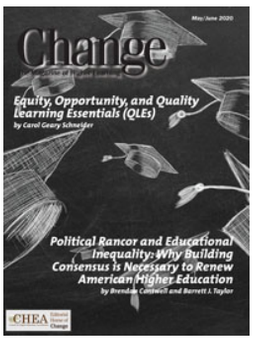

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Re-Energizing Student Success:

High-Impact Practices as a Mechanism to Connect State Policy to Classroom Practice

By Claire E. Jacobson

Claire Jacobson was the Director for the Taking Student Success to Scale: High Impact Practices Network at the National Association of System Heads until March 2020. In this role, she led a national network to scale High Impact Practices concentrated on the intersection of defining quality and assessing student learning with a focus on equitable participation for low-income and first-generation students and students of color. Currently, Claire is the Vice President for Campus Strategy at Student Opportunity Center.

In Short

- In 2017 the National Association of System Heads launched its Taking Student Success to Scale: High Impact Practices Network.
- The goals of this initiative were to identify and scale promising High Impact Practices (HIPs) at both the campus and system level to prioritize equitable participation for low-income and first-generation students and students of color and to implement faculty development in defining quality and assessing student learning.
- State-level student success initiatives can alienate faculty and staff who often struggle to integrate the "completion agenda" into their teaching- and research-based identities. HIPs are a tool to bridge the gap between state policy and classroom practice.
- Good teaching and high-quality learning should be the core of "student success" initiatives. By making learning the center of student success efforts, systems can reengage faculty and reenergize these initiatives.

Harnessing the Power of Cross-System Collaboration

The National Association of System Heads (NASH) represents the chief executives of more than 40 public college and university systems of higher education in the United States. NASH harnesses the power of cross-system collaboration to increase student success in college, especially for low-income first-generation students and students of color. NASH systems—or groups of two or more colleges or universities under a single governing board—aim to leverage efficiency and effectiveness by bridging public policy and institutional goals, by advocating for equitable student success, and by strategically using financial resources.

Many other organizations are dedicated to completion, but NASH has the scale for unprecedented impact: the 4.5 million NASH undergraduates comprise over 75% of the U.S. undergraduate population attending 4-year institutions each year. Due to the percentage of students who attend NASH-member institutions, improving completion rates by just 5% across NASH systems would yield over 50,000 more graduates per year.

Given this potential for impact, in 2014 NASH decided to leverage the power of its systems through a networked effort. Working as a network with NASH as the hub, Taking Student Success to Scale (TS3) initially focused on three evidence-based interventions: (a) Redesigning the Math Pathway, (b) Guided Pathways Using Predictive Analytics, and (c) High Impact Practices for all Students. In 2017, NASH received a $1.2 million 2-year grant (2017–2019) from Lumina Foundation to focus on its High Impact Practices (HIPs) strategy, forming the TS3: HIPs Network.

The goals of this initiative were to identify and scale promising HIPs at both the campus and system level; to prioritize equitable participation for low-income and first-generation students and students of color; to develop approaches to defining quality and assessing student learning; and to scaffold more sustainable professional development in these areas.

In 2017, after a rigorous vetting period, NASH selected the Montana University System (MUS), the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), the University System of Georgia (USG), and the University of Wisconsin System (UWS) to form the TS3: HIPs Network. In turn, these systems selected 22 of their campuses to join the network (see Figure 1). These systems already had a long history of focusing on student success efforts; in fact, one reason they joined the initiative was to expand and focus these efforts with more attention to equitable engagement for students and to sustain professional development for faculty.

While student success efforts or completion initiatives have been a priority for both systems and campuses, this project has highlighted that what is often missing or lacking focus in conversations about the "completion agenda" is attention on faculty as primary participants and, related to this concern, on student learning as a primary outcome. By putting student learning and faculty development front and center, campuses and systems can more tangibly connect state goals, policies, and plans to the classroom.

Due to their very nature, HIPs initiatives must engage faculty and consider curricular outcomes; therefore, unlike many existing completion initiatives, HIPs are a natural mechanism to connect classroom practice to state policy. While it is a challenge for a system to bridge this gap, curricular-focused initiatives can provide opportunities for new connection between system and campus priorities.

A Frustrating Paradox

HIPs are experiential education experiences that strengthen connections between students' in- and out-of-classroom learning and help students express their learning in terms of transferable skills. Employers consistently report that skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving; teamwork, especially with diverse individuals; and oral and written communication, matter more than specific disciplinary knowledge. HIPs are especially valuable in helping students acquire these skills, because, when done well, HIPs require students to practice complex, problem-centered, applied learning. These kinds of experiences, of which research, seminars, community-based learning, and internships are just a few examples, are not new. Most campuses have multiple examples of these kinds of experiences, whether or not they specifically label them as "HIPs."

Figure 1. TS3: HIPs Network

NASH sees the value of HIPs in several ways—requiring reflection and metacognition; demonstrating one or more outcomes, such as persistence, increased engagement, interpersonal competence, and writing proficiency; and involving evidence of sustained effort over an extended period of time culminating in a major accomplishment, such as a research project or applied learning experience. It is a focus on the outcome, and on defining and measuring student learning, more than a specific set of practices that matters when defining what is a HIP; nevertheless, there are typically 11 practices recognized as HIPs:

- First-year seminars and experiences,
- Common intellectual experiences,
- Learning communities,
- Writing-intensive courses,
- Collaborative assignments and projects,
- Undergraduate research,
- Diversity/global learning,
- ePortfolio,
- Service learning and community-based learning,
- Internships, and
- Capstone courses and projects (American Associations of Colleges & Universities, n.d.)

In 2005, researchers at the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, n.d.) analyzed data from what was then called the Enriching Education Experiences (EEE) scale and found that participating in any of the six experiences on the EEE scale (service learning, learning communities, undergraduate research, internships, study abroad, and capstone experiences) was related to higher levels of both engagement and persistence for students.

The effects of HIPs on persistence and the likelihood to graduate are especially important for transfer students (Zilvinskis & Dumford, 2018), and first-generation students and student of color (Finley & McNair, 2013). It was due to the evidence that these and other activities *matter* that in 2006 George Kuh, in concert with Carol Geary Schneider, then president at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, introduced the term "High Impact Practices," naming this collection of evidence-based, engaged learning experiences.

Due to their potential to close equity gaps and increase retention and graduation rates, Kuh (2008) recommended that students participate in at least two HIPs: one during the first year and one in the context of their major. In fact, Kuh (2008) found that HIPs can even have a compensatory effect for underrepresented minority students and that participating in multiple HIPs has a cumulative, additive effect. On average, the more HIPs a student completes, the more likely they are to earn a baccalaureate degree within six years. It is likely that HIPs increase engagement and a sense of belonging for students and especially student populations who can often feel disconnected from their campuses and their learning experiences.

Despite these positive effects, as well as the wealth of campuses' anecdotal evidence of HIPs effectiveness, participation in HIPs is inequitable, with first-generation, African American, and Hispanic students participating at lower rates than their White peers (Finley & McNair, 2013). This creates a frustrating paradox. We know HIPs matter. And we know the students most likely to benefit from them are often the students least likely to participate. To resolve this contradiction, NASH invested in a networked approach to build capacity at the system and institution levels to scale High Impact Practices.

Breaking Down Institutional Divides

Seeing systems as a network—as a community of connected partners—creates new opportunities to think about student success. Historically, systems have been governing bodies focused on compliance. But systems are reimagining their role from one of a hierarchical relationship with their institutions to a collaborative one based on centralized resources and shared problem solving.

A networked approach is a natural fit for NASH as an organization. First, NASH is a very lean organization with minimal staff. Despite this, NASH is able to advance its priorities through partnering with its systems and drawing together the collective wisdom of its members. Moreover, systems are already organized as a network with the system office acting as a hub for its institutions. The TS3: HIPs Network functions as a network of networks; each state system acts as a statewide network with the system office acting as the hub. NASH then acts as a hub for the larger network-of-networks.

NASH systems are diverse, with differing geographic, economic, and social concerns. Likewise, within each system, institutions vary in terms of type, size, student body composition, and mission. But it is not in spite of this diversity, but because of if that a networked approach has been successful. Networks act as connectors and break down barriers across differences. They enable—or even require—problem solving and information sharing among diverse partners.

Many other networks are organized by institution type (such as geographically, by Carnegie classification or size), but NASH has found that breaking down institutional divides leads to unexpected synergies. These cross-sector partnerships free creativity by focusing on problem solving rather than on the particulars of campus politics or practice. Sharing across institutions tackling similar challenges can reveal new approaches to a problem, encourage creative problem solving and information flow, and spark the development of new resources and tools. Often the most creative solutions arise from this cross-pollination of ideas.

Systems are natural sites to foster these types of solution-oriented communities. For example, at the start of the project, several systems were developing definitions of quality and tools for measuring student learning. Rather than each beginning the process anew, participating systems shared existing tools accelerating the process. Prior to joining TS3: HIPs, The Tennessee Board of Regents already had approved taxonomies for nine HIPs. As the USG undertook a similar taxonomy project, they benefitted from the work already completed in Tennessee. The USG project further developed the taxonomy concept, adding components for equity, assessment, and integration with other HIPs. In turn, USG's work influenced the processes at the MUS

and the UWS. Although all four systems developed different methods, the shared learning accelerated the process and strengthened the results.

Making the Macro Tangible

Focusing on HIPs was an unusual strategy for a system-oriented project. Systems typically focus on large-scale initiatives and change, such as improving transfer between institutions or developing common data systems to better track and report outcomes. In fact, the TS3 Network's other priorities—predictive analytics and math pathways—are more typical initiatives for a system due to their institutional-level versus individual-level models of change. This approach makes sense—it's even implicit in the word "systemic."

Similarly, while many student success initiatives have a stated goal of consensus building, they typically only focus on bringing together state and federal policy leaders and building consensus between national and state agendas. Rarely—if ever—are faculty the focus of these efforts or even explicitly mentioned in the mission statements of these projects.

For too long, retention and graduation initiatives have not been connected to work in the classroom, and faculty have not seen their place in these projects. In fact, some initiatives have stalled because they do not tie institutional and classroom goals together. They do not make the macro tangible, and they do not take the micro seriously. But HIPs are a mechanism to connect state-level policy all the way down to the crucial one-on-one relationship between faculty and student.

Often there is tension between focusing on campus- or systemwide graduation efforts that involve thousands or tens of thousands of students, and teaching-focused initiatives that focus on the individual student. But, in many ways, this is a false tension because the way to ultimately graduate thousands or hundreds of thousands more students is one student at a time. Increasing retention and graduation at scale ultimately means reaching students on an individual level.

What we have learned through the TS3: HIPs project—or really what we were reminded of—is that to be successful in any initiative you need to tap into what people care about and appeal to their values and sense of identity. The TS3: HIPs Network's focus on student learning has helped connect campus initiatives on teaching and learning with those on retention and graduation. This teaching and learning focus gave faculty a central role in the completion agenda through conceptualizing structural and policy issues related to student success in ways that make sense to them and in terms that matter to them.

Elevating the Work of Teaching and Learning

This reenergized focus on teaching and learning requires providing faculty and staff with sustained professional development to enable them to reimagine courses to include HIPs, to revitalize existing HIPs that may have become stale and are no longer of the highest quality, and to think about new ways of assessing HIPs with a focus on quality and equity.

This kind of holistic curricular change requires visibility, sustained effort, and resources. Unfortunately, too often professional development is limited to one-time workshops or seminars, which lack the sticking power required to make lasting change. Further, expecting this kind of holistic change to be the responsibility of a teaching and learning center alone is unrealistic, especially at the scale equity requires. Many of these centers have a skeleton staff with few resources. Additionally, they often lack the political capital on campus to impact this kind of strategic change.

Here, too, systems can lead. Typically, professional development, especially as related to teaching, has not been an area on which systems have focused. But this is changing as systems recognize the importance of providing sustained professional development. To support systems and campuses in their professional development efforts, in 2020 NASH launched a series of free online modules on implementing and scaling equitable HIPs. The 11 modules include over 35 interviews and narratives with campuses and systems who have undertaken this work, providing scaffolded points of reflection for faculty, administrators, and systems leaders undertaking these efforts.

HIPs: An Educator's Guide is available at www.hips.nashonline.org. These resources focus on the implementation, assessment, and scaling of

high-quality, equitable HIPs and can be integrated into professional development offerings. The 11 modules include:

- Why HIPs Matter
- System Vision and Leadership
- Goal Setting and Communication
- Teaching and Learning
- Transparency and Quality Learning
- Pedagogy and Equity
- Assess and Analyze
- Equitable Assessment and Action
- Implement and Scale
- HIPs Spotlight

While all four NASH TS3: HIPs campuses are rethinking professional development, USG and MUS have developed an innovative approach to faculty development that optimizes the system as an agent of large-scale change. USG developed its Chancellor's Learning Scholars to recognize exceptional faculty and empower them to be agents of change on their campuses. Chancellor's Learning Scholars participate in a systemwide faculty learning community focused on successful pedagogies, including HIPs, and learn how to facilitate a learning community on their home campus.

These campus-based learning communities then meet every 3 weeks in groups of 8–10 and focus on a specific change to classroom practice. USG intentionally designed this program to be a prestigious opportunity for which faculty must be nominated to participate and for which they are recognized by the chancellor for completion. By year three of the program, USG expects to have over 100 campus-based faculty learning communities running, reaching 40–50% of their 10,000+ full-time faculty. The scale of this kind of change, especially related to classroom practice, is unimaginable without system intervention.

Demonstrating the power of networks, MUS has adapted the model developed by USG. This knowledge sharing saved MUS, a much smaller system, considerable resources. In the MUS, only two campuses—out of 16—have dedicated teaching and learning centers. Participating in the NASH TS3: HIPs project with its increased focus on professional development helped magnify these gaps, as well as focus opportunities across the state where the system could provide support.

Based on the model from USG, MUS is launching a statewide faculty learning community, which will recognize excellent teachers, spread expertise from campuses with teaching and learning centers to those who have none, and involve larger groups of faculty in conversations about incorporating HIPs into their teaching and curriculum. Like USG, MUS has made this a prestigious opportunity, receiving permission to call the group the "Regents Teaching Scholars" and recognize participants at Board of Regents meetings. Regents Scholars will participate in professional development sponsored by MUS and then lead a faculty learning community on the home campus. The 2019 faculty learning community theme focuses on incorporating HIPs in introductory or general education coursework.

Participating in the TS3: HIPs project helped elevate the work of teaching and learning centers and highlighted the need for a more comprehensive, systemwide plan for professional development. Because participating system offices had to report to their boards on the progress of the grant, board members were engaging in conversations around teaching and student learning, sometimes for the first time. Systems noted that these conversations catalyzed their boards to develop an interest in teaching and learning beyond this project, enabling the system office to pursue important pedagogical priorities that had previously gained little traction.

To make teaching and learning ongoing, central priorities require moving this work from the domain of the willing led by the few to a strategic part of the institution's mission. Currently, on most campuses, teaching and learning centers lack the strategic position needed to impact lasting change. But being at the center of these kinds of national projects and partnering with the system can elevate the work by providing state and national exposure.

In the last 10 years, there has been a sea change in the political capital afforded institutional research on campus. As data have become a critical aspect of decision making, Institutional Research has moved, often literally, from a remote office primarily occupied with federal reporting to a central place on campus, often with a seat on the president's cabinet. This change demonstrates that campus hierarchies can shift, especially with the

national spotlight. It is time to give teaching and learning professionals the same seat at the table.

Rethinking Approaches to Data Collection

A reinvigorated focus on student learning requires rethinking approaches to data collection and assessment. Systems can lead in these efforts by supporting their campuses in expanding definitions of evidence and data collection. Most systems focus on collecting quantitative data, which is critical, but incomplete. Recognizing this limitation, some systems are expanding their data collection methods. In Wisconsin, the system is adopting the new National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Quality and Equity in High-Impact Practices survey module as one means to better understand the student experience in HIPs. NSSE developed this module in 2019, which is available as an add-on module to the NSSE survey, due to the need for better tools to understand and assess quality and equity in HIPs, and to understand the impact of HIPs. The survey asks students in-depth questions about their experiences in HIPs to measure their effectiveness and inform implementation. UWS will support the administration of the new HIPs quality modules on all system campuses beginning in spring 2020. This project will be one means to track participation and also provide system-level data on students' perspectives on HIPs and help to guide improvement efforts.

The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) was one of the first systems to collect statewide quantitative data on HIPs. To do so, they first developed systemwide common definitions of HIPs by developing HIPs taxonomies. These common definitions enable institutions to code "HIP" courses in their Student Information System. Once courses are coded, data across system campuses can be pulled to analyze student participation in HIPs. Data can also be disaggregated to assess participation and its effect on metrics such as retention and completion. TBR is in the process of analyzing its first 3 years of course-level data to assess the impact of participating in HIPs on completion. Initial findings show that since joining TS3: HIPs, the total student population participating in HIPs has increased from 20 to 30%.

These disaggregated data are a critical first step and should not be underestimated. However, disaggregating data is not how one addresses equity, but rather is one tool to answer questions related to a larger strategy. When done well, disaggregating data makes it possible to see where gaps exist so the *reasons*—structural, institutional, pedagogical, and so on—for those gaps can be explored. Ultimately, answering the most pressing concerns about students requires information beyond quantitative data.

To move beyond a reliance on quantitative data, TBR expanded its data collection efforts to include a qualitative assessment on systemwide implementation of HIPs that included semi-structured interviews with faculty. TBR also piloted a qualitative data-gathering tool to be used by faculty in their HIP courses. This tool asks about student engagement and outcomes and collects student work samples. This shift can be challenging for faculty who may not be used to this type of assessment. In our experience, faculty do embrace assessment when they are included in the process and understand its connection to improving teaching and student learning. This need again emphasizes the importance of integrated professional development and the critical role of system support.

These additional data collection methods are critical because data beyond participation counts are necessary to ensure equity. At the start of this project, most institutions were open to engaging with questions of equity but were unsure how to integrate this into their agendas. Discussions were often perfunctory and focused on access to HIPs rather than on the equity of the experience. But equity is not only about access. Access is important, but access without shifts in policies, procedures, culture, and so on may just reproduce more of the same.

Large data sets and the accompanying quantitative analyses are important, but they have limits. "Big" data is important, but in the current climate, we often expect this one type of data to answer all of our data needs. This expectation is unrealistic. Quantitative data can tell you what happened, but they cannot tell you *why* something happened. And they cannot tell you *how it happened.* To

close equity gaps, we must *understand the student experience.*

Moving HIPs from isolated pockets of excellence to systemic practice requires better understanding what works, for whom, and in what context. To do so requires engaging with students to ask them questions about the quality of the experience, questions that disaggregated data can only partly address. The more "small" data relevant to these questions we collect, the more we can tell data-backed student stories, and ultimately, the more we can make the connection between policy and practice.

This qualifier—"data-backed"—is critical as "small," or qualitative data, are not the same as anecdotes. Gathering and analyzing qualitative data requires a set of skills with which senior leadership and assessment and institutional research professionals are often less comfortable. Here, again, system offices can lead by supporting campus efforts to reconceptualize data and (re)focus on including students' voices in the process. Systems can also lead by providing professional development around sound qualitative data collection and analyses. Finally, systems can lead by recognizing these types of evidence are valid.

Where Systems Lead Campuses Will Follow

Being part of a national project has enabled network participants to bring initiatives that had been operating on the periphery of system priorities into the center. HIPs are now part of the system strategic plans for all four systems. In two systems, in particular, this may not have been possible without this national attention. In turn, HIPs were formally added to the strategic plans of at least five of the network campuses.

Where systems lead, campuses will follow. Good teaching and high-quality learning should be the core of "student success" initiatives. By making learning the center of student success efforts, systems can reengage faculty and reenergize these initiatives. By encouraging student-focused, problem-centered practices that include strategic professional development and holistic data collection, systems can lead the way to more equitable opportunities for all students. C

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