

Creating Transformative Experiences:
The Art of Student Engagement and Engaged Student Scholarship

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December 18 2020

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Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge the individuals who contributed to conducting this research study and writing this report. Below are the names of the individual contributors.

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Executive Summary

Student engagement, refers to the manner in which students behave by taking advantage of opportunities outside of the classroom that ultimately allow for psychological stimulation, has become an increasingly important measure of social and academic success in higher education (Kahu, 2013). However, our research suggests that colleges and universities need to invest in providing more opportunities for student engagement. All institutions of higher education could benefit from leveraging the arts as it has the potential to inspire students academically and facilitate the development of intercultural competencies including a sense of awareness, empathy, and compassion for other human beings who are different from them.

This report provides context and outlines the importance and benefits of leveraging the arts to promote student engagement. However, some of the key challenges institutions of higher education face pertaining to student engagement are discussed in the report as well. Our research explores how course curriculums at higher education institutions are not leveraging student engagement opportunities, such as the performing arts, to their fullest potential.

What can institutions of higher education do to leverage the arts and artists to have “brave conversations” about human differences pursuant to the development of more equitable and inclusive teaching and learning environments? It was found that the arts can inspire students to further engage within the community and thus, strengthen the teaching and learning culture and accelerate the development of intercultural competencies. For this to occur, barriers and obstacles need to be identified and addressed at the institutional level.

The largest barriers to entry to arts events engagement offered through the university for students and community members alike include “lack of time,” “cost of the event,” and “lack of

knowledge about what events/programs are offered at Penn State”. This may apply more broadly to other universities, where it can be assumed that many students are facing similar challenges.

Our research suggests that some student groups are often left out of the conversation and are not equitably represented in the arts programming provided by universities. As a result of this discrepancy, this research aims to understand universities’ roles in promoting student engagement across student populations.

Introduction

"The arts enable us to put ourselves in the minds, eyes, ears and hearts of other human beings."

- Richard Eyre, renowned British theatre and film director

The arts are crucial to create an environment where students can learn and grow from different experiences that are easily accessible on college campuses. According to findings from the Center for the Performing Arts (CPA) We ARE Inside Arts initiative and the Mellon Arts on Campus Project at The Pennsylvania State University, the performing arts are in a unique position to highlight issues within the community that are viewed as vital for creating a teaching and learning culture that contributes to growing students' sense of identity, community, and empathy. In addition to the findings from such initiatives, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE) Annual Results for 2019 found that the more High Impact Practices (HIP) or engagements that students have outside the classroom such as, high-order learning, reflective and integrative learning, quantitative reasoning, collaborative learning, discussions from diverse others, student-faculty learning, and relationship and supporting environment affect the impact of the HIP and yield positive results in regard to learning and development. However, the NSEE study found that most course curriculums in higher education are not fully utilizing student engagement opportunities, such as the performing arts, to enhance student's learning and development and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at the university level and in surrounding communities and workplaces.

In cooperation with the Penn State Office of Undergraduate Education and the Student Engagement Network (SEN), the Creating Transformative Experiences—The Art of Student

Engagement and Engaged Scholarship research study was funded to create and disseminate knowledge on the potential contributions of leveraging the arts as an agent of change to provide transformative experiences for students and promote student engagement. Transformative experiences result in students seeing themselves, their situation, others, and the world from different perspectives.

Our research study seeks to discover how the arts can be leveraged to inspire students to become psychologically involved, connected to, and passionate about learning as well as motivate them to develop intercultural competencies including a sense of awareness, empathy, and compassion for other human beings who are different from them. In addition, one of the thematic priorities highlighted in the Pennsylvania State University's Strategic Plan (2016-25) is advancing the Arts and Humanities and using them as agents of social change.

The intention of this study is to provide a framework for examining in a scholarly manner the potential advantages to utilizing the arts as an agent of change to bring about understanding between individuals that differ from one another. This study contributes research-based information, possible problems with current systems, and potential solutions to this ideation in an attempt to highlight the psychological importance of promoting the arts as a vehicle of cultural understanding among students and the development of intercultural awareness and competencies. Furthermore, this study seeks to connect research and discovery with practice and delivery.

Other studies, such as the research study done by the Hanze University of Applied Science which analyzed the possibility of utilizing artists and designers as agents of change, have fallen short by over generalizing cultural groups and failing to approach concepts and issues from an individualistic perspective. As a result, these disproportionate studies lacked the cultural perspectives from an inordinately broad standpoint, thus, negating the nuance of the study in

determining the impact of the arts on students' thoughts about learning as well as their own cultural values and beliefs.

Relevant theories pertaining to leveraging the arts as an agent of change, such as author David Perkins' theory on learning through the arts, are helping to create an awareness of others and the actions that demonstrate understanding of those different from oneself. Our theory is that the work at the CPA at Penn State and other institutions of higher education, will help reduce bias, discrimination, and racism, contribute to the development of a more welcoming, safe, and inclusive teaching and learning environment, which will promote student engagement. More research is needed to understand how the arts are encouraging the creativity and enthusiasm that are essential to inspire positive student engagement to bring about a teaching and learning culture that promotes a sense of belonging, connectedness and community.

Research Study Objectives

This two-year research study aims to explore the arts and their impact on fostering student engagement in higher education. We seek to understand the components in the arts that inspire undergraduate students to become involved and connected to learning. Universities exist to provide research and engaged scholarship experiences. This project enables us to link select theories to effective strategies to improve student learning outcomes. Our intention is to gain insights regarding the relationships between the arts, importance of inclusion and belonging, and student engagement at Penn State and other institutions of higher education.

The student experience will be documented throughout the project with the assistance of video interviews and focus group discussions. Study subjects include students, faculty, staff, and alumni from Penn State and collaborative research institutions. We are seeking to discover if and how the arts can help support the formation of a psychologically safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environment. Also, we seek to understand what are the potential linkages of students developing intercultural awareness and competencies and in creating empathy, compassion, and a sense of belonging. In addition, we layout actionable recommendations as guidance for administrators and higher education leaders to consider for implementation at their respective institutions.

In sum, we hope to inspire engagement in the arts and strengthen the teaching and learning culture in higher education. Furthermore, this engaged scholarship experience will provide an immersive and collaborative action research experience (i.e., learn by doing) for undergraduate students at the Pennsylvania State University, who served as research assistance under the direction and guidance of the Principle Investigator Dr. Tom C. Hogan, professor of practice in Human Resource Management and scholar, Student Engagement Faculty Academy for academic

years 2019-2021. Dr. Hogan also serves as a scholar-in-residence, at the Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State and Teaching and Learning with Technology Faculty Fellow for academic year 2020 - 2021.

Study Methodology

This study began fall of 2019. Research assistant opportunities were made available to undergraduate students from the University Park campus, Commonwealth Campuses, and Penn State's World Campus. Students were also sourced from Dr. Hogan's LER 460 Ethics in the Workplace classes. An engaged scholarship (i.e., out of classroom learning) component is embedded in the course in lieu of a final exam. A new research team of undergraduate students was formed each semester to complete specific research tasks.

The Major University Presenters (MUPs) is a consortium of 19 University affiliated Performing Arts Centers/Programs, including Penn State University. It is an informal network founded in 2002 for participants to gather together in the spirit of mutual support and cooperation. The Consortium's purpose is for participating organizations to more effectively align with the education, research and public engagement missions of their universities. In addition, to document the student experience, undergraduate research assistants were interviewed.

In the fall of 2019, undergraduate research assistants completed a literature review focusing on scholarly articles and journals published regarding the potential contribution of the arts in promoting student engagement in higher education. Based on the literature review, students developed structured interview guides and a focus group protocol and questions. In the 2020 spring semester, students conducted video interviews with students, faculty, staff, and alumni at

Penn State University and a number of collaborative research institutions, who were recruited from the Major University Presenters.

During the fall 2020 semester, undergraduate research assistants focused on analyzing the data collected, identifying key findings, developing actionable recommendations, and writing the research study report. Video interviews of research assistants were conducted via Zoom to adhere to CDC social distancing guidelines, given the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the research team developed a briefing package that will be used to report out to the leadership team at Penn State and our collaborative research institution partners. The research team for the spring 2021 semester will use the research study report to write articles to be submitted to targeted academic journals and professional trade publications and to develop and submit proposals to present at conferences, symposiums, and summits.

Data Collection & Analysis

Our fall 2019 literature review identifies the lack of research that exists surrounding the impact of the arts on student engagement. There is clearly not a one size fits all engagement strategy that can be implemented everywhere. The literature review aims to answer two questions - how to increase student engagement, and who increased engagement will affect. Most notably, increased student engagement will greatly impact “under-represented, minority, and marginalized student populations” (Research Team Literature Review, 2020). One theory is that increasing the presence of the arts in school, “can result in significant development of traits such as confidence, competence, and connection (Barrett & Bond, 2015).” It is not enough to just increase the presence of the arts however, as the need for inclusion and equity is just as important in increasing student engagement at the university level. As for the involvement of technology in terms of the arts, it was found that even with limited studies conducted, it does increase

accessibility for people to learn and engagement with the arts, which is vital to address disparities in inclusion.

In the Fall 2019 Arts Pulse Report (Fall 2019 Arts Pulse Report, 2019) which is a survey distributed to Penn State students to gauge interest and participation in the arts at the university, data on several topics were gathered. The following students were surveyed (Figure 1).

Table 1. Selected Demographics of all respondents

	Respondents	
	n	%
Gender		
Men	246	27.0
Women	664	73.0
Student Status		
Domestic white	588	64.1
Domestic students of color	192	20.9
International	138	15.0
Residence Status		
On campus	403	43.9
Off campus	515	56.1
Class Standing*		
First and second year	385	53.4
Third, fourth, and fifth year	336	46.6

*Undergraduate students only

Figure 1

Topics such as attendance and participation to arts events, attitudes towards the arts events, and beliefs in barriers to participation and engagement to arts events were explored in the report. There were several key takeaways that are relevant for investigating and improving upon art programming and events. Regarding attendance at art events, among the most attended were theater productions, art galleries, and musical performance, implying that these events are the most popular and easily accessible for students and community members. Overall, there were positive attitudes and opinions regarding the arts and their commitment to diversity and inclusion, with the most notable aspect of the research pointing out that among undergraduate students, “domestic white students generally had higher positive attitudes towards Penn State arts

reflecting the commitment to diversity/inclusion and having a good variety of events....

However, international students were more likely to feel that events tend to separate people along ethnic, cultural, or other differences” (Fall 2019 Arts PULSE Report). One explanation could be that international students may tend to feel that when an event highlighting a cultural event like Russian ballet captures only a small glimpse of that culture, while other domestic students use the experience to form general assumptions about the culture as a whole.

If an institution of higher education is not a majority white institution, for example, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the focus should be on embracing varying cultures, while appreciating the culture at these universities. This could be seen in the form of emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural communication as globalization becomes more common, and this could be done through introducing different art programming that features cultures from around the globe.

Definition of Student Engagement

While the definition of student engagement varies, there is constantly an overarching theme of empowering students to learn and grow in ways that can be used for the rest of their life. “Penn State will advance the power of participation and the spirit of innovation by connecting undergraduate and graduate students with engagement experiences that produce resilience and empower them to make a positive impact as citizens and leaders of the world” (*Engaging Our Students*). Penn State’s strategic plan aims to engage students by providing access to meaningful experiences during their time at the university. Penn State specifically aims to encourage student growth in multicultural awareness, ethical reasoning, civic responsibility, along with professional development. There is a desire to facilitate student learning in a way that extends beyond the

classroom where students can take what they learned, be engaged, and carry it with them for the rest of their life.

Penn State's Student Engagement Network plays a crucial role in advancing the power of participation. The organization aims to engage all types of students through various integration outlets such as working with parents and families, those students accepted but not yet attending Penn State through new student orientations, current students, various student outreach centers such as health and wellness, and faculty. "Those partnerships and integrations and intersections are key for the network," says Mike Zeman, the Director of the Student Engagement Network. He exemplifies the idea of digitization, actually getting the word out through a word face is a high challenge but one the network desires to overcome. It is important to streamline the processes of the Student Engagement Network for easier access for all. While assessing engagement can be difficult, the Student Engagement Network says it all comes down to one thing: having a supervisor or coach overseeing one's experience. It is important to develop this framework to facilitate students and ensure they are growing.



"Student Engagement means to me that the students are making a psychological investment to what they are learning in the classroom by applying it across experiences and real world circumstances in order to understand it better. I think they take pride in mastering not just the formal learning practices but welcome the informal methods to wrapping their brain around the skills that are really going to be mandatory for meaningful career pursuits and community impact. That level of student engagement is important because it promotes higher learning in the classroom and outside the classroom." - *Mike Zeman, Director of the Student Engagement Network at Penn State University*

The research team conducted a number of video interviews with students, faculty, staff, leaders, and alumni from Penn State and collaborative research institution partners. Several Penn State University leaders and administrators were interviewed and asked to define student engagement. Each person offered their own opinion on what student engagement means to them, which is an interesting idea to explore, as each person had a different definition. This is important to recognize because this can further be broadly applied to entire student populations, where each student will think about engagement on their own terms. This can make quantitatively measuring engagement difficult, but not impossible. Several professors discuss the advantages of involving students, which positively impacts their education and growth as professionals. They discuss that student engagement could involve anything from internships to study abroad opportunities or applying what you learn in the classroom to the real world like habitat for humanity. These experiences have been formally referenced as, “High Impact Practices”, which are discussed in the next section. Having a common understanding and vocabulary the concept of student engagement is a first step in enhancing student experiences across universities.

SOURCE: National Survey of Student Engagement Annual Results 2019

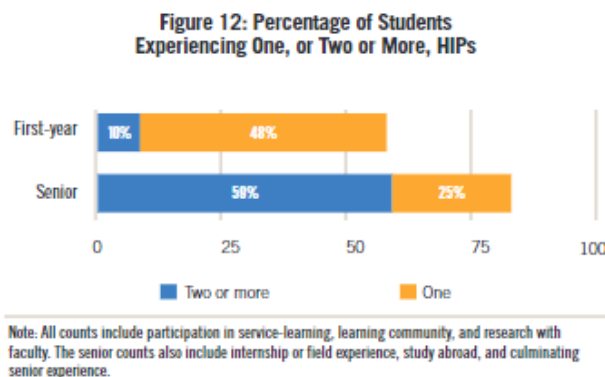


Figure 2

The NSSE Annual Results suggest undergraduate students should participate in at least two “High Impact Practices” (HIPs) during their four years at a university. “High-Impact Practices (HIPs) represent enriching educational experiences that can be life-changing” (The National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). High Impact Practices by student and institutional characteristic results are as follows:

- Seniors at Baccalaureate Arts and Sciences colleges experienced HIPs at higher rates
- HIP participation showed minimal variation by sex but varied somewhat by race/ethnicity
- Students of color are less likely to have done research with faculty, study abroad, or an internship/field experience
- HIP participation was much more common among traditional-age students and those enrolled full time
- HIP participation varied by major-field category

High Impact Practices make it so that students are engaging beyond the classroom, thus feeling more fulfilled and satisfied with their college experience. The reviewed research examined reasons that some students may not complete college, which can include financial concerns, campus culture, personal reasons, relations with other students, pressure to party, not enough opportunities to socialize or have fun, pressure of managing demands of school, personal life, and work, with financial concerns and personal reasons at the top two. To help students fully engage outside of the classroom, increase their sense of belonging in the community, and find a balance with their school work and social needs, High Impact Practices should be stressed and encouraged by university faculty and administration. The arts are something that students can be involved with that serves as a HIP, as they create opportunities outside of the classroom for students to expand their knowledge and experiences.

Programming

During the spring 2020 semester, members of the research team attended a performance of Step Afrika!, which is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping, founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams (About Us. 2020). Students that participated in the event seemed to enjoy this performance and learned new information about the culture. Students specifically mentioned that they liked interacting with the performers and it helped them learn about the more diverse cultures that the performance showcased. Step Afrika! also showcased a performance virtually in September of 2020. With many people in attendance, it showed that virtual programming can be a successful alternative to in person events that allows for people to engage with and experience the arts from the comfort of their own living spaces. Furthermore, virtual programming can enable artists to connect not only with potential audiences, but also with potential donors.



Figure 3

SOURCE: <https://www.stepafrika.org/about/>

The Step Afrika! performance is a prime example of the type of engaging, informative experience that could help students utilize the arts to gain a better understanding of the world. This was an opportunity that was available to students for free through the Student Fee Board, which allows students to see guest speakers, performers and shows for free. Creating opportunities where students get to experience the arts in an affordable and fun way is a step towards removing a large barrier of cost for most students' involvement in the arts.

Penn State University Pulse Report and Mellon Foundation Grant

According to the key findings from the Pulse Report, there are a few actionable steps that can be taken to increase engagement with the arts. First, international students should be surveyed and included in the decision making for arts events offered through the university if the department is going to improve upon its diversity and inclusion. Secondly, institutions of higher education need to address barriers of entry to participation. When thinking about the lack of time students may have to attend these events, it may be advantageous to begin incorporating these into course work, as encouraging students to attend events as a part of a class, or in lieu of class time, may give students the time they need and incentive to engage in these activities. To motivate students, faculty could offer extra credit for participation.

Another document, We Are... Mellon Proposal (“We Are...”,2020), discusses the meaning of the phrase, “We Are...” to both the Penn State community and the results of the Mellon Arts on Campus Project. “We Are...”, for those a part of the Penn State community, means they belong to a large and interconnected community that exists globally. To Penn Staters, it is a symbol of pride and joy. This project examined how those that do not feel as welcome in the community feel about the phrase. To examine what this phrase means to those individuals, the arts can be used as a tool to reflect ourselves back to ourselves. One contributing factor as to why some may

feel excluded is that Penn State is a majority-white institution. According to Penn State admission statistics (“Admission Statistics”, 2020), about 65% of the University Park student population is white. Hence, the importance in developing a welcoming, psychologically safe, inclusive teaching and learning environment and a sense of belonging for all.

The arts can help inform and educate students, faculty, staff, and alumni on the ethical, strategic, and pragmatic benefits that can accrue from promoting inclusion, equity, and belonging if the programs and events offered are effective at promoting the development of intercultural awareness and competencies and provide an opportunity for “brave” conversations and dialogue. For instance, The World in Conversation Project, founded at Penn State in 2002 under the leadership of Drs. Sam Richards and Laurie Mulvey, began as “a small group of committed students worked to create a kind of dialogue that would invite the unexamined, sometimes politically incorrect thoughts of participants into the room” (The World in Conversation Project, 2019). World in Conversation has grown into an experience where 96% of people who participate feel as though it was a worthwhile experience. Universities should showcase art forms that represent those who may feel excluded from the community. This will create ample learning opportunities for those who may not know a lot about certain topics and cultures and will also create an environment where marginalized individuals can feel represented in the community via the arts. Ultimately, this can create a stronger sense of inclusion and belonging.

Building a stronger sense of inclusion and belonging includes the creation of culturally diverse general education courses. For instance, at Penn State, courses such as Western Pennsylvania Art, Jazz, and the African American Experience. and new integrative courses have also been added like The Science of Music combined with Under the Hood: How Classic Music Works. This is evidence that the University supports the creation of culturally diverse educational

courses, and that the faculty are willing and excited to teach them. The main challenge of creating culturally diverse educational courses is the amount of time it takes to create a new course, availability of department funding, and the challenge of how faculty can design these new integrative courses that would help them use the arts in a unique way. Culturally diverse courses can translate back to the real world which creates an awareness of other points of view.

The need for inclusive leadership and developing a sense of belonging is important for ensuring that decisions made at an administrative level accurately reflect the needs of the entire student population. Leaders and role models, such as professors, can contribute to create an environment of respect and appreciation for human differences. These lessons can transcend the classroom and help students become global citizens and active agents of real change.

In short, it is important to be proactive in recognizing and minimizing bias and discrimination in higher education and implementing strategies, policies, initiatives, practices, and procedures to remove barriers to creating and maintaining an inclusive teaching and learning environment. We believe the arts are uniquely qualified to assist accomplishing this goal.

Measuring Diversity and Inclusion

Real progress cannot be made at addressing inequities and lack of inclusion in student engagement at a university level without being able to quantitatively define and measure inclusion and belonging. It was found that for inclusion, the definition should be fluid and defined through behaviors like, “respected”, “valued”, “treated fairly”. When dealing with inclusion, there should exist different viewpoints, and ultimately become measurable. The biggest challenge present when defining inclusion involves those in positions of power reflects dominant views and values, and intentionally or unintentionally ignoring the views and values of

non-dominant groups. The lack of diversity at majority-white institutions of higher education may be a contributing factor.

The C-suite challenge (C-Suite challenge, 2019) consists of responses by CEOs concerning the building of more inclusive organizations. This analysis infuses our focus on the importance of engagement and redefining our purpose as an academic institution. These goals can encourage a space for creativity, motivation, and collaboration. The conference board outlines the future aspects of a successful organization in 2025:

- Customer-centric approach
- Adopt new disruptive business models
- Redefine the process of work
- Drive innovation with project teams
- Foster collaboration by eliminating distractions and boundaries
- Develop greater transparency to communicate effectively

The conference board defines this inclusive workplace as one that encompasses respect and recognition. This includes the flexibility of implementing informal and open communication. This creates a sense of fairness and consideration for one another. To create this inclusive culture CEO respondents, believe that 2025 organizations should include:

- Transparency in speak up culture
- Continuous learning opportunities for employees
- Diverse project teams to share and engage on perspective

In respect to responses of CEOs (C-Suite Challenge, 2019), human capital executives believe that the true drive of an inclusive culture is defined by eliminating unconscious bias and molding

a safe atmosphere both physically and psychologically. They report that supporting the gender pay gap will increase the representation in leadership by both men and women. Since inclusion is not permanent it is important to reevaluate and consistently work on. This behavior is influenced by leadership and the operation of an organization. To gain the full benefit of inclusion a workplace should understand individual perceptions and feelings. This statement “inclusion lives inside individuals, between them, and outside the workplace”. This includes interactions and relationships in and out of the workplace. This again makes it clear that providing a diverse and inclusive experience at the university level will prepare graduates for being successful in the workplace.

Inclusion is necessary in every setting, however, the ability to measure inclusion remains a challenge. In the context of student engagement while it is necessary for universities and other entities to put on events that include everyone making sure everyone is included is hard because of factors such as lack of funding, accessibility, etc. Spada states, “Long-term, systemic improvement in inclusion levels can only be achieved if we measure and hold people accountable for progress.” Companies are learning and adapting to various approaches to measure inclusion:

- Qualitative approaches use interviews and focus groups to evaluate employee experiences.
- Quantitative approaches focus on individual behaviors, perspectives, and culture of business.
- New data-collection and analytical approaches work to analyze rational connections and correlate them with business outcomes.

For measuring inclusion recognizing potential pitfalls can help identify organizational weaknesses and potential progress. Inclusion can influence greater effectiveness in the workplace by enhancing employee engagement and work/life balance. Universities can also use this method for measuring inclusion within their art programming and events.

In the collection, *Featured Insight Race Ethnicity and Social Justice, A Global Perspective*, (“Featured Insight Race Ethnicity and Social Justice, A Global Perspective”,2020), it expresses the importance of addressing racial and ethnic diversity in the workplace. A viable approach should be formulated in the goal of providing equal opportunities for employees. Common factors to consider include demographics, commitment to social justice, and diversity and intersectionality. Within the topic of demographics some countries are more racially and ethnically diverse than others. For example, the majority (92%) of China’s population consists of Han Chinese. In contrast, the United States is growing into a future majority-minority nation. An example of inclusive diversity today is represented by millennials showing support and involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement.

In terms of social justice, this concept is constantly changing due to different experiences and political perspectives. Some elements of these commitments include human rights, equal opportunity, and rule of law. This idea of social justice is regularly discussed but it can be argued is rarely put into action. Many countries today still abide by a sort of hierarchy or dictatorship. Companies and political leaders sense a sort of resistance and danger in empowering these rights. Rather than suppressing the abilities of diversity there needs to be action to support it. Within race and ethnicity, the aspects of diversity can create a shared common language. This includes several groups of identity that claim similar experiences known as intersectionality. This term highlights the overlap and complexity between an individual's life and its categorization of race,

ethnicity, gender, social class, or social orientation. This collection shows great support for the abilities of the arts and leadership. Through engagement of the arts we can deliver social harmony and greater equity in the communities. Awareness of racial and ethnic differences will allow us to push for social justice and form impacts worldwide.

Video Interview Findings

Over the course of this research, virtual interviews were conducted to document the experience of students. These interviews were captured within a short time frame around ten to fifteen minutes. It gave students the opportunity to reflect on their experience and what they had learned. Also, virtual interviews were conducted with students and faculty from collaborative research institutions.

In an interview with ***Brenna Zollman, a student of University of Nebraska-Lincoln***, she discusses her involvement with the Performing Arts as a facilitator, advertiser, and surveyor. She conveys her struggles with incorporating engagement at events with specific groups of students such as Fraternities. Zollman states that a huge factor is posed on the ability to make events free and attractive to students.

In an interview with ***Martha Thomas, a faculty member at University of Texas At Austin***, she discusses her perspective on promoting student engagement. She discusses her trial and error using food and games to draw the attention of students to events. As a member of the art community she recognizes the importance of creating a space that students can feel welcome and go to freely. She also discusses the effects social media has had on engagement and discussion. Social media continues to influence experiences and the quality of everyday conversations. This

showcases how we can attempt to use technology to our advantage to attract students and communicate events with a post or share.

In an interview with *Cary Mazer, theater arts and English professor at the University of PENN*, discusses how he influences engagement with his students and campus. As once an English professor he discusses his journey of starting a theater scholar program with a small budget. In his studies in the history of theater, he has discovered that as a generation we have become more ethnically and racially diverse. He believes that as a student double majoring is a great way of becoming more involved. With the involvement of the theater students can gain an experience with a sense of community.

In an interview with *Howard Graham, the associate director of academic programs at the University of Kansas*, discusses the importance of achieving involvement and engagement. He refers to involvement as time spent on tasks and engagement as the reflection on those experiences. He also discusses the distribution of a “common book” to incorporate the university's present values and concerns. This book is nominated and distributed to first year, domestic, and international students. Their intention is to connect and engage with students through university culture and curriculum. He stresses the importance of moving towards events that are conscientious and inclusive of diverse backgrounds.

Deloitte, a large consulting company, has published findings regarding the Human Experience, as it is replacing the Customer Experience, across organizations (Dunlop, 2019). In sum, people want to be treated like humans and to be able to connect with others on a personal level, forming real relationships. Arts and programming create avenues for this at a university level, where students and the community can attend events, meet people, and gain knowledge and exposure to things they might not get to experience on a normal day of classes and work.

Another article published by Deloitte explores the drawbacks of living in a technology driven world. “When digital connections—personal and professional—lack a human touch, it can create an environment where people feel isolated, underrepresented, and unfulfilled” (O’Brien, 2019). Again, Deloitte points out the importance of the Human Experience, connecting to the human spirit, and incorporating empathy into everything that we do. This idea is relevant to this research, as one actionable recommendation is to increase virtual programming to increase attendance and student engagement across populations. However, this needs to be met with a balance, and should not replace in person events and programming, as virtual events can have fewer desirable impacts, where the event may feel less engaging and leave people feeling isolated. To create a transformative program or event that can appeal to everyone, the Human Experience needs to be incorporated. Examples of the Human Experience include friendship, change, nature (Spacey, 2018) - the list goes on. As these are all things people can relate to, they will create a more inclusive experience for those in attendance.

An excellent example of highlighting the Human Experience is done through the article, “You Can’t Be What You Can’t See” (2020). In this piece, published in the Penn State Magazine, stories of black Penn State alumni are featured, where they share their personal experience and perspective on attending such an institution, “It is a great university,” Hogan says. “And we can do better.” An overarching theme to each profile detailed the importance of diverse representation in leadership at the university. Students need to be able to seek out faculty that they can relate to and feel comfortable with. These create role models and mentors that allow students to see themselves being successful in the future. In some profiles, the alumni detailed some less than ideal situations they had experienced while at school, spanning from lack of diversity to threats and harassment from other students. People tend to fear the unknown, and for

large white student populations with limited interaction with minority groups before coming to college, it creates a hostile environment for individuals who are not represented in areas across campus, spanning from faculty and administration all the way to programming and the arts. With more programs that expose students to other cultures and history, students will be able to expand their knowledge and thus decrease the often-unintentional hostile environments that are created.

Personal Reflections

Below are the personal reflections of undergraduate research assistants who worked on this report during the fall 2020 semester. Their insights document their experience and highlight their growth and development.



My name is ***Sasha Kalika and I am a junior majoring in Labor Employment***

Relations and Public Relations. After going through all the research, the

previous research team has collected I thought a lot about what student

engagement really means. Student engagement is how students use what they

learn in the classroom and apply it to real-world experience. For me this means the three

internships I have completed so far where I used what I have learned in my communication

classes such as my writing skills, how to create an ad campaign and so much more to help the

Penn State Alumni Association, WPSU, and the Daily Caller. These experiences not only helped

me use the skills I learned and apply it to a career but it also helped me rule out what I do not

want to do in the future which is be a journalist.



My name is ***Nina Juliana and I am a current senior majoring in Labor***

Employment and Relations. My involvement in this research study has allowed

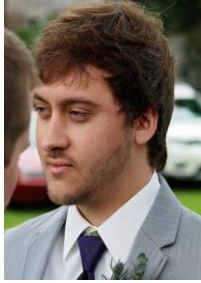
me to reflect on the capabilities of the arts challenging student engagement. This

exposure opens opportunities for perception, growth, and achievement. I have learned that this achievement can be cultivated not only through academics but by initiating the goals we set in the real world. Ultimately, this study captivates the beauty of inclusion and the ability to inspire others. I plan to use this inspiration as a tool for when I graduate college and move into the workplace as an HR professional.



My name is *Reece Levine* and I am a senior at Penn State double majoring in *Labor Employment Relations and Public Relations with a minor in Spanish*.

My participation in this study has made me think of the impact I can make during and after my time here at Penn State. While student engagement is extremely important, I believe most students are not connected to or passionate about what they are learning because they do not realize their capability of change in regard to what they learn in the classroom. Students of any background and with any major can make a difference in the world and it is important to realize this. Personally, I have felt inspired in my classes and excited to take what I have learned and apply to my job once I graduate. I believe most students should feel this way so they can not only feel a sense of belonging but be connected to what they are learning. Student engagement should be at the front of the minds of the universities of higher education because what is taught can undoubtedly make an impact. In my opinion, universities have the responsibility to provide equal opportunities for student engagement as this is an extremely powerful tool that encourages student inspiration to make real impact and change.

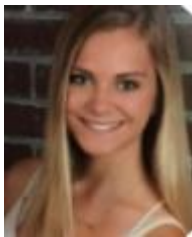


My name is *Gunner Eble* and I am a current senior *majoring in Labor and Employment Relations at Penn State University*. Participating in this research study has really opened my eyes to all of the possibilities and potential platforms for change and positivity that can be offered through the arts. I grew up in a small town that lacked the resources to house large art programs beyond such as performing arts. This made it very hard for some students to express their creativity and likely hindered our ability to learn about inclusion and culture. When I came to Penn State, I was blown away by just how many different clubs and classes were offered, having been so limited in my previous years of schooling. In learning about the way the arts can contribute and hearing the sensational stories and different pieces of advice from such kind and compassionate people within the arts, such as musician Michael Mwenso, I am all the more confident in the message behind this research study. Some things simply cannot be taught in a classroom alone and I believe that topics like ethics and acceptance are prime examples of this. This is why we must work to accommodate, mold, and promote the arts as an agent of change to encourage diversity, inclusion, and compassion within college campuses and their surrounding communities.



My name is *Jacqueline Gesualdo* and I am a senior at Penn State University with a *major in Labor and Employment Relations*. Collaborating with my team to create this research study report has been an overall, enlightening experience. I have learned a plethora of information regarding student engagement and the opportunities that have been offered to students to engage with the Penn State community. Enrolling in such a large university opened my eyes to the incredible student engagement opportunities. Taking advantage of these opportunities can have a true impact on not only my own personal perspectives but societal perspectives as well. As this research study report has

demonstrated the importance of student engagement, it has also taught me how the arts can be leveraged to further promote engagement opportunities. I have learned how the arts can be used as a medium to enlighten communities with the knowledge of different perspectives. The arts can be leveraged to educate students on diversity and inclusion and overall, better communities all over the nation. I believe that the information I learned in this research study will truly benefit me in my future career. I will be able to utilize this information on a personal and organizational level. I want to implement these practices on a daily basis as diversity and inclusion with regards to the arts is essential in promoting compassion among students. Above all, this experience has taught me to take advantage of student engagement opportunities while I still can as some universities deprive their students of such occasions.



My name is ***Madylin Knight*** and I am a senior ***at Penn State University studying Labor and Employment Relations***. My participation in this research study has made me realize how student engagement can create a sense of belonging and make a difference in any experience. I have learned that

becoming actively engaged has several positive impacts and this study has opened my eyes to opportunities that offer individual growth as well as success. I am excited to take what I learned from this research study and utilize this information to help me succeed in my career and my overall future as well. In my opinion, it is important to feel connected in diverse settings and to take advantage of the opportunities that the arts have to offer.



My name is ***Zach Pesto*** and I am a ***senior studying labor and employment relations***. Participating in this research study has taught me a variety of things.

Firstly, it is rare to have the opportunity to work with a team of this size.

Working with 12 other peers on such a project of this scale requires clear

communication and collaboration, which are both crucial skills to master. Seeing as how all of us will be working with teams on projects at some point in our futures, it was important that we practiced this now. In regard to the project itself, participating in this research study also provided learning experiences. I've realized how many more engagement opportunities there actually are than I had realized prior to the study. These opportunities tend to always somehow benefit or better participating students, which has motivated me to become more involved in these opportunities myself. I am excited to take what I have learned and apply it in the near future.



My name is *Mary Enger* and I am a *senior studying Labor and Employment Relations and Dispute Management Resolution*. My participation in this research study project has exposed me to a lot of different programs and events offered by Penn State to engage students further in the arts. I was able to see just how many events that are available for students, however, if I was not taking this class, I probably would not have been aware of the many interesting programs offered by different organizations through the school. This goes to show the importance of marketing and advertising for events, especially for those not on academic tracks within the more artistic majors. Professor Hogan had encouraged our class throughout the semester to attend and reflect on a number of events, from Step!Afrika's virtual performance to guest speaker Michael Mwenso from *The Shakes* sharing his experience with the Dean of Arts and Architecture. While each event I attended this year was held virtually, I still found each performance and guest speaker to be educational and impactful.



My name is *Matt Aprile* and I am currently a senior studying *Labor and Employment Relations and Entrepreneurship*. My participation in this study has helped me gain a lot of knowledge as well as be able to provide change into student engagement. I was able to learn many things and be actively involved in the study where we learned how student engagement makes significant impacts in students and faculties ability to learn and grow. I am very excited to be able to use this information for my future career and believe that this is truly a growing experience.

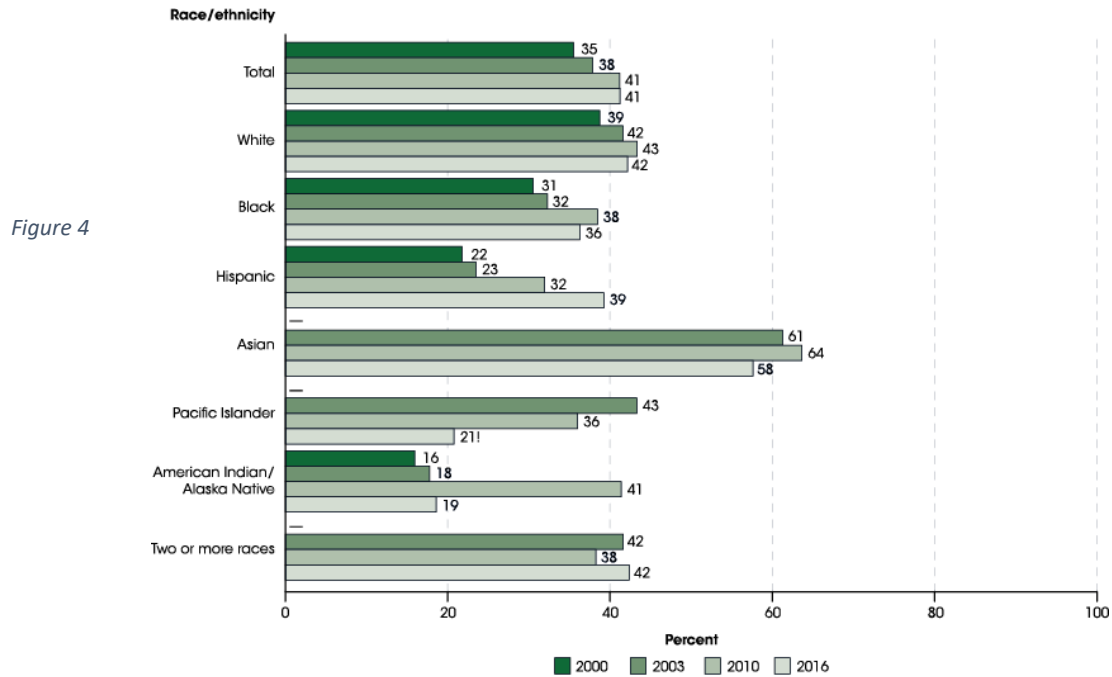


My name is *Erin Johnson* and I am currently a *senior at the University Park* campus. I am majoring in *Labor and Employment Relations and I am also pursuing two minors in Dispute Management Resolution, as well as, Communication Arts and Sciences*. Growing up as a dancer, the arts have always had a special place in my heart. Dance has shaped me into the person I am today, which is why I was so excited to join this team to help inspire others through the gateway of the arts. Seeing how COVID-19 has affected the engagement of students in class, it was exciting to emerge myself into this research.

Key Findings

After extensive research, discussions, and meetings, we aim to answer the question: Why is this important? The basis of this study is to determine the benefit of being engaged by being psychologically involved, connected to, and passionate about learning, in relation to the arts. Penn State's strategic plan involves using the advancement of Arts and Humanities to foster change and inclusion. We found that some of the most common barriers to entry regarding events and programs offered by Penn State, often revolve around the problem of “lack of time” as well as “cost of the event.” Another barrier of entry that creates cause for concern is the fact

that domestic white students had a higher positive attitude toward Penn State arts commitment to diversity/inclusion rather than international students who feel more separated ethnically and culturally. This is something that all universities should strive to address, as international students comprise 5.5% of student enrollment in the U.S (Number of International Students in the United States Hits All-Time High, 2019). Universities are also made up of other marginalized groups that need to be represented as well (Figure 4).



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October, 2000, 2003, 2010, and 2016. See Digest of Education Statistics 2017, table 302.60.

Hence, the importance of feeling welcomed, valued and included in their university community. To address this, international students must be especially included in surveys based around the decision making for arts events for Penn State to improve their inclusion effort, and potentially surveyed separately or more thoroughly.

Furthermore, the issue of “lack of time” that students are facing is a barrier to involvement. It will be more effective in increasing engagement if universities begin to incorporate art programming and events into students' course work and academic plans to foster engagement. Penn State is surrounded by community, togetherness, unity, and utilizes the “We Are” chant to express it. For Penn State and the arts and humanities culture to stay true to the “We Are” phrase, they must include all walks of life and promote student engagement to all students. To be a more competent global leader it starts with our inner Penn State community. We want to share that with the inclusion of several new interdomain gen ed courses, we can expand our students' identities and backgrounds to boost their confidence. The Penn State community must continuously ensure that the idea of being “one” is valued and all students are united as well as together. With this, it is important for all students to develop a positive outlook on inclusion and diversity in relation to the performing arts here at Penn State.

Actionable Recommendations

In this section, we provide our Top 5 actionable recommendations for leaders of higher education to consider for implementation. They include:

1. Generate funding opportunities for students to participate in arts events and programming both in-person and virtually to build on face-to-face engagement experiences.
2. Incorporate technology by creating a feature on the respective university app that students can download and easily access engagement opportunities on their campus through their phones.
3. Provide faculty and staff with adequate training and resources in order to expose them to how the arts can be used in student engagement and as a result, how it can be incorporated into their curriculum.

4. Create more diverse general education classes that mandate or encourage participation in art events and programming.

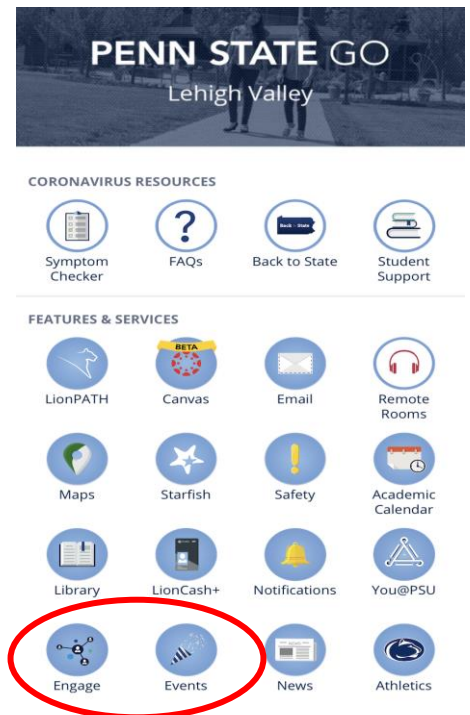
5. Survey under-represented or marginalized groups on campus to ascertain what types of arts programming they specifically would like to see.

Students in higher education often do not have the funds to be able to properly immerse themselves in the arts. Shows and exhibitions can be pricey and are not always in a college student's budget. We suggest a small portion of tuition be donated to CPAC for the fee for performances to be waived or significantly cheaper. As an alternative to this, we suggest that more funding opportunities are generated for students to utilize. For example, Penn State offers grants that students can apply for to help assist with the costs of student engagement. Learn more about Penn State's Student Engagement funding at the website,

<https://www.engage.psu.edu/remote-innovation-grants/>.

Taking advantage of the technology already available to students, universities can utilize their school apps by featuring "events" and "engage" buttons as seen on a screenshot of the homepage of the Penn State Go app. This creates quick and easy access for all students to stay updated on different events and engagement opportunities offered around their campuses. Promotion of the app can be sent out in university wide newsletters and other communication endorsed by the school.

Another recommendation we have is to provide faculty and staff with adequate training and resources in order to educate them on how the arts can be used in



student engagement and as a result, how it can be incorporated into their curriculum. If given the right resources, faculty can understand the power and importance of engagement. For example, Professor Hogan's LER460 class at Penn State constantly brings in guest speakers that allows students to be engaged, understand different points of view, and have an open conversation. Faculty can facilitate conversations with different guest speakers that creates engagement. One example of a guest speaker who visited LER460 was Michael Mwenso. Below is a primary account from student Reece Levine:

“

I really enjoyed talking to and listening to Michael Mwenso, he certainly has a different outlook on life that I believe most could benefit from. I learned not only the importance of accepting and understanding different point of views as people come from different places and have different experiences, but also the importance to not have blinders on, to value yourself, and to get to know yourself. This idea of getting to know yourself stood out to me the most because I do not think most people "know" themselves. It is important to even talk to yourself and develop a relationship because without this, it may be impossible to calm nerves or face challenges or hard times. It's important we get to know ourselves to help cope and manage anything that comes our way for the rest of our lives. I am going to take this idea and apply it to my everyday life. After he mentioned this, it immediately made me think of my nervousness for an interview I have next week. However, once I talked myself down and began even talking to myself, I really was not so nervous anymore and I immediately felt more confident. Michael also taught me the importance of "wanting to be an image of the world," which I think goes hand-in-hand with being a future HR professional in accepting all employees and to not think narrow-mindedly.”

Another recommendation we have is to create more diverse general education classes that mandate or encourage participation in art events and programming. General education courses are an excellent way for students to learn more about topics outside of their major courses. When universities offer more diverse and interesting classes, students will be able to have greater takeaways, especially when those classes incorporate participation in art events and programming. Penn State for example offers INART005, which is an integrative arts course where students attend a number of performing arts shows throughout the semester, encouraging students to engage beyond the classroom.

We also recommend that university administration make stronger efforts to survey students in marginalized groups and take into account their responses during the decision making for arts events. As noted through the reports, international students have not felt included when it comes to the arts at Penn State. By getting their opinion on the matter, it can allow for a more inclusive review of how Penn State is doing. This way, international students will have a more positive outlook on diversity and inclusion in relation to the arts.

Additionally, in order to ensure there is enough time for students to become more engaged and attend different events, we recommend that students be given the opportunity to attend events during class time, in other words, as a part of their course work. This way, students will not have to worry about “lack of time” and missing events. With that being said, we recommend that Penn State addresses the barriers of entry and ensures students that there are different options regarding attending events. Offering virtual events also encourages attendance, as it cuts out the amount of time needed to travel to and from the event as people can attend from wherever they have access to technology. Penn State’s Student Programming Association (SPA) has successfully hosted a variety of guests virtually through their lecture and concert series. In order

to pay for these performers to make appearances virtual, SPA uses funding from the student-initiated fee, which is included in students' tuition. This money could be further allocated to support programming for art events.

Another suggestion is to have events and shows display a broader range of culture or more connections to more cultures. As some of the data collected shows above, when students were surveyed about events, white students were more likely to be more involved in them than international students. Some of these international students surveyed have said this is due to the fact that they feel that these events separate people culturally and ethnically. Thus, if the art or performances include content from a broader range of cultures worldwide, then international students will be more inclined to go.

Finally, we recommend that classes relative to the events being held offer extra credit for attending. This will provide incentive for students to attend, which will help solve the overall problem. As mentioned earlier, a problem that is encountered is the price of admission, students will be less inclined to pay the admission fee unless some sort of incentive is provided. With the incentive of receiving extra credit, students will be more willing to pay the admission and attend. Additionally, it would be more convenient for individuals who have a busy schedule and do not have the time outside of class to attend events, therefore more students would be able to attend. In order to garner support from faculty, students can submit post attendance reflections that somehow relate the material they learned from attending the event to their course work before they receive the extra credit. Students who are able to synthesize information to apply to the real world will be able to get the most out of their class.

Conclusion

This two-year study aims at exploring the impact of the arts on student engagement among those in higher education. More specifically, we stress the importance of inclusion and developing a sense of belonging, connectedness, community. The study is focused on higher education stakeholders including students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

We concluded while it is important for students to be involved, connected to, and passionate about learning there are common barriers that interrupt this process. Common barriers identified are “lack of time” and “cost of the event.” In addition, we found that international students generally have a less positive attitude towards diversity and inclusion than domestic white students. While Penn State promotes student engagement for all, in order to expand student diversity, Penn State must also better communicate with students to ensure awareness and promote a positive outlook on inclusion and diversity in relation to the arts. We have also learned that as people we are all subject to biases both consciously and unconsciously. It is important to recognize this, effectively manage bias, and enact policies and training in response to relevant biases. However, measuring inclusion levels is a barrier as well, but it is still extremely important to hold people accountable for progress or perhaps, no progress. Measuring is possible through a variety of mechanisms such as qualitative, quantitative, and new data-collection analytical approaches. We also found high impact practices can engage and enrich student educational experiences.

Universities should provide high impact practices as they have been found to yield positive results with student engagement, learning, and development. Additionally, it is important to give students the opportunities to engage and attend events through their enrolled courses so they do not stress over a lack of time and therefore, will not disengage. With this, it is equally as

important to address, recognize, and manage the barriers of entry to ensure that students are equally included and equally have the same opportunities to engage and connect to learning. As some populations of students are underrepresented and other students feel marginalized, it is important they are included in the making of art events to promote diversity and inclusion. All in all, we hope to inspire engagement in the arts which will no doubt strengthen the culture of any academic community. It is important to understand there are barriers, but nonetheless they can be overcome. Penn State University and other institutions of higher education can create a positive teaching and learning environment where their students become psychologically involved, connected to, and passionate about learning while also developing a sense of awareness, empathy, and compassion for those who are different from them.

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Appendices

Box Video Interviews

- University of Nebraska
- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Pennsylvania
- University of Kansas

Research Team Literature Review. 2020.

You Can't Be What You Don't See. September 2020.