## Practical Approaches Faculty can take for Engaging and Retaining Diverse Students

The following is adapted and summarized from Quaye, S.J. and Harper, S.R. (2015) *Student Engagement in Higher Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Approaches for Diverse Populations.* Routledge, New York and London

This book has ideas for Institutions and faculty about ways to retain students and create conditions for their success. This summary document focuses on the ideas and strategies found in the book that **faculty** might implement to help create a climate of inclusion and to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to persist and succeed in their chosen areas of study.

### Engagement and Persistence—why planning for engagement of diverse populations is important

Differences in first-to-second year persistence, as well as in four-year and six-year graduation rates, continually disadvantage many students of color, undergraduate men, lower-income students, first generation college goers, and undergraduates who commute to campus. Those students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely to persist through graduation. This assertion has been empirically proven and consistently documented by numerous higher education researchers (e.g. Astin, 1975, 1993; Bean, 1990, 2005; Berger and Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem and Sullivan, 2000; Bridges, Cambridge, Kuh, And Leegwater, 2005; Milem and Berger, 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Peltier, Laden and Matranga, 1999; Stage and Hossler, 2000; Tinto, 1993, 2000, 2005).

### Practices that Foster Learning and Retention

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has identified ten engagement indicators and a set of high-impact educational practices that have substantial positive effects on student learning and retention:

* Academic Challenge—Higher order learning (not just the facts!), reflective and integrative learning, quantitative reasoning (not just the formulas!) and helping students with effective learning strategies.
* Learning with Peers—Collaborative Learning, opportunities for discussions with diverse peers\*
* Experiences with Faculty—Student-faculty interactions and effective teaching practices
* Campus Environment—Quality of interactions (trust, warmth) and supportive environments
* High Impact Practices—Service Learning, Experiential Learning, Study Abroad, Research with faculty, Internships and Coops.

\*An erroneous assumption is often made that students will naturally learn about their peers simply by coming into contact with those who have different views, experiences, and identities. Actually, educators must facilitate structured opportunities for dialogues between students from different backgrounds and cultures for such learning to occur. Meaningful strategies must be grounded in the students’ actual experiences, reflect their unique backgrounds and interests and be designed for both broad conversation across campus, and individual interactions among specific students. Intentionally devoting attention to those students who traditionally struggle with their connection to others at the university and to the “university culture” is an important way to change our own practice for greater inclusivity.

What Faculty can do to Learn about Diversity and Inclusion

Continuously “unpack” **your own** **socialization**, in an attempt to understand how **you** came to view the world as you do, and how you may change your perceptions and strategies to building a more inclusive community.

* Reflect actively on your own background, personal journey and significant life events that solidified your own gender, racial and cultural identity. In this process, identify any sources of privilege that may seem ‘normal’ to you, but are not for low-income students or students from other cultures and histories
* Learn about and avoid unintentional ‘’micro-aggressions” toward people who are different (in culture, ability, skin color, sexuality, etc.)
* Learn about implicit bias: how it works and how to counteract it
* Learn about and listen to the lived experience of minority students in the University
* Become knowledgeable about the various student supports the University provides
* Learn about the history of colonization and its long-term effects
* Do not assume that ‘typical’ ways of doing things are the only appropriate ways—think actively about what you want students to be learning and what constitutes fair and universal access to that learning. (for example timed tests, that actually test test-taking strategies, rather than understanding and application of concepts…)

### What Faculty can do to Create an Inclusive Classroom:

* Have high expectations for **all** students, whether they are members of the aforementioned groups who often struggle at University or not. Clarity in expectations, and fairness in applying standards is critical to the success of each of the students in your classes. Underestimating students, or making exceptions does not serve them in developing their knowledge, skills, or confidence
* Create opportunities for open debate/discussion and collaborative learning in the classroom
* Provide structured reflection opportunities for students as they grapple with your course and their place in it
* Get to know your students, their backgrounds and attitudes
* Help all students see how their identity is made up of an intersection of multiple identities—race/ethnicity, gender, social class, personal life events, etc.
* Help all students see that how they perceive the world and interactions in it may not be how their peers have experienced those same interactions. Encourage discussions of individual experiences and careful listening to one another in such discussions.
* Allow students to bring their own backgrounds to the classroom, to course assignments and to projects. This requires some flexibility in assignments to allow for personal creativity and culturally appropriate contributions
* Make accommodations for differently abled students to succeed
* Design activities and assignments in such a way that they are accessible to anyone: Ensure multiple means of expression of knowledge and multiple ways of engagement in the learning process.
* Create a ‘classroom culture’ that openly values and respects diversity and listening to one another: Establish rules of civil conduct in the classroom
* Actively address effective learning and time management strategies with your students
* Help your students to clearly define their own educational goals
* Point students to the support systems the University has for them (learning support centers, disability services, counseling services, culture-specific services, student groups and clubs)
* Point students to resources they might not be able to find on their own (opportunities for undergraduate research, sources of funding…)