

Understanding difference through dialogue: A first-year experience for college students

### **Abstract**

Research (Gurin, Nagda & Zúñiga, 2009) on Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) has primarily focused on student outcomes in traditional semester-long, three-credit courses, documenting the positive impact IGD has on college students' (a) intergroup understanding, (b) intergroup relationships, (c) intergroup collaboration and action, and (d) perceived relevancy of diversity in higher education. The University of Illinois at Chicago First-Year Dialogue Seminar (FYDS) was designed as a one-credit, half-semester course based on traditional IGD courses and associated outcomes. Approximately 100 freshman students participated in the pilot of the seminar, completing both pre- and posttest measures of intergroup understanding, intergroup relationships, intergroup collaboration and action, and relevancy of diversity in higher education. Additionally, a comparison group of approximately 80 freshman students, not enrolled in the course, were administered the posttest survey at time 2. The results showed significant gains across measures of intergroup understanding, intergroup collaboration and action, and relevancy of diversity in higher education. Furthermore, FYDS students had significantly higher means across several of the same measures of intergroup understanding and intergroup collaboration and action than the comparison group. These results suggest the potential efficacy of a new model of IGD-based pedagogy and learning.

**Keywords:** first-year experience, first-year seminar, dialogue, high-impact practice, diversity, social identity, college students.

### **Introduction**

The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) has one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation (U.S. News & World Report, 2013). As articulated in UIC's diversity strategic plan (*A Mosaic of UIC Transformation*, 2012), UIC aims to harness the unique opportunities afforded it by the representational diversity of its students, faculty, and staff, to become a national leader in diversity-related scholarship. In line with this value, a structured course was created that would allow students to benefit from the informal and interactional diversity within their learning environments and understand these benefits through the study of educational, social psychological, diversity, and social justice literatures. Informal/interactional diversity is based on principles of social psychology and requires students to learn about each other, exchange worldviews, and share experiences that expand their multicultural cognitive frameworks (Gurin, 1999). Interactions with diverse peers along these lines have been empirically linked to students' capacity to think pluralistically and commit to life-long civic engagement (Hurtado, 2005).

Pedagogical elements and principles of an extensively researched educational practice called Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) (Gurin, 1999; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin & Maxwell, 2009) were used to advance UIC's informal and interactional diversity given that IGD engages students in active, experiential pedagogy and offers intentional interaction in a classroom setting. The UIC First-Year Dialogue Seminar (FYDS), a course for all entering freshman students, was created as a foundational course where students begin developing the skills and understanding necessary for transitioning to college, engaging in diversity-related opportunities and resources, and exploring diverse backgrounds and experiences of their peers through structured meaningful interactions. In this paper, we describe a study of students

participating in the course and the assessment of their learning along the following outcomes: (1) intergroup understanding, (2) intergroup relationships, (3) intergroup collaboration and action, and (4) perceived relevance of diversity in higher education.

### **Literature Review**

The seminar focus was on diversity and student development, therefore literature was reviewed and discussed as it relates to the first-year experience and campus diversity climate to better situate this study in the knowledge base.

Research over the years has provided direction in understanding how to increase diversity while improving the learning environments for students from diverse backgrounds (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). One step in improving the learning environment lies in understanding and developing programs and policies that improve the campus climate for students. Campus climate has been defined as the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). One such way to impact the campus climate and educational outcomes for students has been the emergence of first-year experience seminars. First-year experience seminars help to provide students with content knowledge, skills to navigate institutional systems and services, and student development skills such as communication, collaboration, and confidence. Students who participate in these experiences obtain higher grades and are less likely to be placed on probation (Porter & Swing, 2006).

Previous research has shown that first-year experience seminars are considered a High-Impact Practice (HIP) -- an intervention that helps improve student engagement with their education and therefore, success (Kuh, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010). Specifically, Kuh's (2005) review of numerous institutional efforts revealed that curriculum-

based experiences with small groups of students who regularly engaged with faculty and/or staff provided a high-impact experience. Strong emphasis was placed on the development of critical thinking skills, content knowledge, and collaborative experiential learning environments.

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) as a pedagogy and theoretical framework is grounded in research and theory in fields of education and psychology (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1976; Cook, 1984; Pettigrew, 1991; Gurin, Peng, Lopez, & Nagda, 1999; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). Foundational models of IGD education were developed within the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations in the late 1980s (Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001; Zúñiga et al., 2007). At its core, IGD has the theoretical, epistemological, and pedagogical principles central to teaching and learning about diversity and social identities, and grows from intergroup contact theory, intergroup relations, and intergroup interaction (Pettigrew, 1998; Zúñiga et al., 2002).

IGD can generally be defined as a face-to-face learning experience over a sustained period of time in which participants from diverse social identity groups explore personal and group commonalities and differences; locate these different identities and experiences within societal systems of power, privilege, and oppression; and find ways to work collaboratively toward a more equitable society (Zúñiga et al., 2002, 2007; Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009). IGD models and pedagogies seek to develop: (a) consciousness-raising (developing personal and social identity awareness, social system knowledge); (b) relationships across differences and conflicts (a capacity for sustained communication, bridging differences); and (c) strengthening of individual and collective capacities to promote social justice (action commitments to other participants, examining spheres of influence in one's life) (Zúñiga et al., 2002; Nagda et al., 2009).

Studies of college students' involvement in IGD programs reveal significant positive effects in preparing them for engagement in a pluralistic and participatory democracy (Thompson, Brett, & Behling, 2001; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Moreover, Hurtado's (2005) longitudinal research demonstrated dialogue-based diversity education among college students has a significant effect on the development of perspective-taking skills and pluralistic worldviews.

### **Theoretical Framework for Intergroup Dialogue**

The development and assessment of the course in this study was guided by a critical-dialogic theoretical framework for intergroup dialogue (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013; Nagda et al., 2009; Nagda, 2006; Sorensen et al., 2009; Stephan 2008). As illustrated in Figure 1, researchers have suggested a relationship between pedagogy and communication processes. These processes lead to specific pedagogical features and influence communication processes, which, in turn, foster psychological processes. Specific outcomes of this process include intergroup understanding, intergroup relationships, and intergroup collaboration and action.

Taking the first part of the model, pedagogical features have been defined in terms of content learning, structured interaction, and facilitation (Gurin et al., 2013). Content learning, centered around key concepts and information, is accomplished through assigned readings, reflective writing assignments, and didactic and experiential activities. Structured interaction involves creating conditions within the classroom allowing for sustained engagement and learning over a designated period of time to promote active development for all students of different backgrounds (Gurin et al., 2013). Facilitation within the intergroup dialogue model can be best characterized by extensive training and support in the skills and knowledge of dialogic communication (serving in the role as a guide vs. a traditional teacher with the goal to create an

inclusive climate for learning; Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2011; Zuniga, et al., 2007).

The second step in the model, communication processes, refers to processes that occur among individuals; specifically, critical dialogic processes. Critical dialogic processes focus on how individuals speak with and listen to each other (Sorensen et al., 2009; Nagda et al., 2009; Gurin et al., 2013). Critical processes promote reflection of learning about experiences in a broader social context of power and inequality.

Psychological processes, the third step, are processes that occur within individuals (e.g., cognitive involvement and positive affectivity, Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004; Gurin et al., 2013). Cognitive involvement has been defined as developing students' critical thinking skills, analytical skills, multiplistic thinking, and exploration of identity. Affective positivity has been defined as positive interactions, emotions, and comfort when interacting with difference (Sorensen et al., 2009; Gurin, Nagda, & Sorenen, 2011; Gurin et al., 2013).

The outcomes of the critical dialogic process have been identified as intergroup understanding, intergroup relationships, and intergroup collaboration and action (Nagda et al., 2009; Gurin et al., 2013). Intergroup understanding focuses on cognitive empathy; that is, an openness to or consideration of multiple perspectives. Intergroup relationships focus on intergroup empathy and motivation to bridge differences through communication skills. Intergroup empathy involves emotional understanding of others' experiences. Bridging differences refers to sharing of individual life experiences with other community members. Intergroup collaboration and action outcomes focus on a commitment to social responsibility and action when addressing social inequity.

### **Course Design**

The FYDS is only an introduction and not a full dialogue experience thereby making it

distinct from traditional IGD courses that have been discussed within the present literature review. Although FYDS is heavily adapted from traditional IGD courses and incorporates similar key pedagogical strategies, it differs from those developed and evaluated by Gurin and colleagues in significant ways worth noting. The course in the present study takes place over eight weeks versus a semester, thus having less in-depth interaction and sustained engagement. It was designed to provide a developmentally appropriate foundation in concepts of social identity, communication, and diversity for entering freshman students versus upper-level students, and awards one versus three credits. Unlike IGD courses that focus on one singular social identity as the course topic (e.g., gender, race, class), this course focused on multiple social identities and their intersections within its content, experiential activities, and assigned readings. Lastly, it was taught by one trained facilitator whereas in traditional IGD courses, there are two facilitators who co-lead the course (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009).

Similar to traditional IGD courses, a primary emphasis is placed on providing students with facilitated opportunities to learn and gain confidence – in a safe and supportive environment – and skills needed to effectively communicate across groups. It was designed to give students space to build awareness and talk about issues, experiences, and perspectives, and provide opportunities to learn about scholarship and history underlying diversity and how to avoid negative intergroup interactions.

The curricular content is pedagogically similar to and heavily adapted from the program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) at the University of Michigan. The course followed the same four-stage pedagogical process model (forming relationships; exploring differences and commonalities of experience; discussing controversial topics; building alliances) as traditional IGD courses, included engaged learning activities and assignments (e.g., social identity profile;

privilege walk), and integrated foundational reading assignments on key concepts (e.g., the differences between dialogue, debate, and discussion; social identities and intersections; power and privilege; social change).

Under the direction of faculty and staff, the course curriculum was created to focus on the development of critical thinking skills and learning from diversity and dialogues (See Table 1). Students were introduced to theory and empirical findings from psychology, education, and other disciplines about diversity, culture, identity, and intergroup dialogue. Course topics included group dynamics and intergroup contact theory, social identity development, social justice and diversity theory, power and privilege, and institutional and systemic social problems. The course also provided a formal introduction to institutional diversity initiatives, campus resources, and programs, with the intention to support future graduates with becoming successful at communicating, living, and working together in diverse groups.

After development of the course curriculum, qualified instructors served as the course facilitators and completed an extensive training in IGD facilitation techniques, course content, and weekly instructional activities. Training was developed and based on current research and practice specifically focused on IGD facilitation (e.g., Maxwell, et al., 2011; Beale, Thompson, Chesler, 2001) and adapted from IGR at the University of Michigan. Some of the critical areas highlighted included understanding social identity and the relationship to social justice concepts (social power, privilege, oppression), developing facilitation skills (e.g., managing and leading group processes), and examining intergroup and interpersonal relationships. Facilitators used a structured curriculum to teach the course and participated in weekly supervision sessions throughout the eight weeks to discuss the course content, communication skills, and student reactions. Additionally, they kept weekly logs to monitor levels of student engagement,

understanding, and comfort with the course.

During the fall 2012 semester, eight sections of the course were offered and taught by one facilitator and the enrollment in each section did not exceed 18 students. There were seven in-person sessions per course section, each lasting 110 minutes, and the eighth week consisted of a take-home final paper assignment instead of a final exam or final class. The course was a one-credit, 8-week seminar graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory.

### **Hypotheses**

We tested the following research hypotheses about student learning: Compared to pretest and to a freshman comparison group (freshman students who were not enrolled in the intervention during the fall 2012 semester), students enrolled in the course at posttest would have (1) increased levels of intergroup understanding, (2) increased levels of intergroup relationships, (3) improved levels of intergroup collaboration and action, and (4) more favorable attitudes and perspectives toward diversity and higher education.

### **Methods**

#### **Participants**

One of the major design differences between this dialogue course and IGD courses discussed previously involved the unequal representation or balance of two or more social identity groups in the classroom (Gurin et al, 2013). Alternatively, this course admitted any first year student, regardless of social identity.

The course was open for voluntary enrollment to all freshman students. A total of 112 students enrolled, of which 99 completed both pre- and posttest surveys. The sample ranged in age from 17 to 20 years ( $M = 18.12$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). An additional 82 freshman students served as the comparison group. They ranged in age from 17-20 years ( $M=18.28$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ). The

purpose of collecting data from a sample of students who had not taken the seminar was to determine whether students enrolled in the course were different than a sample of their peers not enrolled in the course. Cluster and convenience sampling techniques were employed for the purpose of gaining a representative sample of freshmen. One-third of this sample was from English composition courses while the others volunteered in response to solicitation in person and via email. Student volunteers in the comparison group were compensated for participation with refreshments. Students in both groups were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and anticipated academic majors as shown in Table 2.

### **Design and Procedure**

The pretest assessment and posttest assessments were given by paper-and-pencil surveys. Students completed surveys at the beginning of class one and at the end of class seven during the fall 2012 semester. Survey administration lasted approximately 30 minutes. Comparison group students received the same posttest as the students in the dialogue course during the fall 2012 semester. Data were confidentially collected, face-to-face, and in larger group settings ranging from 10-20 students per data collection meeting.

### **Measures**

Survey constructs were adapted from established measures from the Multi-university Intergroup Dialogue Research Project Guidebook (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2009). These measures examine the impact of IGD initiatives on students' interpersonal communication skills, awareness of inequalities, frequency of and engagement in actions toward social change (Nagda et al., 2009). For the purposes of this research study, the outcomes examined included: intergroup understanding, intergroup relationships, intergroup collaboration and action, and attitudes toward higher education and diversity.

Survey responses were measured on a 7-point agreement scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) unless otherwise specified. If students responded to all items within a construct, the individual items were summed to create a composite score for each construct (see Table 3). Composite score ranges are dependent on the number of items per construct. The measures are described below.

### **Intergroup understanding**

Students responded to items within three constructs pertaining to self-reports of intergroup understanding. The first, “openness to multiple perspectives,” was measured with three items (e.g., “I am willing to listen to the variety of views that can emerge in talking about social issues and problems”), with responses measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). The second, student awareness of structural attributions of gender inequality, was measured with four items (e.g., “Discrimination in the workplace still limits the success of many women”) on a 7-point Likert agreement scale. The third, student awareness of structural attributions of racial/ethnic inequality, was measured with four items (e.g., “Unfair hiring and promotion practices help to keep many people of color from gaining positions of power”) using a 7-point Likert agreement scale.

### **Intergroup relationships**

Students responded to three items assessing their motivation and perceived skills in interacting with people of different racial/ethnic groups. A motivation index was created by combining three items from previously established Multi-university Intergroup Dialogue Research Guidebook scales (e.g., “I am able to respect and interact with people in other racial/ethnic groups.”). Responses were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*).

### **Intergroup collaboration and action**

Students responded to two constructs pertaining to self-reports of intergroup collaboration and action which measured confidence and frequency of engagement in behaviors to address issues of prejudice, discrimination, and injustices. First, students responded to six items indicating their level of confidence in engaging in social actions (e.g., “Recognizing and challenging the biases that affect my own thinking,”). Second, students responded to six items about their frequency in engaging in the same social actions. Items intended to measure confidence were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all confident*) to 7 (*extremely confident*). Items intended to measure frequency were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*).

### **Higher education and diversity**

One construct gauged students’ perceptions and attitudes about higher education and diversity. Attitudes toward political issues in society were measured with two items (e.g., “Racial profiling is a serious problem in our society”).

### **Data Analysis**

The pretest and posttest Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients are reported for the scales measuring each construct. Pretest reliability coefficients were on average 0.05 less than the posttest coefficients (see Table 3).

A paired sample t-test was employed to examine change in mean composite scores from pretest to posttest within the cohort of students in the course. Then, an independent samples t-test was used to test mean differences between students in the intervention and the comparison group at post-test. Both t-tests assume that the composite score distribution is normal; however due to a violation of this assumption, ancillary nonparametric statistical tests

were employed and analyzed median differences. These nonparametric statistics better suit the ordinal level data and therefore we employed the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and independent samples Mann-Whitney U-Tests to examine the median differences. A preset level of .05 ( $p < .05$ ) was used to determine statistical significance.

If results were significant, Cohen's  $d$  statistic was used to determine the effect size. Coefficients less than 0.2 were considered small effect size and coefficients ranging from 0.2 to 0.5 were considered moderate effect.

It is important to note that many of the original constructs contained low levels of reliability as indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients when analyzed using the current sample. An exploratory factor analysis was performed to restructure the constructs with low reliability. Adaptions to the constructs are based on the factor analyses and include the following: Openness to multiple perspectives consists of less items (three versus five) and attitudes about political issues in society (two versus six items). The following original constructs were combined: confidence in self-directed and in others' directed actions and frequency of self-directed and others' directed actions. The following constructs did not benefit from any restructuring based on the factor analysis, thus were removed from the analysis due to low reliability: intergroup relationships, beliefs about individual action and social change, and attitudes towards multicultural education and diversity.

## **Results**

### **Intergroup Understanding**

Statistically significant changes were observed among the students from pre- to posttest on all three constructs of intergroup understanding and between the students and comparison group for two of the three (see Table 3 for all means). Specifically, means of Openness to

Multiple Perspectives increased from pre- to posttest,  $t(98) = 4.01, p = .001$ , and students had higher means than the comparison group,  $t(179) = 2.59, p = .01$ .

Mean ratings of Awareness of Structural Attributions of Gender Inequality significantly increased from pre- to posttest,  $t(97) = 2.14, p = .018$ , but students did not significantly differ from the comparison group,  $t(177) = 0.31, p > .05$ .

Students in the course showed significant growth in terms of Awareness of Structural Attributions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality from pre- to posttest,  $t(98) = 5.04, p < .001$ , and compared to the comparison group  $t(179) = 1.78, p = .039$ .

### **Intergroup Collaboration and Action**

Students' ratings of their confidence in engaging in social actions increased from pre- to posttest,  $t(97) = 4.94, p < .001$ . Furthermore, students showed statistically significant higher levels of confidence in engaging in social actions,  $t(170.5) = 3.15, p = .002$ ) than the comparison group. Increases in the frequency of social actions were also found to be statistically significant, from pre-posttest  $t(97) = 5.50, p < .001$ . These differences are consistently directional in favor of students obtaining more positive scores than the comparison group,  $t(164.4) = 3.84, p < .001$ .

### **Higher Education and Diversity**

Scores indicating more tolerant positions on political issues in society were observed among FYDS from pre- to posttest  $t(98) = 3.05, p = .003$ . Students' attitudes toward political issues were not significantly different from the comparison group;  $t(163.8) = .06, p = .96$ .

### **Ancillary Statistics**

The related samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and independent samples Mann-Whitney U test were used to analyze differences within groups (pretest to posttest) and between groups (students in the course compared to comparison group), respectively. Significant results of the

related samples Wilcoxon Test were consistent with significant findings of the paired samples t-test across all constructs. Similarly, significant results from the independent sample Mann-Whitney U-Test were consistent with significant independent sample t-test results across all constructs (refer to Table 4).

### **Discussion**

The overall pattern of findings are consistent with our theoretically derived hypotheses and with the extant literature on more traditional IGD-related course outcomes. These findings provide support for the impact of an eight-week First Year Dialogue Seminar on intergroup understanding, intergroup collaboration, and attitudes about higher education and diversity.

The course evaluated in this paper was able to introduce students to concepts of dialogue, diversity, social identity groups, and structural inequality while fostering intergroup understanding, collaboration, and action. These results provide evidence for the promise of first-year diversity-related experiences in higher education and are particularly noteworthy in their overall consistency with findings from a substantial body of research examining similar outcomes examined within longer formats, specifically the semester-long dialogue courses (e.g., Gurin et al., 2013; Nagda et al., 2009). Thus, it may be more practical for colleges and universities with a similar representational/numerical diversity to incorporate a dialogue course into their curriculum; however, it should not go without pressing for the importance of giving attention to the institutional context and factors impacting the setting of this research.

During the course, students developed greater understanding of their own social identities in relation to other groups, becoming more conscious of their own identities and those of others, and how identities shape people's values, beliefs, opportunities, and experiences. Moreover, students gained an increase in empathy for others, having indicated an increased ability to

understand different perspectives, and to see multiple sides to issues, especially those related to gender and racial inequality.

This outcome, related to the awareness of multiple perspectives, is referred to in the psychological literature as cognitive empathy (Davis, 1983) and lays the foundation for the development of emotional empathy (Batson et al., 1997). Emotional empathy is noted to be an intergroup relationship outcome in the dialogue literature (Gurin et al., 2013).

After taking the course, students demonstrated more comfort in communicating with others, while also becoming more aware of the individual actions and social structures promoting inequality. When increased levels of intergroup understanding and empathy are coupled with greater awareness of social inequality, the foundation for increased levels of intergroup collaboration and action can be set (Gurin et al., 2013). This is evinced in our sample by students' increased confidence and frequency in challenging bias within themselves and others. This implies that students in this seminar are developing skills in both the ability to be open to multiple perspectives and emotional responses to others' experiences, each of which have been identified as psychological components related to reducing bias and prejudice (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Batson et al., 1997; Finlay & Stephan, 2000).

One unexpected inconsistency in outcomes in the present study was the low internal consistency coefficient yielded for the intergroup relationships variable. The study findings did not illustrate support for an increase in student reported levels of motivation to learn about racial/ethnic differences. It is possible that the motivation index developed by combining three items from two existing scales from the Multi-university Intergroup Dialogue Research Project ended up serving as a weak measure of this construct.

Our comparison groups showed significant differences in the majority of their post-test

scores, within scales of intergroup understanding and intergroup collaboration (see Table 4). The observed differences between the non-course comparison group and the students in the course provide stronger evidence of the effect of the course on student outcomes than the pre and post group comparison, as the comparison group design decreases the risk of selection bias.

However without the use of randomized samples and control and intervention groups, the nature and degree of the course impact on behavioral and attitudinal changes remains unclear.

Additionally, without longitudinal data, it is unknown whether the results from this study would be sustained over an extended time period and the role of the course in retention and overall college experience.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are both strengths and weaknesses in our work. This work significantly contributes to literatures on intergroup dialogue and student development by illustrating that a relatively short course can be developed and launched by public urban universities (based on well-validated course and evaluation materials from existing research and practice on IGD), and result in many of the same positive outcomes found for longer IGD courses that might be practically prohibited in a curriculum. It is worth highlighting that the findings are fairly consistent with the extant literature on IGD-related courses that are significantly longer in duration (semester versus an eight week session), but vary in important course design features previously discussed. which include: a focus on a specific social identity characteristic with an equal balance of student membership and taught by two facilitators matched to equally represent the identities.

We acknowledge our results are not based on an experimental design, but instead employed a pretest/posttest research design with comparison at a specific institution. Student samples were not randomly selected from the entire freshman population (we could not force

students to register for the course – they had to be free to sign up for it) and did not employ the use of control and intervention groups. Without random assignment or a matched control group design, it is difficult to ascertain our course’s causal contribution to changes in our study’s outcomes. Additionally, since the dialogue course was voluntary, this self-selected group of students may have been more inclined or interested in exploring issues of social identity than the average student.

We also note that the results from this small, non-random sample, are not necessarily generalizable across various institutional contexts or representative of larger student populations. Generalizing beyond this sample should be met with caution given the unique characteristics of this case study and the institution housing the course. Specifically, this institution was engaged in a campus-wide diversity strategic thinking and planning process and therefore the climate and the expressed support of diversity efforts during the intervention could have impacted our results.

Lastly, this small sample size also could account for the lower than expected internal consistency coefficients for several constructs of our scale measures. Given that the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were lower than expected for pre-test awareness of structural attribution of gender, pretest awareness of racial inequality, and post-test attitudes about political issues in society, these items may be less reliable indicators of the desired constructs. Future research warrants reconsideration and further revisions/adaptations of survey measures given that the multi-university study used in this study consisted of scales developed for institutions and courses that had very different contexts.

### **Implications**

These findings contribute to the literature showing the importance of high-impact practices in higher education (Kuh, 2005; Kuh et al., 2010). Data from this course have evolved

empirically-guided and theoretically-rigorous research illustrating that this dialogue-based curricular effort developed as a first-year seminar may be a high-impact practice for college students at large public urban institutions (Brownell & Swaner, 2009, 2010; Kuh & Schneider 2008). The data suggest that the course could be considered as a high-impact practice contributing to efforts intended to better prepare, educate, and care for students in the setting described in this study. Comparable institutions may model the course and adapt it to their respective contexts to provide more high-impact practices in American higher education.

This study has important policy implications of interest to higher education policymakers, practitioners and student development. The integration of this dialogue seminar approach within the credit-bearing structures of higher education can serve to enhance learning related to the benefits of diversity. Results support the critical role of higher education in capitalizing on the structural diversity of its students within structured classroom settings (Gurin, 1999). Policymakers in higher education can consider replicating this model on their campus as a degree requirement for graduation. This type of policy paradigm shift of moving diversity education into the credit-bearing structures of institutions helps to move beyond representational diversity, while leveraging and capitalizing on interactive diversity in higher education. As campus climates shift due to increasingly diverse students, traditional courses and programs designed to transition students to college may not be sufficient. Institutionalizing engaged diversity as a core value through campus-wide initiatives and programs may provide a pathway to more inclusive transition programs.

As for implications relevant to higher education practitioners, it is important for educators to involve various constituency groups (administrators/leadership, students, staff, and faculty) to develop and sustain meaningful, structured, dialogue-based courses that have the

potential to become integrated as an institutional value. It is also important to have a partnership in these programming efforts between student affairs and academic affairs to develop and sustain programming. Here, the binary of student affairs' role as co-curricular and academic affairs' role as curricular is re-envisioned as a genuine partnership and collaborative effort where both units share responsibility for the holistic development of students and also have the ability to increase student engagement and exposure of programming to the broader campus community. This collaboration is especially important in environments like UIC where no clear racial majority exists, and multilingual and first-generation college students represent significant minority populations.

### **Conclusion**

This research is important in contributing to the larger effort of universities to develop the whole student and not just their cognitive abilities or content-specific knowledge base. Instead, institutions of higher learning are taking responsibility for developing students' individual identities, social locations, and overall psychosocial development. The course in this study capitalized on the reality that students in their later teen years and early adulthood are at pivotal crossroads in their own personal development -- not solely as students, but as human beings -- and that institutions of higher education are ideal places for the safe development of students' consciousness and critical thinking skills (Gurin, 1999). This new type of learning is ideally situated in the university, because of its ability to separate students from their past in a way that permits exploration of difference, formation of intimate relationships, and experimentation with new ideas and life roles before making permanent adult commitments.

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**Table 1***Course learning objectives by session*

Session	Learning Objectives
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define/distinguish key concepts of dialogue, debate and discussion</li> <li>• Establish foundations for an inclusive climate for learning</li> <li>• Introduce UIC's commitment to diversity and social justice; discuss role and value of diversity in higher education</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review building blocks of dialogue</li> <li>• Explore opportunities and challenges in dialoguing about diversity</li> <li>• Review and practice interactive communication</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of social group memberships; exploration of differences and commonalities</li> <li>• Review concept of multiple social identities</li> <li>• Exploration of the impact of identities on self, others, and society</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote understanding of key concepts of privilege and discrimination and dynamics of inequality</li> <li>• Explore the development and implications of difference among groups</li> <li>• Explore and establish connections between identities and social consequences</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the role individual, social, and institutional-level discrimination plays in society</li> <li>• Participate in activities that demonstrate how social policy and practice impact access to resources, power, and privilege</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish/practice dialogue skills in exploring disagreements/controversial topics</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore opportunities for collaborative change</li> <li>• Create allies (partnerships) for change by identifying individual, collective, and community-based assets and relationships among them</li> </ul>

**Table 2***Demographic information for FYDS students and the comparison group*

Demographic	FYDS (N=112)	Comparison (N=82)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	71%	48%
Male	29%	52%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
African American/Black	18%	16%
Asian	23%	24%
Latino	31%	27%
White	24%	23%
Other	4%	10%
<b>Anticipated Major</b>		
Math, Science, Engineering or Architecture	32%	40%
Nursing, Social Work, or Public Health	23%	18%
Business	11%	12%
Social Sciences, Arts, or Humanities	15%	15%
Other	20%	15%

**Table 3***Psychometric properties of constructs listed by measure*

Measure Construct	Cronbach's Alpha			Pretest			Posttest			Comparison		
	n	Pretest	Posttest	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Intergroup Understanding												
Openness to multiple perspectives	3	0.76	0.80	99	18.16	2.66	99	19.07	2.04	82	18.15	2.75
Awareness of structural attributions of gender inequality	4	0.69	0.78	98	19.48	4.65	98	20.36	5.03	81	20.14	4.46
Awareness of structural attributions of racial inequality	4	0.64	0.76	99	17.80	4.82	99	20.13	4.96	82	18.79	5.13
Intergroup Collaboration and Action												
Confidence in social actions	6	0.82	0.85	98	32.53	5.61	98	35.22	5.75	81	32.54	5.95
Frequency of social actions	6	0.83	0.85	98	29.19	6.80	98	33.17	6.32	82	29.39	7.09
Higher Education and Diversity												
Attitudes about political issues in society	2	0.71	0.65	99	10.64	2.54	99	11.41	2.14	81	11.40	2.35

Note: The property *n* refers to the number of items corresponding to each construct.

**Table 4**

*T-test (paired and independent samples) and nonparametric tests (related and independent samples) results for FYDS student growth and between group comparisons*

Measure  Construct	Related/Paired Samples				Independent Samples					
	T-Test			NP Test	T-Test			NP Test		
	t	Df	d	Z	t	df	d	U	Z	
<b>Intergroup Understanding</b>										
Openness to multiple perspectives	4.01*	98	0.38	3.72*	2.59*	179	0.38	3362.0	2.03*	
Awareness of structural attributions of gender inequality	2.14*	97	0.22	2.53*	0.31	177	0.10	3746.0	0.65	
Awareness of structural attributions of racial inequality	5.04*	98	0.51	4.86*	1.78*	179	0.27	3317.0	2.12*	
<b>Intergroup Collaboration and Action</b>										
Confidence in social actions	4.94*	97	0.48	4.84*	3.15*	170.5	0.47	2863.0	3.42*	
Frequency of social actions	5.50*	97	0.60	5.56*	3.84*	164.4	0.56	2741.0	3.76*	
<b>Higher Education and Diversity</b>										
Attitudes about political issues in society	3.05*	98	0.33	3.12*	0.06	163.8	0.00	3935.5	0.22	

Note: Cohen's d indicates effect size for parametric t-test results.

\*p<.05

Figure 1. The Critical-Dialogic Theoretical Framework for Intergroup Dialogue

