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Inclusive Teaching Practice: Identity Prism

Alison Sloat
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Teaching Practice

After attending the 2019 UNLV Educational Equity Institute, a group of us (Jarret Keene, Rosan Mitola, Maria Banda Roberts, and I) developed the Identity Prism activity (Figure 1) to increase students' sense of belonging and inclusion on campus. On the first day of Fall 2019 classes, all SCI 101 first-year students:

- Completed a visual prism that incorporated six aspects of themselves including their college major, academic goal, strength, life outside of UNLV, identity, and anxiety or fear about college (Figure 2);
- Shared one aspect of their identity with a peer; and
- Found one common aspect with their peer.

The combined class response data was shared with students in the next class session (Figure 3). On the last day of class, students revisited the activity to analyze changes.

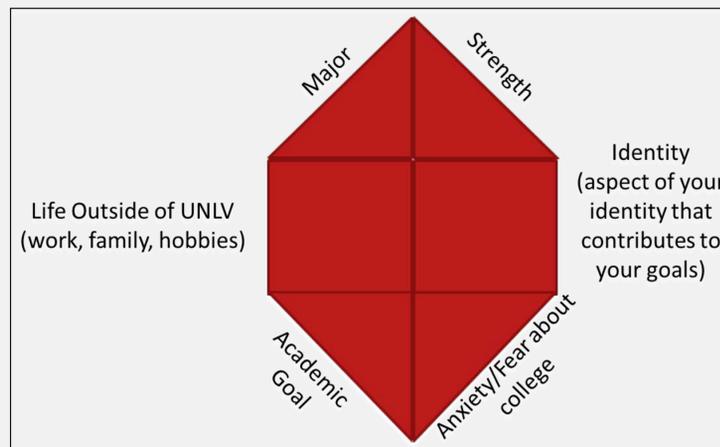


Figure 1. Identity Prism activity template for students.

Needs it Addresses

An increased sense of belonging is directly tied to higher retention rates in STEM fields, especially among minority (Lisberg & Woods, 2016) and First Generation students (Graham et al., 2013). After students shared their anxieties with each other and the group, they reported that they felt less anxious and alone because they realized their peers felt similarly and/or they found someone with a similar background. This activity helped build a sense of community and belonging on campus by connecting students with each other through their fears, goals, and backgrounds. It also allowed me to better identify student needs from the first day of class so that I could address them throughout the semester.

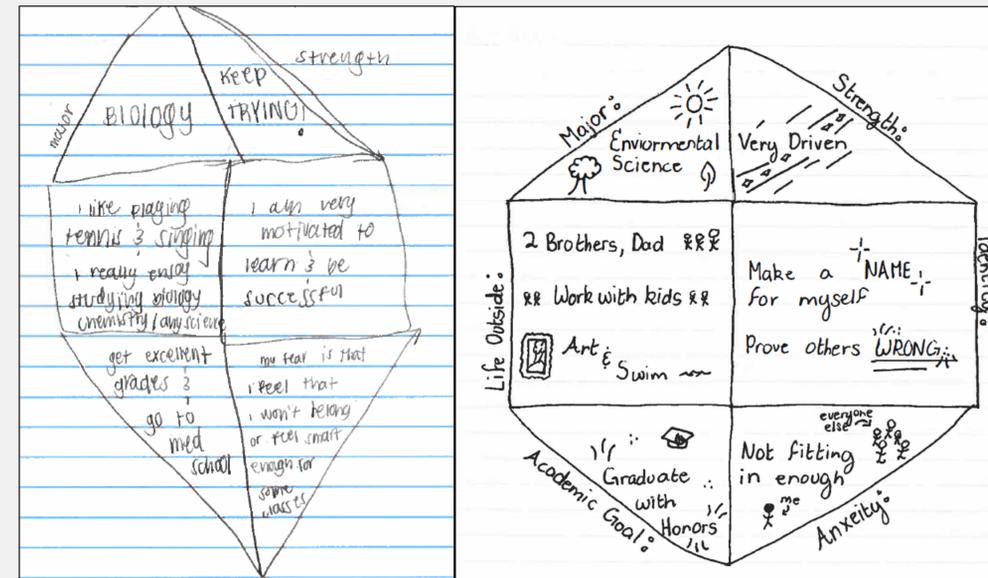


Figure 2. Example Identity Prisms created by SCI 101 students on the first day of class.

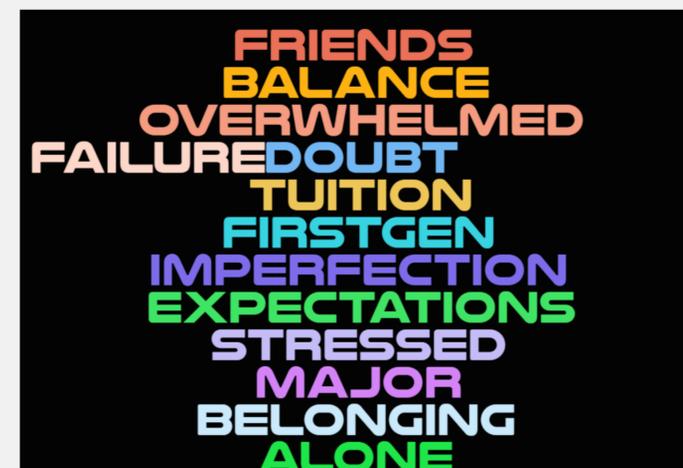


Figure 3. Common student responses when asked about their anxieties or fears about college. These results were shared with students on the second day of class.

Student responses on the last day of class:

“This whole section has changed because I eventually fit in perfectly fine and made great friends. I also don’t have that fear of not feeling smart enough in my classes because I am doing really well. I surround myself with people I am able to learn more from and who help me improve.”

“The only thing that has changed is that I’m not afraid of failing classes because I already am.”

“My new goal is to grow as a person, and my new fear would be that I fall into a loop of bad habits, that ultimately inhibit me from reaching my full potential.”

Figure 4. On the last day of class, students analyzed their Identity Prisms, writing about how they had changed over the course of a semester.

Evidence it Benefits Students

- 66% of students reported feeling anxious about failing, not belonging, and being first generation students (Figure 3).
- 34% felt anxious about choosing the wrong major, paying for tuition, and balancing school and work (Figure 3).
- Combined with other inclusive practices including think-pair-share, low-stakes quizzes, and incorporating more structure throughout the course, this activity helped boost the retention of students throughout the semester to 99%.
- The percent of failing students decreased by 4% compared to the previous fall semester, thus improving overall first-year retention rates in the course and college.

Resources

- The Chronicle of Higher Education provides practical and easy to incorporate inclusive teaching practices (https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190719_inclusive_teaching).
- Materials developed during the 2019 UNLV Educational Equity Institute will be available online by Fall 2020 on the Faculty Development website.
- UNLV Faculty Fellows offer workshops throughout the academic year on inclusive teaching practices and teaching tips (<https://www.unlv.edu/facultycenter/events>).

How You Can Adopt This Practice

Inclusive practices ranging from the Identity Prism activity to low-stakes quizzes to think-pair-share, even in large lecture classes, can be incorporated without major modifications to your course structure. These small changes can impact the inclusive culture in each classroom and at UNLV.

References

- Graham, M.J., Frederick, J., Byars-Winston, A., Hunter, A.B., and Handelsman, J. (2013). Increasing persistence of college students in STEM. *Science*, 341 (6153), 1455-1456. doi:10.1126/science.1240487
- Lisberg, A., and Woods, B. (2018). Mentorship, mindset and learning strategies: An integrative approach to increasing underrepresented minority student retention in a STEM undergraduate program. *Journal of STEM Education*, 19 (3), 14-20.