

High-Impact Practices in Higher Ed



Of the full-time students starting college for the first time this fall, only [64 percent](#) will have graduated six years from now from the school where they started. The odds of completion are lower for students who are Hispanic (54 percent), Black (40 percent), or Native American (39 percent) than for those who are Asian (74 percent) or White (64 percent).

Prior research suggests that a set of “high-impact practices” (HIPs) can help close this gap by providing minoritized students with enriched and supported opportunities to learn. Adding to this research, a [recent study](#) by NEPC Fellow Jaekyung Lee of the University at Buffalo of the State University of New York, Namsook Kim of the University at Buffalo, Mengchen Su of the University of Minnesota, and Samantha Greenwood of the University at Buffalo examine these practices, drawing upon qualitative interviews, analyses of student transcripts, survey and administrative data and other information to explore the impact of these practices at different types of institutions. An article about the study was published in March in *Trends in Higher Education*, a peer-reviewed journal.

What are HIPs? Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood describe them as follows:

[A]ctive learning practices that promote deep learning and are data-proven to make a significant impact on college and career success. They include first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning, internships, capstone courses and projects, and e-portfolios. Key features involve substantial investments of students’ time and effort, structured opportunities for knowledge application, reflection, and integrative thinking, meaningful contacts with

faculty and peers, interactions with diverse others, chances for learning outside of the classroom, high performance standards, and public demonstrations of competence.

Below is a list of eight types of HIPs examined as part of the study, along with findings from the recent study. Importantly, Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood's results account for demographic and institutional factors in order to estimate the impact of these HIPs net of other considerations that might influence the results (e.g., parental education levels and high school GPA). The research team used propensity score matching, which allowed them to draw causal inferences.

- 1. Academic and sociocultural engagement:** Examples of academic and sociocultural engagement include having social contact with faculty, talking with faculty about academic matters outside of class, meeting with an academic advisor, participating in study groups, attending fine arts activities, and participating in school clubs and/or sports. Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found that students who are engaged academically and socioculturally as undergrads are more likely to attend graduate school. They also found they are more likely to obtain full-time employment after graduation.
- 2. Study abroad:** Study abroad is associated with elevated rates of intercultural understanding/skill and graduation. It appears to make an especially positive difference for underprepared students and those at risk of dropping out of college. Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found that undergraduates who study abroad are 2.57 times more likely to graduate and 4.25 times more likely to obtain a full-time job after graduation than are their peers who do not study abroad. They are 3.68 times more likely to attend graduate or professional school.
- 3. Foreign language:** Taking foreign languages in college appears to encourage higher achievement when students are still in college. It can also help students get jobs in the US and abroad. Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found that undergrads who take foreign language classes are 2.32 times more likely to attend graduate school than those who do not.
- 4. Co-op/internship:** Internships can help students get and keep jobs after graduation. Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found that students who completed internships are 2.61 more likely than those who did not to obtain fulltime employment after graduation. Students who participate in internships also earn higher GPAs and may be less likely to drop out of college.
- 5. Student teaching:** Compared to their peers who do not engage in the practice, undergraduates who participate in student teaching are 2.75 times more likely to graduate from college, 3.75 times more likely to obtain full-time employment after graduation, and 4.01 times more likely to attend graduate school, Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found. Prior research has found that this specific subset of internship experience is also associated with elevated levels of "self-efficacy," which is the belief that goals and tasks can be completed.
- 6. Advanced math courses:** Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found that students who

take advanced math classes in college are 86 percent more likely to enroll in graduate school.

7. **Research:** Compared to those who do not, undergraduates who participate in research are more likely to work full time or attend graduate school, Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found.
8. **Volunteer activities:** Students who volunteer in college earn more credits and higher GPAs, prior research suggests. Service learning appears to boost graduation rates for minoritized students and for students overall. Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood found that, relative to peers who do not volunteer, students who volunteer are more likely to attend graduate school.

Lee, Kim, Su, and Greenwood findings suggest that, in some ways, HIPs have the potential to serve as a rising tide that lifts all boats. “Further analyses of our sample subgroups also found that well-integrated college learning experiences, as measured by the intensity of engagement in HIPs, matter for college success across all racial and socioeconomic groups of students,” they write. “Particularly, engagement in four or more HIPs across academic and sociocultural domains significantly improves the chance of college and career success for all groups of students.”

However, when it comes to closing opportunity gaps, HIPs are not a panacea. The researchers note that “outcome gaps between racial and socioeconomic groups of students still remain significant even at a high level (i.e., four or more) of HIPs.” These practices are necessary but not sufficient.

NEPC Resources on Higher Education

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