

Examining the Effects of Campus Climates and High-Impact Practices on Critical Thinking

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Land Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge that the land we are meeting on today has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, specifically the Shawnee, Wyandotte, Miami, and Delaware nations.

ACPA-College Student Educators International honors and respects the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this territory on which we gather.

Our International Field

#ACPA17 provides an opportunity to discuss global concepts in higher, post-secondary, and tertiary education. Please remember that not everyone in the room is from the same country nor works within the same system of higher or tertiary education. We invite you to use language that welcomes all participants to the conversation.

Overview

- Literature Review
- Conceptual Framework
- Research Question
- Research Design and Analysis
- Findings
- Discussion and Conclusion

Literature Review

- Critical thinking is a desirable and important student outcome (AAC&U, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)
- Research has previously linked critical thinking to diversity, instructional methods, high-impact practices, and college attendance
- There is a lack of consensus regarding how critical thinking is defined and assessed in higher education
- Those who think critically strive to understand and improve both themselves and society, key components of civic learning (Paul & Elder, 2008)
- However, most research on critical thinking in college focuses on student engagement, such as high-impact practices

Conceptual Framework

- Critical thinking is the intentional and systematic processing of information using higher-order thinking skills (Scriven & Paul, 1987)
- Students' development of critical thinking is influenced by their affective dispositions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Paul & Elder, 2008; Scriven & Paul, 1987)
- Civic learning corresponds to any learning that contributes to student preparation for community involvement in a diverse, democratic society (Howard, 2001)
- Integrating these definitions strengthens the connection between the skills and dispositions necessary for critical thinking and civic learning and engagement

Research Question

How do high-impact practices and campus climates that support civic learning influence students' self-reported capacity for critical thinking?

Methods and Analysis

- Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory (PSRI), 2013-2016
- 16,117 students from 27 colleges and universities
- Weighted and imputed for survey nonresponse
- Multilevel modeling (MLM) approach
 - Group-mean centering
 - Coefficients are unstandardized due to MLM
- Variables entered in blocks

Outcome Measure – Critical Thinking

- Five item factor ($\alpha=.90$, $M=4.08$, $SD=.82$)
- Each item used five-point, Likert-type scale
- Captures importance of affective dispositions and cognitive skills that enhance development of critical thinking (Paul & Elder, 2008; Scriven & Paul, 1987)
- Addition of moral and ethical component reflects the ability to consider consequences as part of critical thinking

Outcome Measure (cont.)

- **My experiences at this campus have**
 - ...further developed my respect for perspectives different from my own
 - ... increased my ability to gather and thoughtfully use evidence to support my ideas
 - ... increased my ability to understand the evidence, analysis, and perspectives of others, even when I disagree with them
 - ... developed my ability to consider the moral or ethical dimensions of issues
 - ... developed my ability to consider the moral or ethical consequences of my own actions

Variables

- Demographic controls:
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Class Year
- High-impact practices:
 - Assessed according to frequency of participation
 - Zero to three or more
- Campus climate factors:
 - Contributing to a Larger Community
 - Perspective Taking
 - Ethical and Moral Reasoning

Findings

- See Table 1 on handout for coefficients and model statistics
- Final model accounted for almost 60% of within-group variance in the outcome
- Magnitude of high-impact practices declined after introducing climate factors
- Campus climates were largely significantly and positively related to the critical thinking outcome
 - Importance factors were largest coefficients in final model
 - Advocating for Contributing to a Larger Community was negatively related

Discussion and Conclusion

- Once we control for individual student engagement in high-impact practices, campus climates are most influential on the critical thinking outcome
- Campus professionals have the ability to influence campus climates that support civic learning
- Reinforcing campus values and connecting campus rhetoric with purpose for students
- Integration of high-impact practices and campus climates

Selected References

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