

Examples of High Impact Educational Practices at MTSU

MTSU defines academic engagement as a student's active learning experiences as demonstrated through quality of effort, physical and psychological involvement, and participation in productive learning activities. These productive learning activities might include high impact activities outlined in the AAC&U's "High Impact Educational Practices."¹ MTSU already has a firm foundation of high impact educational practices in place. A descriptive sample of these localized activities is provided below.

First year seminars

MTSU offers first-year seminars like University Seminar (UNIV 1010). This course is an elective course, but is required of all students with undeclared majors. The course introduces students to college life, encourages students to engage in out-of-class experiences, and incorporates on-campus field trips to visit the Campus Recreation Center, the Walker Library, etc. For more information on UNIV 1010, see: <http://www.mtsu.edu/university-college/university-studies/univ-1010.php>.

Common Intellectual Experiences

MTSU also offers many common intellectual experiences through its community lectures, expert forums and panels, dramatic and musical performances, and art exhibits. One notable example is MTSU's Community Summer Reading Program. Created in 2002, this program aims to provide a unifying experience for the entering class of students, build partnerships with Murfreesboro community organizations, encourage intellectual interaction among students, provide students with the opportunity to read and personally interact with critically-acclaimed authors, and affirm the importance of reading for a successful and fulfilling life. More information on the Summer Reading Program can be found at: <http://www.mtsu.edu/summerreading/>

Learning Communities

MTSU offers two types of learning communities: Living-Learning Communities and Raider Learning Communities.

Living-Learning Communities (LLCs) are coordinated by the Residence Life Department. These LLCs house students with common academic goals together in a residence hall. Their LLC student advisors serve as mentors to the groups and live on-site as part of the LLCs. Examples of LLCs include: Aerospace, Diverse World/Diverse Arts, First Year Experience, Give Me a Beat (Recording Industry), Global Learning Community, Honors, Music, Nursing, Pre-Professional Programs, True Blue, and Women in Science and Engineering. More information can be found at: <http://www.mtsu.edu/living-on-campus/living-learning.php>.

Raider Learning Communities (RLCs) are clusters of courses that are linked together and/or share a common cohort of students. General Education courses have been paired to form these RLCs. Since each community is made up of the same people, students get to know their classmates very easily. This program is designed with first-year students in mind, but any student who needs general education courses may participate. More information on the RLCs is available at: <http://www.mtsu.edu/rlc/>.

Writing Intensive Courses

¹ Kuh, G. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Washington, DC: AAC&U. Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/hip_tables.pdf

MTSU offers a variety of writing intensive courses. While each major has its own unique writing-intensive courses, many students first encounter these in the second semester of their freshman year in the Research & Argumentative Writing course (ENGL 1020). MTSU students have access to the University Writing Center [<http://www.mtsu.edu/uwc/>] in the Walker Library to assist with writing at all levels.

Undergraduate research

MTSU has a strong tradition of undergraduate research. The MTSU Undergraduate Research Center [<http://www.mtsu.edu/urc/>] was created in 2004 to promote research at the undergraduate level and to provide university support for undergraduate students and the faculty members who mentor them in scholarly and creative activities. This includes providing information and financial support through grants. The Undergraduate Research Experience and Creative Activity (URECA) Committee offers competitive undergraduate research grants. Other MTSU-affiliated programs that involve undergraduate research on campus include: MTSU Honors College, TLSAMP, Tennessee Space Grant, Geo-environmental Challenges REU, and First STEP. MTSU also celebrates undergraduate research each spring at its annual Scholars Week Celebration [<http://www.mtsu.edu/research/scholarsWeek/>].

Diversity / global learning/ study abroad

MTSU's Office of International Affairs [<http://www.mtsu.edu/intered/>] aims to strengthen the global and international dimensions of teaching, learning, research, and service at MTSU. The office works to integrate international education into the curriculum and promote global awareness, knowledge, and proficiency across MTSU's campus. The office provides study abroad opportunities, provides support for international students, and facilitates scholar exchange programs with international universities.

Service Learning/Community-Based Learning

MTSU's previous QEP project, experiential learning (EXL), has become institutionalized and is now part of the campus culture. The EXL program offers students a chance to apply classroom knowledge to real-world work environments through collaborative partnerships and projects. EXL students, staff, faculty partner with local businesses and organizations to create rich and unique learning and teaching experiences. For examples of service learning opportunities and EXL partnership experiences, see: <http://www.mtsu.edu/exl/index.php>.

Another service learning event is the annual Alternative Spring Break event. The Alternative Spring Break program [<http://www.mtsu.edu/sos/breaks.php>] is one in which a select group of students participate in various volunteering roles in the community during Spring Break week. Each trip focuses on a different social issue, for example: homelessness, hunger, environment, etc. Activities vary from year to year.

Internships

Internship opportunities exist across campus with offerings in various academic department. While no centralized internship office coordinates these opportunities, the EXL office does list some internship courses that are eligible for EXL credit: <http://www.mtsu.edu/exl/internships.php>.

Capstone Courses and Projects

Capstone courses and projects vary by department and major. Some examples include: AERO 4340 (Aerospace Maintenance Management Capstone), CIM 4910 (Concrete Industry Management Capstone), EMC 4460 (New Media Capstone), NURS 4590 Capstone Clinical, ORCO 4500 (Senior Capstone in Organizational Communication), and PRST 4010 (Senior Capstone). These capstone courses

provide opportunities for students to apply their cumulative knowledge and skills from their respective disciplines. Some of the classes require working with industry professionals, practicum experiences, consulting, and the creation of reflective electronic portfolios.

Project Based Learning

Examples of project-based learning exist across MTSU's campus, but the most notable examples come from the Department of Engineering Technology [<http://www.mtsu.edu/et/>]. Students in this department get hands-on learning experiences by interacting with industry professionals on projects in construction management, engineering technology, environmental science and technology, and mechatronics engineering. Space robotics and solar-powered vehicles are examples of the department's project-based learning experiences.

Civic Engagement

MTSU's most visible proponent of civic engagement is the university's participation in the American Democracy Project (ADP). The ADP's goal is to produce graduates who understand and are committed to engaging in meaningful actions as citizens in a democracy. By working with students and faculty, the ADP seeks to nurture programs inside and outside the classroom that raise the levels of the campus community's engagement with local, national, and global communities. MTSU has participated in this national initiative since ADP's founding in 2003.

Flipped classrooms

Faculty in the Department of Mathematics have been early adopters of the "flipped classroom" model of teaching. This pedagogical model essentially "flips" the lecture and homework elements in a classroom. Students watch video lectures outside of class, and spend class time applying the course material and working through any difficult issues or concepts. Faculty in other departments have also adopted the flipped classroom model, and has sponsored a course redesign faculty group to flip classrooms in courses with high failure, drop, and withdrawal rates.

Reacting to the Past

Faculty in MTSU's History Department use the innovative "Reacting to the Past" teaching style developed by Mark Carnes of Barnard College to teach history. This approach engages students by having them engage in unscripted role playing games to learn class content, and they become motivated to spend hours outside of class, working with and discussing primary texts in order to "win" the game. Faculty in the History Department have led faculty learning communities to spread this unique pedagogy to other academic departments on campus.