How Do Race and Socioeconomic Background Influence Experiences of Good Practices in Undergraduate Education?

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Background

• Existing research focusing on equity in higher education as a question of access.

• Equity of experience -- specifically the experience of vetted good practices in undergraduate education.
Good Practices

• student-faculty contact
• cooperation among students
• active learning
• academic effort/time on task
• prompt feedback to students
• high expectations
• respect for diverse experiences and ways of knowing

Importance of Good Practices

- Good practices relate to desirable higher education outcomes.
  - Graduation rates
  - Cognitive development
  - Educational aspirations
  - Openness to diversity
  - Orientations to learning
Our Research Questions

• Do low SES students experience good practices to the same extent as students from higher SES backgrounds?

• Do students of color experience good practices differently than White students?
Method

National Study of Student Learning

• Sample
  o 18 four-year and 5 two-year colleges & universities (N=2400)

• Data
  o NSSL pre-college survey
  o CSEQ and NSSL follow-up
Variables

- 19 dependent measures distributed across 7 principles of good practice:
  - Student-faculty contact
  - Cooperation among students
  - Active learning / Time on task
  - Prompt feedback
  - High expectations
  - Diverse ways of knowing & learning
  - Quality teaching

- Independent variables:
  - SES - set of dummy variables representing SES quartile (lowest quartile served as the reference category)
  - White - dummy variable, coded 0 for Students of color; 1 for White
Analyses: Stepwise OLS Regression

- Model 1 controlled for:
  - Gender
  - ACT/SAT
  - HS grades and involvement
  - HS work obligations
  - Academic motivation
  - Respondents' dependent children
  - College attended was first choice
  - Plans for a graduate degree

- Model 2 additionally controlled for:
  - On-campus residence
  - Number of credit hours completed
  - Hours worked on- and off-campus for pay
  - Course taking patterns in several areas
  - Institution type
SES Results – Effects of Model 2

Greater exposure to Good Practices

- Most statistically significant effects were found between the highest SES quartile and the lowest quartile (the reference category).

- Students in the highest SES quartile reported greater exposure to the following good practices than did those in the lowest SES quartile:
  - Faculty interest in teaching & student development
  - Course-related interactions with peers
  - Academic effort/involvement
  - Number of textbooks read
  - Number of term papers written
  - Non-course-related interactions with peers
  - Cultural & interpersonal involvement
Race/Ethnicity Results – Effects of Model 2

• White students reported greater exposure to the following good practices than their non-White peers.
  o Quality of non-classroom interactions with faculty
  o Faculty interest in teaching & student development
  o Academic effort/involvement
  o Number of essay exams in courses
  o Using computers for academic work
  o Instructional organization and preparation
Inequities in Experiences - Possible Factors

• It is not institutional differences, the types of courses taken, living on or off campus, and how much a student works.

• Experience (or lack of) may drive behaviors – cultural capital

• Are colleges and universities focusing on the needs of minority and low SES students once they reach campus?
Inequities in Experience – A Cause for Concern

• Our research reaffirms the Greater Expectations findings.
• Experiencing good practices contributes to positive learning outcomes and positive development.
• We expect institutions and faculty to universally support the notion that educational experiences should not depend on students’ race or SES background.
Taking Action - Research

• We need further research to substantiate and update our findings.

• The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, a longitudinal study funded by the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, will provide a significant opportunity to replicate the present findings with data more reflective of today’s postsecondary students and their experiences.
Taking Action – Policies and Practices

• Recognizing and encouraging students in orientation, first-year programs, and advising.

• Encouraging faculty to enhance their teaching.

• Enhancing and implementing programs for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.
Audience Discussion

• What do you think accounts for these findings?
• What is happening on your campus?
  – Is there an experience gap? What do your NSSE/CSEQ findings show?
  – What perpetuates the gap? How are you trying to close it?
• What policies and practices would you recommend based on the current findings?
• What additional research would you like to see?
Conclusion

• Our commitment to equality and equity cannot end with the acceptance letter. We should strive to ensure equal opportunity for all students throughout their college experience.

• For a copy of our paper, contact:
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