

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: EFFECTS OF “HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES”
ON FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE
STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Demographic changes in the U.S. indicate that more first-generation college students will matriculate into higher education in the next decade. First-generation college students may face a number of social and cultural barriers to success in college, and are less likely to graduate nationally. “High-impact practices” have been proffered as interventions that can help students, especially first-generation college students, build academic, social and psychological engagement in college and help them succeed. This quantitative study estimates the effects for first-generation college students from participation in five specific and widely used “high-impact practices”: academic first-year seminars, extended orientation first-year seminars, service learning, internships and living learning communities. Utilizing propensity score matching on student level variables, this research project more accurately estimates treatment effects of “high-impact practices,” controlling for endogeneity based on self-selection, bias often unaccounted for

in much of the extant quantitative research on “high-impact practices.” Five years of longitudinal student data, including 15,828 student records from 2013-2018, were analyzed from UMBC, a mid-sized public research university. When combined with 9,985 survey responses from students who participated in “high-impact practices” (at the same university during the same years), this study helps explain how such interventions may help students succeed. The research reveals that for first-time first-generation college students, service learning and internships have statistically significant effects on student success (final grade point average, persistence and graduation). For transfer first-generation college students, extended-orientation first-year seminars, service learning and internships were associated with success. Internships were associated with larger positive treatment effects for first-generation college students. Combined with the survey study of students’ perceptions of the effects of participating in “high-impact practices,” these same three practices which were statistically significantly associated with student success also were reported by students to help them to feel engaged, be motivated to graduate, and build critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills, including teamwork and networking skills. This research contributes to the scholarship on “high-impact practices,” providing more accurate measures of treatment effects on first-generation college students’ academic success and contributing to the understanding of how specific “high-impact practices” affect different students’ academic, social and psychological engagement in college.