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Principles and Practices of Caring Communities

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Faculty Articles

Faculty and staff in the College of Education are excited about the future and our ability to better serve COE students under this new structure. The following section presents an article from a faculty member in each of the new departments. Dr. Susan Carson, from Educational Foundations, writes about principles and practices of caring communities; Dr. Roger Wilson, from Educational Foundations, writes about education commissions; Dr. Claudia S. Wojciakowski, professor emerita from Educational Leadership and Counseling, writes about changes needed in our educational system; Dr. Andrew Topper, from Literacy and Technology, writes about 21st century education and technology; and Dr. Brian G. Johnson, from Teaching and Learning, writes about the effects on youth of stop and frisk policies.

Principles and Practices of Caring Communities

By Susan Carson, GVSU Faculty

Educational opportunities have the potential to increase equity on local and global scales. School reform efforts call for rigorous redesign in management (e.g., finance, human resources, organizational leadership, and negotiation) and education (e.g., child development, instructional design, assessment, faculty development, school law and politics) (Levine, 2005). However, identifying the principles and practices associated with creating caring communities and equity opportunities (particularly for vulnerable populations) often is not a priority of reform efforts. This is despite the potential to enhance student achievement, critical thinking, democratic citizenship, communication, relationships, and general satisfaction in a learning community.

The identification of principles and practices of caring communities holds schools responsible not just for outcomes but for the opportunities and choices they offer (Noddings, 2005). As educators, we are entrusted with the whole student. That trust compels us to craft the educational experience so each student is valued and values others and so each student is allowed to reach his or her full potential while developing a sense of justice (Noddings, 1995). There is a strong professional responsibility to care and to teach our students how to care.

We need to identify principles and practices of caring that can be commonly held and promote equity opportunities for vulnerable populations within our educational community. This need is coupled with the implementation process in higher education programs: how do we pass this information on to students so they can be equipped to care? The research summarized in this article closely examined the importance of principles and practices of caring communities in institutional settings and explored how to infuse those principles and practices into these settings.

Background

The importance of community can be traced back through ancient religions and civilizations. An ideal community, according to Gandhi and Socrates, is one that resembles the human body (Gandhi, 2006). The individual parts, each designed to complete a specific function, must work together for the functioning of the whole. Gandhi states that communities, despite all their complexity, must function in synchronicity. This is imperative to avoid destruction and violence. The caring that we want as individuals must happen for all. This concept of "all" is truly all-inclusive, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable populations to include gender, culture, race, and class.

Among philosophers, social scientists, and educators today there is renewed interest in community as opposed to individualism (Bellah et al., 2007). Extreme individualism can weaken the meaning that gives substance to the ideal of individual dignity (Tocqueville, 1967). Tocqueville coined the phrase "habits of the heart" as a unique expression describing what helped form American character. He explored the possibilities that some aspects of American character might isolate us from one another and ultimately weaken our freedom. Beardall, Bergman, and Surrey (2007) created a framework for learning about connection. They contend that acknowledging the centrality of connection is imperative in teaching and learning and it creates opportunities to build healthy relationships in culture and gender. We are all connected; our actions do influence one another.

To create environments based upon principles and practices of caring communities, leaders need to promote collaboration and shift teaching attitudes toward pedagogy to improve learning and ultimately create a culture of caring (Liontos, 1992). As educators, it is imperative to understand ourselves and examine our alliances in relation to self and others. We then can pass this understanding on to our students, preparing them to care (Noddings, 2005). (Johnston and Pagano [2006] discuss the importance of teaching students how to be responsible to others.)

Being responsible is to empower one's self as well as others. This requires a shift in how we achieve our goals. Principles and practices of caring will take on the unique nature of the institution from which they were conceived, of course. Our understanding and implementation of caring will vary greatly; however, caring will be at the core. The responsibility for caring rests with the individual. But conditions need to be created where the individual pursuit of caring is reinforced by the support of others in that institution.

Within this individual expression lies a thread that binds us all, our collective humanity, and desire to be cared for. The Dalai Lama said he believes all human beings are brothers and sisters. "Different ideologies and different political or economic systems are only secondary; the most important point is that we are all the same human beings, living on one small planet" (Lama, 2000). So how can we as educators identify principles and practices of caring we can emulate? How can we empower our students to care? As an educator and a conscientious steward of resources, I acknowledge it is of compelling public interest to further my understanding of principles and practices of caring communities and disseminate that knowledge accordingly.

Purpose

This research identified principles and practices of caring communities, furthering understanding of global connections and educational opportunities. There was an em-

phasis on equity opportunities for vulnerable populations to participate in these caring communities. This research required attention to a variety of vital aspects, including:

1. Understand how principles and practices of caring communities might be integrated into educational institutions and education programs

2. Create a greater understanding of the relationship these principles and practices have to learning and teaching

3. Explore how we empower others to care

A variety of contexts were analyzed to determine how to best implement these principles and practices. The research covered findings and methodological procedures that systematically integrated principles and practices of caring communities in three vastly different cultures: (1) a college of education in an urban, regional, comprehensive teach-

ing institution; (2) an economically distressed urban public school environment; and (3) a suburban public school environment where socioeconomic demographics have vastly changed.

Case Study 1: Regional Teaching University
Background

In the regional case study, the researcher involved was interested in identifying and integrating principles and practices of caring communities (skillful governance, trust, dignity, multiculturalism, awareness of safety, and healing of harm) into a college of education's organizational culture. Over the course of 10 years, the college struggled with its identity, often consumed by a larger university. To add to this complexity, the college transitioned through
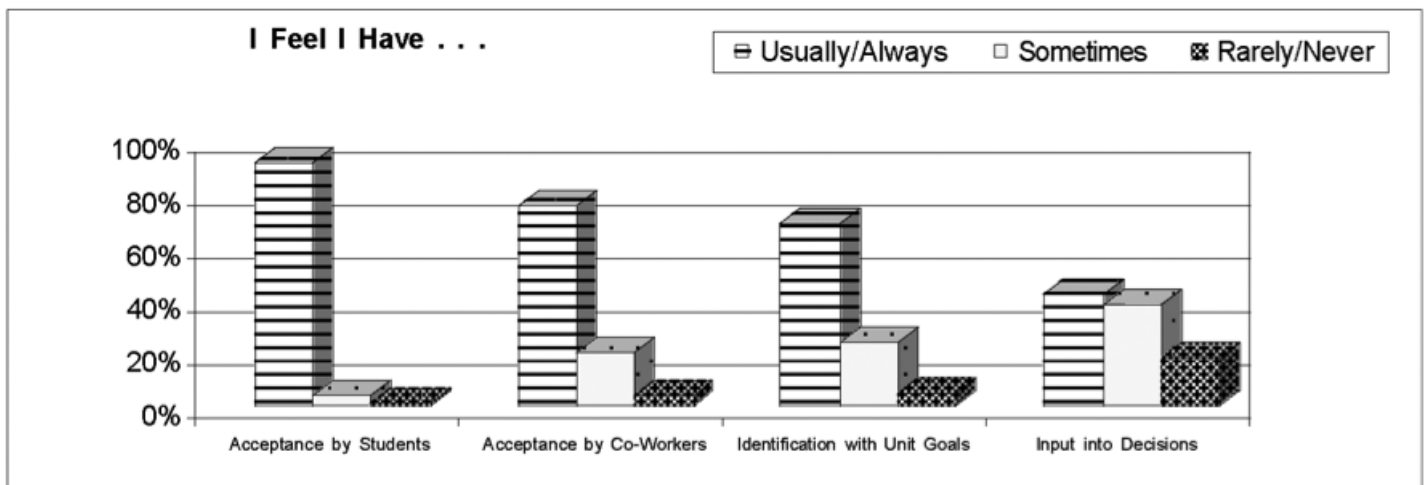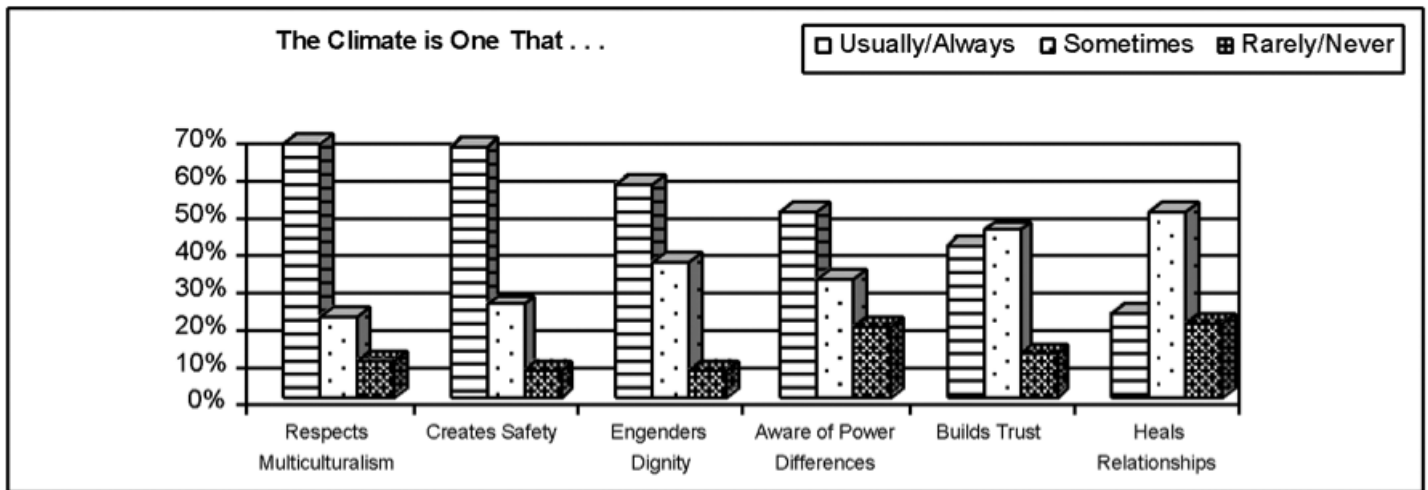
two deans, two interim deans, and a host of vice-deans, leadership teams, and administrative structures. The current structure evolved from a school of education to a college of education. This development produced its own growing pains to include student support in advising consistency, continual state and federal changes to certification, ever-changing demands of field preparation, and economic challenges. One of the most notable transformations in growth was the cry for voice and for this voice to be heard and valued.

Outcomes and Results

To begin this work, a climate study was conducted in October 2006. 91% of the administrative staff, 100% of the secretarial staff, 81% of the tenure track faculty, and 72% of visiting/affiliate faculty completed the survey for a total return of 83% (Carson, 2009).

Researchers found that their initial hypotheses were supported. Specifically, two categories surveyed (isolation because of beliefs/perspectives (political, religious, ideological)) and (college climate in relation to healing harm done to relationships) showed significant results:

Overall Summary

This work was followed by numerous retreats, allowing all participants opportunities to process the information collectively in work groups and individually in local, national and regional contexts. During the 2006-2007 academic year, consensus was reached to develop principles that all members of the college could support and implement in helping lead the organization toward positive change. Additionally, a structure for academic unit reorganization was created that sought to improve communication by equalizing power across two departments while still maintaining programmatic integrity.

Unit reorganization quickly followed on the heels of the climate study with an open call for model construction. The operating governance of academic units had been in effect for 10 years - a traditional three-unit model of Leadership and Human Services, Curriculum and Instruction, and Foundations and Technology. Everyone who wanted to get involved could and everyone who wanted did. Multiple models were proposed, including a School Personnel Model, Initial/Advanced Model, Three Department Model, Two Department Model, and an Integrated Model. What entailed was a year-long project to thoroughly examine governance under the proposed models.

Two models were finalized, each using a two-department model:

- An innovative model blending theory and practice into two departments: Teaching & Learning and Schools & Societies

College of Education Faculty/Staff Climate Study, Fall 2006					
Position and Return Rate:					
Return	AP Staff	COT Staff	Tenure Track Faculty	Visiting/Affiliate Faculty	Overall
N	10/11	11/11	35/43	18/25	74/89
%	91%	100%	81%	72%	83%

- A traditional model: Leadership & Learning and Special Education, Technology and Foundations

At the last academic meeting of the 2007-2008 school year, faculty voted for the traditional model, which was implemented in Fall 2008.

Still, the cry was made that voices were being silenced through the tenure/tenure track composition of faculty council. Affiliate and visiting faculty; Administrative Professionals (AP); and Clerical, Office and Technical staff (COT) did not have voice or input into the design of the guiding principles and practices. They saw by direct, daily involvement how improvements could be made for student success (as well as faculty fulfillment) in our implementation of policies and practices that guided our College of Education. A copy of The Conceptual Framework presented to the COE Reorganization Committee on June 27, 2007 appears in Appendix 1.

Throughout the summer of 2009 a volunteer committee began the work of revising the faculty governance bylaws to fit the new governance structure. At the beginning of the 2009-2010 academic year, it quickly became apparent that larger college participation was desired. Affiliate and Visiting Faculty, AP, and COT wanted a voice. They had representation on the Dean's Leadership Team, but not with Faculty Council. In the process of the climate work and reorganization, the value of full participation was clearly demonstrated. A participatory call was issued for involvement in designing the governance bylaws. Members from Affiliate and Visiting Faculty, AP, COT, and interested tenure/track faculty came forward. Working collaboratively with the governance committee, a model was designed. Everyone was welcome at Faculty Council. When a vote on an issue was to occur (with the exceptions of personnel and curriculum), each group would meet and hold a parallel vote. All group recommendations would be presented to the dean for consideration and direction.

Emergent themes continued to be dominate throughout the research:

1. People wanted to belong to a caring community

2. Cultural change is slow to form

3. Integration of principles and practices of caring community requires self-transformative as well as organizational processing and restructuring

4. Mutual understanding and time became acknowledged challenges in the development of a caring community

As the work continues it will be equally important to examine our role in pre K-12 environments. As we change, we teach our students the importance of identifying and integrating principles and practices of caring communities. They in turn will need support in implementing this work in pre K-12 schools.

Case Study 2: Higher Education Student Population
Background

In spite of an overabundance of teacher candidates throughout most of Michigan, it is still difficult for urban and poor isolated rural school districts to attract highly qualified teachers to fill open positions. This is the case not only in parts of Michigan but throughout the United States (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2007). In the College of Education (COE) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, there is ongoing discussion about the kinds of multicultural teaching opportunities available to pre-service teachers. The 2012 accreditation review by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) identified this as an area for improvement at GVSU. There was an inconsistency in providing pre-service teachers with authentic multicultural internship experiences.

In Winter 2007, work began to formalize an ongoing collaborative partnership with the Kent School Services Network (KSSN) and GVSU COE. KSSN is a county-wide coalition of organizations committed to assisting students in schools with an unusually large population from low-income, homeless, and transitional families. Agreements were established at the start of a formal partnership with two elementary schools and one middle school in an urban district struggling to meet the needs of its student

population. The charge of this coalition was twofold: 1) to increase the level of attendance at school by K-12 students from impoverished families and 2) to provide the resources that would increase the likelihood of academic success for these students. Two instructors committed their efforts to this initiative, teaching their education prerequisite courses in public school settings. Although the two classes met in the neighborhood K-5 school, the course objective and outcomes were the same as those meeting in university classrooms.

Outcomes and Results

Two groups of instruments were identified to provide data that would measure the impact of this teaching strategy on both the K-5 students and the university students. University students were asked to complete pre-study and post-study surveys. (Please see Appendix 2.) Informal discussions with the university classes also were documented and the traditional student course evaluations were used to establish a profile of each class's perspective of their semester-long experience at the neighborhood school. Although there was no attempt to account for so many variables that were operative throughout this project, the amount and types of feedback from the university students served as indicators of the importance of this experience to them. There was practical significance in establishing an overall perspective by the university students regarding their collective experience in the neighborhood school.

It became immediately apparent that principles and practices of caring communities needed to be integrated into a learning environment from very personal perspectives. The university students wanted to feel safe while working together in vastly new environments. Communication skills were honed and essential in improving working relationships that successfully addressed issues of race and culture.

They developed a strong sense of respect and compassion building a strong capacity and interdependence within their learning communities.

"This experience has been so crazy. I didn't realize just how much I had learned, to be completely honest. I've gained a ton (of) confidence in working with these students and it shows in the way they react to my presence."

"What I wanted while I was working with these kids was to bring out the positive side…so that each and every one of them would be happy with the skills that they have and not worry about what skills they seemed to struggle with."

"When I walk into the school…I have a social responsibility to these kids."

"Diversity might be in the classroom when it comes to (demographics), but if we spend a little time with our students each day…hopefully we can catch them up enough to diminish diversity in (achievement)."

A second instrument would serve as a measure of differences observable in the K-5 school prior to the beginning of the project (Time A) and at the close of four semesters (Time B). The independent variable was the mean difference between Time A and Time B in state test scores for the K-5 classes in which university students assisted individual learners. These mean differences would be compared to those of the K-5 classes in which university students did not assist individual learners. In a pre-study analysis of power, two years of data regarding the comparison of school test results were established as the minimal amount of time necessary to show a pattern, if any, of these test results (Glass & Hopkins, 1996).

Comparisons: Fall 2006 and Fall 2007 Semesters					
Times	Attendance Rate	Students receiving free/reduced lunch	Suspensions	ED YES Report	MEAP 3rd Grade Reading Proficient
Time A Fall 2006		91%	41	C	26.7%
Time B1 Fall 2007	Increase of 78%	86%	2	B	51.5%

To enhance the preparation of teachers to be effective in creating more caring, peaceful school environments and stronger community alliances, a new framework from which to build the best practices is required. In a vastly diverse milieu within education today, the notion that one preparation fits all future teaching positions ignores that diversity within contemporary society. In a global culture that calls out for competencies in peace education, diversity understanding, and environmental stewardship, this lends strong support for the need of teacher preparation programs that build more and stronger community alliances, as well as teachers who can navigate the social structures within urban communities especially.

Case Study 3: Orne Department of Education Living Language Work Group, Alençon, France

Background

Emile Dupont, Montsort, and Courteille Primary Schools, as well as the central education administration in Alençon, France were chosen as subjects for this branch of the research. The goal was to identify how teacher education faculty embrace and educate students about principles and practices of caring communities and understand how principles and practices of caring communities are identified, developed and integrated into teacher education curriculum and practices. One phase of this research explored equity opportunities, which further promote educational attainment and participation. The sites in France were selected for their diversity in student and teacher demographics and their rich heritage of social activism that symbolizes the French citizenry and leadership.

Outcomes and Results

Teachers were surveyed on how they identify, develop, and integrate principles and practices of caring communities into their curriculum and instructional strategies. Smaller sets of the institutions' educational teachers were interviewed to gather more information regarding principles and practices of caring communities in curriculum and instructional strategies. The data were then triangulated with attention to intentional/unintentional ways to organize principles and practices into caring communities in curriculum and instructional strategies.

Educators' responses to the survey varied. All educators wanted to be part of a caring community: 77% strongly agreed it is important to belong to a caring educational community. 23 % agreed it is important. Opportunity (specifically time availability) was one of the primary obstacles identified in being able to share and talk with one another about goals and common projects. This gave rise to stated challenges in mutual understanding and power differences.

"At a primary school level, the opportunity for 'primary teachers' to share, to talk each others about goals, ways, and common projects to make the pupils succeed is less and less available."

"Our educational community, in the past, has been trained to think of what to do, the way to do it; with the pupils/students….Now our government has decided to reduce the opportunity."

Teacher education in France is going through reform. The core concentration is a three-year process. Upon completion, teachers will complete an unpaid internship for one year. Previously the internship was two years and paid. Before graduation, teacher education candidates must compete with each other for job availability. If there are

only 30 openings for language arts teachers in France, only 30 applicants will graduate with their teaching credentials. The country is divided into departments much like the Intermediate School Districts in the United States. Within these central administration departments, numerous cuts are being made throughout France. The changes have created stress within the system, felt at all levels: administration, teacher, student, and family. This can be seen in the review of survey data. The climate at my institution is one that...never heals harm to relationships was repeatedly identified (62%). Strikingly respect, dialogue, peaceful means, integrity, responsibility, and modeling were identified in priority order to enhance overall working climate. 77% of the participants surveyed wanted opportunities to collaborate.

Schools in France receive the same funding. What separates each school is the amount of parent/guardian support received. This manifests in the facility, experience of educators teaching in the school, materials available, and technology, to name a few differences. One school had ramps leading to each classroom with handrails for adult reach, as well as lower handrails for younger students. This same school had hooks at each desk for student backpacks. In contrast, another school was in an older, remodeled building originally designed for separate education of boys and girls. The disparity in community support did not lessen the strong desire to stand up for beliefs, being responsible, and caring for the constituents of community. Social responsibility is central to the tenets of the French, whether the distribution of power and wealth is viewed as equal or exploited.

Outcomes

This research demonstrated: (a) a deepened understanding of the balance of academic freedom and collegial and professional responsibilities in teaching and endorsing equity; (b) informed practices for a college of education to teach our children/selves how to implement caring; (c) future work in academic climate and relationship building for equity enrichment of vulnerable populations; and (d)

methods for educational institutions to build their own principles and practices of caring communities.

Emergent themes became dominant throughout the research. They grew from prevailing questions:

1. Is it important to belong to a caring community within our educational setting?

2. What sort of caring community do we aspire to be?

3. What challenges exist within our current structure and working climate that may hinder the development of common principles and practices for a caring community?

4. What practices are necessary if our community is to thrive and what practices would prevent its thriving?

5. What principles and practices of caring would shape and sustain the community we aim to be?

6. How can we implement the identified principles and practices of caring communities within our educational environment?

The living principles of the three educational institutions arose and are currently being finalized. Collectively they include: (a) the affirmation of inherent dignity; (b) the maintenance of a climate of justice marked by respect, integrity and caring for each other; (c) the fostering of mutual understanding; (d) the confirmation of freedom of expression with civility and decency; and (e) the expression of individuality within bounds of courtesy, sensitivity and respect. The principles and practices became a vision that faculty, staff and students readily embraced.

How these principles grew into practice became a central tenet in the study. The implementation will be developed over time. Identifying and cultivating principles and practices of caring communities strengthened teaching, working climate, and caring outreach to our students, instructing how to care. While the emphasis in this research was on the identification of principles and practices of caring communities in conjunction with structural elements of education, it can be expanded to embrace other aspects of policy development.

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Appendix 1

Conceptual Framework

This proposal was presented to the COE Reorganization Committee on June 27, 2007 and was revised and re-submitted on July 11, 2007. It was presented to the College of Education faculty and staff on August 21, 2007 and to PTEAC on September 12, 2007. It was accepted by PTEAC on October 11, 2007. It will be the basis for the larger conceptual framework document and will replace the document adopted in 1999.

College of Education Philosophy

Believing that schools function as social and political entities as well as for the growth of individuals, the College of Education prepares teachers and leaders a) to enhance the academic and personal potential of their students, and b) to evaluate the social and ethical implications of educational policies and practices.

Mission: "Teaching, Leading and Learning in a Democratic Society"

The College of Education prepares candidates who enhance the individual growth of their students while working to establish policies and practices that promote the principles of democratic education. The College articulates this mission as Teaching, Leading, and Learning in a Democratic Society.

Values: Expertise, Equity, Liberal Education, Social Responsibility

The College of Education values expertise to guide our practice, equity to guide our interactions, liberal education to guide our perspectives, and social responsibility to guide our commitment to democratic education. We value these ideals in our preparation of candidates, our development of faculty, and our relationships with the larger community we serve.

Alignment of Mission, Values, Dispositions, Knowledge, and Skills

Mission	Values	Dispositions	Knowledge	Skills
Teaching and Leading	Expertise and Equity	Believes that all students can learn and that society is best served by the development of individual potential	Understands the theoretical and research base of meaningful teaching, learning and leadership	Demonstrates effective teaching and assessment, responsible leadership and professional vitality
Learning	Liberal Education	Values diverse traditions, varied forms of expression, intellectual honesty, and multiple modes of instruction	Understands that knowledge evolves, crosses disciplinary lines, and relies on skills of critical thinking and ethical judgment	Prepares students for engaged citizenship by seeking varied perspectives and solutions based on knowledge rather than opinion
Democratic Society	Social Responsibility	Believes that educators can shape the direction of schools in a democratic society	Understands that educational policies and practices can foster or impede democratic principles	Collaborates professionally in promoting schools that contribute to free inquiry and democratic citizenship

Appendix 2 Fall 2007

		Strongly disagree		Neutral		Strongly agree
Pre-Study and Post-Study Surveys						
Characteristic		Strongly disagree		Neutral		Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
Pre-	Social self-confidence	0	3	5	10	2
Post-		1	1	1	16	3
Pre-	Time Management Skills	0	1	2	11	6
Post-		1	0	6	13	2
Pre-	Ability to address conflicts	1	2	7	8	2
Post-		0	1	3	16	2
Pre-	Intellectual self-confidence	0	3	6	7	3
Post-		0	1	3	15	5
Pre-	Understanding yourself	0	2	3	11	4
Post-		0	1	5	11	7
Pre-	Ability to work in diverse groups	0	4	2	7	7
Post-		0	0	3	9	10
Pre-	Public speaking skills	0	2	7	9	2
Post-		0	3	6	11	2
Pre-	Understanding of problems facing your campus	2	1	9	4	3
Post-		1	2	9	7	2
Pre-	Interpersonal skills	0	1	7	8	4
Post-		0	1	4	14	3
Pre-	Problem solving skills	0	1	6	10	3
Post-		0	1	1	16	4
Pre-	Ability to think critically	0	2	6	9	3
Post-		0	1	4	14	2
Pre-	Leadership skills	0	2	3	8	7
Post-		0	2	2	11	6
Pre-	Ability to get along with diverse people	0	4	2	7	5
Post-		0	0	1	7	13
Pre-	Ability to work cooperatively	0	4	3	5	8
Post-		0	0	3	9	9
Pre-	Physical health	0	3	3	7	7
Post-		0	1	10	3	7
Pre-	Emotional health	1	2	4	8	5
Post-		0	0	8	6	8
Pre-	Ability to take responsibility	0	5	0	7	8
Post-		0	0	5	8	8
Pre-	Understanding of others	1	3	4	7	5
Post-		0	0	1	10	10
Pre-	Understanding of self	0	2	5	10	3
Post-		0	1	1	13	6