

# **A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE DECISION-MAKING EXPERIENCES TO PARTICIPATE IN HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES**

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High-impact practices in education can have a transformative influence on students' educational growth and personal development; however, research suggests that not all students participate in these educationally purposeful activities. Some institutions have integrated high-impact-practice programs into the curriculum to center these opportunities within the student experience, yet participation varies by student demographic. The present qualitative research study explores the decision-making experiences of 23 former program participants, including a specific focus on barriers, for participating in six high-impact-practice programs.

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The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2007) has identified 10 promising high-impact practices (HIPs) for education, including first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, service learning, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, study abroad and other experiences with diversity, internships, and capstones. Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider (2017) commented on the use of the HIPs since their introduction:

HIPs are now part of the postsecondary lexicon and have earned a place among the most promising approaches to enhancing student success. But such promise carries with it a moral and public obligation: once something seems to promote high-quality learning, completion, and equity, the only acceptable response is adoption – with consistency, fidelity, and reliability. (p. 14)

The success and growth in emphasis on HIPs likely can be attributed to the positive outcomes to which they are tied: (a) persistence and grade-point average, (b) deep methods to learning, (c) higher rates of student and faculty interaction, (d) improved critical thinking, (e) increases in writing skills, (f) greater appreciation for diversity, (g) higher student engagement, and (h) compensatory effects (Finley, 2011; Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015; Kuh, 2008). Most HIPs can have a transformative effect on students' personal and educational growth (Kinzie, 2012). Research has persuasively shown that HIPs improve the quality of a student's experience, learning, retention, and success, particularly for historically underrepresented populations (Kuh, 2008). For example, HIPs are associated with outcomes such as improved graduation rates and narrowed achievement gaps between racial and ethnic groups (Kinzie, 2012; National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2007).

Sadly, HIP participation is inequitable; African-American, Latinx, first generation and transfer students are the least like-

ly to complete such experiences (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, et al., 2017). Finley and McNair (2013) stated that "the evidence that high-impact practices provide distinctive and compelling benefits for multiple groups of students, including those who have been traditionally underserved in higher education, illustrates what might best be referred to as the 'equity effects' of high-impact practices" (p. 19). Finley and McNair (2013) acknowledged that their national dataset is too far removed from the nuances of campus life and policymaking to guide adjustments in particular HIP practice or to inform new efforts. It is imperative, therefore, for faculty and staff practitioners to examine their own equity effects to make evidence-based decisions about how to improve HIPs that strive toward, advance, and support equitable outcomes for all students (Finley & McNair, 2013). Where might campus practitioners begin with this important equity work? With inequitable participation in HIPs to begin with, outcome measures might be a secondary problem.

Scholars have understood that barriers for participation exist within specific types of high-impact practices for underrepresented students. For instance, Cama et al. (2018) discussed the barriers for interning abroad due to the lack of funding, supportive faculty of color, family and institutional support. Perkins (2020) has similar findings utilizing an anti-deficit perspective on study abroad experiences of students of color. Their findings suggest enabling networks of support, specifically the role families play in encouraging students of color to participate, plus emphasizing anticipated gains (Perkins, 2020). Aside from these more recent studies, more efforts are needed to understand barriers as an access and equity concern.

### **Problem Statement**

The current focus on using evidence-based changes to increase student success has motivated campuses to adopt HIP experiences, document their benefits, and implement more effective approaches

to supporting these practices. However, while research has demonstrated that participation benefits all students, not all students partake in HIPs (Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2007). To increase retention, persistence, and student success, institutions can focus on increasing engagement in these educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2008).

The expectancy theory, self-efficacy theory, and motivational theory all suggest that students are predisposed to search for certain kinds of activities during their college experience (Kuh, 1999; Olsen et al., 1998), such as how to spend their time, which, in turn, affects their inside and outside the classroom performance (Bandura, 1982; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). If students are predisposed to participate in high-impact practices, higher education leaders are compelled to form and understand the decision-making process for students who seek out such experiences in more developed, conceptualized ways. Exploring the decision-making experience and barriers for HIP participation is a crucial step in aiding institutions in improving student success and retention.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The present study, part of a larger study examining long-term effects of participation in HIPs, sought to examine the decision-making experience and potential barriers for student participation in a variety of educational HIPs. Specifically, researchers sought to explore predisposition as an access and equity issue impacting persistence and success. The primary research question we sought to answer was “what was your decision-making experience when considering your participation in a high-impact educational practice?” Secondary research objectives included identifying barriers and motivators to participate.

## **Methods**

### **Design**

The present study, focusing on the decision-making experience for participation, followed the basic qualitative research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We utilized an interpretive paradigm in order to understand and examine the decision-making experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, we used a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. This was an appropriate methodology, since the purpose of the study was to describe the meaning of the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Multiple researchers working as a research team utilized a collaborative framework to examine multiple HIP programs at one institution. Research team members included program administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals.

### **Sample**

The sample was alumni of HIP experiences from six different HIP programs. These programs represented 4 of the 10 types of HIP defined by Kuh (2008) and were all from the same large public research institution. The HIP programs were selected largely out of convenience and all HIP programs maintained thorough and accessible alumni lists. Table 1 presents the names of the programs included in the study, their abbreviations, type of HIP, and a brief description.

From these six programs, the researchers used key informants, or “gatekeepers,” to help develop a master list of program alumni to interview. The researchers employed a purposive sampling method until they reached data saturation (23 respondents). Because of the larger study’s focus on long-term impacts of HIPs, all participants identified completing their program between 1 and 21 years prior. Additional criteria for the purposive sample varied by the type of HIP. For instance, study abroad programs diversified their purposive sample by location of study and duration abroad.

Table 1  
*HIP Program Descriptions*

Program Name	Abbreviation	HIP Type	Description
Agriculture Policy Internship Program	APIP	Internships and Field Experiences	A semester-long internship for undergraduate and graduate students within the College of Agriculture. Extensive application, selection, and training process before internship semester.
Agriculture Study Abroad Programs	ASAP	Diversity/Study Abroad/Global Learning	Students within the College of Agriculture apply for and participate in independent, faculty-led internships or exchange programs abroad. All range in length, academic requirements, and location.
Leadership Learning Community	LLC	Learning Communities	A living-learning program for freshman focused on leadership. A one-hour course each semester along with retreat and other cocurricular elements.
Living and Interning Abroad Program	LIAP	Diversity/Study Abroad/Global Learning	A structured international service, fellowship, or internship abroad. Onsite orientation and support <u>is</u> also provided for students who participate.
Policy Internship Program	PIP	Internships and Field Experiences	A semester-long internship for undergraduate and graduate students from all majors. Extensive application, selection, and training process before internship semester.
Undergraduate Research Scholars	URS	Undergraduate Research	Upperclassmen who choose to participate in research through a year-long experience with a faculty member. Additional support is optional through seminars and courses.

For undergraduate research, participants were included from both science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and humanities projects. All programs worked to include a diverse sample based on major, gender, race, first-generation status, and time-out-of-program as known to the program gatekeepers. A rank-ordered list of alumni by each program gatekeeper was returned to the research team, along with their contact information, which was used to invite participants to the study via email.

### Data Collection

A *Qualtrics* webform allowed respondents to provide consent, create a pseudonym, and complete a demographic questionnaire; it also contained the interview questions, allowing respondents to reflect or prepare responses prior to the interview. Five researchers collected interview data, with each assigned to a program (not their own) to give respondents the ability to comment freely on their program participation. All interviews were conducted with an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocol (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) that was adopted by the research team. Interview

questions were “What attracted you to participate in the program?” “Describe any hesitations or barriers for your participation in the program,” and “What would you say most influenced your decision to participate?” Each interview lasted between 16 and 42 minutes, with a total of 23 interviews completed.

### Participants

Table 2 provides information on the 23 participants, including the respondent’s pseudonym, HIP program, current age, race, gender, first-generation status, time to degree, time out of HIP program, and other demographic information. Demographic information mirrored demographics identified by Kuh (2008) and the NSSE

(2007). For first-generation status, participants were asked to respond to a yes-or-no question once shown the definition of “first generation” – TAMU considers first generation to be when neither parent nor guardian graduated from a four-year college.” Socioeconomic status was collected from participant responses to the survey question, “During your time at TAMU, how would you describe your socioeconomic status?” Finally, self-reported time to degree was obtained using the question, “How long did it take you to graduate from Texas A&M University?” One pseudonym was changed by the research team to protect participant anonymity. Additionally, while not a criterion for study participation and not included in the table, all respondents graduated from

Table 2

#### *Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Program	Age	Employment	Race	Gender	Education	Socioeconomic Status	First Generation	Transfer	Time to Degree	Time Out
Sue	APIP		Self-employed, incorporated	White	Female	Doctorate	Lower middle class	No	No	On time	20
Nash	LLC	24	Government	White	Female	Master’s	Upper middle class	No	No	On time	6
Bryan	APIP	28	Private, not-for-profit	White	Male	Master’s	Lower middle class	No	No	Late	6
BAJ	APIP	42	Private, for-profit	White	Male	Master’s	Upper class	No	No	Late	20
Vivian	LLC	28	Self-employed, incorporated	White	Female	Bachelor’s	Upper middle class	No	No	On time	3
Laura	APIP	39	Self-employed, not incorporated	White	Female	Professional	Upper middle class	No	No	On time	12
Rex	APIP	38	Private, not-for-profit	White	Male	Master’s	Upper middle class	No	No	Ahead of schedule	17

Pseudonym	Program	Age	Employment	Race	Gender	Education	Socioeconomic Status	First Generation	Transfer	Time to Degree	Time Out
Bryan	APIP		Private, for-profit	White	Male	Bachelor's	Upper middle class	No	No	On time	1
Ginger	LIAP	62	Government	White	Female	Doctorate	Lower middle class	No	No	On time	12
Joy	LIAP	41	Private, for-profit	White	Female	Master's	Lower middle class	No	No	On time	21
Cat	APIP	35	Private, for-profit	White	Female	Doctorate	Upper middle class	No	No	On time	14
Michelle	URS	28	Private, not-for-profit	White	Female	Bachelor's	Working class	Yes	Yes	Late	1
Smith	URS	24	Not employed	Asian, Asian American	Male	Bachelor's	Upper middle class	No	No	Ahead of schedule	1
Lisa	URS	26	Self-employed, incorporated	Latino/a, Hispanic	Female	Graduate	Lower middle class	No	No	Ahead of schedule	1
Robert	PIP	25	Not currently employed	White	Male	Bachelor's	Lower middle class	No	No	Ahead of schedule	3

(continued)

the university. All participant information was self-reported. Of the respondents, the majority participated in internships (52%;  $n = 12$ ), followed by study abroad experiences (26%;  $n = 6$ ). Respondents were overwhelmingly White (83%;  $n = 19$ ), which was expected given the institution's student demographics. In terms of gender, 13 respondents were female (57%) and 10 identified as male (43%). The range of time out of the program was 1 to 21 years, with the average being approximately 8 years removed from the HIP experience. Finally, one respondent was upper class, two identified as working class (8%,  $n = 2$ ), and the majority identified themselves as members

of the middle class (87%,  $n = 20$ ).

### Data Analysis

All interviews were conducted via phone and later were transcribed using digital audio-recording by members of the research team. An open-coding analysis was used to determine emerging themes and patterns based on participant reflections (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Data themes and categories were interpreted by the research team through triangulation and consensus-building (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Each unit (idea) was initially listed without placement into categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Tacit knowledge was employed in making

Pseudonym	Program	Age	Employment	Race	Gender	Education	Socioeconomic Status	First Generation	Transfer	Time to Degree	Time Out
Mark	PIP	27	Private, not-for-profit	White	Male	Bachelor's	Upper middle class	Yes	No	Late	8
Elizabeth	PIP	23	Private, not-for-profit	White	Female	Bachelor's	Upper middle class	Yes	No	Ahead of schedule	2
Ari	PIP	27	Private, not-for-profit	Latino/a, Hispanic	Female	Master's	Lower middle class	No	No	Late	5
Leslie	PIP	37	Private, not-for-profit	White	Female	Master's	Upper middle class	Yes	No	Late	15
Alexandre Dumas	ASAP	28	Private, for-profit	Latino/a, Hispanic	Male	Bachelor's	Lower middle class	Yes	No	Late	1
Jake P.	ASAP	24	Private, for-profit	White	Male	Master's	Working class	No	No	Ahead of schedule	4
Matt	ASAP	25	Private, for-profit	White	Male	Bachelor's	Upper middle class	No	No	On time	4
Robert Wilson	ASAP	32	Government	White	Male	Master's	Lower middle class	No	No	Late	1

initial judgments for categorization (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided techniques for establishing rigor and trustworthiness for qualitative research. Trustworthiness relates to the degree of confidence that the findings of the study represent the voice of the participants and their context (Dooley, 2007). Credibility in this study was achieved with two rounds of peer debriefing. The research team met once when each member had conducted at least one interview. Emerging themes were discussed. The team met a second time to review all transcripts and form the final categories. To ensure transferability, the researchers reported the findings using quotes from the participants. Data were also trace-

able to the original sources using an audit trail for dependability and confirmation (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

### Limitations

A few limitations are of note. First, respondents in this study were limited to those who ultimately participated in a HIP program, so findings are biased to hesitations and barriers that were ultimately overcome by program participants. There may be factors in the decision-making experience before program participation that only students who ultimately did not participate may be able to speak to. This concern may be addressed via future research. Additionally, the time out of the HIP program for

participants ranged from one to 21 years. Thus, the memory of participants who have been out of the program for considerable time may not be as reliable or specific. When asked particular questions, some participants shared they do not recall or remember specifics. The research team assumed participants who provided responses to a question were accurate and therefore warranted inclusion in analysis.

### Findings

The research team reviewed transcripts, first independently and then collectively, to determine major themes of the decision-making experience: (a) *awareness*: respondents recounted how they became aware of their HIP program, with many citing individuals who informed or encouraged them to apply/participate; (b) *interest*: respondents provided insights into their interest in the program, ranging from opportunities to work toward/explore college or career goals, a way to connect with like-minded people on campus, and an opportunity to distinguish themselves academically and professionally; (c) *hesitations*: respondents discussed barriers to participation, with finances and academics being subthemes.

### Awareness

The decision-making experience findings ranged from students having no initial awareness of the HIP programs to intentionally seeking out the program as part of their college experience for personal or professional development. For example, when asked what attracted her to an undergraduate research program, Alaina said, "Being made aware of it in the first place. I was not aware of it." Most prominently, researchers found that, among the interviewees, a network of people played an important role in directly encouraging their participation in HIP experiences. Network connections included pre-existing relationships such as family members and faculty, as well as newly formed relationships such as classmates. In fact, 57% (n = 12) of the respondents

cited a person or people who helped encouraged their HIP participation.

This awareness through encouragement was both direct and indirect. For example, respondents recalled direct encouragement from parents who understood the benefits of participating in HIPs, or an aunt who had traveled extensively and volunteered to pay for the student's study abroad, or friends who were participating and encouraged them to go along. Nash reported that she chose to participate in a learning community because both her parents worked in higher education and encouraged participation in such an experience. "They explained that I would go in with a certain amount of people that I would be taking classes with, live in the same hall, and would make the transition to college less intimidating." And, Lisa, an alumna of an undergraduate research program said, "I saw it as a chance to do something a little more . . . to take it to the next level," adding that it was her professor who "pushed me a little bit further" to do research.

Indirect encouragement came in the form of such things as meeting a friend of a friend who participated in a program previously and talked highly of the experience or hearing about the program(s) at an event or on-campus resource table. For example, referring to the internship program in which she participated, Cat said, "Friends on campus had participated in the past and talked about it," making her "less afraid of the opportunity." Similarly, Bryan, who also participated in an internship program, said that he had seen advertisements for the program on campus, but it was only after he talked to a friend's sister about her participation in the same program that it "seemed like a viable option."

Other students were made aware of the HIP experiences in this study because they were built into degree programs; thus, participation could count academically toward graduation. "They were required courses. That was the best reason, and really a good reason, to go," said Jake about a study

abroad program, who also reported that he was able to double major and graduate on time. Similarly, Matt said he chose to study abroad because “I had a friend who was going on the trip and also the fact that I could get some credit toward my degree program.” Lastly, respondents also voluntarily disclosed how they first heard of the program(s), citing traditional marketing and recruitment methods such as mailings, postings on bulletin boards, and class presentations.

### Interest

As was reported in the awareness section of this paper, some students unintentionally came across the HIP experiences, but most ultimately connected participation to a driving interest. Respondents viewed participation in the program(s) as a way to connect with a group, see different areas of the country and world, gain professional skills, or distinguish themselves.

Nash said about a learning community, “I wanted to be very intentional about my time at TAMU” and liked that two of the required courses were also part of her major. Another learning community participant also reported liking the idea of being surrounded by students with similar interests. Smith, referring to his undergraduate research experience, said that the program:

. . . stood out to me because the students seemed excellent. I wanted something like that. Students were achieving and not just getting by. I wanted this to be part of my story that helped me stand out. There was nothing else to me that quite compared to that.

Rex shared similar sentiments when he recalled the competitiveness and prestige of the program as an aspect that interested him.

Respondents who saw participation in the programs as a “means to an end” often cited that participating in these HIPs would help them reach specific goals in or beyond college. Ginger (study abroad program) recalled, “One of my goals was to go to Aus-

tralia,” while Joy said of an international awareness program:

I think I had always been attracted to the idea of learning more about the world than the world I had been exposed to date, which had been relatively narrow, and I knew this would give me an opportunity to do that.

She also reported that she was most attracted to her international experience because she liked that it met a personal goal and was facilitated by a university program. An undergraduate researcher, Lisa, said she was attracted to the experience because “it was something I had to give my best effort in.” She went on to elaborate on the joys of having true ownership of something:

And, this is silly because it makes it sound like I did not put my best foot forward in my classes—I did—but this was *my* project. It was something that not everyone had the chance to do. It was my baby; it was my project.

Career goals were a frequently cited reason for participating in HIPs. Students wanted to explore career opportunities, gain skills that could be applied toward future employment, or add something meaningful to their resume. Will, an intern program participant, said that he was looking for “programs and experience that related to the job market” in which he was interested in finding a career. Alexandre said of a study abroad program: “I wasn’t really sure what I was going to do with my career. I knew I liked my major, but I wasn’t sure what I was going to do in the field because it was so broad.” Elizabeth remarked that she participated to:

. . . see if it was something I was really interested in. I already knew I wanted to do some type of communications, but did not know a certain industry or a particular field . . . That was the main reason [for participation]. I knew my skillset but [was searching for] a particular field or industry to apply them.

Mark, who participated in an internship program, said he was interested in partaking in

"work that I thought was well aligned with my passions and talents." Lastly, Alaina said she participated in undergraduate research because "it was an opportunity to see if this was something I wanted to do before I took the plunge into 2.5 years of doing research."

As shared, a motivating interest was an underlying element for many HIP participants. These motivations included a desire to affiliate with like-minded students, grow their professional experiences, or align with their personal and professional passions.

### Hesitations

When asked about specific barriers to participation, participants ranged in response. Some respondents cited having no barriers to participation, such as Vivian, who said of a learning community, "I don't remember having any hesitations," and Smith, who remembered, "No, I didn't [have any hesitations]. It was something I was very excited about." Some, like Elizabeth (internship program), were driven by diversifying university experiences and thus their résumés. Elizabeth stated, "I don't know if I really had any [hesitations]." In fact, she said that "just because she had previously completed a study abroad," she wanted another experience "outside of the state" because employers would see her as a stronger candidate. "On a résumé, an experience outside my city and country [would tell employers] that you are more willing to try new things," she said.

However, others cited finances, lack of confidence, lack of parental approval, academics, and uncertainty as barriers to participation in their HIP program. For example, on confidence, Joy (international awareness program) recalled thinking, "Oh my gosh, what am I doing?" And Alaina (undergraduate research) said, "Um, to take on something like this as well was a little intimidating . . . I was not the traditional undergraduate student. I went to school full-time, worked part-time, and had two kids." She recounted, however, that "my initial fears were worked out with the awesome

support of the professor I ended up working with." Ari (internship program) was intimidated by the application/selection process, having stated, "I was really nervous about the interview and application process. It was more intense than anything I had ever done before."

When it came to people as a barrier, only family was cited; university faculty and staff were never mentioned as a barrier. This point is best demonstrated through Joy's recount of her initial conversations with her family about studying abroad: "I would say one of the main barriers was ignorance. No one in my family had a passport other than my grandfather's sister." In fact, the concept of going abroad was so foreign to Joy's family that she said they looked at her strangely when she told them about the opportunity and asked, "How do you even do that?" Similarly, Mark (Internship program) said, "I think the biggest barrier was parental approval," whom he reported "thought the internship was a waste of time—a pointless experience." Facing the hurdle of parents not supportive of a HIP experience, Mark said he believed it was a "worthwhile experience" and had to "commit myself to whatever I needed to overcome," which ultimately included working several jobs to pay for the experience himself.

Students were concerned about academics and time to graduation. Sue, an internship program participant, said she had a "reservation about being gone the fall of my senior year." Nash said, "The big reason I decided to participate was because two of the courses were required as part of my major, and I wanted to be intentional about my time [in college]."

The most prominent and pervasive perceived barrier across many of the programs was financial burden and considerations. Of respondents, 62% (n =13) cited cost as an issue. "Quite frankly, the only barrier that really comes to mind was the cost," said Will, who participated in an internship immediately following graduation. "So really, having to figure out if I could budget everything

coming straight out of college.” And Robert (study abroad) said that he did not have a barrier from an academic standpoint but did from a “monetary support standpoint.” Interestingly, some respondents recognized and mentioned that cost could have been an issue, even if their family could afford it. Overall, there was a definite recognition of financial (or perceived financial) barriers.

### Discussion

Our findings extend the current literature by providing an in-depth examination of equity effects within an individual institution (aka research site) context, which was a recommendation made by Finley and McNair (2013). Our study uniquely examined barriers across multiple high-impact programs rather than limiting participants to one program type. Many scholars investigating high-impact practices limit inclusion criteria to one program (Chama et al., 2018; Perkins, 2020) and thereby limit the transferability of the findings to other HIP program types. Our sample also targeted participants who were 2-30 years post-HIP experience rather than students currently in a program or only tracking their experiences through graduation. This provides new insight to the field, revealing that some barriers persisted across multiple generations of students. Furthermore, while it is known that HIPs offer benefits to student success during their time in college (Kilgo et al., 2014) and well beyond (Henderson, 2017), we ultimately uncovered themes of barriers that are shared among students from different races and socio-economic backgrounds. This demonstrates HIP programs continue to struggle with access and equity issues for students of various social identities.

Study respondents explained how they became aware of their HIP program, with many citing individuals who informed them of the opportunity or encouraged/discouraged them to apply/participate. This theme echoes existing findings and recommendations from Perkins (2020) who advises us to “adopt strategies that acknowledge and

leverage students’ networks, including family.” In fact, she found that family was the most impactful subcategory of network enablers, noting that faculty and administrators played a minor role in student decision making processes. Our study reinforces this complexity, finding that families may sometimes discourage students from participation, leaving them to identify social and financial support resources on their own. This leaves us with the question, how do we better engage or social networks to support student participation and completion in HIPs?

Relating to the theme of interest, respondents provided insights into their interest in the program, ranging from opportunities to work toward/explore college or career goals, a way to connect with like-minded people on campus, and an opportunity to distinguish themselves academically and professionally. Our findings mirror that of Perkins (2020) who identifies a similar theme as anticipated gains, including skill development, network expansion, experiential expansion, and cultural knowledge expansion. Therefore, both study findings underscore HIP program administrators articulation of the larger WIIFM—What’s In It For Me? worth ratio (Baker et al., 2007). Finally, in our theme of hesitation, respondents discussed barriers to participation, with finances and academics being subthemes that amplified and reinforced previous findings. For instance, Kuh, (2017) writes “the sobering reality, however, is that participation in HIPs remains inequitable, with first generation, transfer students, and African-American and Latino students least likely to participate” (p. 12). While our study included predominantly white participants, access and equity issues are prevalent for white students and may pose more of a hesitation or barrier for historically underrepresented students. This may be even more prevalent around financial access. Kuh (2017) continues and identified three substantial obstacles for HIPs including money, stating “high-impact practices are costlier to imple-

ment compared to the typical credit hour. In other words, engaged, personalized learning cannot compete with the large lecture in terms of instructional cost" (p. 13). Other scholars echo finances as a significant barrier (Chama, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2009; Salisbury et al., 2011; Vernon et al., 2017). In conclusion, some types of HIPs cost money that students cannot always easily come up with.

### **Implications**

Several implications can be drawn from the present study's findings of awareness, interest, and hesitations. The first implication for practice is to better articulate a worth ratio for students to participate in HIP programs; next is ensuring that HIP programs aid in fulfillment of academic degree requirements; and last is making concerted marketing efforts to overcome program stereotypes. Additionally, and to conclude, recommendations for future research are outlined.

### **Implications for Practice**

First, articulating a worth ratio that emphasizes immediate and future benefits may aid students in their HIP program decision-making experience. As a reminder, respondents in this study were limited to those who ultimately participated in a HIP program, so findings are biased to hesitations and barriers that were ultimately overcome. The researchers' open-coding analysis led to the emergence of a theme of awareness. Respondents mentioned people who influenced their decisions to participate in a HIP program, which aided in their awareness of the program. Noticeably within the transcripts, on-campus individuals were always referred to as positively encouraging the experience, while family off the campus would sometimes encourage and other times discourage participation. Ultimately, however, even when students were discouraged, they seemed determined to find a way to participate, understanding an ultimate benefit, perhaps because they

knew the university was backing the experience. For example, throughout interviews, respondents often used language that focused on futuristic benefits when describing what they wanted to get out of the experience, such as "worthwhile," "great opportunity," "career," "network," and "experience." The risk of obtaining these benefits seemed to outweigh the concerns that caused hesitations. Overall, considering how to best represent the worth ratio to prospective HIP program participants could be fruitful to ensuring meaningful interest and access for students. Additionally, when considering this in relation to first-generation college students, it becomes clear that these students may need to convince their family units to support HIP participation.

Second, ensuring that HIP programs aid in fulfilling academic degree requirements is critical. As expressed by study participants, a prominent hesitation and barrier was uncertainty with how the HIP experiences met degree requirements. Participants were concerned with delaying graduation or not receiving credit, and therefore scholarships, to participate. HIP administrators and higher-education leaders are therefore charged to better link HIP experiences as required or strongly encouraged within the degree plan. Many institutions require study abroad (Hulstrand, 2012; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2005) and/or internships (Burnsed, 2010; Chickering & Gamson, 1987) as a component of the degree. For those programs without such requirements, academic advisors might list HIP experiences on proposed degree-plan course worksheets or might encourage students to participate in on-campus HIP experiences such as undergraduate research or learning communities. Additionally, higher-education institutions might consider developing more on-campus HIP experiences such as internships. This would allow students to gain meaningful, discipline-based experiences as interns on campus. These experiences could be structured to be more demanding than traditional student-worker positions, but might also

alleviate student concerns for finances when considering HIP opportunities.

Ultimately, findings from this research study can be helpful for university faculty, HIP program administrators, and student affairs professionals. Awareness of barriers to participation can be used to enhance recruitment efforts and target various student populations based on perceptions of HIP experiences. For example, knowing that an undergraduate research program can sometimes be perceived as too prestigious can prompt program administrators to frame their recruitment efforts in a way that is not so elitist. Or for programs that are costly due to time away from campus, program administrators can find ways to reduce costs or help students identify additional funding sources. Program administrators might choose to develop a robust area of their website dedicated to budgeting, personal fundraising, and other strategies to supplement funding. Higher education professionals and development officers may use student anecdotes, such as comments previously shared by Will and Robert, to frame development initiatives focusing on increasing access to HIPs. For instance, student affairs offices commonly have development officers embedded or connected to the division, which could be key in increasing financial access to these deep learning experiences. Knowing that students are perhaps skeptical of leaving campus or partaking in a program outside of their normal college plans, higher-education practitioners can tailor their programs to reduce these barriers. Further findings from this study (not discussed in this paper) revealed that once these students were admitted to or participated in their HIP program, they were satisfied with the experience. While it may prove difficult for higher-education practitioners to completely control the actual HIP experience, they can control and shape efforts to eliminate barriers during the decision experience and provide opportunities for more students to participate.

## Implications for Research

Following, implications for future research are outlined. As stated, a limitation for the present study is that participants ultimately completed a HIP program. A similar study might be replicated with students who apply for and accept a program, but later decide to not participate. Another rich sample within which to explore the decision-making experiences might be for graduating undergraduate students who did not participate in any HIP during their undergraduate experience. Additionally, the present study sample was predominately white and therefore warrants replication with a more diverse sample of Students of Color (Nuñez, 2017). The over representation of white students' in HIP scholarship remains problematic for understanding and addressing inequity in HIP participation (Sweat et al., 2013). Finally, the present study only explored four HIP types (i.e., internships, undergraduate research, study abroad, and learning communities), leaving opportunity for decision-making experiences to be further explored for capstones, freshman seminars, and others.

Overall, the present studies' findings of awareness, interest, and hesitations make an important contribution to higher education's understanding of educational HIPs. Exploring the decision-making experience for HIP participation serves as valuable insight into the larger access, equity, and retention literature on how such practices have proved beneficial for college students from many backgrounds (Kuh, 2008; Leskes & Miller, 2006).

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