

# TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES THROUGH IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES ENGAGEMENT

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## *AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION*

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## *EXTENDED ABSTRACT*

In its fourth year of implementation, the Hispanic Success Initiative (HSI) at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) incorporates non-cognitive practices in a co-curricular setting designed to improve retention and foster a sense of belonging for students. Students selected to participate are primarily first-time freshmen and transfer students. The majority of the participants have at least one risk factor – low income, low high school/transfer GPA, or first-generation college student status. UCO has a Hispanic student population that is 11% of the total student population. The percentage of Hispanic students has rapidly increased in the past five years, and it should reach 15% within the next four years.

HSI sessions allow for identity development while creating a sense of community. Many of these students often struggle with negotiating identity resulting from expectations to succeed while maintaining ties to families and conflicting feelings of wanting to experience greater and lesser ties to Hispanic culture, as well as struggles to negotiate the university system while trying to succeed academically. The cohort convenes bi-weekly to foster communication between students and to guide them through the Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process using generative interviewing skills (Peet, 2015). Students engage in exercises to discuss academic, co-curricular, familial, and social experiences and receive feedback from their peers on the tacit skills, strengths, and values that emerge from each student's experiences. These conversations occur in triads and are planned, focused discussions guided by the Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process (Peet, 2013). HSI participants develop reflections on their experiences and transformation through the program guided by embodied prompts or questions (Peet, 2015). The structured reflections allow students to document their strengths, skills, and confidence and learn how to communicate these. UCO faculty, staff, and peer mentors provide feedback on student reflections and reinforce generative knowledge interviewing through mentoring. Additionally, HSI connects students to UCO's values of leadership; global and cultural competencies; research, creative, and scholarly activities; and service learning. These values align with Kuh's (2008) high-impact practices shown to increase retention. Student reflections on growth through academic, co-curricular, familial, and social experiences are uploaded to an e-portfolio and are assessed using the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR).

Year-to-year retention data for the cohorts overall show positive outcomes. Data for the first cohort of students shows HSI participants were retained from Fall 2015 to Spring 2017 at a rate of 78%, compared to 71% for the overall Hispanic undergraduate student population and 69% for the general undergraduate population at UCO. The average GPA for HSI participants in Fall 2016 was 2.94, compared to 2.81 for all Hispanic undergraduate students and 2.88 for the general undergraduate population. Data from the second and third cohorts are being analyzed and show similar trends. Participant feedback and student reflections

also illustrate the impact of the program on the students' increased self-efficacy, self-awareness, and sense of belonging. The participant responses below are representative of the feedback students provide at the end of the program.

*“Being a part of this organization has given me insights and reflection skills necessary to gain a greater understanding of experiences present in my life.”*

*“As a first-generation college student, being a part of HSI has provided a community, like a home away from home, here at UCO that has made me feel welcome[d] and involved.”*

Data on four-year graduation rates for first-time freshmen and three-year graduation rates for transfer students who participated in the first cohort of the program will be available at the end of the current academic year.

### SELECT REFERENCES

Kuh, G. D. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Peet, M. (2013). The Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process TM: Identify Your Capacities, Discover Your Purpose, Demonstrate Your Difference. [Workbook]. Ann Arbor.

Peet, M. (2015). Transformative Students' Beliefs: Developing Employability skills and generative identities through the Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 3(2), 15-36.

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