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Examining Changes in Students' Intercultural Development in Student Affairs Professional Preparation

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Purpose of Assessment and Significance

The purpose of this project is to assess if the multicultural mission of the WMU Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) masters’ program is being fulfilled. The mission of the program is to “recognize the centrality of diversity and inclusiveness to higher education and to effectively and ethically lead and serve in a dynamic educational culture.” This program is one of the few student affairs preparation programs in the U.S. with a focus on effectively serving historically marginalized groups. Additionally, the researcher hopes to use findings from this pilot project to conduct future studies highlighting the College of Education and Human Development’s (CEHD) and WMU’s efforts toward increasing intercultural competence within other programs in the college and across campus. Finally, the researcher hopes to use funding from this assessment grant to position himself as a national expert in examining how diversity-focused curricula can serve to influence the intercultural development of students in higher education.

The significance of conducting the assessment project is that the cohort of approximately 20 masters students entering the HESA program in Fall 2016 will be directly impacted by gaining a greater understanding of their individual intercultural development and how this development is influenced by program outcomes. Additionally, by assessing the current HESA curriculum, future students of the program have the potential to be affected by subsequent curricular changes as a result of findings from this assessment.

Objectives

In this pilot assessment project, students in the HESA MA program will complete the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment during their first academic year in the program (2016-2017) and again in their final semester (Spring/Summer 2018). The IDI has been rigorously tested, has generalizability across many different cultures, and has been implemented both domestically and abroad (Hammer, 2015). This pre and post-test assessment will provide information regarding students’ intercultural development as a result of completing the program, which places an emphasis on diversity within the curriculum. The 39 hour master’s program requires a minimum of three diversity-related courses (9 credit hours) as well as having content on diversity and inclusion infused throughout the remaining curriculum. By determining if there is a significant difference between the pre- and post-test results of the IDI and exploring reasons for apparent differences through interviews, observations and surveys, data collected may allow program faculty to better tailor aspects of the curriculum to increase intercultural development in students. This mixed methods assessment includes collection, analysis and dissemination of both quantitative and qualitative data through administration of the IDI assessment, individual and focus group interviews, and surveys.

Learning Outcomes Examined

The HESA master’s program at WMU reflects the idea that, “distinctive to higher education and student affairs is an emphasis on the centrality of diversity and inclusiveness in higher education. One of the ways this is actualized is through a required and individually designed diversity cognate” (WMU HESA website, 2016). This assessment will work with program faculty to identify diversity cognates offered in the curriculum and how they impact the intercultural development of graduate students over time. In the first phase of this two-year longitudinal assessment project, the principle investigator will utilize a number of quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches to determine whether the broad learning outcome of emphasizing diversity and inclusion within the curriculum impacts the intercultural competence of students enrolled in the program.

Methods

This curriculum assessment project utilizes an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014), which seeks to investigate the impact of diversity focused curriculum in the HESA masters program on students’ intercultural development over time. In an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the researcher first collects and analyzes quantitative data related to a phenomenon of interest and then follows up with qualitative data collection and analysis to help interpret the meaning of the quantitative data collected (Creswell, 2014).

Three research questions guide the proposed project:

1. Is there a significant difference in the intercultural competence of graduate students, as measured by pre- and post-test administrations of the IDI, as a result of program curriculum focused on issues of diversity and inclusion? (Quantitative)
2. How do graduate students describe their experiences in the program related to issues of diversity and inclusion? (Qualitative)
3. What experiences do graduate students attribute to changes in their intercultural development over time? (Qualitative)

Assessment Instrument

Instrumentation: Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment. This assessment will be purchased through IDI, LLC. Information on the IDI can be found at: https://idimemory.com/products/the-intercultural-development-inventory-idi/

Dissemination of Results

The results of the study will be disseminated in the following ways:

- Conference Presentations at conferences within the researcher’s field – target conferences include ACPA, NASPA, and NAFAA (Currently ACPA 2017 Conference in Columbus, OH)
- Publications within various target journals in the researcher’s field – target publications include Journal of Diversity in Higher Education the Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice.
- HESA and ELRT department website for marketing and recruitment.

Assessment Timeline

Year 1 (2016-2017):
Participants complete IDI pre-test assessment (approximately 20 students) and meet individually to debrief results of the pre-test assessment. Schedule initial focus group interview to discuss students’ experience with diversity in the curriculum, their professional work, and their personal experiences. Observe diversity-focused coursework in which subjects are enrolled related to observe student discussions of diversity issues and interpersonal dynamics. Researcher will also review course syllabi for classes observed.

Year 2 (2017-2018):
Analyze data collected during Year 1; online survey to gather information on how students utilize information gained from diversity-focused coursework during required summer field experiences. Continue curriculum observations as appropriate and schedule second focus group interview. Participants complete IDI post-test assessment and schedule final individual interview to debrief post-test results.

Project Support

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