The perceived experience of students becoming positive change agents: A case of the Honors Living-Learning community program at Rutgers University - Newark

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ABSTRACT

Studies have found that in higher education institutions in the United States of America, a variety of resources, student engagement, institutional practices, and other stakeholders contribute to students' perceptions of becoming positive change agents. This project explores how the Honors Living-Learning Community (HLLC) program at Rutgers University-Newark (RUN), New Jersey capitalizes on resources, leadership, curriculum, and other strategies to promote students' perception to become positive change agents. Secondary research from a survey completed by the HLLC graduates was utilized for this project. As a descriptive study, survey responses were coded and evaluated to determine the HLLC's impact on students' perception on becoming positive change agents. The study found that the HLLC program at RUN successfully promotes students' perception to become positive change agents. The HLLC program achieves this through its curricular structure, which integrates academic rigor with community engagement, and a strong emphasis on leadership development. The HLLC's success in developing positive change agents has practical implications for institutions of higher education. Other universities could consider replicating the HLLC 's unique curricular structure and community engagement strategies to promote leadership development and cultivate positive change agents among their graduates.

Keywords: *Communities, Curriculum, Faculty, Higher education, Positive change agent.*

Highlights of this paper
- The role of leadership in higher education institutions in promoting students' perception on becoming positive change agents.
- The Honors Living-Learning Community (HLLC) as a practical model utilizing multifaceted approaches to engage and promote perceptions of becoming positive change agents among students.
- The impact of innovative and purposeful curriculums which connect with students' knowledge and lived experiences to confront social issues relevant locally and globally.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth participation in public life is critical to developing and strengthening a democratic society (Akin, Engin-Demir, & Calik, 2017). Akin et al. (2017) argue that a substantial democracy predicates the growth of engaged democratic citizenry. An active citizen does not quickly accept accepted practices but challenges them, participates actively in social and political arenas, and becomes aware of their rights and obligations (Andersen, 2012).

The Honors Living-Learning Community (HLLC) at Rutgers University – Newark (RU-N) in Newark, New Jersey, seeks academically promising, exceptionally talented, and civically minded individuals to impact their communities positively. Students accepted to the HLLC participate in an inclusive curriculum taught by diverse teachers and community leaders, preparing them to be agents of sound change. The program aims to increase students' understanding and experience with social concerns and their ability to navigate various institutional environments. The capstone projects developed by HLLC students aim to benefit the public good via collaborations with public and private stakeholders' holders.

Despite recent changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, intuitions of Higher Education must continue to create a conducive environment through their programs and curriculums to ensure that students become positive change agents. This project examines the students' perceptions of the HLLC curriculum, emphasizing its relevance to the HLLC's social justice goal - nurturing scholars on their path toward becoming positive change agents (Rutgers University – Newark, 2017).

2. BACKGROUND

The HLLC founded in 2015, is a ground-breaking RU-N program that changes the way honors is recognized, talent is developed, and communities are engaged. The HLLC is redefining "honors" by forming intergenerational and interdisciplinary learning communities of students, teachers, and community partners to address some of the country's most serious social concerns. Selected students join a living-learning community and an intergenerational network to nurture knowledge, promote understanding across and between communities, and enact social, institutional, and cultural change across all intersections of identity.

Currently, there are 241 students enrolled in the HLLC. The HLLC is unusual because it is an academic honors program and a residential living-learning community. The HLLC's program is predicated on the notion of "Local Citizenship in a Global World." This notion is embodied in Rutgers' 2014 Strategic Plan, which calls for a cross-cutting project that targets a cross-cutting set of this vision's goals and incorporates several intervention leaders and units throughout RU-N. Through the HLLC program, talented scholars from Newark, New Jersey, across the United States, and globally reside and learn at RU-N alongside other HLLC scholars in a conducive environment (Rutgers University – Newark, 2017).

The HLLC is a transformational honors access and development program that encourages the academic, social, and personal growth of outstanding scholars from all areas who want to be change agents in their neighborhoods and beyond. The HLLC was founded to address racist, classist, and deficit assumptions that create and reinforce barriers

to academics' access to higher education, especially in vulnerable areas (Esquilin, 2018). The HLLC admits students ranging in age, background, socioeconomic level, and life experiences (Rutgers University – Newark, 2017).

The HLLC utilizes a rigorous admissions process to determine a student's capacity to prosper in college and contribute constructively to the greater good (Rutgers University – Newark, 2017). Additionally, the admissions process involves both group interviews and individual interviews. The HLLC selects students to join a living-learning community and intergenerational network that spans all facets of identity. These identity intersections include those devoted to generating knowledge, building understanding between and among communities, and mobilizing social, institutional, and cultural change. The HLLC brings together researchers and faculty members from all schools of RU-N and community-based partners via a program focused on global citizenship. With a focus on social action and problems of inequality, the HLLC brings together academics and community-based groups to create and execute projects and courses that benefit the community as a whole and effect changes based on shared passions and interests. This project defines "faculty" as any individual providing instructions (i.e., part-time lectures, guest speakers, and adjunct professors).

Scholars at the HLLC participate in a shared interdisciplinary curriculum focused on "local citizenship in a global world" topics. The curriculum encourages critical thinking, cultural competency, and examining what it means to be a responsible citizen locally and globally. Faculty members from RU-N have been instrumental in forming the HLLC and continue to play critical roles in the growth and success of the HLLC curriculum.

The HLLC curriculum serves as a second specialization that smoothly integrates with each scholar's major curriculum, fostering critical engagement in how local and global concerns develop in their diverse fields of study. The program also involves HLLC Scholars in existing Newark anchor institution collaborations, allowing them to draw forth local-global links in publically engaged scholarship and education. The HLLC curriculum requires a minimum of 18 credits in HLLC courses (the order of which is determined by the student's major and status as a first-year or transfer student). The curriculum consists of three core classes and three HLLC interdisciplinary electives taught by world-renowned teachers from various academic fields, local community leaders, and public scholars.

To supplement the curriculum, the HLLC offers several social identity groups such as the Men of Character, Woman of Color, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Group to create safe and inclusive spaces for all. Furthermore, the HLLC has several student leadership groups to foster student engagement in the Rutgers University- Newark community and the community-at-large (Rutgers University – Newark, 2017).

The HLLC has implemented several programs to construct knowledge among academics cooperatively with community members via participatory activities centered on social justice concerns, using a multimodal methodology designed and grounded in research. HLLC serves as a model for other programs seeking to move beyond theory-based activities and toward practice-based initiatives. The HLLC concept is being developed as a nationwide college model focusing on teaching and program execution. The project aims to address the following research questions: (1) Does the HLLC program promote students becoming positive change agents? and (2) What aspects of the HLLC program facilitate students' perception to become change agents?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dunne and Zandstra (2011) offer a four-segment model to analyze an organization's effort to involve students in decision-making (see Figure 1). The model's four segments include student evaluation of their own experiences, student participation, student collaborations, and student-led. This model may equip students with the skill set necessary to become positive change agents. Students as assessors include mechanisms through which the institution and external stakeholders listen to and act on the student's voice. Internal, cross-institutional, topic and service-based

student feedback is collected by monitoring devices such as questionnaire surveys, and focus group. It consists of official complaint processes and informal department-level evaluation comments.

When students are considered as participants, it places an emphasis on the institution's commitment to increase student participation in teaching, learning, and institutional growth. The participation of students is enhanced through student-faculty conversation and students' active participation in the quest for solutions to identify problems. Student involvement is most visible in its participatory form through established participation in university committee structures across the entire institutional system. For example, their representation in various initiatives from cross-institutional working groups to learning and teaching committees.

In addition, students as collaborators emphasize students' active participation as co-creators and subject matter experts. It encompasses student involvement in institutional development. When students take on the role of change agents in this approach, the emphasis and direction shift significantly toward the students themselves. For example, students train faculty in innovative technologies, develop curricula and resources, negotiate assessment processes and practices, write examination questions and question banks, set assignments, redesign module provision, and delivery, and create induction material for new student cohorts.

Finally, as change agents, students must shift from institutionally driven agendas and activities toward student-directed initiatives. Excellent partnership efforts have developed from departmental-led agendas to institutional initiatives with a stronger emphasis on student-driven focus and direction. In this role, students become actively involved in the institution's and subject areas' transformation processes, often assuming leadership roles. Regarding students functioning as change agents, requires students to assume more leadership roles through active participation in upgrading their learning experiences. Students are evolving from observers to change agents. While having a 'voice' is essential, it may remain a passive experience compared to being empowered to drive and lead change projects. According to Dunne and Zandstra (2011) a premium is placed on the more active forms of engagement of the model's bottom segments without diminishing the significance of other segments.
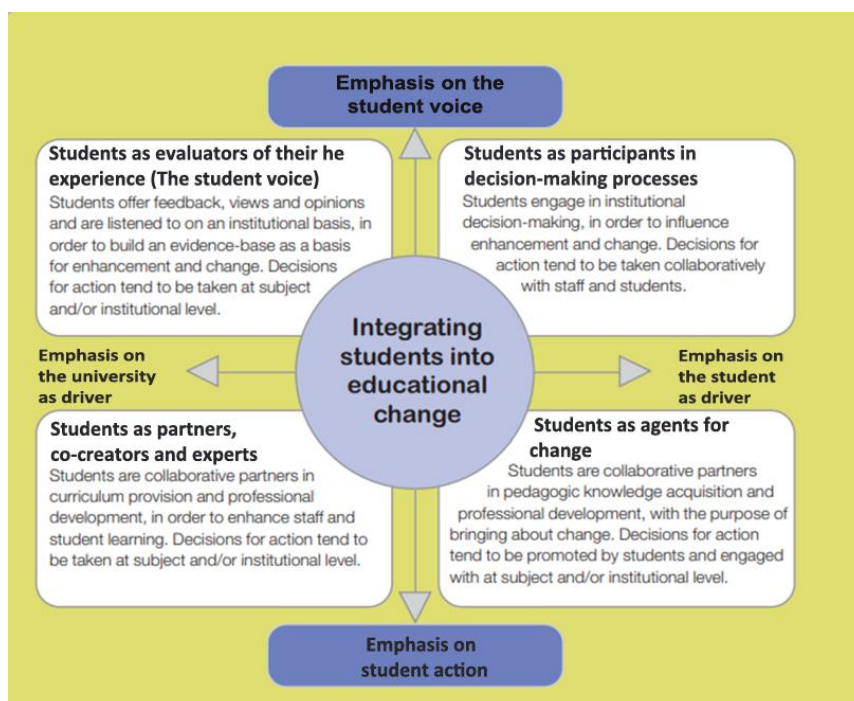

Figure 1. A theoretical model for students as change agents.
Source: Dunne and Zandstra (2011).

4. LITERATURE

Higher Education (HE) is often regarded as having a substantial influence on alleviating conflict and its consequences on society (UNESCO, 2017). HE institutions can serve as a platform for transmitting ideas and values to students and their respective communities and construct and extend bridges of reconciliation, peacebuilding, and cohesion (Millican, 2018). The HE faculty members' direct interaction with students may place them in an ideal position to make critical contributions to "supporting peace, social cohesion, and nation-building and national identity promotion" (Horner et al., 2016). In collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, the HE sectors can fulfill their obligation towards communities by empowering students to become positive change agents.

4.1. What is a Change Agent?

There are various definitions that describes the role of a change agent. According to Stevenson (2008) a change agent is as much about personality and character as it is about definitions; such a person must understand people, possess a strong capacity for self-motivation, be motivated by passion, and be patient. Change agents are unhappy with the world around them, but most importantly, a change agent lives in the future, not the present, and "has a vision of what might or should be and utilizes it as the ruling sense of action" (Stevenson, 2008). This project opted for the definition of Tschirky (2011) who states that a change agent is a person or group that assumes the fuction of initiating and managing change in an organization. The change agents can be both internal (e.g., managers or employees) and external (e.g., consultants).

Furthermore, Bee and Kaya (2017) highlight that civic engagement, political engagement, conventional political involvement, and unconventional political participation are all components of active citizenship. While political and civic involvement implies an awareness of civic or political concerns, civic and political participation relate to an individual's or group's particular activities, such as voting (Bee & Kaya, 2017). Active citizenship, in this view, entails both critical involvement with existing political and social institutions and the (re)production of shared goals and needs in everyday encounters (Jansen, Chioncel, & Dekkers, 2006). As a result, engaged people should possess a feeling of duty and tolerance and a readiness to collaborate.

In addition, the tolerance for individual differences, acceptance of society's variety, collaboration for the common good, and dispute resolution are all well-known traits of engaged citizens (Stubbs, 1995). For this purpose, citizenship education as a HE-based experience for democratic societies (Print & Coleman, 2003) has a significant impact on individual citizens by enabling them to get a better understanding of political and civic society and to become more active, cooperative, and trustworthy (Print & Coleman, 2003). There is a common question about what civic education should include across many democratic countries worldwide. For example, democratic principles and processes, democratic citizenship values, rights and responsibilities, history and constitutions, legal systems, are among a comprehensive list of topics to include as part of citizenship education (Print, 2007). In European countries, attributes such as students' literacy in human rights and democracy, cultural and historical diversity, self-respect and respect for others, positive self-image, conflict resolution, transformation into a pluralist society, active participation in HE and community life, and practicing democratic principles have all been encouraged to be integrated into citizenship education (Eurydice, 2005).

4.2. The Role of Leadership May Promote Student Perception to become Change Agents

Leading complex institutions like universities have significant normative, practical, and organizational challenges. Educational leaders must negotiate a rugged terrain, which necessitates teamwork (Stensaker, Van Der Vaart, Solbrekke, & Wittek, 2017). This relationship involves a variety of stakeholders, including the communities

they serve, the state and federal governments, faculty, and students. As a result, educational leaders' duties exceed educational management, resource allocation, coordination, and administration (Bolden et al., 2012). Grunefeld et al. (2017) suggest that high-quality educational leadership involves knowledge and attention to instructional support. As a result, the capacity to promote conversation about the importance of teaching given a university's core business is critical, as most faculty members in senior positions have a solid research record. With the often-considerable number of individuals participating in leadership, it becomes critical to understand how organizational processes shape their interactions (Gosling, Bolden, & Petrov, 2009). However, following Amey (2006) we emphasize the importance of leadership that originates 'from different levels and functions, as a combination of top-down, bottom-up, and middle-out contributions.' In an ideal world, this approach would incorporate shared, reflective leadership practices throughout the institution and with external stakeholders rather than a single strong leader (Floyd & Fung, 2017; Jones, Harvey, Lefoe, & Ryland, 2014). A collective approach from these various stakeholders' contributions shows that each entity should take ownership to promote an inclusive curriculum that can provide students with the necessary skills to become positive change agents.

4.3. Resources Required at Institutions of Higher Learning to Promote Student Perception to become Change Agents

Education is a fundamental necessity for human development and poverty eradication, and it is critical for national development and a thriving society (Sivakumar & Sarvalingam, 2010). Furthermore, higher learning institutions' role in uplifting society is now even more critical to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on societies, particularly the more marginalized communities. Additionally, Sivakumar and Sarvalingam (2010) argument may be used to increase students' awareness of their role as change agents for the greater good of their society. Rahman and Uddin (2009) argue that education is the government's duty and should be controlled using national resources. Higher education institutions serve as the critical platform for social and economic development in collaboration with their students and communities (Brennan & Teichler, 2008). Thus, governments and society have a strong interest in maintaining a steady flow of students enrolled in higher education for the greater welfare of society (Husain & Syed, 2016). The institutions of higher learning, community, private sector, and students should collaborate with governments to ensure that policies and activities include the voice and resources of all stakeholders to fulfill governments' responsibilities towards its citizens.

4.4. The Curriculum and Instruction in Higher Education that Promote Student Perception to become Change Agents

Higher education's curriculum is constantly changing and growing. Additionally, a curriculum for higher education is a curriculum-in-action (Barnett & Coate, 2005). The higher education curriculum development is not concerned with precise processes in the curriculum creation process but with the connections between the groups or individuals participating (Tierney, 1989). Postmodernism embraces chaos, embracing "emergent currents of change" (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994). Slattery (2006) argues that the higher education curriculum contains three key determinants, namely: (a) an emphasis on community cooperation rather than corporate competitiveness; (b) holistic process views rather than discrete pieces; and (c) a multi-layered, interdisciplinary curriculum. Oliver and Hyun (2011) state that the development of the curriculum in HE has traditionally been the faculty's responsibility. However, more recently, external pressures such as society, government, and alumni have influenced curriculum formulation and the process of curriculum reform (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). These various stakeholders can offer valuable contributions to ensure that the students are equipped with the necessary skills to become positive change agents to benefit their communities, the country, and the world.

Knowledgeable, experienced, and passionate faculty can contribute to delivering an effective curriculum. Teaching has always been seen as more than a profession or employment. Hansen (2011) for example, refers to it as a 'moral practice'. According to Fullan, 'scratch a good global teacher, and one will discover a moral purpose' (Fullan, 1993). However, Fullan (1993) believes this moral aim must be supplemented with "change agent" abilities. Additionally, Fullan says that incorporating change into the moral purpose helps instructors devise ways to achieve their moral objectives.Teachers are seen positively in many countries across the globe as someone who may assist bring about beneficial improvements in people's lives (Bourn, 2016). Teachers are perceived as natural leaders capable of advising on various community issues. Ball (2013) emphasizes the preceding by arguing that instructors should see themselves as agents of change rather than change objects.

Global learning, along with the associated notions of global education, global citizenship, education for sustainable development, and development education, is predicated on the premise that learning is inextricably tied to personal and societal transformation (Bourn, 2016; Kirkwood-Tucker, 2009). Steiner (1996) defines the global instructor as someone interested and concerned about events and movements in their local, national, and global communities. Steiner (1996) further states that instructors actively seek to stay informed while maintaining a skeptical stance toward their sources of information. Thirdly instructors take a principled stand against injustice and inequalities and support others who do the same. Fourthly, global instructors are informed about environmental concerns affecting their own and other communities. Finally, instructors value democratic procedures as the most effective method of effecting good change and participate in social action to support their opinions.

Bourn (2016) argues that if global learning is seen as a process of learning, as a pedagogical technique, rather than an ideal condition, then changes in the learner's attitude and perception of the world may occur, but this does not necessarily imply or should imply social transformation.

Steiner (1996) highlights three critical components of global teaching:

1. It is a technique that emphasizes both the instructor's and the student's first-hand experiences using various educational methods.
2. Global teaching recognizes those teaching concepts from social justice, and the democratic viewpoint entails putting them into reality in the classroom.
3. Global teaching uses various modes of presentation and develops a variety of methods.

4.5. Strategies to Promote Student Perceptions to become Change Agents

Throughout history, a limited group of students has assumed proactive roles in their institutions of higher learning and communities (Ropers-Huilman & Mccoy, 2011). These students, dubbed "student activists", have insisted on being involved in institutional decision-making, particularly those concerning curriculum, leadership, and social and global concerns portrayed on campus (Altbach, 1999; Boren, 2001). Additionally, several student change agents encourage HE leaders to be accountable social actors who recognize the importance of their actions on and off-campus (Barnett, Ropers-Huilman, & Aaron, 2008; Dey & Hurtado, 1995). These students see a need for institutional or societal change. Boren (2001) states how, starting in the 15th century, students were instrumental in overthrowing governments, questioning accepted knowledge, and enacting change on a more local level.

Boren (2001) states that today, student resistance movements constitute a critical factor in social power dynamics. In addition, students must be willing and capable of acting for the greater good (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Stephens, 2003). This position implies that educated individuals must acquire the skills necessary for successful action and feel sufficiently involved in their communities to be motivated to contribute to their enrichment.

An emphasis on the necessity of teaching and practicing civic and community participation in higher education takes these skills and incentives into account. Much of this material has concentrated on how students grow due to their engagement in change, leadership, or activism (Astin, 1993; Astin & Astin, 2000; Boyte & Kari, 2000; Kezar, 2004; Kuh, 1995). There has been scarce research on the impacts of student change agents on their peers, institutions, and greater society and how larger societal discourses regarding students' responsibilities in tertiary education influence the nature and impact of their efforts.

Suppose students are the "outputs" of their HE institutions. Are these students encouraged to alter those institutions or to alter society via their participation in such Ropers fundamentally? How are students' reform initiatives regarded and supported if viewed as "future leaders" or "citizens" of their institutional and greater communities? Ropers-Huilman and Mccoy (2011) suggest that students as change agents can influence institutional decision-making, disrupt educational functioning, educate others, advocate for underrepresented groups, and improve society. Student change agents have traditionally been crucial in university and societal reform movements (Altbach, 1999; Boren, 2001) yet the goals and features of student change attempts have evolved throughout time (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Ropers-Huilman and Mccoy (2011) argue that students who act as change agents have the possibilities to teach and learn via their experiences. Such experiences allow them to practice civic engagement-related skills and motivations. Listening to students' voices implies that students are customers (Benner, Catherine, & Jeffrey, 2019). Rather Healey (2012) proposes a future vision in which "student engagement as co-partners and co-designers in all university and department learning and teaching initiatives, techniques, and practices should be the norm, not the exception." (Healey, 2012).

Benner et al. (2019) describe "student voice" as "student involvement into their education," which might include feedback on instructional themes, how students learn, and how curriculums are constructed, among other things. It is also critical to increase student voice for historically disadvantaged groups, including students from Black, Latinx, Native American, and low-income areas and students with disabilities.

In addition, Benner et al. (2019) recommend the following strategies to enhance students' voices that may contribute to those students becoming change agents.

- Surveys are an effective way to elicit several opinions from students.
- At the HE level, district, and state levels, decision-making bodies might include students or consider their viewpoints.
- Student newsletters and forums enable students to acquire information, interview sources, raise concerns and report on the news. In addition, the avenues may serve as a vehicle for exposing issues in a community and a forum for students to voice their thoughts.
- Students participate in shaping the structure and atmosphere of their learning environment via democratic classroom activities. Lecturers work with students on choices, assisting students in developing the ability to cooperate with their classmates and lecturers.
- Students need to get the space and time necessary to undertake systematic research, identify oppressive conditions in their classrooms or communities, and devise solutions to solve them using the action research technique (Rubin & Jones, 2007).
- Teachers and institutions may empower students' agency in what and how they learn. According to feedback from participants in this model, this approach provided a unique opportunity for teaching staff and students to co-create a more informed model of learning and teaching development that enhanced learning experiences for all and repositioned ownership of those learning experiences as a shared responsibility between academics and students (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014).

- Student consultants can provide insight into particular teaching and learning experiences by addressing power imbalances and promoting shared accountability approaches (Cook-Sather, 2009) which serves as a basis for enhancing and legitimizing students' voices to share their ideas and take leadership.

The following practices may offer the groundwork for and enhance the execution of any plan that empowers students to express their perspectives and take the initiative (Benner et al., 2019).

- Diverse opinions from students. The student's voice is not uniform. Students come from various backgrounds and have a variety of needs. Strategies that include student viewpoints and empower students to lead should involve a diverse range of students, particularly historically disempowered students who may be struggling to thrive in today's educational settings. Incorporating student opinions is made simpler by student surveys, democratic classroom methods, individualized learning, and student-led conferences, all of which facilitate participation by a more significant number of students.

- Students and lecturers should have clear expectations, objectives, and procedures. Students will have varying degrees of involvement and decision-making authority depending on the plan, age level, or organization, such as the councils. Lecturers at all levels—administrators, instructors, and policymakers—should be honest about the areas in which they seek student input and how they intend to include student opinions (Mitra, 2018). Many lecturers will need to go beyond their control zone and accept a new paradigm. Students may then see how their ideas and activities affect policies and practices.

- Trust between lecturers and students. Students and lecturers should cherish and respect one another's opinions and act with excellent intentions. Underlying trust will enable kids and lecturers to resolve disagreements. Schools can aid in developing these relationships by providing opportunities for lecturers and children to interact and communicate outside of specialized academic programs (Weiss, 2018).

- Student platform. While many of the tactics outlined above are more suitable for middle or high school students, schools should begin developing the skills and attitudes necessary to take the initiative, advocate for solutions, and effect change early on. Educators may aid in developing student voice by scaffolding some of these tactics.

- Lecturers' platform. Lecturers must change their perspectives and acquire new collaborative abilities to execute these approaches effectively. For example, lecturers may need assistance in determining the best ways to adjust institutions to promote open discussion and trust between lecturers and students. Additionally, they may benefit from seeing effective tactics in action and hearing from lecturers who have seen the benefits of genuine cooperation with students.

5. METHODOLOGY

Understanding the connection between leadership in higher education institutions, lecturers, community, and its impact on the curriculum, and how that is translated into students becoming change agents are constructs that influence one another.

5.1. Participants

Participants in this study were students who graduated from the HLLC from 2018 to 2021. The final sample size consists of 122 graduate students. Multiple e-mail contacts with links to the graduation survey were sent to maximize participant response rates.

5.2. Measures

This study relies on secondary data gathered over four years from 2018 to 2021. The secondary data source was derived from reflections from a survey that HLLC graduates must complete prior to graduation. This survey was distributed to 171 graduating students enrolled in HLLC at Rutgers-Newark, of which 122 provided their feedback, and this was the sample size. The graduation survey was administered through the online project management platform Podio and had an estimated completion time of five to ten minutes. The overall goal of the graduation survey was to gather feedback about experiences within the HLLC and post-graduation plans.

The graduation survey consisted of seven questions. These included students' contact information, their HLLC experience in 2-3 sentences, their post-graduation plans if they are pursuing graduate school or the workforce, and a space to provide any additional information. Student responses were categorized into the following themes: (1) Attitudes, (2) Action, (3) Catalyst, and (4) No Relationship to Project.

5.3. Findings

Given the phenomenological nature of this research project, the authors reviewed each student's response to examine if the HLLC was promoting students becoming positive change agents and what aspects of the HLLC program facilitated the students' perception of being or becoming change agents? While examining each student's response, the authors focused on the viewpoints, experiences, and feelings shared about the HLLC to determine their connection to the research question. Each response was then given a nominal label to determine its relationship to the project. Prior to analyzing the data, the authors determined that each response would be reviewed and labeled according to the following nominal themes:

- *Attitude:* Did the student state that the HLLC influence their feeling or opinion about change agency?
- *Action:* Did the student attribute their behaviors or actions towards changing agency to the HLLC?
- *Catalyst:* Did the students state that the HLLC provided them with an environment to engage in a change agency?
- *No Relationship to the Project:* The students' reflections did not include any feedback regarding change agency. Instead, their responses focused on other aspects of the services provided by the HLLC.

Additionally, the following labels were also included, if a student's response alluded change agency, to determine which aspect of the HLLC program influenced the student's perception towards positive change agency: (1) Faculty; (2) Curriculum; and (3) Program. The authors reviewed each response and sought consensus on a label based on the student's feedback. Disagreements were discussed among the authors for a consensus based on the outlined label definitions of the study.

Through the nominal labeling and analysis of the data, the authors yielded 35 individual responses alluding to the HLLC promoting students becoming positive change agents and aspects of the HLLC program facilitating the students' perception of becoming change agents. The data findings yielded the following results:

- Fifteen (15) students responded that their feeling or opinion about change agency was influenced by the HLLC (Attitude). The majority of the respondents included statements such as, "Being surrounded by a group of people who are driven and ambitious towards creating positive change in the world expanded my own views of what it is possible to do." Additionally, nine respondents indicated a shift in their self-awareness and need for social change. This shift is reflective in comments like, "The HLLC has helped me down a path of understanding myself and others. I became more aware of social injustices around us and stood against them."
- Of the 15 responses labeled as Attitude, 12 respondents attributed the HLLC Program with influencing their feeling or opinion about change agency. Various respondents stated, "[the] HLLC helped me realize what I

am passionate about and how I can have a voice and be a part of meaningful societal changes." Additionally, seven respondents alluded, "Becoming self-aware, using my talents and voice to enact change, and developing a deep level of empathy for issues that are not my own are only a few lessons this program has gifted me."

- Three (3) respondents labeled as Attitude attributed the HLLC Curriculum with influencing their feeling or opinion about change agency. The following statement exemplifies this influence, "[the] HLLC afforded me the opportunity to meet and develop relationships with like-minded individuals who are passionate, serious, and intentional about creating equitable space for all in some regards. What is more, upon joining HLLC, you come to find it pretty quickly that social problems exist from many perspectives, and it is only through extensive and deliberate dialog, the will to act and empathy will we ever get close to addressing these problems."

- Twenty (20) students responded that the HLLC provided an environment to engage in a change agency (Catalyst). Most of the respondents stated, "HLLC afforded me the opportunity to meet and develop relationships with like-minded individuals who are passionate, serious, and intentional about creating equitable space for all in some regards." Many of these respondents stated, "I was able to take in so many perspectives that opened me up to new possibilities and outlooks that I had not experienced prior to attending Rutgers University. Being part of a community so passionate about social justice and change has been not only crucial to my success within the university but also extremely liberating." Another six respondents included statements such as, "The HLLC was a transformational program that helped me to contextualize what it takes to be a true change agent in society. Change agency is a complicated path, and the skills that are needed to be successful in making and inspiring changes are difficult to master, but the HLLC provided the analytical and practical framework in which to cultivate these skills."

- Of the 20 responses labeled as Catalyst, 15 respondents attributed the HLLC Program with providing them with an environment for them to engage in change agency. Many respondents stated, "The HLLC helped me get out of my bubble and become a change agent." Furthermore, "the program has challenged me to be the voice not only for those around me but also for my community." Six (6) more respondents included statements such as, "The program has challenged me to be the voice not only for those around me but for my community."

- Another five (5) respondents labeled as Catalyst attributed the HLLC Curriculum with providing them with an environment for them to engage in change agency. Some of the responses included, "classes have allowed me to gain more knowledge about people, community, and the world at large." The majority of these respondents specifically alluded to the classes or the curriculum, such as, "[the] HLLC's curriculum gave me a new perspective and framework to understand concepts of justice, human rights, and advancing kindness. Thanks to my time as an HLLC scholar and being at RU-N, I developed my identity as an academic force and an activist."

- None of the students' feedback attributed their behaviors or actions towards change agency to the HLLC (Action) or specifically identified the faculty as an impacting aspect of the HLLC program facilitating their perceptions of becoming change agents. Even though the findings do not indicate a relationship between the student actions towards positive change agency or the faculty's role in their perceptions, a relationship could exist. The framing and analysis utilized for this project did not identify any student feedback alluding to either.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings from this project indicate that the HLLC program encourages students to become positive change agents. The project looked at how the HLLC program contributes to students' perceptions of becoming positive agents. Based on the responses from the students and the framing of the project, we could not identify a single attribute being the cause of students becoming change agents. Instead, various attributes and aspects of the HLLC Program contribute to students' perceptions about becoming change agents. Various constructs are needed to promote positive change agents, as reviewed in the literature. Among them, the role of leadership, strategically utilizing resources, the type of curriculum offered, and corporative student engagement opportunities are essential for program aiming to promote positive change agents.

The role of leadership in HE institutions is critical in determining the institution's type of culture and climate. Effective leadership should include a collective approach that includes the voices of their students, faculty, community partners, and other stakeholders. Stensaker et al. (2017) mentioned that educational leaders must negotiate a rugged terrain, which necessitates teamwork. Based on the reflective feedback from the students, we found that the HLLC as a program plays a role in them becoming change agents. Twenty-five (25) HLLC students shared their perceptions explaining how the program facilitated them understanding their identity and their awareness of social injustices and taking a stand against them. A similar study by Sivakumar and Sarvalingam (2010) stated the importance of increasing students' awareness of their role as change agents for the greater good of their society.

Additionally, besides institutional leadership, providing resource allocations, coordination, and management (Bolden et al., 2012) is essential to various partnerships. The type of resources and how the leadership in higher learning institutions allocates them are meaningful to becoming change agents. This project found that the classes and curriculum provided by the HLLC leadership expanded the perspectives and broadened the lenses of the students around issues related to social justice and developed their identity. While students mentioned the positive impact of the curriculum, no feedback was given regarding the faculty.

The HLLC students received teaching based on a shared interdisciplinary curriculum built upon themes related to "local citizenship in a global world. The curriculum of HLLC is in accordance with what Stark and Lattuca (1997) advocate. They state that external pressures such as society, government, and alumni have influenced curriculum formulation and the process of curriculum reform.

As mentioned in the background section about the HLLC, this project concurs with Benner et al. (2019). They recommend strategies to enhance student voices to equip those students better to become positive change agents. These strategies include surveys for the students, representation of decision-making bodies, student newsletters, and forums that enable students to acquire information, interview sources, raise concerns and report on the news. Furthermore, to allow students to shape the structure and atmosphere of their learning environment, certain conditions must be met. These conditions include students needing the space and time necessary to undertake systematic research, identify oppressive conditions in their classrooms or communities, devise solutions to solve them using the action research technique (Rubin & Jones, 2007) and finally, empowering students in what and how they acquire knowledge (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Student consultants can provide insight into teaching and learning experiences (Cook-Sather, 2009).

6.1. Recommendations

The HLLC should conduct a pre-and-post survey with multiple components that will allow the leadership to identify if any specific factor significantly influences students becoming change agents. The survey should be

administered annually in the fall semester and at the end of the spring semester, allowing the HLLC leadership to compare changes in perception among their students from year to year.

6.2. Significance of this Project

These results add to the rapidly expanding field of publicly engaged scholarships. Before this project, evidence of the extent to which the HLLC program contributes to the student's perception of becoming change agents was purely anecdotal. With the ever-changing phase of higher education, the HLLC is an example of a program already serving as a catalyst to encourage its students to become change agents. In addition, becoming change agents should be embedded in the mission and vision of similar programs across the country. Finally, building on this project, it is essential to conduct primary research that examines the various independent variables that may impact students' perceptions of becoming change agents.

6.3. Limitations of Study

The project was based on secondary data derived from reflective feedback collected from a particular sub-group at the HLLC. The graduating class of 2018, which comprised of 28 transfer students, was not included in this project because the survey was not administered to this group of students. Another potential problem is that the project's scope may have been too broad.

6.4. Areas for Future Research

Future work is required to establish the viability of the HLLC program, in the long run, to contribute to students' perceptions of becoming positive change agents. There are opportunities to enhance the initiatives of the HLLC program to promote students' perceptions to become positive change agents. Further studies are needed to develop a framework around the perception of students' journey to become positive change agents.

7. CONCLUSION

In sum, multiple attributes are responsible for students becoming change agents. Partnerships with various stakeholders are necessary for this process. How students perceived the leadership of the HLLC program, and the curriculum were referenced in the feedback provided by the HLLC graduates. This project found that the HLLC program plays a critical role in students becoming change agents. Also, the resources provided by the HLLC contribute to the process of students becoming change agents. It would have been interesting to include other constructs aside from those identified in this project. The community's role in a program and curriculum development are factors to investigate in future studies. Finally, the mission and vision articulated on the HLLC website are translated to how the students are becoming change agents. This connection is an indication that the feedback received from the students is aligned with the mission and vision of the HLLC.

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