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High-Impact Practices: Enhancing the Student Experience

Last semester, Brutus enrolled in a service-learning course focused on improving peoples' physical activity. Brutus built new relationships with community partners, learned about root causes of inactivity, and is now considering graduate programs in public health.

After completing an introductory engineering course in the fall, Michelle joined her instructor's research lab. Assisting in the lab helped Michelle gain confidence in her research abilities, make connections between her coursework and research activities, and develop strong relationships with faculty mentors.

Gabe is passionate about students' learning and the social benefits of public education, but she has struggled to articulate her career plans. By enrolling in a senior capstone course, Gabe was able to reflect on the totality of her undergraduate career and draw meaning from her most transformational experiences. She has now decided to pursue a career in educational policy.



Brutus, Michelle, and Gabe have different backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Yet because of their involvement with [high-impact practices \(HIPs\)](#), each has benefitted from personal, professional, and academic growth.

This resource provides a general introduction to HIPs and how to integrate these practices into your courses. We'll explore the various course types associated with HIPs—including service-learning, research intensive, and capstone courses—and the pedagogical considerations known to facilitate students' learning and development.

What the research says...

In 2007, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) introduced 10 educational practices seen as foundational to a 21st century liberal education: **first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, service- or community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses or projects** (Kuh, 2008). Because of their potential to foster key student outcomes, AAC&U termed these "high-impact practices" or "HIPs." In 2016, AAC&U added **ePortfolios** as the eleventh HIP (Watson et al., 2016).

Student involvement with HIPs is linked to many educational benefits, including: deep learning and personal development (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2008), increased odds of retention (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Dagley et al., 2016; Provencher & Kassel, 2017), and greater academic achievement (Bonet & Walters, 2016). Furthermore, the benefits of HIP participation accumulate such that when students participate in multiple HIPs, they are likely to experience more positive outcomes (Finley & McNair, 2013).

All students benefit from their involvement in HIPs. However, researchers have found that participation may be especially beneficial for students from underserved backgrounds (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2008). According to findings from one national study, as students from underserved backgrounds and their traditionally advantaged peers participated in more HIPs, outcome disparities between groups were minimized (Finley & McNair, 2013).

These findings suggest that HIPs are an evidence-based approach to closing equity gaps. Unfortunately the time investment and financial resources needed to participate in some HIPs can be a barrier to participation when students have competing commitments such as caring for family, commuting to school, or working a job. Experts make the case that integrating HIPs into the core university curriculum can promote equity and inclusion, allowing all students to engage with high-impact learning as part of their daily student experience.

Pedagogical considerations

What is it about HIPs that makes them so beneficial for students? One explanation is that when thoughtfully designed and administered, HIPs boost student engagement, a key moderator for student success. For an educational experience to be truly considered "high-impact" and promote engagement, instructors are advised to attend to several pedagogical considerations (Kuh, 2008). These building blocks of HIPs contribute to students' academic achievement, persistence, personal development, civic engagement, and sense of belonging on campus (Brownell & Swaner, 2010).

The following pedagogical principles—identified by Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) as the "eight key elements of HIPs"—are important to consider when integrating any HIP into your course.

Performance expectations

ELEMENT #1: "Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels"

First, identify expectations and course outcomes that are appropriate for students' developmental readiness. The assignments, discussion topics, and evaluation of an introductory course will obviously differ from an intermediate or advanced seminar. Be mindful of how you can meet students where they are based on entry characteristics. Sequence your course in ways that **appropriately challenge students and encourage their growth** over the course of the term.

Time and effort

ELEMENT #2: “Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time”

Second, guide students to exert significant time and effort toward educationally purposeful activities. As students invest more time and energy into their curricular and co-curricular experiences, they are more likely to realize the desired outcomes of an undergraduate education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Time and effort are central to student engagement and foundational to HIP pedagogy—craft learning activities that not only require **substantial time on task**, but also set **high expectations for students’ effort**, thus encouraging quality work (Kuh, 2009).

Interaction and collaboration

ELEMENT #3: “Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters”

Third, facilitate shared experiences between students, their peers, and you as their instructor throughout your course. Collaborative assignments, sometimes called **group projects or team assignments**, have long been used in college courses. With respect to HIPs, the pedagogical benefits of fostering collaboration in your course are twofold—working with others prompts students to problem-solve while actively considering the input of peers with unique perspectives.



Experiences with diversity

ELEMENT #4: “Experiences with diversity, wherein students demonstrate intercultural competence and empathy with people and worldview frameworks that differ from their own”

Fourth, guide students to step outside their comfort zones and engage with diverse worldviews. When properly designed and administered, HIPs encourage students to actively consider new perspectives that differ from their own. Establish and maintain a learning environment where students from diverse backgrounds can feel comfortable sharing their unique experiences, actively consider new ideas, and respectfully disagree with one another.

- Review your **course syllabus** to ensure assigned readings, videos, podcasts, and other materials reflect authors with a range of social identities, ideologies, and lived experiences.
- Coach students early in the term on how to **effectively talk about difference** or across differences. You might consider the distinctions between debate, discussion, and dialogue.
- Work with students to establish **community norms** to which all participants (students and instructors) are accountable. Examples of community norms could include: “Speak from your own experience, not on behalf of others,” “Give your full attention to the person who is speaking,” and “Be accountable for your words, recognizing they may unintentionally cause harm to others.”
- Be mindful of the **biases and assumptions** you bring to the class as an instructor. Remain open to feedback and invite students to share ideas for how the course can be improved to better incorporate new perspectives.

Inclusive Learning Environments



Looking for specific ideas to establish an inclusive atmosphere and foster open discussion in your course? Learn more in [Shaping a Positive Learning Environment](#) (/teaching-topics/shaping-positive-learning) and [Calling in Classroom Conflict](#) (/teaching-topics/managing-classroom-conflict).

Feedback

ELEMENT #5: “Frequent, timely and constructive feedback”

Fifth, provide students with frequent and high-quality feedback. Feedback can be understood as how you communicate your assessment of a student’s performance, relative to learning goals or learning outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022). Feedback from an instructor (or peers) is essential to bolstering students’ engagement in an experience and directing their future efforts toward educationally purposeful activities. **Without high-quality and consistent feedback, an educational practice cannot be considered high impact.**

For example, imagine if a student submitted a reflection assignment and the only feedback you provided was, “Great job!” Although this comment is encouraging and positive, there is no indication that you closely read the assignment or took time to offer unique suggestions. As a result, the student may be less inclined to invest time and effort in future assignments. That said, feedback does not need to be overly critical, especially for informal assignments like a personal reflection.

To construct high-quality feedback, consider the following suggestions:

- Aim for a tone that is affirming and encouraging.
- Offer both positive and constructive feedback.
- When offering constructive feedback, cite specific examples in the assignment where the student can improve and fully explain your thinking.
- Connect your feedback to overarching goals of the assignment or course.
- Acknowledge instances where students’ performance improves from one assignment to the next by incorporating prior feedback.

Reflection

ELEMENT #6: “Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning”

Sixth, provide opportunities for students to engage in reflective practice. Create and maintain a learning environment that encourages them to synthesize what they are learning, deepen their levels of self-awareness, and reframe their perspectives. Through reflection, students can make meaning of their overall college experience. Helping them to develop the skills and habits of reflection will support their development during college and encourage an orientation to lifelong learning.

You might have students reflect through a variety of mediums, including **writing journals, constructing ePortfolios, or participating in group conversations**. But it is not enough to simply say, “Go reflect!” and expect positive results. The learning associated with reflection is made possible by **clear instructions on how to reflect and prompts that frame the exercise**. For example, soon after a learning activity concludes, ask students to recap the activity, articulate what they learned, and consider how they plan to use this knowledge moving forward. Be sure to provide students sufficient time for in-depth reflection.

Meaningful reflection is further aided when peers or instructors provide quality feedback, ask critical questions, and help students develop key ideas. Experts have argued that students are most likely to realize the full benefits associated with reflection when they receive high-quality feedback on their insights but aren’t graded for their work. This approach allows students to assign personal meaning and significance to reflection rather than seeking others’ approval.

Real-world application

ELEMENT #7: “Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications”



Seventh, provide students opportunities to apply what they learn from involvement with a HIP in new settings and scenarios. One of the greatest strengths of HIPs is that they prompt students to **apply learning to real-world situations**. When incorporating HIPs into your course, consider ways to link theory with practice beyond the classroom.

There are many ways to bridge the divide between theoretical concepts and real-world applications. For instance, you might use **case studies** in class to bring your lecture content to life. Various **projects and assignments** may prompt students to propose potential solutions to local problems, articulating the pros and cons of different options for various stakeholders.

Service learning is an excellent way to help students make meaningful associations between the content of their studies and issues facing community partners each day.

Pedagogy centered on real-world application not only facilitates learning, but helps students develop their identity as active citizens and community members.

Demonstration or presentation

ELEMENT #8: “Public demonstration of competence”

Finally, consider ways for students to share their learning with others. Examples include **presenting to classmates, publishing an ePortfolio, or submitting an internship project for review**. Beyond the feedback and evaluation they receive from their audience, the act of preparing their work for others prompts students to synthesize and articulate their learning with attention to accuracy and quality.

Courses types and experiences

The eight key elements of HIPs described above are the building blocks for integrating high-impact learning in your course, but the power of HIPs stems from how you design and administer the learning experience. This section summarizes the various course types and learning experiences where you can readily apply this pedagogical advice.

How might you integrate HIPs into your teaching? Some HIPs can be embedded as learning activities in any course, such as collaborative assignments, research projects, or ePortfolios. Other times a course is based around a specific HIP, as with service-learning and writing-intensive courses.

The transformative potential of HIPs stems from the fact that participation boosts students' engagement in their college experience. Capstone experiences, first-year seminars, global learning, internships, learning communities, service-learning, undergraduate research, and writing intensive courses all provide ideal conditions for applying HIP pedagogy, boosting students' engagement in their learning, and unlocking a range of educational benefits.

Read more about each high-impact course or experience below.

► **Capstone Experiences**

► **First-Year Seminars**

► **Global Learning**

► Internships

► Learning Communities

► Service-Learning

► Undergraduate Research

► Writing-Intensive Courses

HIPs and your Ohio State course

With Ohio State's General Education (GE) program, students may "satisfy a particular GE Theme requirement if that course involves key practices that are recognized as integrative and high impact" (Office of Academic Affairs, 2021).

Within the context of the GE, you may think of "integrative practices" as closely mirroring "high-impact practices." Examples of integrative courses at Ohio State that align with AAC&U's criteria for HIPs include service-learning, education abroad and away, research and creative inquiry, interdisciplinary and team-taught courses, and courses taught in a foreign language.



Read more about [General Education at Ohio State](https://ugeducation.osu.edu/general-education) ↗ (<https://ugeducation.osu.edu/general-education>).

For guidance on how to incorporate specific HIPs into your course, check out the additional Ohio State resources provided below or contact [Teresa Johnson](mailto:johnson.674@osu.edu) ↗ (<mailto:johnson.674@osu.edu>), High-Impact Curriculum Expert in the Office of Academic Enrichment ↗ (<https://osas.osu.edu/oaee/>).

Summary

The AAC&U labels eleven educational practices "high-impact" because of their potential to foster key student outcomes. Eight of these HIPs are described above, including capstone experiences, first-year seminars, global learning, internships, learning communities, service-learning, undergraduate research, and writing-intensive courses.

High-impact practices (HIPs) are an evidence-based way to increase student engagement and close equity gaps. Research demonstrates that experience with HIPs benefits all students, deepening learning and personal development, increasing odds of retention, and promoting academic success. Integrating HIPs into the core university curriculum—as with the GE curriculum at Ohio State—can reduce barriers to access and allow all students to engage with high-impact learning as part of their daily student experience.

To effectively incorporate HIP pedagogy into your course, the eight key elements of HIPs (Kuh and O'Donnell, 2013) are useful guiding principles.

1. "Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels"
2. "Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time"

3. "Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters"
4. "Experiences with diversity, wherein students demonstrate intercultural competence and empathy with people and worldview frameworks that differ from their own"
5. "Frequent, timely and constructive feedback"
6. "Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning"
7. "Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications"
8. "Public demonstration of competence"

Explore

Resources

- [First-Year Seminars \(Ohio State resources\)](https://firstyearseminars.osu.edu) ↗ (<https://firstyearseminars.osu.edu>)
- [Global Education \(Ohio State resources\)](https://oia.osu.edu/global-education/planning-program) ↗ (<https://oia.osu.edu/global-education/planning-program>)
- [Office of Service-Learning \(Ohio State resources\)](https://service-learning.osu.edu) ↗ (<https://service-learning.osu.edu>)
- [Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Inquiry \(Ohio State resources\)](https://ugresearch.osu.edu) ↗ (<https://ugresearch.osu.edu>)
- [Writing Across the Curriculum \(Ohio State resources\)](https://cstw.osu.edu/our-programs/writing-across-curriculum) ↗ (<https://cstw.osu.edu/our-programs/writing-across-curriculum>)
- [Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices \(AAC&U repo...\)](https://vttechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/87004/AssessingUnderservingStudents.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) ↗ (<https://vttechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/87004/AssessingUnderservingStudents.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>)
- [HIPs at Ten \(journal article\)](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00091383.2017.1366805) ↗ (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00091383.2017.1366805>)
- [The Link Between High-Impact Practices and Student Learning: Some Longitudinal ...](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-014-9788-z?noAccess=true) ↗ (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-014-9788-z?noAccess=true>)

Learning Opportunities

[Using Technology to Support High Impact Practices in Your Course](https://ohiostate.csod.com/samldefault.aspx?returnurl=%252fDeepLink%252fProcessRedirect.aspx%253fmodule%253dlodetails%2526lo%253da9f768cba0d4-4de5-a149-901df3e14af3) ↗
(<https://ohiostate.csod.com/samldefault.aspx?returnurl=%252fDeepLink%252fProcessRedirect.aspx%253fmodule%253dlodetails%2526lo%253da9f768cba0d4-4de5-a149-901df3e14af3>)

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Related Teaching Topics

Designing Assessments of Student Learning

Explore best practices for planning thoughtful and effective assessments of student learning.
(/teaching-topics/designing-assessments-student)

Designing Research or Inquiry-Based Assignments

These guiding questions and considerations will help you design meaningful research assignments.
(/teaching-topics/designing-research-or-inquiry-based)

Search for Resources



Center for Life Sciences Education
(<https://clse.osu.edu/>)

Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing
(<https://cstw.osu.edu/>)

College of Arts and Sciences Office of Distance Education
(<http://ascode.osu.edu>)

College of Education and Ecology
(<https://distanceeducation>)

Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning
(<https://drakeinstitute.osu.edu>)

Faculty Advancement, Medicine Engagement (FAME)
(<https://medicine.osu.edu/fame>)

Office of Academic Enrichment
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([https://ugeducation.osu.edu/](https://ugeducation.osu.edu))

Ohio State Online University Libraries
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Teaching and Learning Resource Center

To connect directly with our partners for teaching support or for help with Ohio State tools, visit our [help forms \(/help\)](#).

Website administrator: teachingresources@osu.edu ↗ (<mailto:teachingresources@osu.edu>)

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