead of the expected approaches of the social sciences) to use methods that utilized visual analysis—perhaps graphic or design theory, perhaps theory implicit in computer gaming design, perhaps adaptations of film or video technology? And, moreover, suppose that none of these are the expertise of the students! So to approach any specific problem, the students had to become aware of new theory—new-to-them methods of analysis.

My involvement, along with the participating faculty and guest architects, was to offer critiques of the four final group projects. Each “practiced model,” exemplary of a dimension of the problem, was being understood exclusively through critical theoretical methodologies of visual, design, or gaming approaches, and each was expressed with the novelty and clarity of technology. We were overwhelmed! The graphic designs (many used digitized or video models); the students’ insights; the participatory learning; the students’ energy, excitement, and deserved ownership of their “resolutions” were remarkable. Equally so was the community commitment to learn from and support each other throughout the term. The students were committed as much to what their colleagues were developing as to their own projects.

For a moment, I saw the transition from theory to practice before me. This was engaged learning of a sort we long to experience—for when we see it, we recognize its power.

I must admit that among required readings for the seminar were sections from Transforming Undergraduate Education, BTtoP’s recently published book—but I’m confident that those

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In Brief: BTtoP News and Notes

New Book from Thomas Ehrlich and Ernestine Fu on Civic Work

Civic Work, Civic Lessons: Two Generations Reflect on Public Service is a collaboration between Thomas Ehrlich—renowned civic scholar, author, and higher education administrator—and Ernestine Fu—a civic entrepreneur and Stanford University student. The work “explains how and why people of all ages, and particularly young people, should engage in public service as a vocation or avocation.” For more information and purchase, see: http://www.civicworkciviclessons.org/.

Twenty-Nine Institutions Join BTtoP Well-Being Initiative

Thirty-seven institutions were invited to participate in a new BTtoP national initiative to reaffirm the commitment of attending to the well-being of students as a cornerstone of higher education’s mission. Participants were tasked with crafting and submitting a proposal for a matching grant of up to $10,000 for project plans that deepen commitment on campus to this well-being mission of higher education—attending to the whole student learner.

Twenty-nine participating institutions will send a team of two persons to Washington, DC, September 26–27, 2013, for discussions and workshops that will strengthen their proposals and those of their national colleagues. Final projects will be supported by the end of the year and implemented in the spring of 2014. BTtoP looks forward to highlighting the outcomes of these dedicated institutions with the implementation and documentation of their planned campus projects. For a list of the institutions participating and description of the initiative, see the “well-being” section under “Funded Initiatives” on the BTtoP website: www.bttop.org.

2012-2014 Funding Opportunities: Deadline December 13, 2013

BTtoP has funded hundreds of proposals under the 2012–2014 Request for Proposals, and opportunities for funding are still available. We invite proposals for projects that will promote engaged learning, civic development and engagement, and the psychosocial well-being of college and university students.

Due to the extraordinary amount of quality grant submissions in recent rounds, BTtoP will only accept Seminar Grant applications (for up to $1,000) for the remainder of the 2012-2014 funding period (encompassing the December 13, 2013 and March 14, 2014 remaining deadlines.)

Funding categories II and III are no longer active in the 2012-2014 period. Examples of funded projects, frequently asked questions, and other information about the 2012-2014 RFP are available at the “Funding Opportunities” page of BTtoP’s website, www.bttop.org.

Look for BTtoP Session at AAC&U’s 2014 Annual Meeting

A session highlighting the projects of some of the funded institutions involved in BTtoP’s Well-Being Initiative will take place Friday, January 24, 2014, at 10:30 am. We hope you will attend to learn and discuss with your nation-wide colleagues ideas for best practices in attending to the whole student learner.

BTtoP will also be hosting an informal reception for friends and colleagues Thursday evening, January 23, 2014 in the Grand Hyatt. For more information on the 2014 Annual Meeting, visit: http://www.aacu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/AM14/.

From Director

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selections accounted for only a very small part of the significance of the seminar for these students. Much more important was their opportunity to be taken seriously (by each other and by Prof. Bass and the other participating faculty) as co-learners—each contributing their own steps to the process. The students were fully the key actors—their engagement, their enthusiasm and creativity, indeed, their willingness to be ‘out there’ on a novel edge of analysis, were central. They used methods of analysis that were not only new to them but are in fact rare within the academy. Perhaps in this sense, seeing transitions of theory to practice are as much matters of imagination and community involvement as they are matters of documenting supporting evidence.

Perhaps this example and experience triggers your own recollection and valuing of a truly powerful and empowering experience of learning. Here’s hoping that you have had such an opportunity or experience—they can define higher education.
The Bringing Theory to Practice Project (BTtoP) is an independent national effort. It is funded by the Charles Engelhard Foundation of New York, and functions in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in Washington, DC.

The Charles Engelhard Foundation is a New York-based foundation whose mission focuses on projects in higher and secondary education, cultural, medical, religious, wildlife, and conservation organizations.

S. Engelhard Center is a non-profit public charitable foundation; its mission is to support projects and initiatives that affect greater and sustained commitments by educational institutions at all levels to provide effective means of addressing the intellectual, emotional, and civic development of today’s students in preparation for claiming their positive future.

Publications Available By Bringing Theory to Practice

Civic Values, Civic Practices
Don Harward, editor
The second volume in The Civic Series provides new perspectives on fundamental issues related to the current nature of the civic, the relation of civic learning to action, and what it takes to realize the civic mission of higher education.

Transforming Undergraduate Education

This resource features chapters from twenty-four scholars, educational leaders and practitioners as well as ten case studies of campuses that have been recipients of Bringing Theory to Practice support. Project co-founder and director Don Harward contributed Part 1 and edited the book; national evaluator Ashley Finley both authored a chapter and co-edited the case studies.

For more information: www.aacu.org/bringing_theory/publications.cfm