

Connecting the Dots: Identifying Particular Challenges which Correlate with a Decreased Likelihood of Student Extra- and Co-Curricular Involvement



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Introduction

Objectives and Significance of Research

Research shows that student involvement correlates positively to higher GPAs, better sense of community, and improved self-esteem, and correlates negatively with stress (Deneui, 2003; Bergen-Cico, Viscomi, 2012; Webber, Krylow, Zhang, 2013). Alexander Astin's research also claims that the more time students invest in activities, the greater level of satisfaction they experience with college overall (Astin, 1986).

However, despite the proven benefits associated with student involvement, there is limited research - specifically at the University of Central Florida (UCF) - concerning why many students are not participating in activities outside of the classroom. The objective of this research is to gain first-hand knowledge from currently enrolled UCF students regarding their levels of co-curricular and extra-curricular involvement. The purpose of this research is to provide a snapshot of the factors that may affect levels of student involvement. This information can be utilized to help organizations and institutions break down the barriers that limit student participation in co- and extra-curricular activities, while also providing insight into how student involvement can be made more accessible to a larger population of students with diverse experiences.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) conducted a small-scale survey for the purpose of assessing high-impact learning across the University of Central Florida curricula. The results of this research are highlighted in the Baseline Study section and were used as a foundation for tools proposed in the What's Next section.

Hypothesis

The investigators hypothesize that aspects of student profiles such as part-time or transfer status, financial need, or online status will correlate to lower levels of co-curricular and extra-curricular involvement.

Key Terms

Co-curricular: Activities, programs, and learning experiences that complement or are an extension of the formal learning experiences in a course; experiences that are connected to or mirror the academic curriculum (Stirling & Kerr, 2015)

Extra-curricular involvement: Activities that may be offered or coordinated by a school, but may not be explicitly connected to academic learning (Baker, 2008)

High-Impact learning: A learning activity that typically demands a considerable amount of time and effort, facilitates learning outside the classroom, requires meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, encourages collaboration with diverse others, and provides frequent and substantive feedback (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2015)

Integrative learning: An understanding and disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus (Association of American Colleges and Universities VALUE Rubric)

Baseline Study

The QEP conducted a 30-question survey of undergraduate students at UCF to gain insight and student perspective for QEP program development. This anonymous survey was administered digitally and with hard copies to a total of 23 courses.

In the survey, students were asked to voluntarily self-report their levels of involvement in campus activities, leadership, and integrative learning, as well as demographic and student information. Data from these surveys were then analyzed to draw conclusions on the patterns and frequency of integrative learning on the UCF campus and apply this knowledge to the development of the programs.

Baseline Study - Visualizations

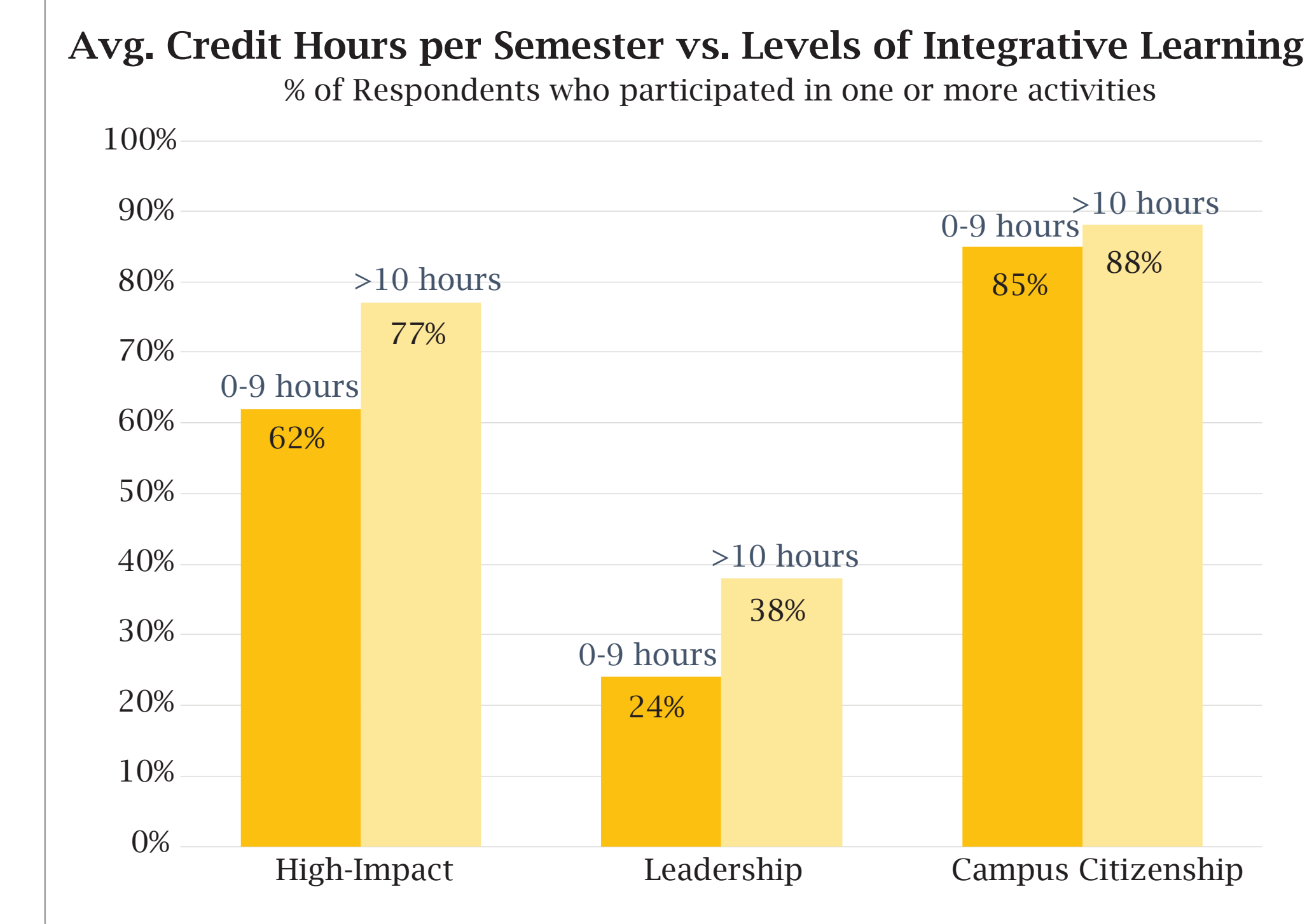
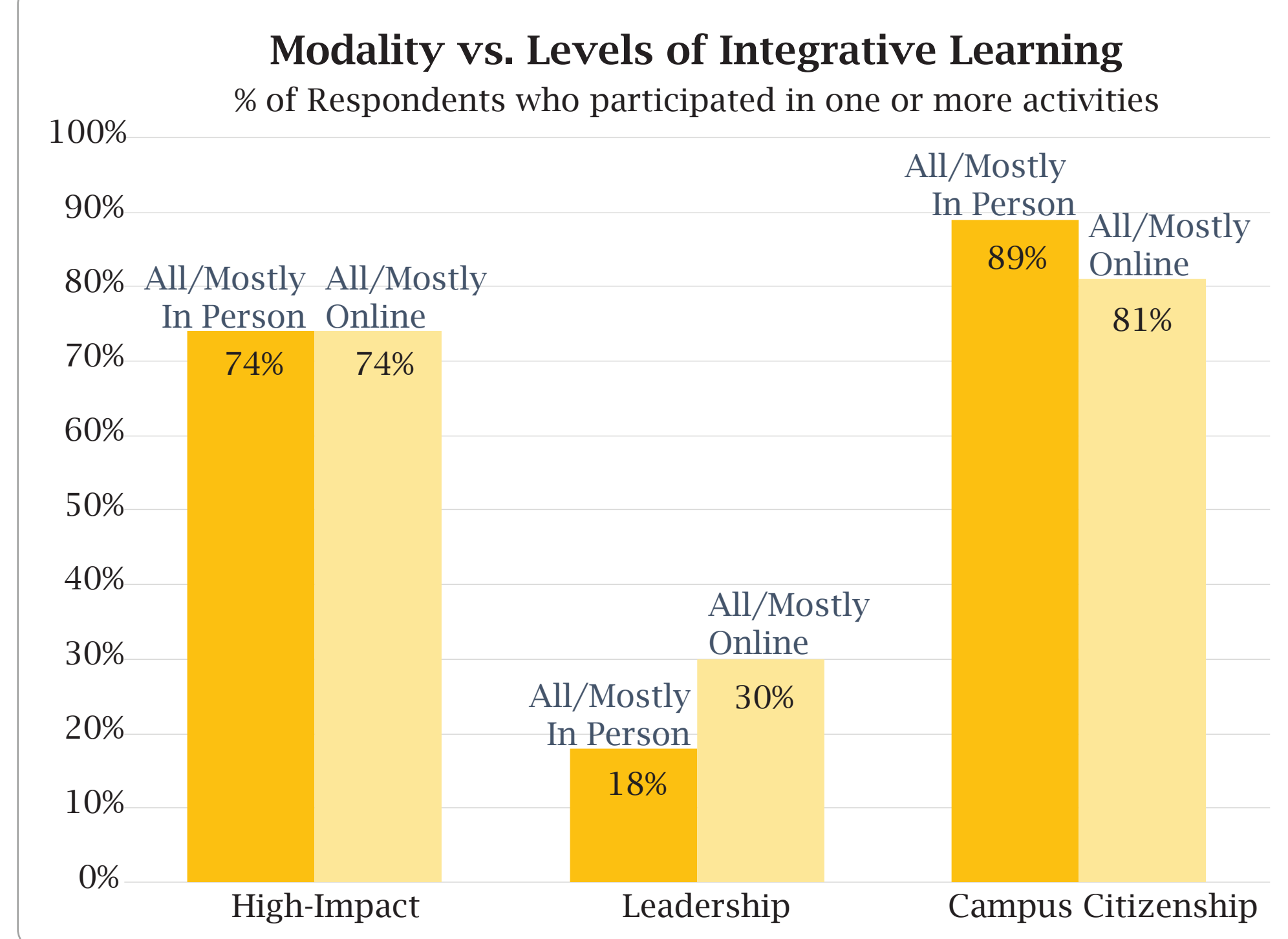
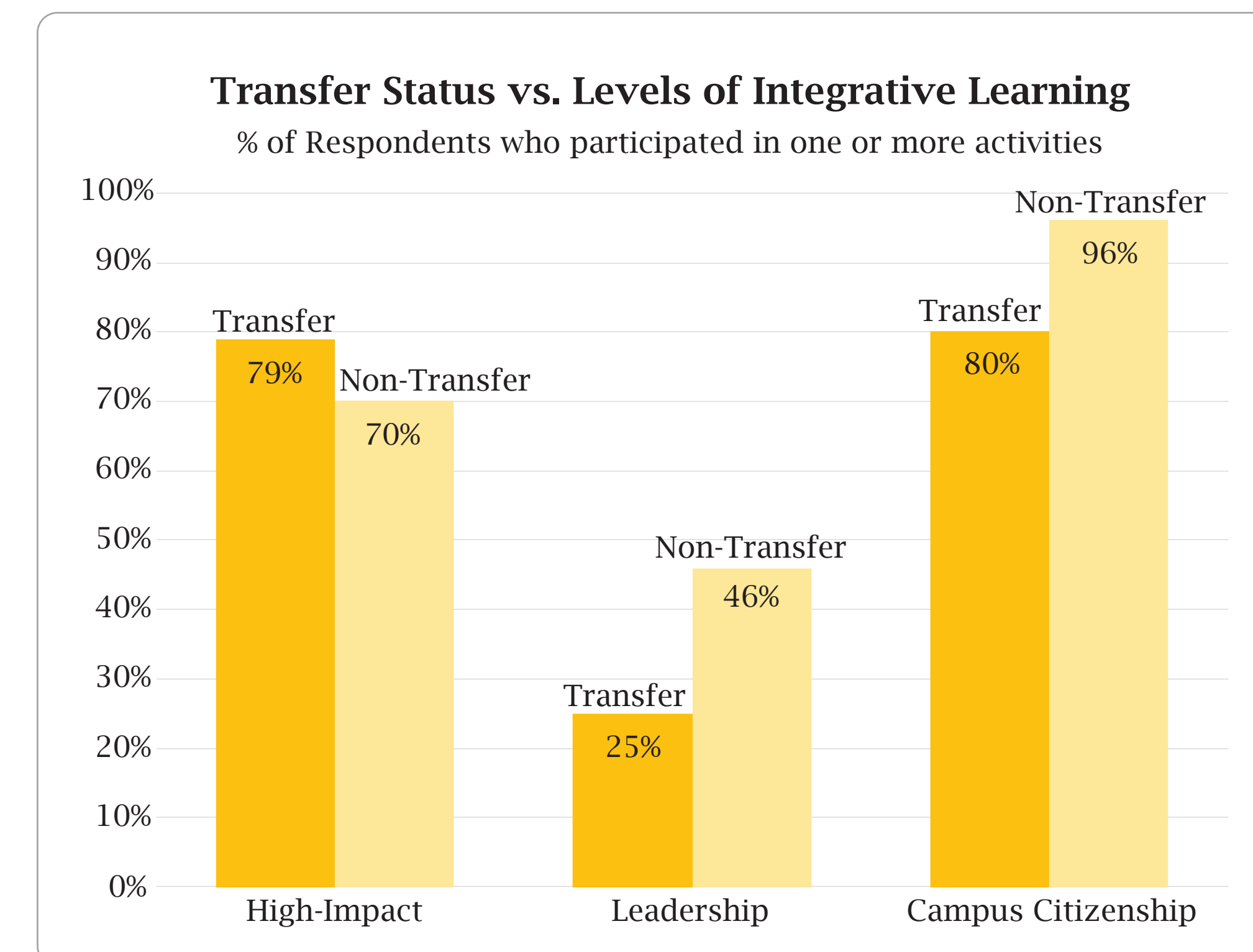
Campus citizenship, leadership, and high-impact were defined for respondents to include the following activities.

Campus Citizenship: Intellectual events (e.g. lectures, symposium, conferences), social justice and advocacy events, clubs or registered student organization (RSO) meetings, service or charity events, cultural events (e.g. film screenings, concerts, art exhibitions), professional networking events, or other

Leadership: Event organizer or co-organizer, RSO officer, club or RSO founder, peer mentor or tutor, student athlete, research or creative work presenter, or other

High-Impact Activities: Honors in the major, LEAD Scholar Academy, McNair Program, senior design project, service-learning course, internship, co-op, study abroad, Living Learning Community, group projects, capstone, independent study with a faculty mentor, or other

The three graphs in this section were created with data from the QEP survey. They examine three common student demographics and compare the levels of activity for campus citizenship, leadership, and high-impact activities. The results of this study gave the investigators a preliminary idea of what the barriers to student involvement might be. Modality, course load, and transfer status all appear to have some impact on student involvement and activity. The perceived impact of these barriers on student involvement vary across the demographics; however, the presence of these barriers warrant further study.



Methodology

In order to study the effects of different barriers to student involvement, the researchers have constructed their own survey. The researchers utilized the QEP survey and other university-wide surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement to create their own questions. Based on the results of the QEP survey specifically, the researchers identified a measurable difference in the levels of integrative learning between different demographics of students. For instance, transfer students, online students, and students who take fewer than ten credit hours per semester report, respectively, 21%, 12%, and 14% lower levels of leadership than their peers. Therefore, the researchers will conduct additional research on these three specific barriers, and several other potential barriers. Other possible barriers that the researchers will investigate are personality traits, mental health, housing situation, familial commitments, and language and culture.

The survey will be administered anonymously to a diverse pool of undergraduate students at UCF. Respondents will participate in the survey via Qualtrics, and in classroom settings in a variety of disciplines with permission from professors. Given that the target audience of all undergraduate students at UCF is 55,773, the researchers hope to obtain a minimum sample of approximately 400 students. Student responses will provide self-reported demographic profiles and levels of involvement for researchers to analyze.

What's Next

Next Steps

The human research is currently pending approval by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon IRB approval the researchers will leverage pre-existing relationships with faculty established through the QEP to connect with professors and request to conduct the survey during class time or distribute electronically to students. The researchers will also utilize their networks on campus through RSOs, housing, courses, and other communities to distribute the online survey.

Solutions

By identifying perceived barriers to student involvement, campus resources and RSOs can use this information to create involvement opportunities that are more accessible and inclusive to students who may be facing these barriers. For example, according to the Baseline Study, students who are in primarily online classes, who take fewer than 10 credit hours per semester, and who transferred from another institution, have lower levels of campus citizenship than their peers. A possible solution for campus resources or RSOs could be adjusting the time or presentation style of events to attract crowds that face these barriers.

Implications

The vetted research on the benefits and positive correlations to student involvement substantiate the sentiments that institutions and organizations should aim to provide as many students as possible with opportunities and accessibility to campus involvement. The diversity of student demographics creates a challenge for these institutions in ensuring the benefits of campus involvement are granted to all students. Through intentional analysis of the populations of students who are not engaged in optimal levels of student involvement, research can provide insight into why and how institutions and organizations can combat barriers to involvement at UCF, and beyond.

References

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