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*The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education were a huge success when they were first issued in the mid-1980s, and they have continued to be refined and used in a variety of ways since then.*

## Development and Adaptations of the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

*Arthur W. Chickering, Zelda F. Gamson*

Concern for improving undergraduate education has been unrelenting in the second half of the twentieth century. The two of us have been involved in many of these efforts and in the mid-1980s found ourselves in a position to pull together many of them under the rubric of Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.

### **Origins of the Seven Principles for Good Practice**

As one of the authors of “Involvement in Learning” (National Institute of Education, 1984), Gamson feared that this report and others that appeared within about a year of each other would not reach the faculty, administrators, and students to whom they were targeted (Bennett, 1984; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1985; Newman, 1985). We both were members of the board of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), a broad-based national organization, and urged that it devote several of its national conferences to the improvement of undergraduate education. We also suggested that AAHE sponsor the development of a statement of the principles of a good undergraduate education.

Around the same time, we attended a conference at Wingspread, the conference center in Racine, Wisconsin, operated by the Johnson Foundation, which brought together the authors of several of the recent reports on undergraduate education along with other observers of higher education.

At this meeting, it became clear to us that the dissemination of a statement of principles could be timed to an undergraduate education reform movement that appeared to be sweeping the country.

All of the elements for this project were in place—two credible sponsoring organizations (AAHE and the Johnson Foundation), general discussion of the issues involved, and a broad-based national movement to improve undergraduate education. Drawing on the “principles of good practice in experiential learning” adapted from consumer groups by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), an organization on whose founding board Chickering served and whose early history Gamson chronicled (Gamson, 1989), we decided to come up with a similar set of principles for undergraduate education.

How were we to generate such a statement? We wanted the statement to reflect the collective wisdom of the individuals who were most knowledgeable about the research literature. With support from the Johnson Foundation and the Lilly Endowment, we invited a small task force to meet for two days at Wingspread in the summer of 1986. The task force members included scholars who had conducted much of the research on the impact of the college experience as well as scholars of organizational, economic, and policy issues in higher education. The gathering was an extraordinary event in its own right. Though most of the participants knew one another’s work, they had never come together to trace their work’s implications for improving undergraduate education. We presented them with a number of principles we had drawn up ahead of time, with the caveat that they were to end up with no more than nine, preferably fewer.

We insisted that whatever we produced be accessible, understandable, practical, and widely applicable. Although everyone agreed that faculty were the primary audience, several task force members also felt that we should try to reach campus administrators, state higher education agencies, and government policymakers. The desire to reach multiple audiences reinforced the need to make the principles understandable and practical.

## **Development and Dissemination**

The final version of the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education was presented in the lead article in the March 1987 issue of the *AAHE Bulletin* (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). It said that good practice in undergraduate education

- Encourages student-faculty contact
- Encourages cooperation among students
- Encourages active learning
- Gives prompt feedback
- Emphasizes time on task
- Communicates high expectations
- Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

The response to the article was immediate and overwhelming, and it was soon republished as a special section in the June 1987 issue of the *Wingspread Journal*. More than 150,000 copies of the seven principles were ordered from the Johnson Foundation, and an untold number were copied or reprinted in other publications, such as newsletters of national associations and campus centers for teaching and learning.

We felt encouraged enough by the enthusiastic response to the statement of the principles to develop a self-assessment instrument for faculty members, with examples and indicators of each of the principles. We also decided to produce a second instrument with indicators of campus practices and policies in support of the seven principles. After much testing and circulating of ideas, inventories of good practice were published in 1989 by the Johnson Foundation in two handy self-assessment booklets (Chickering, Gamson, and Barsi, 1989).

The response to the inventories was again overwhelming. Within a week of publication, forty thousand were gone. After several printings, their distribution was taken over by Winona State University, which had established the Seven Principles Resource Center. Accounts of the seven principles and their adaptations and uses have appeared regularly since (Gamson and Poulsen, 1989; Heller, 1989; Chickering and Gamson, 1991; Hatfield, 1995). A veritable industry of commentary, research, and adaptation has followed.

## Adaptations

We are aware of only some of the adaptations of the seven principles and do not intend to be exhaustive in those we present here, although they do illustrate the variety of follow-up activities and works in progress. The principles and the inventories have been incorporated in, adapted in, or used as the springboard for several similar assessment and research instruments. The earliest is the Student Inventory, available from the Seven Principles Resource Center at Winona State, which asks students to rate themselves according to indicators of each of the principles. Another student-oriented adaptation is the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Student Affairs, a collaborative effort of the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

The College Student Experiences Questionnaire is a well-developed research tool containing indicators that can be adapted to measure several of the seven principles. A new edition now includes some items that address more of the principles. This questionnaire has been used in several studies (Kuh and Vesper, 1997; Kuh, Pace, and Vesper, 1997).

Richard Webster at the Fisher College of Business, Ohio State University, has created the Learning Process Inventory and Assessment (LPIA), a survey-guided assessment based on the seven principles and the faculty, institutional, and student inventories. According to Webster, "The LPIA is a tool for helping faculty members communicate their subject matter to their students (that is, teaching content and teaching processes) and for

helping students take more responsibility for . . . learning course content and managing their own learning process in more effective ways. This transfer of responsibility from teacher, instructor, or trainer to learner is one key to learning communities, in K–12, in higher education, and on the job” (personal communication, 1998).

Peter Ewell and his associates at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) have incorporated the seven principles into a larger list of good practices (Ewell and Jones, 1996). These adaptations have appeared in an influential report issued by the Education Commission of the States, *Making Quality Count in Undergraduate Education* (1995). The report refers to twelve attributes of quality in undergraduate education:

- The organizational culture must have (1) high expectations, (2) respect for diverse talents and learning styles, and (3) an emphasis on the early years of study.
- A quality curriculum requires (4) coherence in learning, (5) synthesis of experiences, (6) ongoing practice of learned skills, and (7) integration of education and experience.
- Quality instruction incorporates (8) active learning, (9) assessment and prompt feedback, (10) collaboration, (11) adequate time on task, and (12) out-of-class contact with faculty.

Building on this work, Ewell led the creation of a survey of student engagement (National Survey of Student Engagement, n.d.), intended to provide information about the extent to which colleges and universities exhibit characteristics and commitments to high-quality undergraduate student outcomes. The results of the survey will be used to help colleges and universities improve the quality of their performance and offer data for making informed judgments to external assessors such as accrediting bodies and government agencies, as well as parents, students, and the media.

## Applications

A variety of applications by institutions and individuals complement these adaptations of the principles and inventories. Perhaps the most systematic and extensive is described by Chuck Worth, director of institutional research at California State University, Chico. Worth reports:

The seven principles have been broadly distributed and widely used. . . . This has been part of our overall university effort in strategic planning. The heart of our academic mission and the first goal of our strategic plan is student-centered learning. . . . It has been given to deans with encouragement to discuss [it] . . . with chairs and faculty. It has also been distributed and discussed at university leaders’ strategic planning retreats, consisting of chairs, deans, academic senators, and key faculty. . . . Our president and provost gave two

\$5,000 awards in a first annual recognition of an Outstanding Commitment to the Development of Student-Centered Learning Environments. A memo to all faculty and staff specifically mentioned the seven principles as a guide and partial criteria for the awards [personal communication, 1998].

The university has also used the seven principles in orientations for new faculty, in instruments for student assessment of the learning environment, and in student focus groups.

The seven principles have guided inquiry into the educational consequences of new communication and information technologies. At George Mason University, for example, a faculty technology survey asked whether computer technology encourages contact between faculty and students, encourages cooperation among students, and so on through the list of principles. The Flashlight Project, which uses the seven principles along with other ways of evaluating the impact of technology on student learning, offers opportunities for faculty to engage in discussions about technology (Chickering and Ehrmann, 1996). Karen Gentemann in the Office of Institutional Assessment at George Mason writes that in using the Flashlight Project materials, she has “been encouraging faculty to read some of the articles in which the principles are discussed” (personal communication, 1998).

The seven principles have also been deployed in professional development workshops. Peter Frederick, a professor of history at Wabash College, describes how he uses them: “I have used the seven principles as a standard first page for probably well over a hundred workshops I have done in the past decade throughout the nation. . . . The workshops are variously titled: ‘Active Learning in the Classroom,’ ‘Revitalizing Traditional Forms of Teaching and Learning,’ ‘Empowering Learners for a Diverse Democratic Society.’ The workshops are almost always interactive, [a format that allows me to] model the principles. . . . What prompted me to use them? They are pithy and make sound pedagogical sense. Pithiness is important for faculty, who do not want much educational theory” (personal communication, 1998). George Kuh, professor of higher education at Indiana University, who has used the seven principles “at least fifty times in presentations over the past few years,” comments that “people always copy them down from the overhead and want copies” (personal communication, 1998).

Finally, we know about some of the individual faculty members who have applied the principles (Chickering and Gamson, 1991; Hatfield, 1995). An example is Jane Fraser, a professor of industrial and systems engineering at Ohio State University, who reports:

I have always tried to discuss my teaching methods with students. . . . I used the seven principles for a discussion of my teaching methods this quarter. I handed out the list to the class and also had the list on an overhead. I went through each principle, discussing how I am trying to accomplish it. I then discussed how each principle can be turned into a point of good learning—actions a student should take, not just actions the professor should take. . . .

Finally, I opened the discussion . . . about what principles they would add to the list. [The students] had some very good suggestions, especially along the lines that good practice involves conveying enthusiasm and presenting material in interesting ways [personal communication, 1998].

## Research

The seven principles have inspired several lines of research. John Braxton and his colleagues looked at the tendency of different academic disciplines to enact the seven principles (Braxton, Olsen, and Simmons, 1998). They found that disciplines with “low paradigmatic development,” such as history, psychology, and sociology—fields in which faculty are not in much agreement about the theory methods, techniques, and problems that are characteristics of the discipline—use four of the seven principles in their teaching: encouragement of student-faculty contact, encouragement of active learning, communication of high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of knowing. George Kuh and his colleagues report on two studies based on the seven principles using the College Student Experiences Questionnaire. In a study of students’ experiences at baccalaureate institutions and at doctoral degree granting universities, Kuh and Vesper (1997) found that students at the former reflected a positive effect of the seven principles, especially through increased faculty-student interaction between 1990 and 1994, and that students at the universities did not. In another study, Kuh, Pace, and Vesper (1997) found that faculty-student contact, cooperation among students, and active learning were the best predictors of student educational gains in college.

We are pleased that the seven principles have inspired such research and encourage others to make use of both the principles and the inventories in carrying out studies of teaching practices, student learning, faculty, disciplines, and institutions. Our greatest impact, however, is on individual faculty members and on institutions. As George Kuh pointed out to us, “There are many of your apostles out there who are translating and interpreting the principles as policies and practices are evaluated and developed. . . . You can see the images of these principles reflected in many of the initiatives we have under way on my campus and elsewhere. So [even if] folks may not be wearing a laminated SEVEN PRINCIPLES card around their necks, the principles have and will continue to have a substantial impact” (personal communication, 1998).

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ARTHUR W. CHICKERING is visiting distinguished professor at Vermont College, Norwich University, Montpelier, Vermont; senior associate in the New England Resource Center of Higher Education; and visiting professor of higher education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

ZELDA F. GAMSON is senior associate and founding director of the New England Resource Center for Higher Education and professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

