

## **Transformational Learning Experiences**

**Conducted on** the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2011

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### **Moderators:**

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The focus group sessions were conducted to **a)** explore the Transformational Learning Experiences Truman students undergo while in Truman. **b)** to find out the reasons why some students do not participate in any Truman-identified Transformational Experiences including identify any obstacles that prevent them from participating and **c)**to find out what Truman as a university can do to encourage more students to participate in these learning experiences.

## II

The focus group was conducted on the February 24th, 2011. This study was conducted in two sessions with four groups in each session. There were two facilitators and one note taker for each group. However the second facilitator took notes too. The first session began at 1:30 and the second session at 3:00 pm. Each lasted for an hour with an average of 4 subjects in a group. The participants were juniors and seniors who were randomly selected by credit hour and asked to sign up for times that were convenient for them.

## III

### **1. When you think of transformational learning, what comes to mind?**

Students had various ideas as to what they would call a transformative learning experience. Some were close to the Truman working definition but others shed light on other areas that could be considered as Transformative Learning experiences.

- An experience that can be reflected upon. That is “before and after”...you remember how you thought before and realize afterwards you have a completely different view.
- A transformative Learning experience is one that changes your viewpoint on an issue that you hadn't thought of before engaging in the experience.
- An experience that changes the way you approach the world, how you view yourself, and how you see things and handle situations
- An experience that solidifies what you know and gives it more purpose
- An experience that allows you to apply what you learn in class .
- Rather than solidifying what you already know, the experience gets you to think in a completely different way and changes the way you act or feel about things.

- It's definitely an out of classroom, hands-on experiences, including internships, study abroad, as well as out-of classroom one-on-one time with professors, ex. professor spending time with student to aid student learning.
- Experiencing new environments
- Breaking preconceived notions
- Employs different methods of learning

A student summed it up as:

- Quote: "It's ( a TLE) being given a chance to be an adult."

2. What about your own Transformational experiences since coming to Truman?

- **Did you have experiences like this?**
- **Which were most transformational?**
- **What about your experiences made them transformational?**

Most participants said internships were the most transformational experiences they had undertaken. Internships were described as very transformational by students because it gave them a practical way to use or apply their class room knowledge.

Study abroad was another experience some participants found transformative. Some said the experience wasn't necessarily beneficial in the academic sense. However, it was an opportunity to enrich their cultural perspectives on issues. Study Abroad also helped students view life through a different lens. Some other students went on research programs in foreign countries (example: Panama) which qualifies as both a study abroad and research opportunity.

Furthermore, service learning and intensive volunteer work allows students to shape their perspective on life, and allows students to gain hands on experiences in fields they would like to venture into.

Conferences were also named along with the previously mentioned Transformative learning experiences. Students said conferences gave them opportunity to interact with people in the professions they would want to pursue and gave them a chance to network. The conferences created an opportunity to interact with practitioners and learn about what has brought them to where they are in their profession.

3. If you have participated in any Transformational Experiences, what made you decide to?

- **How did you learn about/decide to/etc.?**

Most students said they found information on their own especially if it was not a course requirement to graduate. Those that heard the information from professors had a personal relationship with them and had encouragement from the professors to take part in the learning experiences.

- **How did you overcome barriers that you encountered?**

For credit-bearing internships, students overcame financial barriers by participating in internships in Kirksville. Those that faced the problem of time overcame it by working hard to fit in the Transformative Learning experience or by planning ahead. Planning for experiences such as study abroad needed to be done very early. Students suggested that the best time to fit experiences in is before the end of the sophomore year. After that, the schedule gets too structured.

Some experiences don't fit with others time-wise, one example including the time it takes to get into a leadership position, usually not before the sophomore year is over, which was also agreed to be the best time for a study abroad experience

- The freshman orientation week for chemistry is big on getting people involved, showing what opportunities are available in research, organizations and tutoring. However, freshman orientation for undeclared majors isn't very helpful at showing opportunities, with everyone being on such different pages. One student missed out on the opportunity to learn more about her major, declaring late and missing her specific freshman orientation.

Some students believe "professors really want to interact with students, which is a great thing about Truman. They recognize interest in students and try to help them pursue that."

3. If you haven't participated in any TE's, did you want to?

- **What barriers did you encounter?**

A major problem for most students has been the structure of most courses and their requirements. An example given was that in the Chemistry department, the time to try anything (Transformative Learning Experience) is before the end of sophomore year. Time was another factor that prevented most people from partaking in any Transformative learning experiences. A part of the students agreed that summers are used to get jobs to help pay college bills.

The study abroad office was said to be unhelpful in helping students plan for study abroad. Students advised other students to be determined in their planning and process their application independently.

Money was another major factor that hindered a lot of students. Some students have already spread themselves thin on loans.

Also, some students thought deciding what organization or activity to join during the Activities fair can be overwhelming since there are being bombarded with so much information at once.

4. What could Truman do to make these experiences accessible to more students?

**What can Truman do to help students' experiences become even more transformational even without participating in the known TLE'S?**

Students suggested that the University make funds available for student-authored publications. They felt that students would be encouraged to do more if they know that there are people interested in helping them develop projects. Others agreed that making more money available for transformative learning experiences in general would be very helpful, since money was one of the biggest obstacles that prevented people from participating in Transformative Learning experiences.

A suggestion was made to have a resource or website where commentary or advice would be available for those taking part in internships where a Truman student had previously interned.

Kirksville-based internships were suggested as a way of cutting down cost of the internship especially when the internship is for credit. Kirksville internships are also more accessible.

Internships should become a graduation requirement for all majors. The requirement will serve as a motivation to students to look for internships.

Classes should have guest speakers during the semester. Workshops would be another way to make learning experiences more transformational.

The JINS courses should be improved to help students gain a lot from the experience and improve their writing skills.

5. What is important for Truman to know about these experiences?

- Promotion of these experiences and their importance especially to students who live off-campus since they seem to be at a disadvantage when it comes to dissemination of information.
- Bring more challenging experiences to the students.
- Providing a list of professors that have certain research interests to the students, so students can approach the professors themselves.
- Change the perception of freshmen: “I don’t need to know this now, I have so much time”