Article

A Model for Engaging Students, Faculty, and Communities in Social Action through a Community-Based Curriculum and Admissions Process—A Case Study of the Honors Living-Learning Community at Rutgers University—Newark

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Abstract: The Honors Living-Learning Community (HLLC) at Rutgers University–Newark (RU-N) pushes the boundaries of academia's possibilities by placing community-engaged scholarship as a critical pillar of student success. Established in 2015, the HLLC is pursuing its triumvirate rallying call—"revolutionizing honors, cultivating talent, and engaging communities". The HLLC brings together dynamic students passionate about social justice issues, Rutgers University-Newark faculty and staff, and community partners aiming to tackle some of the nation's most urgent social issues. Pivoting on a curriculum structured around what it means to be a local citizen in a global world, the HLLC brings students and faculty members from every school and college at Rutgers-Newark together with community-based partners to operationalize authentic experiential learning. With its emphasis on social action and issues of inequality, the HLLC brings together the academic sphere and community-based organizations to design and implement projects and courses that promote social justice in the community and enact ameliorative changes based on shared passions and mutual interests. Through a multimodal approach grounded in literature and best practices, the HLLC is built intentionally from the ground up on high-impact practices for student success and the principles of full participation. This paper highlights the HLLC's efforts to engage students and community members through community-engaged courses and programs to address issues such as inequity. Furthermore, the authors offer a model that actively moves beyond theory to practice-based initiatives within an honor's academic context. Examples of the HLLC's initiatives are presented to enhance the discourse around collective knowledge building and community-engaged research by highlighting student and community partner-led initiatives. Given the HLLC's resolve to develop a national model, the paper dedicates special attention to pedagogy and programs.

Keywords: Community Engaged Scholarship; University and Community Partnerships; Holistic Admissions; high impact practices; honors; Curriculum and Pedagogy Design; anchor institution

1. Introduction

In 1766, Queen's College, a private institution collaborating with the Dutch Reformed Church, was established. Queen's College was renamed Rutgers College in 1825 after philanthropist Colonel Henry Rutgers (Our Revolutionary Roots n.d.). Rutgers is one of the tenth oldest institutions of higher learning in the United States of America. In 1864, New Jersey offered a land grant to expand the institution, but not until 1956 was Rutgers established as the State University of New Jersey. Rutgers University has four campuses throughout the state of New Jersey: Rutgers University-Newark (RU-N), located

in Newark; Rutgers University–Camden, located in Camden; Rutgers University-New Brunswick, located in New Brunswick and Piscataway; and the Rutgers Biomedical and Health Science School (RBHS), with locations in Newark and New Brunswick. Each of these four campuses operates independently, under the supervision of a chancellor, themselves under the President of Rutgers University (Our Revolutionary Roots n.d.).

Rutgers University–Newark (RU-N), according to its mission statement, "is a remarkably diverse, urban, public research university that is not just in Newark but of Newark—an anchor institution of our home city" (An Anchor Institution | Rutgers University—Newark n.d.). As an anchor institution, RU-N is committed to the City of Newark's social foundation and economic engine and its surrounding areas, as well as exploring bold innovations that set new expectations for students from Greater Newark—and across urban America—to thrive in college. This double serving mission places RU-N's resources and commitment to knowledge building within the City of Newark. Furthermore, it also ensures that RU-N actively engages with, cultivates, and, more importantly, learns from the local talent–students and community members. This weaving of resources, knowledge building, and engagement manifests through public, private, and nonprofit sector partnerships that strategically leverage RU-N's publicly engaged scholarship and civic-oriented interests through our anchor institution work. One signature manifestation of this commitment is the Honors Living-Learning Community (HLLC). According to Austin (1986), honors programs are hosted at a variety of different sorts of postsecondary institutions. In general, honors education refers to "all of the ways in which a college or institution strives to accommodate the educational demands of its most gifted and motivated students" (Austin 1986, p. 5). The goals of honors programs are typically to identify and select highly capable students, and then to challenge those students academically and to allow them to exercise their potential. The institutional goals for establishing honors programs often include recruiting and maintaining students and staff by demonstrating a "commitment to excellent education," garnering funding, and "improving the institution's public image as a center of great study" (Austin 1986, p. 7). Not surprisingly, there are several sorts of honors programs, many of which are adapted to the institutions at which they are offered.

Piloted in 2015 through the Social Justice Learning Community (SJLC), the HLLC's first cohort of 30 scholars was enrolled. After a successful pilot year, the HLLC was launched in September 2016 as an honors initiative. Designed to challenge traditional frameworks "honors" and merit, the HLLC broadens pathways to college for promising talent and seeks to provide opportunity and prosperity for all, including those which systems of inequality have systematically disenfranchised. (About HLLC | Living Learning Community of Rutgers Newark n.d.). As a signature initiative focusing on identifying the change agents of tomorrow, the HLLC designed a robust and inclusive admissions process and an innovative curriculum focused on "Local Citizenship in a Global World".

The authors embarked on this endeavour because of the need to strengthen the evidentiary base about the impact of HLLC since its pilot in 2015. The HLLC leadership. along with a Fulbright Visiting Scholar, employed a case study analysis to address the following research question: how do the HLLC's (1) admissions process, (2) curriculum, and (3) community-based partnerships promote critical publicly engaged scholarship?

2. Materials and Methods

This section offers frameworks upon which HLLC draws to address critical conscious knowledge creation. We understand there to be a direct benefit to communities by levering university resources to nurture emerging change agents through a curriculum that promotes social justice. The HLLC model maintains that a collaborative learning opportunity arises when local scholars presenting their local communities are enrolled in higher learning institutions. Both local scholars and higher learning institutions gain empirical knowledge from each other, while at the same time channeling that knowledge back to the local community through its scholars' participatory actions and social justice initiatives. This

section offers three frameworks to enhance community engagement: high-impact practices, asset-based approaches, and non-cognitive skills development.

2.1. High Impact Practices for Student Success

According to The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2007) and Kuh (2008), there is an evidentiary base for educational activities classified as high-impact practices (HIPs). These learning activities include learning communities, undergraduate research, study abroad, and service-learning. Moreover, these educational activities create a conducive environment for active learning to enhance performance based on anticipated outcomes. When these activities are planned and executed correctly, these practices can ensure that scholars discover and make links when confronted with local, national, and global issues. Unsurprisingly, Brownell and Swaner (2009) argue that HIP practices "live up to their name", observing a wide range of benefits for participants.

An evidentiary base suggests that HIPs may positively impact scholars' individual development and educational growth. Empirical evidence supports the notion that HIPs can enhance the quality of scholars' experience, learning, retention, and success, particularly for underserved scholars (Kuh 2008). HIPs are associated with improved graduation rates and narrowed achievement gaps between racial-ethnic groups. Moreover, Huber (2010) finds that HIPs have modest positive effects on final Grade Point Average (GPA) and timely graduation results varied by racial-ethnic and socioeconomic background. HIP participation has differentially positive effects on the GPAs of both Latina/o respondents and Pell grant recipients.

Opportunities such as first-year orientations or retreats, international studies, and internships have become more available across a range of bachelor's-granting private and public institutions of higher learning, including extensive research institutions of higher learning and small private colleges. Many scholars participate in HIPs engaged with the community, with 48 percent of scholars participating in service-learning. While research shows that all scholars benefit from participating in HIPs, not all scholars participate equally. In addition, Latino and African American scholars participate in internships less frequently than white scholars. Given the benefits of HIPs, disparities in participation are a reason for concern. Institutions of higher learning that aim for educational equity and social justice support HIP investments that increase participation among diverse student groups. (Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore 2014). Institutions of higher learning should put strategies in place to ensure that all scholars, irrespective of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background, can equally benefit.

Research suggests that Learning Communities are a HIP that can add significant value to the undergraduate experience. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (High-Impact Practices n.d.) states that the primary aims of learning communities are to promote cross-course integration and to engage students in "big topics" that extend beyond the classroom. These one-of-a-kind communities are inspired by the work of John Dewey (1938) and Alexander Meiklejohn (1938). Learning communities have flourished on college campuses around the nation since their start as an interdisciplinary collaborative experience. To add more value to learning communities, over the last 25 years, higher education institutions have dramatically expanded learning communities into living-learning communities (LLC) (Arensdorf and Naylor-Tincknell 2016).

According to The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2007), LLCs are one of ten "high impact best practices" that result in a variety of good student development outcomes and are extensively adopted throughout the country's campuses (Taylor et al. 2003). LLCs are made up of students who share a residence hall floor and have a common interest or major. Learning communities are intentionally structured around academic and co-curricular components to aid students in establishing a sense of community early in their college experiences and fostering meaningful connections with teachers and other students (Gabelnick et al. 1990). Additionally, there are numerous types of learning communities at institutions of higher education; however, each learning community shares

certain characteristics, such as shared learning in small groups, specific learning objectives, meaningful connections between teachers and students, and integrated learning (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Shapiro and Levine 1999). Additionally, by offering a more holistic experience for students, LLCs have been shown to increase not just retention and degree completion, but also student learning, faculty engagement, and student participation both inside and outside the classroom (Astin 1993; Tinto 1987; Tinto et al. 1994).

2.2. Asset-Based Approaches

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) developed asset-based community development in their pioneering work Building Communities from Within. The phrase "from within" refers to the idea that community members should take the initiative to build their communities to benefit all. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) criticize attempts to create social change driven by outsiders, as well as the traditional perception that communities should develop based on needs and shortages in the community.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) further argue that these models believe that structures present in these communities promote their marginalization. To ensure that communities are not marginalized and avoid injustices (Smith 2012), community-engaged scholarships should be grounded through an understanding that a community holds assets (Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore 2014). Furthermore, Gordon da Cruz (2017) adds that diverse community members can contribute unique assets based on their racial, cultural, and ethnic experiences in the community. When building a community profile, it is essential to acknowledge the existing assets and understand the relationships between various assets. These relationships may stem from standard skill sets, personal and professional relationships, similar goals, and economic and social connections. The work of Freire (1970) and Viola (2014) underlines the importance of supporting justice through the inclusion of knowledgeable people who have experienced marginalization in society. Furthermore, Freire (1970) explains how awareness can emerge when marginalized community members collaborate, surfacing the suppressing structural forces.

Gordon da Cruz (2017) states that many institutions of higher learning and community members involved in community-engaged scholarship are silent on the issues of justice, inequality, critical consciousness, or the underlying causes of social issues impacting communities. The silence on these issues may contribute to the power structures that can lead to the unequal distribution of resources in the community. Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore (2014) argue that when higher learning institutions wish to engage in service and community-based learning, it should be clearly stated in their mission. Only then will faculty and students be persuaded to contribute on and off-campus. Moreover, faculty should incorporate community-based learning into class content across all disciplines and the appropriate pedagogical approaches to offer these courses. These practices, in tandem with an asset-based approach, can prepare students for community-based learning and yield several benefits. These benefits can lead to a stronger connection to and personal investment in the local community and a greater understanding of communities. Furthermore, the understanding and connections to communities can equip students with the necessary skills to contribute to future community work. Besides, National Survey of Student Engagement (2011) argues that elements of asset-based community development provide a solid foundation for future utilization of community-based learning in academic courses, in line with best practices for service and community-based learning.

Eyler and Giles (1999) observe that community-based pedagogies provide opportunities for personal growth among students, enhance GPA, and are associated with developing critical thinking skills. Service-learning also appears to enhance students' perception of their sense of social responsibility. Likewise, Battistoni et al. (2009) state that if students are involved in various volunteer opportunities in their communities, institutions of higher learning connect students to global movements in ways that better civil society. In addition, Murphy and Rash (2008) argue that students grapple with how social issues may threaten their communities through service-learning courses. These challenges imposed

on communities by social problems cannot be ignored because they impact all community members. Towards remedy, service-learning can provide students with a greater understanding of being a fully involved, autonomous citizen (Cone 2003; Schamber and Mahoney 2008). However, as mentioned earlier, service and community-based learning benefit from integrating these pedagogies into the classroom.

Indeed, many service-learning communities have raised concerns that this pedagogical tool can have the adverse effect of supporting unchecked privilege and inequality. Students may interpret their service-learning experiences as providing or giving assistance to those in need. This interpretation may then preserve or spread the belief that a community is vulnerable or powerless, especially when the service experience overlooks the community's resources (Mitchell 2008; Peterson 2009). Furthermore, this service-learning model may separate higher learning institutions from their community instead of aligning them as part of the community. These problems underpin the power dynamics between community partners and the academy, creating separation and hierarchy. To eliminate these concerns about exchange and authority in service-learning, students need to experience a learning process that accounts for employing their class-based skills in new ways (Cone 2003; Simmons 2010). Students have to move the conversation around community-based learning from discussing the offering of service to exploring the learning during this experience. Therefore, students' formative and shared service-learning experiences must fit into the course's conversations and assessment activities surrounding skill development.

Asset-based approaches may be employed to achieve this goal by employing elements of asset-based community development in a series of initial activities to offer classes to students for service learning. Offering students straightforward methods for participating in community work is one of the principles of good practice (National Society for Experiential Education 2013).

Canvasing as a strategy can ensure that students do not overlook existing resources in the community (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Canvasing is essential in asset-based activities because it critiques the philosophy that a community depends on external sources for success and growth, thereby expanding student awareness of the resources within their communities. Students are better prepared for future service-learning experiences because they do not perceive the community as needing people. The students identify and better understand the community and, as a result, are more able to deconstruct issues of inequality, dominant/subordinate groups, and the lack of trade-off often linked to service-learning. As is the case in canvasing, creating a visual map aids students' understanding of the relationship between the institution of higher learning and the broader social system of which both the students and the institution are members. These lessons of the foundational material and canvasing may lay the groundwork for future work in the broader community by prompting students to understand both connections and gaps between community members and institutions of higher learning in general.

2.3. Non-Cognitive Development

During the past few decades, cheap and low-skilled labor has provided many developing countries and communities with an advantage. This added advantage enjoyed by developing countries in the past may be something of the past due to movement to automation (Kattan 2017).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era of automatization demands highly skilled workers to work alongside emerging technologies. Education research at international, national, and local school levels pays increasing attention to the value of so-called non-cognitive skills, sometimes referred to as socio-emotional skills. Due to changes in economies and labor market needs coupled with automation, there is a shift in the demand for these skills. For many countries and communities, the question is how their education systems can more successfully strengthen the development of non-cognitive skills.

Kattan (2017) further states that these non-cognitive skills can provide future employees with flexible skills to develop and continually adapt to the 4IR. Non-cognitive skills

include a range of abilities such as meticulousness, perseverance, and teamwork. These non-cognitive skills form a critical piece of employees' skill sets, which comprise cognitive, non-cognitive, and job-specific skills. One model, Positive Education, creates a conducive environment that supports care and trust. Centrally to this approach is a "double helix" view of success that links well-being with a focus on academic excellence. The benefits to individuals and communities of including non-cognitive skills are increasingly evident. Empirical evidence argues that these skills should be developed early amongst students (Kattan 2017).

Gordon da Cruz (2017) offers a model for developing these skills to build critically conscious knowledge through community-university partnerships research. This partnerships research can dismantle the structural barriers that lead to the marginalization of community members. Furthermore, critical consciousness building among students can enhance the understating and recognition of communities' social and ethical norms. With this awareness, students and community members can collaborate and support each other to ensure that community resources are effectively and efficiently utilized to benefit all. Institutions of higher learning should incorporate these skills in their curricula and pedagogical frameworks to ensure that their output, the future students, fully grasp these skills to the benefit of their communities, national and internationally.

2.4. Methods

This article employs secondary research. Furthermore, the article employs existing qualitative data from the HLLC website, course catalog, and student assessments of the program. The authors used a critical case study approach to investigate the HLLC's claims about its admissions process, curriculum, and community-based relationships connected to critically engaged scholarship. The three themes, namely admissions, curriculum, and community-based partnership, identified and guided the analysis of program assessments by the students. Peer-reviewed journals and books were examined to guide the different frameworks and explore how these frameworks apply and contribute to the HLLC curriculum's attempts to address social justice issues in communities.

This research design involves organizing, collating, and analyzing the data samples toward defensible research conclusions. The article looked firstly at the frameworks as secondary data sets to serve as a benchmark to evaluate the HLLC curriculum to determine the extent to which the program promotes social justice in communities. The data from the HLLC was accessed from the RU-N website, the HLLC website, and a graduation survey maintained by the HLLC.

3. Results

An overwhelming number of knowledgeable, critically-thinking, academically promising people face significant impediments to higher education. The HLLC is committed to removing barriers that limit college enrollment for the vast, growing, diverse talent pool in this nation and cultivating this talent to address local and global issues. No one is more qualified to assist in resolving these critical societal challenges than students who have firsthand experience with their consequences. As a result of their experiences in their communities, these students bring various insights, making them essential contributors to the institutions of higher learning and their respective communities. The HLLC engages students in critical community-engaged scholarship in a variety of ways, including through its admissions process, curriculum, and community partnerships. In return these initiatives foster a sense of belonging and social justice awareness within HLLC scholars.

3.1. Admissions

Designed for the HLLC by Marta Esquilin, Associate Dean-HLLC, and grounded in asset and community-building theories and best practices, the HLLC takes a novel approach to admissions compared to most university honors programs. The HLLC defines "honors" differently, focusing on student potential that blunt instruments such as the Scholastic

Assessment Test (SAT) results cannot measure. HLLC uses in-person and group interviews to assess how potential students use multiple intelligences in collaborative problem-solving. This method reveals who students are, their talents, and what they can contribute to an exceptionally diverse and challenging learning environment such as Rutgers University–Newark. Aligning with RU-N's anchor mission, this approach has allowed the HLLC to expand its talent pool and enroll a significant amount of Newark and Greater Newark students, averaging at least fifty percent in every admitted cohort.

HLLC scholars, comprised of high school graduates, transfer students from community colleges, returning and older students, and veterans, to name a few, live and learn together at RU-N. These students represent intergenerational networks across all intersections of identity and focus on cultivating knowledge, fostering understanding across and within groups, and activating positive social, institutional, and cultural change. Brought together through an innovative curriculum focused on "Local Citizenship in a Global World" that recognizes a diverse range of abilities, skills, and knowledge, the goal of the HLLC is to help students grow into thought leaders in their fields, positive collaborators in their communities, and change agents in our world.

3.2. Curriculum

By centering its innovative curriculum on themes related to "Local Citizenship in a Global World", the HLLC engages a broad base of faculty, staff, students, community partners, and organizations with wide-ranging disciplinary and professional expertise and deeply shared values of social justice advancement. Central to the HLLC's innovative curriculum is interdisciplinarity, engaging all sectors of the University and reflecting its anchor mission. To this end, the HLLC curriculum intentionally attempts to intersect with students' lived experiences and knowledge to approach local challenges that resonate both locally and globally through historical, philosophical, legal, and comparative perspectives (About HLLC | Living Learning Community of Rutgers Newark n.d.). Through its curriculum, the HLLC offers both inter- and transdisciplinary undergraduate courses that engage creative approaches to teaching and learning. By re-imagining the classroom as a space for active and collaborative learning, pedagogical innovations provide many opportunities for creative growth and change. They also allow the re-imagination of the actual classroom space, allowing classes to meet in community settings. As such, pedagogical innovations include but are not limited to:

- Promoting ideas with significant potential to enhance teaching effectiveness and facilitate student engagement through ongoing cohort-like meetings each semester.
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration among RU-N faculty, HLLC scholars, and community members through team teaching; partnering faculty members, community leaders, and students as course instructors.
- Promoting creativity through digital tools, visualizations, multimedia, online environments, agile classrooms.
- Enlisting students as active partners in the construction of teaching to promote active learning
- Incorporating publicly engaged scholarship as a means for academic evaluation and collaborative knowledge building

The HLLC offers a shared interdisciplinary 18 credit curriculum that serves as a second concentration minor for all fields of study at RU-N. The HLLC curriculum is developed on themes related to "local citizenship in a global world", and responsible citizenship aims to critically engage scholars in how local and global issues emerge in various fields of study (hllcnewark.rutgers.edu). The curriculum also enables HLLC Scholars to become involved in existing anchor institution collaborations in Newark, allowing them to draw out the local-global connections in publicly-engaged scholarship and education. The curriculum includes three core classes, a combination of HLLC inter-disciplinary elective courses-taught by world re-known faculty from various academic departments, local community leaders, and public scholars, and a capstone experience.

3.2.1. Core-Courses

Local Citizenship in a Global World

As described by the Rutgers University-Newark Courses Catalog (Catalog Navigator: Honors Living-Learning Community 526 n.d.), this intensive semester-long course gives scholars insights into how local citizenship impacts social and institutional change. Scholars engage in readings and assignments highlighting various social justice and community activism throughout the course. Furthermore, the course deals with how local citizenship has impacted social changes in Newark through educational reforms and how social movements impacted Newark's youth citizens. Visiting speakers include local, national, and international organizations who address concerns related to school reform, eminent domain, and environmental racism, to name a few (Catalog Navigator: Honors Living-Learning Community 526 n.d.).

Negotiating Space, Place, and Identities

The course Negotiation Space, Place and Identities offers scholars the opportunity to reflect on their socialization in relationship to others. Through various activities, scholars explore the power dynamics that lead to the marginalization of social groups and the empowerment of others.

Voice, Citizenship, and Community Engagement

This course highlights special projects, university initiatives, and community-based agencies engaging in community development. Through this course, scholars are presented with models of community engagement to emulate in developing their voices, interests, and skills as community-engaged citizens. The course challenges scholars to design and implement a community-based project that contributes to the campus community's greater good, helping them enact changes based on shared passions and interests.

3.2.2. HLLC Electives—Special Topics Courses

Purposely designed as special topics courses instead of standing classes, HLLC elective courses vary from semester to semester. Weaving the HLLC's theme of local citizenship in a global world, elective courses offer the HLLC the flexibility to offer dynamic, innovative, and community-based courses that allow the HLLC to cultivate local talent while engaging communities. The elective courses provide scholars with opportunities for intellectual exploration, advanced techniques in critical analysis, research, fieldwork, and opportunities to co-create knowledge with community-based partners.

3.2.3. Capstone

An experiential experience built on the themes of the HLLC's core courses, the capstone allows scholars to delve deeper into how issues of social inequity can be addressed through their specific academic or professional discipline. Each scholar must complete a capstone project at RU-N, in a local community, or at an international site. Following high-impact practices (High-Impact Practices n.d.), the capstone project can take the following formats: research projects, an intern with local not-for-profits or government agencies or engage in international academic or service-learning projects (About HLLC | Living Learning Community of Rutgers Newark n.d.). Each project targets high-impact, cross-disciplinary community engagement or community-engaged scholarship. Examples of past projects have included: creation and implementation of a mentoring program for high school students, independent projects in partnership with seed grants, contributions to research or policy white papers, and digital art or media advocacy projects (About HLLC | Living Learning Community of Rutgers Newark n.d.).

3.3. Community-Based Partnerships

By leveraging the flexibility of the HLLC elective courses as Special Topics, the HLLC partners with various community-based partners to offer community-based courses. One

of these partners is the Humanities Action Lab (HAL). HAL is an alliance of universities, organizations, and public spaces that cooperate to produce community-curated public humanities projects on urgent social issues (Humanitiesaction-lab n.d.). HAL aims to offer innovative courses that expand the knowledge base of students and community members while serving as an incubator for tangible changes based on shared passions, interests, and knowledge building. The following highlights how the HLLC has partnered with HAL to offer community-based courses and critical publicly engaged scholarship opportunities.

3.3.1. Augmented Reality and Archives: Environmental Justice in the Ironbound

Offered as an elective course towards completing the HLLC Curriculum was an immersive learning experience investigating Newark's Ironbound section history of environmental justice in collaboration with the Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC). The course's grassroots organization and partnership emphasized co-creation and knowledge production inside and outside the classroom. Through interviews with residents and archival research, students conducted a deep dive into the history of this migrant neighborhood to understand how the social and political landscape deeply impacted who experienced environmental injustice and how those communities resisted it. Students explored the neighborhood's toxic vulnerability through interviews and archival research. They learned about citizen-led movements to remediate polluted areas and proactive initiatives such as community gardens and green infrastructure. Ultimately, the students worked with the ICC and served as docents, interpreting the sites of environmental injustice in the ICC's environmental justice tour-augmented reality experiences designed to expand visitors' knowledge of environmental hazards while serving as a tool to mobilize people to become more engaged. Through the course, the students learned best practices for working with and learning from community members and archival research to link historical community knowledge with academic archival knowledge, preserve the legacy of citizen-led movements, and inspire a new generation of environmental, social activists in the region.

3.3.2. Translocal Learning Studio

Offered as a capstone experience to complement the HLLC curriculum and as a core tenet of HAL, the translocal studio "honors the unique circumstances, autonomy, and tools of hyperlocal organizing and supports building reciprocal learning relationships between localities across the world" (Climates of Inequality | Humanities Action Lab n.d.).The studio consisted of six module sessions bringing together undergraduate and graduate students, community organizations, and faculty from HAL's partner universities. These participants engage as teachers and learners to collaboratively experiment with exercises, workshops, readings, media, and other materials that challenge what teaching and practicing justice-centered public history can and should be (Climates of Inequality | Humanities Action Lab n.d.). In addition to participating in the Translocal Learning Studios, scholars also completed one of three project areas to fulfill their capstone requirement:

- Curriculum Development: Scholars conducted focused research on a topic related to environmental justice and environmental racism. Research findings were then utilized to support the development of a curriculum component, including developing reading lists, assignments, discussion questions, and facilitation guides related to environmental justice issues.
- Public Programming Design: Scholars contributed to implementing HAL's summer storytelling session and fall programming focused on environmental justice. Scholars were involved in designing and planning a public event and dialogue sessions for HAL's summer or fall series.
- Research and Communication: This option focused primarily on research and public-facing writing. Scholars wrote 1–2 posts for HAL's Climates of Inequality website. Examples of post topics revolved around current events in partner cities, connecting environmental issues across geographies, connecting local environmental issues to systemic problems, and positioning contemporary issues in a historical context.

In combination with the Translocal Learning Studios, these projects allowed scholars to work primarily with present-day environmental justice issues while gaining experience translating academic and community knowledge for multiple audiences.

3.4. Student Perceptions of the HLLC's Curriculum on Social Justice

This section highlights some of the experiences shared by HLLC scholars on how the HLLC impacted their perceptions of social justice. Yearly, prior to graduation, HLLC scholars submit a reflection on their experiences as HLLC Scholars. These reflections are housed within the HLLC's confidential database, and for confidential purposes, we refer to the HLLC Graduates as "Respondents".

Two of the respondents state, "being surrounded by a group of people who are driven and ambitious towards creating positive change in the world, expanded my views of what is possible to do". Another three respondents claim that their experience through the HLLC "has eliminated biases, empowered [their] identity and purpose and most importantly grew sensitive to connecting to the vast world around [them]". Another response is from the opinion that "I was given the tools needed to tackle injustices that create social barriers limiting the success of many who look like me".

Two respondents claim that the HLLC "allowed me to gain mentorship and grow my knowledge of social justice issues" and "to make a difference". A third respondent added, "HLLC helped me get out of my bubble and become a change agent". Furthermore, another two respondent feels that through the HLLC, they became more "self-aware, using [their] talents and voice[s] to enact change, and developing a deep level of empathy for issues that are not my own". One respondent contends, "through the course load and activities outside of class, it . . . helped refine [their] knowledge on how to be a changemaker in the future", while another respondent asserts that the HLLC is "serious and intentional about creating equitable space for all".

Furthermore, "you come to find it pretty quickly that social problems exist from many perspectives and it is only through extensive and deliberate dialog will we ever get close to addressing these problems". Another respondent describes the HLLC as "a hub of socially active and engaged scholars amongst a community advocating for change", while another respondent added that the "HLLC has led me to engage in my passions for community impact and embody the true meaning of local citizenship in a global world".

4. Discussion

As stated, the Honors Living-Learning Community (HLLC) at Rutgers University–Newark is actively attempting to address head-on the challenges that limit critical and justice-oriented community engagement. As an honors program with a living-learning component, the HLLC lives up to both the requirements of being an honors program (Austin 1986) and a living-learning community as the literature highlights (National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2007)). The HLLC aims to create a more equitable, diverse, and justice-oriented program by centering community engagement and actively seeking students from their partner communities. By recognizing the assets that both students and community partners hold, the HLLC reduces the impact that Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) criticize as attempts to create social change driven by outsiders. The HLLC instead places insiders, students from the community, within the institution of higher education and then facilitates their engagement with the community. In this model, the HLLC serves as a bridge that connects the assets possessed by students from the community, community partners, and institutions to create social changes. The aforementioned aligns with Gordon da Cruz's (2017) statement that diverse community members can contribute unique assets based on their racial, cultural, and ethnic experiences in the community.

Furthermore, Gordon da Cruz (2017) argues that it is essential to acknowledge the existing assets and understand the relationships between various assets. Additionally, Freire (1970) and Viola (2014) underline the importance of supporting justice by including knowledgeable people who have experienced marginalization in society. The HLLC

includes knowledgeable individuals who have experienced marginalization by blending the assets held by students and the community through the courses offered and the HLLC admissions process.

Likewise, by utilizing an assets-based model, the HLLC challenges dominant ideologies related to merit, knowledge building, and community development, actively interrogating the marginalizing structural forces and institutional practices that perpetuate these ideologies. According to Freire (1970), these ideologies can be identified and addressed through universal awareness amongst community members. The HLLC employs an asset-based model via the HLLC's admissions process and course curriculum, creating interdisciplinary learning communities of scholars, students, and community members to build critical conscious community-engaged scholarship, as suggested by Gordon da Cruz (2017).

By engaging in a holistic admission process that assesses a candidates' academic potential and social-emotional intelligence, the HLLC creates opportunities that value academic achievement and a disposition to justice-oriented community engagement. The HLLC recruits students with various skills sets from various communities throughout the entire admissions process. Among the skill sets sought are critical-thinking, social and emotional intelligence, leadership skills, an artistic mindset, a passion for social change, and the ability to engage in challenging dialogue across differences. From a community engagement perspective, the HLLC utilizes a diverse cross-section of faculty, staff, and community partners to assist in evaluating scholars to foster a deep investment in the scholars as community members (Esquilin and Eatman 2019). Once selected, scholars are challenged and encouraged to practice social-emotional skills. Since the HLLC incorporates community engagement into their academic preparation, scholars must possess these skill sets to succeed. HLLC scholars utilize academic and research skills to address issues of inequity in tandem with the skill sets that foster community engagement. As Kattan (2017) calls for, the HLLC seeks and cultivates the academic and non-cognitive skill sets of the HLLC Scholars. The HLLC seeks the cognitive and non-cognitive assets of the HLLC Scholar to bridge academic research and practice with community development work fostering a deeper connection and engagement to social good inside and outside the classroom.

By structuring the curriculum around local and global citizenship, the HLLC brings together scholars and faculty from all the schools and colleges at RU-N and connects them with community-based partners already engaged in justice-oriented work. With an emphasis on social issues of inequality, the HLLC acts as a hub to bring together the academic sphere and community-based organizations to design and implement projects and courses. This collaboration may contribute to social justice in the community and enact changes based on shared passions and mutual interests. As a result, the HLLC attempts to deliver an equitable, interdisciplinary, and transformative curricular experience and promote a conducive environment that can blend Rutgers University–Newark, the community, and scholars. These attempts by the HLLC align with Gordon da Cruz's (2017) suggestions that a curriculum should focus on justice and equality to ensure the equal distribution of university and community resources to the benefit of all.

The HLLC also leverages its curriculum and partnership with community-based organizations to offer HLLC Scholars high-impact learning and practices opportunities. The HLLC expands its admissions pool to include students with high non-cognitive skill sets and academic potential. The HLLC admits students who may not be accepted solely relying on standardized testing and originate from areas that may not offer high-impact learning opportunities. As a result, the HLLC, through its community-engaged curriculum, offers its previously underserved scholars opportunities to engage with high-impact practices that have been proven to retain and graduate students (National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2007); Kuh 2008). Beyond retention and graduation, high-impact practices also facilitate meaningful community-based experiences such as everyday intellectual experiences, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity and global

learning, service learning, and capstone projects. These experiences offer mutual benefits to the HLLC Scholars and community partners. High-impact practices become the medium by which scholars and community-based partners navigate academic learning and create collaborative knowledge. The reflection of the HLLC graduates further highlights how the HLLC impacted the perceptions of HLLC Scholars regarding social justice issues. The HLLC Scholars' reflections clearly show the extent to which the HLLC maintains its vision, namely its commitment to critical community-engaged scholarship through its curriculum and pedagogy.

According to the literature reviewed for this article, the HLLC manages to engage HLLC scholars and community partners through community-engaged courses and programs. The HLLC meets the perspectives' prerequisites to ensure critical community-engaged scholarship through its admissions process and curricular offerings based on the literature presented. However, primary data from HLLC Scholars and Community Partners can offer more insights into how successful the HLLC has been in managing the engagement of scholars and community partners in collaborative knowledge building. The authors of this article may have a different approach to the perspectives offered in the literature; therefore, further research from experts on the perspectives covered in this article and other stakeholders can add value to the extent that the HLLC lives up to its mission. This article was limited to the literature studied. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand on other perspectives and literature to add value to meaningful student community engagement initiatives. Finally, a comparative study of institutions of higher learning which engage in community-engaged courses and programs may add value to this article. Community-engagement programs by institutions of higher learning can ensure that the next generation will not be confronted with the same challenges impacting their communities.

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