

Case Study Report
The President's Emerging Scholars Program
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
College of Liberal Arts
Submitted by
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Program Scope & Focus

The mission of the President's Emerging Scholars program (formerly Access to Success) is to advance the enrollment, retention, and timely graduation of its participants. PES is designed for students who may not meet the typical academic profile of admitted students, but whose academic records, extra-curricular activities, and life experiences suggest high potential for success through the Program. The PES program advances many University goals, but primarily serves as a critical access point to the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students.

The President's Emerging Scholars program participants benefit from a full range of services that enhance and support their engagement in the University community and their academic success. The Association of American Colleges & University's 2007 report, "College Learning for the New Global Century, the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP)" identified a number of innovative, "high impact" practices that are gaining increased attention in higher education. These practices – which include first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service-learning, internships, and capstone courses – are frequently implemented in order to meet the shifting needs of a new generation of college students. There is evidence that these practices can lead to a range of positive outcomes (academic, personal, and civic) for the general population of college students as well as underserved students. The PES Program from its inception has been characterized by a number of these high-impact educational practices, including a first-year seminar, learning communities, service learning, and diversity/global learning. Educational research suggests that these high impact practices increase rates of student retention and student engagement, especially for students from groups that have historically been underserved within higher education and/or for students who start farther behind (AAC&U, 2007; Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh, and Laird, 2008).

The PES Program participants also benefit from the full range of academic advising, career counseling, and peer mentoring services that are provided all

CLA students. Students in the PES Program are required to meet with their academic advisor and a peer mentor once each semester, but can also schedule additional meetings as needed. Each semester PES students are provided the opportunity to enroll in one of seven learning communities that provide a potential infrastructure for building community, academic collaboration, and social networking. Courses with high failure and incomplete rates are also supported by Peer Assisted Learning group (tutoring) sessions supported by the SMART Learning Commons. Finally, each semester of their first year, PES students are also required to enroll in a three credit first year experience course that is tailored to the specific learning and support needs of PES students while also being aligned with the general philosophy and goals of the CLA First Year Experience (FYE) course designed for the vast majority of CLA students. Below, is a more detailed explanation of the PES first year experience course.

In the fall semester PES students enroll in *CLA 1005: My Freshman Year: Introduction to Liberal Arts Learning*. Through a shared experience that includes dialogue, experiential workshops, readings, videos, audio essays, spoken word poetry, journaling, and digital storytelling, students are asked to apply an autobiographical and ethnographic lens to their first year experience. Students explore how diverse American college students understand their college education, what they want from it, and how they negotiate and give meaning to their university experience. The core goal of the course is assist students to develop the knowledge and understanding of self, society, and the university that is needed to successfully navigate life in a complex institution of higher education and an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. More specifically the course pushes students to reflect simultaneously on their identities, values, strengths, and goals as well as the “culture of power” (Delpit; 1988) or hidden curriculum of the university. Through reflective essays, in-class exercises, and digital storytelling we ask students to name and make visible their insights into self, student cultures, and institutional culture. Students apply what they are learning about their identities, strengths, values, interests to the construction of four-year academic plans and professional pathways sketches.

Digital storytelling provides one key opportunity for students to delineate the relationship between their identity, strengths, interests, and values and their academic and professional pathways. Therefore, along with providing students a space and a process to reflect on their first-semester experiences, the digital story assignment also supports the development of self-authorship, digital competencies, communication skills, and greater cross-cultural awareness. Put another way, through digital storytelling of stories students build identities, construct meaning, and make connections with others and the world. Moreover, aligned with the retention and graduation goals of the program, digital storytelling promotes increased awareness of protective factors (Richard Lee; 2005) that enhance the ability of students to achieve competence and success despite

culture-specific and/or socio-economic status-specific adversity. And finally, by embedding a graduation planner and professional pathway mapping into the digital story assignment, the program is also facilitating development of the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary for efficient, effective and engaged educational planning toward graduation and professional advancement.

In the spring semester PES students enroll in *CLA 2005: Education and Transformative Citizenship* in order to complete the FYE requirement. CLA 2005 is a service-learning course that provides students a space and process to explore what it means to be an informed, critical, engaged citizen of the world in the 21st century. Through an examination of such issues as educational equity, environmental justice, food justice, homelessness, mass incarceration, gang violence, and urban re-development students are given the opportunity to critically assess information related to the domestic and global challenges of our day in relationship to their values, morals, and ethics. The course also affords students the opportunity through an exploration of local, national, and international civic organizations to envision proactive, nuanced, and sustainable solutions to the growing challenges of our time. In so doing, the PES program works to advance a range of specific University student learning and development outcomes as well as the AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. LEAP is a national advocacy, campus action, and research initiative that champions the importance of a twenty-first century liberal education—for individuals and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality. More specifically, the PES program supports the achievement of a number of essential learning outcomes related to personal and social responsibility, including:

- o Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- o Intercultural knowledge and competence
- o Ethical reasoning and action
- o Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

The point that deserves special emphasis is that the PES student learning experience is anchored in active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges. The service-learning component of the course provides students the opportunity to consider how they can learn from and work responsively and inclusively with diverse individuals, groups, and organizations to build more just, equitable, and sustainable communities. Through service-learning, not only do students learn about practical applications of their studies, they also become actively contributing citizens and community members through the work they provide. Put another way, the community engagement component of the course allows students to explore classroom concepts in the real world while developing valuable leadership, intercultural, and other professional skills.

Institutional Supports and Issues

The **CLA President's Emerging Scholars** succeeds through a strong partnership with the University of Minnesota's central administration, which provides leadership and additional resources for this initiative. CLA provides targeted curricular and advising support to PES students.

The **University of Minnesota Office of Admissions** is responsible for the recruitment, selection, and placement of students into the CLA PES Program. The Office of Admissions also offers \$2,000 scholarships for all selected CLA PES students.

The **University of Minnesota's central PES administration office** supports the peer mentor component of the program through the provision of training, office space, and an appointment management system. The University of Minnesota's central PES administration office also offers an annual 5-day digital story summer seminar for approximately 100 participants. The PES Summer Seminar is an opportunity for students to learn the basic skills of digital storytelling while becoming familiar with campus resources and building community with future peers. The University of Minnesota's central PES administration office has also assisted in program evaluation that has included:

- An end of year student evaluation survey
- Data analysis through UM Reports
- Narrative analysis of student work including written assignments and digital stories
- Staff interviews (Summer 2010)
- End of semester student service learning survey

The **University of Minnesota's Community Service Learning Center (CSLC)** has provided critical support in annually placing approximately 200 PES students into area community-based organizations. CSLC is a campus-wide unit responsible for supporting faculty in developing credit-bearing community-based learning initiatives on the Twin Cities campus.

The **University of Minnesota's SMART Learning Commons** provides Peer Assisted Learning group (tutoring) sessions for courses in which PES students enroll that have high D, F, and I rates.

The **University of Minnesota Department of Athletics' McNamara Center for Student-Athletes** offers critical advising, tutoring, and instructional support for all student-athletes in the PES program. This partnership ensures that student-athletes have a robust, but non-redundant, academic and social support system in place to assist them in meeting their goals as student-athletes.

Community Issues

Most students in the PES program work at organizations that the University has been involved with for decades, while others work at organizations that have no formal affiliation with the University. Although the program maintains partnerships with more than 300 organizations in the Twin Cities area, students often want to work at specific organizations that do not have existing relationships with the University due to personal interests and travel time. For situations like this, the CSLC staff verifies that the organization at which the students are working is a nonprofit or governmental organization. CSCL staff also must work with students to determine if their organization is in compliance with the University's non-discrimination policies. The University's non-discrimination policy has presented a number of challenges to students who have wanted to work for religious institutions.

The McNamara Center for Student-Athletes has also assisted in connecting student-athletes to service-learning opportunities via its Maroon and Gold in the Community Program (MAGIC). In contrast to the majority of PES students, student-athletes in the MAGIC program will each participate in diverse service-learning experiences in multiple institutional contexts. The most significant challenge in collaborating with the MAGIC program has been to ensure that student-athletes are actually pursuing a service-learning experience that is grounded in the broader Twin Cities community instead of events that primarily serve the athletic department.

Generally, PES partners have been successful in helping the program to provide students with meaningful and positive community-based learning experiences. As well, PES students have navigated the ethical and practical challenges of service learning in ways that have allowed the program to sustain and even expand our partnership with hundreds of community-based organizations.

The History/Evolution of the Program

The PES Program (formerly Access to Success) was launched in Fall 2008. The Fall 2013 name change was reflective of the University of Minnesota's central administration asserting broad oversight and program development responsibilities for the five distinct college-based PES program. This move toward greater centralization was accompanied by increased financial investment in the program in the form of additional human resources and scholarships for PES students. During the transition to greater central administration oversight, the central PES office also assumed responsibility for the peer mentoring component of the program and implemented the PES Summer Seminar.

The evolution of the CLA-specific iteration of the PES Program can be aptly characterized as a gradual shift from a developmental education model toward a more strength-based, culturally-attentive, and equity-minded model. This trajectory is reflected in changes in the CLA 1005 curriculum, the removal of restrictions on course selection, and more differentiated pathways within the context of the program's learning community model. More specifically, informed by the work of R. Jehangir (2008), Miksch, Higbee, Bruch, Jehangir, & Lundell (2005), Bruch, Jacobs, & Ghery (2004), Delpit (1988) Barajas (2005), the CLA 1005 was redesigned to exclude the standard curricular pieces related to study-skills, test-taking, and time management that often convey the embrace of a deficit-model of student support. The research indicates that this type of course and program framework and content can exacerbate stereotype-threat and belonging uncertainty among students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. The CLA 1005 curriculum, borrowing from some of the most recent research out of the University of Texas Leadership Action Network (NY Times, March 2014), now includes units on neuroplasticity, mindset, and strengths. And building on past units on student identity, the course has evolved to have more robust units that feature first person narratives of college students from historically underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds. These transformations in the CLA 1005 curriculum and the PES program are informed by the assumption that if a program wants to help promote success for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, it's not enough to deal with their academic and financial obstacles. Programs must also address their doubts and misconceptions and fears.

One of the historical strengths and challenges of the PES Program has been its remarkable diversity in terms of the cultural-background, socio-economic status, and academic preparedness of the students. A range of research indicates that a student's cultural background and socioeconomic status has tremendous bearing on the quality of their undergraduate experience as well as their expectations and needs. See diagram below: (Stephens et al, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2012, Vol. 102, No. 6, 1178–1197)

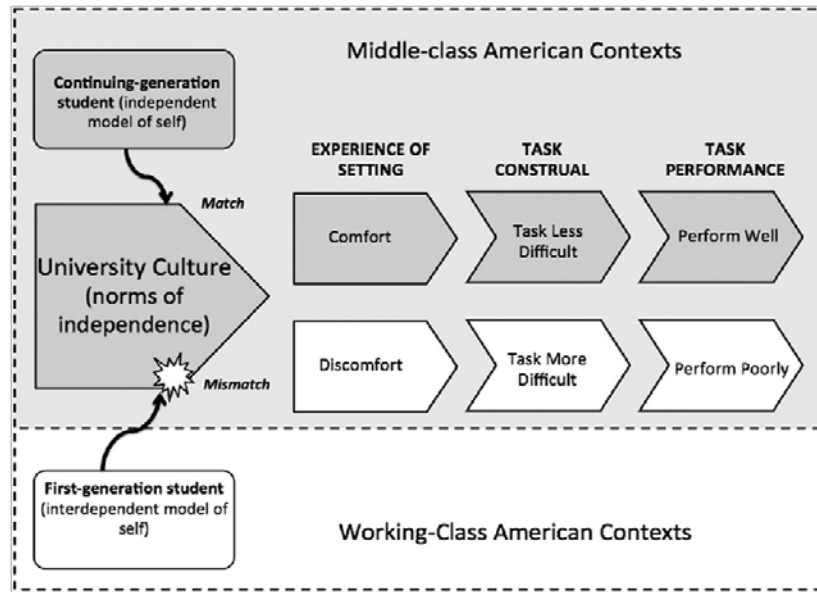


Figure 1. Cultural mismatch theory. Model of the divergent pathways through which a match or mismatch between institutional cultural norms and students' norms can bolster or undermine academic performance.

The insights from cultural mismatch theory would predict that in a program like PES that is characterized by significant socioeconomic and cultural, and educational diversity that there is likely to be some mismatch between the program's norms, requirements, and support systems and students' norms, needs, and expectations. More specifically, the experience of PES Program staff suggests that majority students from more privileged economic backgrounds do not see the PES program as aligned with their social norms and personal expectations of independence, self-reliance, and freedom within the college experience. In response to this emergent pattern of cultural and program mismatch, the PES program pursued a middle-path that maintained the required first year experience course, but made participation in learning communities and peer assisted learning sessions optional. As well, PES staff decided to reduce the number of required meetings with advisors and peer mentors from two to one time each semester. More broadly, PES staff removed constraints that prevented all PES students from enrolling in math or science courses during their first year of college.

Another significant shift in the PES program was the move toward making service-learning an optional rather than a required dimension of the CLA 2005 course. This decision represented a shift to better align the program with what research indicates are the best practices in service learning in higher education. Over time, it became apparent that requiring students who had no intrinsic desire to do service learning to engage in community based learning did not serve their interests nor the interests of the CSLC or community partners. Moreover, from an equity perspective, PES program staff began to see it as increasingly

problematic to force students with significant employment, family, and/or other cultural obligations to complete the service-learning requirement of the course.

Embodiments of the PES Program:

Student Voices:

- *“The ATS program really helped me look at important issues within the Minneapolis community, as well as the world, in new ways. We dissected racial issues, class issues, poverty, education and much more. The program, as well as the class, helped expose me to different views on life and different cultures. Through talking and discussing these issues in the CLA 1005/2005 class and interacting with different individuals from different places, I feel I have a better understanding of other cultures, ways of life, and other people’s points of view.”*
- *“Coming from a predominantly white high school, the U was a huge multicultural transition for me. Being in the Access to Success Program at the U only paved the way more for transition. Because I was in classes with people where my grade depended on discussion, I made friends that I’d never had the opportunity to make while I was in high school. Though at first, being a white person, I felt as if my placement in the program was a bit skewed; I eventually looked at it as an opportunity to diversify myself.”*
- *“I realized there is a lot more social inequality than I really knew of. After looking at many issues in our community and discussing them, I have begun to take more of a stance on social inequalities and try to stand up for what’s right. I used to not really care and think, ‘If I don’t feel the effects, then it’s not my problem.’ I now understand that social inequalities are problems and issues we need to work through, and instead of taking a ‘closed eye’ approach or ‘looking the other way’, we should face these and deal with them.”*

- *PES student project work (Gao Yang)—Senior project inspired by her digital story in CLA 1005. This print was given to PES Office as a gift from the student prior to her graduation.*



- **PES Students' Digital Story Links:**
 - *Abi's Freshman year:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSHD-vZSPPk&feature=related>
 - *Abi's Open Arms service learning:* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU51k1Mv_cs&feature=related
 - *Fanny Jimbo - Freshman year:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9mgQijjAY&feature=related>
 - *Bradley Tuominen- Duluth, MN -* <http://youtu.be/2rn6-pNz5j4>
 - *Mimosa Le - Brooklyn Park, MN-* <http://youtu.be/xHtAU1i7X-g>

Sustainability: Challenges, Threats, & Opportunities

The PES program has proven to be sustainable due to the ongoing financial investments of the College of Liberal Arts and more recently some supplemental funding from the University's central administration. Support from a committed cadre of professionals in the Office of Admissions, the McNamara Center for Student-Athletes, the SMART Learning Commons, the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence, the Writing Studies Department, and a number of other academic departments and faculty will remain crucial for the sustainability of the PES Program.

The program's sustained effectiveness in terms of retention and graduation rates and student development has in larger measure also been due to (and will remain dependent on) the ability of the program to recruit and retain intellectually sophisticated, culturally competent, and deeply caring staff. Over the first 6 years of the program there has been minimal turnover in staff. The director and assistant director have remained with the program since its inception. The success of the program has also relied heavily on the recruitment of intellectually sophisticated, culturally competent, and deeply caring teaching assistants for the CLA 1005 & CLA 2005 course sequence. Recent cuts in the college's instructional budget have reduced the PES teaching team by 50%. This has led to a significant increase in discussion section size and a drift away from the original program design that recognized the meaning and value of smaller discussion sections for our PES first year experience course. This specific example is a microcosm of how larger college and/or university budgets cuts and/or continued state divestment from public education could undermine the integrity and success of the PES Program.

The biggest dilemma of the program surrounds how it will define and approach "diversity" and "access". As currently constructed, the PES program, although marketed as a program for students from underrepresented backgrounds, also serves a significant number of students from more privileged and affluent backgrounds. And as the University of Minnesota has become a more selective institution, the trajectory of the academic profile of PES students is moving away from the traditional student population served by diversity and access programs such as PES. The broader definition of access and diversity implicit in the PES program is a double-edged sword. The broad diversity of the PES program does create exciting possibilities in relation to classroom and community-based learning. Moreover, as currently constructed, the PES program serves as a corrective to the impersonal dispensary that lower division higher education has become. However, the current approach to admissions into PES appears to diminish the capacity of the University to maximize the potential of one tool to advance the representation and success of students from historically underserved communities. Perhaps the current national legal landscape prevents a more narrow approach. Regardless, the easy way to improve graduation rates is to get rid of the students who might struggle. This is not much of an achievement. One of the central dilemmas facing the PES program and public universities more generally is whether we are going to continue on the path of educating better students, or will we commit to educating more diverse students better.

The Edges of the Project

On the horizon, the PES program would like to implement a couple of more intensive community-based learning experiences that intersect with topics and themes from the first year experience course.

- **Urban Sustainability Tour:** a one-week alternative spring break experience designed to give students the opportunity to explore new visions and models of sustainable urban development grounded in the values of community, sustainability, food security, and environmental justice. Through engagement with and reflection on programs and local leaders working for sustainable community development, the Urban Sustainability Tour aims to provide students with a space and process to gain valuable leadership skills, deepen their understanding of contemporary social justice issues, explore meaningful careers in the non-profit sector, and enhance their capacity for critical and compassionate citizenship. The tour would include visits to Milwaukee, Chicago, and Detroit.
- **May Term Learning Abroad Experience in Ecuador:** This program will be a short-term learning abroad experience designed to foster students' engagement with and understanding of the complex issues of power, privilege, and oppression in an international context. The program would provide students with a space and process to explore modes of advocacy and activism that enhance their capacity to imagine a socially just world, and be a part of creating it.
 - The three-week May term learning abroad program would be hosted by CIMAS in Ecuador. Located in South America, the country is home to a wide range of cultures (indigenous, African Diaspora, and Latino), urban and rural communities, and an extensive variety of natural environments. The country has also demonstrated tremendous global leadership in the areas of interculturality, indigenous rights, and environmental justice. Through educational programs offered by CIMAS students will enhance their understanding of the history, cultures, and politics of Ecuador. At the curricular and site visit level, special attention will be given to intercultural relations, including the emerging indigenous rights and Afro-Ecuadorian civil rights movements. Students will also have the opportunity to examine environmental, public health, and economic development issues.

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