

Student Voices on Perspective-Taking & Self-Authorship

The charge of the work group was to conduct student interviews and focus groups on perspective-taking and self-authorship. The work group identified experiences across the Division of Student Life in which we believed students were deepening their capacity for perspective-taking and self-authorship. Fifteen focus groups/interviews were conducted with 12 different student groups/students.

- Alternative Spring Break program (ASB)
- Cricket Club
- Health Ninjas
- Lifetime Leisure Studies
- Native American Student Association
- Student Disability Organization
- Student Government
- UCS Eating Disorder Awareness Advocate Program (EDAAP)
- UCS Student Advisory Board
- University of Iowa Democrats
- WRAC Girls Group
- WRACtivists

Perspective-Taking

When students were asked how they have engaged in perspective-taking while participating in these various programs, four themes emerged. These experiences provided them opportunities to:

- Reflect on their own perspective including challenging their current perspective and reflecting on how it affects their interactions
- Interact with diverse individuals and groups
- Learn about other perspectives including hearing the stories and experiences of others
- Reflect on or consider others' experiences

I feel like I always want to consider others' points of view (as a result of this experience). When I tweeted messages, I worked hard to consider how the messages might be received, given how sensitive body image issues can be.

-EDAAP focus group

Students mentioned a variety of ways they grew and developed as a result of these experiences. These experiences taught students about:

- Finding a connection with others (we are more similar than different)
- Considering others' stories or points of view (increased empathy)

- Recognizing own biases and working not to judge others
- Learning from mistakes
- Communicating with respect (including conflict resolution skills)

And increased their confidence in sharing their own perspective.

When we talk about multiculturalism we always talk about how people are different from us, but we often fail to recognize how similar people are to us. It is much easier to go into a situation with someone from a different background with an open-mind and just be yourself.

-ASB focus group

Students were also asked what other experiences and areas provided them with the opportunity to engage in perspective-taking. Students listed:

- On campus jobs
- Fraternity and Sorority Life
- Dance Marathon
- Residence halls
- Student Government
- Center for Diversity and Enrichment
- Class

Self-Authorship

When students were asked how they have engaged in self-authorship while participating in these various programs, seven themes emerged. These experiences provided them opportunities to:

- Become empowered including increasing their overall confidence and learning that what they can add has value
- Gain awareness of their own values/beliefs/identity
- Interact with diverse individuals and groups which included both challenging and validating beliefs
- Learn from mistakes
- Define themselves
- Reflect on the alignment of values and actions
- Reflect on their future

Everyone needs a basic understanding of self in order to respect others.

-WRAC Girls Group focus group

These seven themes were closely tied to how students said they grew and developed as a result of engaging in self-authorship. Additionally, students mentioned:

- Growing and becoming confident in their own voice (and decisions)

[I] possess the leadership qualities to achieve results and influence others.

-Cricket Club focus group

- Importance of reflecting on or considering others' experiences (increased empathy)
- Respecting others (including respectful communication)

Students were also asked what other experiences and areas provided them with the opportunity to engage in self-authorship. Students listed:

- On campus and off campus jobs
 - Fraternity and Sorority Life
 - Dance Marathon
 - Student Government
 - Iowa N.E.W. Leadership
 - Alternative Spring Break program
 - Student organizations
 - Bridge program
 - Iowa Edge
 - Class
 - Volunteering
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Conclusions and Considerations

Though these experiences were targeted specifically by the work group as intact groups where we believed students were deepening their capacity for perspective-taking and self-authorship, students shared a richer story about how they have engaged in perspective-taking and self-authorship.

These student focus groups and interviews provided evidence that students are growing and developing in the ways we think they are as a result of our programs and services. Experiences that support and help students engage in perspective-taking and self-authorship are happening across all departments within the Division of Student Life.

Students connected easily with the idea of perspective-taking but struggled to understand the concept of self-authorship. This highlights a few important strategies we could be using to support students. We must help students make the connection. As a part of our programs and services we can make it clear to students that these experiences will provide them an opportunity to engage in perspective-taking and self-authorship and further explain what that means.

Students also mentioned a few ways that these experiences supported their engagement in perspective-taking and self-authorship

- The opportunity to share their own perspective including values/beliefs
- The opportunity for reflection (particularly formalized)
- The opportunity to interact with diverse individuals

- The support provided in a group setting

By integrating these aspects into our programs and services we strengthen experiences where students are already engaging in perspective-taking and self-authorship and provide needed structure to those experiences where we believe it should be happening.

I volunteer a lot but don't really think about it. I've never had the opportunity to formally reflect on volunteering and how it changes me. I've brought back [from this experience] the ability to be aware of what is happening to me and how I have changed.

-ASB focus group

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