

Clarifying the Goals for “Scaling” High Impact Practices (HIPs): Some Complexities and Suggestions for HIPs Proponents to Consider

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The National Association of System Heads (NASH) invited me to discern “lessons we can learn” from the NASH HIPs project in four state systems—GA, MT, WI, and TBR--on engaging faculty with efforts to ensure all students’ participation in multiple High Impact Practices (**hereafter: HIPs**). Through 2018-2019, I conducted about 80 interviews—some in person but mostly by phone--with faculty and staff in every system at about half the twenty-two Project Institutions (**hereafter, PIs**). The observations and suggestions that follow are informed by these PI interviews.

Preface: Institutional Goals and Course Design/Redesign Strategies

In all four state systems that took part in the NASH project, Project Institution (PI) work on HIPs was advanced *both* at the Institutional Level *and at* the Course Design/Redesign level. In general, PIs sought to institutionalize student participation in multiple HIPs. The NASH project aimed at “systemic change” in campus-level practice, both in the number and equity of students participating in HIPs and in the quality and equity assurance practices surrounding HIPs. This was the “Institutional Level” aspect of the NASH initiative.

The primary approach to the intended systemic institutional change--advanced through project convenings and especially through programs run by Teaching and Learning Centers--seemed to be helping faculty **design or redesign individual courses** to incorporate HIPs in their courses. This project-wide focus on helping faculty rethink their courses to incorporate specific high impact practices—e.g., collaborative learning, or research assignments-- is what I mean by the “Course Design/Redesign” aspect of the NASH initiative.

The project-wide work on course design/redesign was well-received by participants. Project forums involved many faculty (and some staff) with issues of engaged learning, course quality, HIPs quality, and equity-minded pedagogies. The focus on course design/redesign also made the PI teaching and learning centers critical partners¹ in the larger agenda of making HIPs expected rather than elective in students’ experience of college. Moreover, all four state systems tied their state-wide faculty development efforts to the HIPs initiative. These state-wide networks of HIPs faculty leaders will likely remain an important resource for advancing high impact practices now that the NASH project has completed its work.

That said, we need to question **whether course design/redesign is a sufficient strategy** for the PI and system goal of ensuring that all students will participate in multiple quality HIPs by the time they graduate. Every PI offers hundreds if not thousands of courses. Typically, faculty decide for themselves whether they wish to take part in a Teaching and Learning Center program on any topic.

¹ Not all institutions in the project had established teaching and learning centers. However, all four participating systems supported state-wide and/or regional professional development forums for faculty working on HIPs.

How did these institutions hope to reach “scale” with student participation in HIPs?
And, equally to the point, what did different participants in this initiative mean by the notion of “getting to scale” with students’ participation in quality HIP experiences?

As my interviews at PI campuses progressed, some of my interviewees offered distinctions that I found useful in clarifying how—and to what ends—“scaling HIPs” might proceed.

The “HIPs complexities” discussed below reflect **insights offered by faculty members** interviewed because of their work on the NASH project.

I then offer **my own suggestions on how we can advance HIPs-enriched learning on two levels – both through course design/redesign and through systemic redesign of entire programs to make HIPs participation expected rather than elective.**

These suggestions are preliminary. I welcome constructive feedback and other ideas on how to get “to scale” in making participation in quality HIPs expected, equitable, and empowering.

Part One: Some HIPs Complexities for Proponents to Consider

Institutional Approaches: As one faculty member at a project institution (PI) observed: **“When administrators think about HIPs, they think in institutional terms.”** Administrators, at both the institutional and system level want to know: How many students are taking part in clearly identified HIPs – such as an internship, or a first year seminar, or a research project? How equitable is this participation? Are quality assurance practices in place? What supports are needed to help specific HIPs become part of the institutional fabric? How do we persuade students that HIPs add value to learning?

“This,” the interviewee continued, “is *not* how faculty think about HIPs at all. Faculty think mainly about their courses and what students should get out of them.”

Course Design Approaches: The observation quoted above was on the mark. Across the interviews I conducted for the NASH project, when faculty participants described the benefits of the HIPs initiative, they often talked about embedding active learning assignments into their own courses. Or they described proactive efforts to write quality criteria for other faculty to use in designing/redesigning courses with assignments that would merit a HIPs classification. Some spoke about creating deliberately inclusive assignments as well.

This emphasis on faculty-led course redesign as a primary strategy for expanding HIPs participation became even more evident in interviews with heads of teaching and learning centers and also in reviewing the syllabi for NASH project-related faculty development programs. **Teaching and Learning Center programs emphasize strategies that can be used in any course, especially strategies that make a course interactive and engaging.** There is also an emphasis on equity, bias reduction, and making a learning experience inclusive. One leader in faculty development efforts put the HIPs goal this way: “Every one of our courses should include multiple high impact practices. **Every course can and should be ‘high impact.’**”²

² This idea has clear roots in the HIPs literature. For example, the Kuh/O’Donnell “quality criteria” for HIPs, which are widely used, do indeed describe practices that can be used in any course. George D. Kuh and Ken O’Donnell, “*Ensuring Quality and Taking High Impact Practices to Scale*,” AAC&U, 2013, 10. This description of “eight key elements” in quality HIPs was repeatedly cited in interviews conducted for the NASH HIPs project.

But Here's the Question: If Every Course Should be "High Impact," What Are Systems and Institutions "Scaling?"

Achieving the goal of making "every course 'high impact'" would indeed be transformative—for students and for higher education. But the very comprehensiveness of the goal raises basic questions about what we mean by scaling participation in HIPs— especially as systems and institutions set quantifiable goals such as "at least two HIPs for each student."

Do we want all 20 or 40 courses that count toward a degree to be HIPs-rich?

Or—as systems' goals for HIPs might suggest—is it sufficient for students to take just two or three HIPs-certified courses before they graduate?

Given these complexities, educators may need to clarify the educational purposes behind their HIPs advocacy—by distinguishing among different kinds of HIPs.

Herewith, suggestions for consideration (*Feedback Warmly Encouraged!*)

Part Two: Clarifying the Goals for Students' HIPs Participation

The Suggestions:

- 1. Educators Should Distinguish Between "Skill-Development HIPs" and "Applied Learning HIPs" and....**
- 2. Set Goals for Both Kinds of HIPs and...**
- 3. Ladder Both Skill-Development and Applied Learning HIPs into Degree Programs and Thereby Into All Students' Program Pathways.**

Distinguishing Between Skill-Development HIPs and Applied Learning HIPs:

Skill-Development HIPs. As an author of the original AAC&U list of High Impact Practices,³ I know that the list featured practices that were selected because of their value in helping students acquire a broad array of 21st century skills.

This focus on students' skill-development is why the original HIPs list did not include other practices that also are beneficial to students (especially to increased completion)--practices such as mentoring, or intrusive advising, or just-in-time financial assistance.

The original HIPs list emerged from an effort to identify and promote educational practices that would help all students develop a set of "essential learning outcomes" or 21st century intellectual/practical skills. The authors never viewed the 2007 list of HIPs as "final." There undoubtedly are additional educational practices that can help students develop the intended

³ When first published in *College Learning for a New Global Century* (AAC&U, 2007), the AAC&U list was titled "A Guide to Effective Educational Practices" (53-54 and note 53). The list was retitled—by Carol Schneider and George Kuh--following a major NSSE study which uncovered the positive links between students' self-reported participation in specific HIPs and their likelihood of persisting in college, as well as students' self-reported gains in deep or integrative learning.

learning outcomes, and, in fact, the NASH project deliberately tested the idea that **on-campus work** might become a recognized and validated “High Impact Practice” in its own right.

The [twenty-first century skills](#) that HIPs were perceived to advance include: analytical inquiry, critical and creative thinking, information and digital literacy, unscripted problem-solving, communication skills, engaging diverse perspectives, working with diverse peers, ethical reasoning, integrating and applying learning from different contexts, etc. In study after study, employers both endorse the importance of these skills and also give graduates low marks for their proficiency in them. These “essential” skills are important for careers and for civic participation.

When HIPs are viewed as means to the over-arching goal of students’ “21st century skill development,” the faculty development leader cited above is right to contend that “every course can and should be ‘high impact.’”

Assignments linked to one or more of these 21st century essential learning outcomes should indeed be included in every course. With knowledge rapidly evolving, and higher order skills in high demand, it is past time to retire the idea that a quality course can deliver “content only” with no attention to assignments that help students develop needed 21st century skills.

When we focus on students’ achievement of intended learning outcomes, we can see that HIPs should be part of higher education’s skill-development strategy. But they should not be the whole of that strategy. No single course—whether a HIP or not--can or should try to develop all the “essential learning outcomes” listed above. Rather, specific learning outcomes should be addressed across multiple courses—with faculty helping students recognize both what skills are being addressed and how. (More on this below.)

Within this broader context, HIPs that help students develop these essential skills (and develop college-navigation savvy as well) include: **First Year Experiences and Seminars; Writing and other Skill Intensive Courses, Learning Communities, Diversity Learning, Community-based Projects as Part of a Larger Course, Collaborative Projects, Common Intellectual Experiences, and early practice with skills related to Undergraduate Research, including information literacy and digital fluency.**

Going forward, we might characterize these kinds of HIPs as Skill-Development experiences – and make it a priority to ensure that courses identified as HIPs – both in general education and in departmental majors-- include **multiple assignments** that foster specific 21st century skills in the context of the content area being studied. And, simultaneously, we should help faculty build their own skill in making such courses equity-minded and intentional about fostering all students’ sense of “belonging.”

For skill development HIPs, then, the system and institutional goal would become ensuring that each course is clear about the specific learning outcomes students will practice and highly intentional in linking robust assignments to those specific goals for learning.

For skill-development HIPs, there also needs to be a corollary focus on program design. **Programs can be held accountable for ensuring that the entire program is well designed to provide each student with multiple opportunities to work on the full array of essential learning outcomes—in ways appropriate to program content.** Program review processes can make such intentionality a priority, and a shared commitment.

The proposal here is that we make “skill development” a primary focus for the initial years of college, with HIPs seen as one, *but not the only*, approach to that larger goal. *All* courses would become skill-intentional, but only some courses would include the practices designated “high impact” through the NSSE and AAC&U research.

One advantage of this approach is that it could bring balance to the already widespread interest –within the NASH project and beyond--in providing a First Year Seminar/Experience—a recognized HIP--for each student. Because of the strong policy emphasis on increasing completion, leaders at hundreds of institutions have already flagged the first year as a time to provide a HIP for all students and have made strenuous efforts to organize, staff, and fund these FYS experiences.

Providing a first year HIP is an important goal, especially because well-designed First Year Seminars (FYS) build a sense of community and belonging for students who might otherwise feel lost in the college environment. But a single seminar cannot possibly provide all the practice students need in developing 21st century skills. The other courses students take in their initial years also should be designed to help students practice specific 21st century skills.

In the NASH project, however, there were only a handful of institutional efforts to work, either systemically or programmatically, on connecting the rest of students’ initial year experiences to the FYS.

Nonetheless, the opportunity for developing linkages between an FYS and students’ other first-year courses seemed to be emerging in at least two of the systems: the University System of Georgia (USG) and the University System of Montana (USM). Both have already announced their intention to work on [general education redesign](#). Since general education in both states is largely concentrated in the first two years of study, reviews in both systems could – and in my view, should – foreground skill development (in the context of broad learning) as a priority for all general education courses, while clarifying how the First Year Seminar can help students become more intentional and more successful in connecting their early studies with their own long-term goals and interests.

USG already is emphasizing skill-development across general education courses. The opportunity exists to clarify how the FYS can help students engage the larger purposes of their college study, including the purposes of the general education program.

Applied Learning HIPs.⁴ In contrast to the skill-development HIPs described above, some HIPs provide *immersive applied* learning experiences for students. These HIPs require extended effort and a high degree of agency, integration and application on the part of the student. Much of the work – and the related learning – takes place beyond the routines of course meetings and assignments.

Prior to the beginning of the NASH project, the University of Georgia (UGA) chose the term “experiential learning” to describe these immersive or applied learning HIPs, and created a degree-level requirement that all students should participate in some form of “experiential learning” at UGA. In 2019, informed by the NASH project, the USG Board of Regents

⁴ AAC&U has described these extended learning HIPs as Signature Work in its 2015 LEAP Challenge. “Signature HIPs” is another possible name for these extended effort educational practices. That would add a further goal: ensuring that each of these HIPs provides a meaningful opportunity for a student to help shape the intended educational project. AAC&U, *The LEAP Challenge*, 2015.

determined that “experiential learning” should now become part of all USG students’ educational experience.

USG’s choice of the term “experiential learning” rather than “HIP” for its new direction underscores the need for some refinements within the broader category of “High Impact Practices.” All HIPs have documented benefits for students’ educational development, but only some count as “experiential learning” beyond the confines of classroom and course.

The remainder of this section suggests what those refinements might entail.

Applied Learning HIPs include significant Undergraduate Research projects, Internships and Practicums, Community-Based (often Civic) Projects, Living/Learning in another Culture, ePortfolios, and Capstone Projects. Over time, this set of Applied Learning HIPs may come to include emergent HIPs such as work certifications (already treated as a HIP by the Tennessee Board of Regents or TBR), on-campus work (now under study in Wisconsin as a potential addition to the list of HIPs), or other forms of work-integration.

In general, Applied Learning HIPs are reserved for students who are farther along in their programs (including in two year degree programs) and who have acquired enough preparation to bring agency, relevant knowledge, and developed skills to the table.

Students need and deserve prior 21st century skill development to succeed in these Applied Learning HIPs.

Research suggests that students value these Applied Learning experiences as “real-world” learning – meaning, that they recognize them as opportunities to extend their skills, in complex ways, **beyond the classroom.**⁵ These HIPs require institutional supports—administrative offices and budgetary investments--to take to “scale.” PIs are already acknowledging this reality by establishing offices for Undergraduate Research, Community-Based Learning, Student Internships, and Study Away. A key priority for such offices is sufficient funding to ensure that student finances don’t become barriers to equitable participation.

In addition, these practices require attentive monitoring to ensure that students are really engaged in advanced, substantive applied learning. As one NASH project leader from TBR pointed out, some courses were being categorized as “Undergraduate Research” in the system’s Banner coding simply because a paper was required.

In response, faculty clarified that, to be classified as Undergraduate Research, a course should include explicit attention to “development of research questions,” “hypotheses,” and “projects.” The key distinction here—for Undergraduate Research or other HIPs--is that Applied Learning HIPs should entail the student’s own extended time and effort in designing and executing the intended learning.

Going forward, as systems and institutions track their success in making such Applied Learning HIPs both high quality and equitable, we might set the following goals:

⁵ John Zilvinskis (2017) *Measuring Quality in High-Impact Practices*. (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis) Indiana University: Bloomington, IN.

Build Two or More of these Applied/Experiential Learning HIPs into program degree requirements and curricular pathways (with program faculty choosing the HIPs most relevant to their subject and students' needs, and with students guided to choose at least two from a menu of opportunities).⁶

Establish Institution-Level Equity and Quality Standards for Applied Learning HIPs and Build Them into Program Review Criteria and Processes.

This, in sum, would mean **dual HIPs goals** for both systems and institutions. Faculty and administrators would work simultaneously on:

Ensuring active learning, 21st century skill development, and equity-minded practice in all programs and all or most courses, including HIPs likely to be taken in the first or second year—e.g., FYS, Learning Communities, etc..

Building at least two Applied Learning HIPs into each degree pathway (in general education as well as majors), with the relevant faculty determining which HIPs are most useful to quality learning in specific programs.

Bottom Line:

I have discussed in a separate NASH report the steps systems and institutions might take to work on scaffolding HIPs into all students' degree pathways.

But before we scaffold, we need to clarify what exactly we are trying to help students achieve by embedding HIPs in students' learning pathways.

The strategy proposed here focuses on ensuring students' development of 21st century skills by judicious use of well-designed assignments in all courses and on providing students with advanced extended experiences" by building Applied Learning HIPs into degree and program requirements.

This strategy makes quality equity the ultimate goal, and calls for new attention to intentional program design to ensure that students have multiple opportunities *both to develop 21st century skills and to apply those skills* in immersive experiences, such as an internship, a research project, an e-Portfolio and/or a capstone.

I welcome discussion of the distinctions and strategies discussed in this paper.

⁶ I have recommended in a separate report to NASH that systems create initiatives focused on both identifying well-designed departmental and general education programs and on building faculty capacity for Designing Great Departments. There were several examples of well-designed departmental and general education pathways across the systems participating in the NASH project.

Appendix A: Scaffolding HIPs into Departmental Requirements at UW-Parkside

The Department of Communication program at University of Wisconsin-Parkside emphasizes high-impact practices. These help with student learning, professionalization, civic engagement, and creating a sense of community among our students.

To ensure that all Communication students experience HIPS throughout the curriculum, we have included **HIP experiences in Required Courses** at the following levels:

COURSE	TYPE OF HIP	PLACE IN CURRICULUM
COMM 107: Communication and the Human Condition	Diversity-focused	Lower-level core; General Education
COMM 207 & COMM 208: Introduction to the Communication Discipline, Parts 1 & 2	Undergraduate research	Lower-level core
COMM 295: Sophomore Seminar	Eportfolios; Collaborative learning	Lower-level core
400-level elective in Communication	Collaborative learning, community-based learning, and/or undergraduate research	Upper-level requirement
COMM 495: Senior Seminar	Eportfolio	Upper-level requirement

In addition to the above requirements, many of our other elective courses include HIPS, so in practice, it is not uncommon for our students to experience six or more HIPS.

In addition, because Comm 107 and Comm 207-208 are taken by all students, the Communications Department also includes a local version of a “common intellectual experience,” which has also been identified as a High Impact Practice.

III. DEPARTMENT SUPPORT FOR TEACHER-SCHOLARS AND ENGAGED PEDAGOGIES

The department is committed to supporting faculty and staff in teaching excellence. This includes encouraging diverse and multiple ways to assess teaching and student learning as well as supporting scholarship that examines student learning. These activities are a part of our merit evaluations as well as consideration for tenure and promotion.

Note: This summary was distilled from materials prepared by the Communication Department, University of Wisconsin Parkside

Carol Geary Schneider, January, 2020

Scaffolding High Impact Practices and Community-Based Learning in All Students' Departmental Degree Requirements

- The UW-Parkside Communication program emphasizes high-impact teaching practices through community-based learning class projects, internships, capstone courses, electronic portfolios, undergraduate research opportunities, and collaborative learning.
- Communication majors are required to complete at least **five high-impact courses** before graduation.
- The Department of Communication is an undergraduate program that offers a Bachelor of Arts major in Communication, minors in Communication, Digital Media and Production, Health Communication, Organizational Communication, and Public Relations, and certificates in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Digital and Media Literacy, Digital Media Production, and Health Communication.
- With 123 student majors, **it is the largest major in the College of Arts and Humanities and sixth largest major at UW-Parkside.**
- The Conflict Analysis and Resolution program is the third largest certificate program at our university.
- The Communication Department curriculum is guided by a set of six learning goals that as a theme integrate communication competency, theory, ethics and professional development. The learning goals address: Identity, Diversity, Messages, Roles, Knowledge, and Research.
- The program **integrates professionalization experiences throughout the curriculum.** For instance, students may have class projects where they work with a community partner to implement a marketing plan, a conflict management workshop, or teach children media literacy skills.
- Students' major learning experience is 'book-ended' through a Sophomore Seminar and Senior Seminar learning experience.
- In Sophomore Seminar, students learn about program learning goals, begin their ePortfolio development, and learn about high-impact educational opportunities.
- **In Senior Seminar, students refine their ePortfolio to reflect on their learning throughout the program. This assists them in making connections that they can share with prospective employers after graduation.**
- To make the curriculum accessible to a variety of students such as working adult and nontraditional students, the program offers several courses in online, hybrid, and evening formats.
- Approximately **one-fifth of Communication classes are university designated community-based learning classes.**
- Undergraduate students have presented solo and with faculty at international and regional academic conferences.
- Faculty members are active researchers who have received research awards at the international, national, and regional levels.
- Communication students come from diverse backgrounds with 34% of students identifying as from an underrepresented minority group, 24% as nontraditional, 64% as Pell grant recipients, and 63% as first-generation students.