UNDERSTANDING GAINS FROM ON-CAMPUS CULTURAL EVENTS

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Undergraduate seniors at a residential liberal-arts college reflected on their experiences attending on-campus cultural events. These focus groups were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using a grounded theory-derived approach to understand how these events shaped their college experience. The resulting communication artifact revealed a variety of student outcomes tied to on-campus cultural event attendance. The findings have implications for the design, implementation, and assessment of academic and co-curricular programming, particularly in terms of articulating the purpose of such programming and enlisting faculty in its delivery.

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IT IS STANDARD PRACTICE FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES to provide an active program of on-campus cultural events such as lectures, musical and theatrical performances, and art exhibition openings. Collectively across campuses, millions of dollars are spent annually to pay speakers and performers, construct and maintain expensive performance facilities, and organize and advertise these events. With a common mission for colleges and universities to develop students into well-rounded, intellectually curious, and engaged citizens (Javinar, 2000; King, et al., 2007), it is not surprising that these programs and events are a valued fundamental component of the co-curriculum or "other curriculum," the activities outside of the classroom experience that promotes student learning and development (Kuh, 1995). These on-campus cultural events also serve as a core element of the intellectual and cultural identity of the campus, providing a range of opportunities, through a social forum, to engage with new or differing views or novel artistic experiences. Little research, however, has explored how attendance at these events affects the college student experience and how they may contribute to their holistic development.

On-Campus Cultural Events

On-campus cultural events (hereafter OCCEs) include the scholarly lectures, artistic performances, exhibition openings, or similar out-of-class opportunities to engage with arts-, sciences-, and humanities-related endeavors, primarily in the role of audience member. OCCE programs are designed to draw all members of the campus community (e.g., students, faculty, staff) as well as members of the local community. Accordingly, they present a unique opportunity to integrate as well as facilitate aspects of participants' intellectual, academic, and social development.

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With a broad scope of activities (e.g., readings, panels, performances) covering a wide range of topics or genres, OCCEs provide opportunities to present new ideas, perspectives, or experiences as well as facilitate meaningful interactions among students, faculty, or community members. The repeated opportunity to engage with ideas and individuals that differ from preexisting knowledge and experiences is essential for growth of knowledge, the development of cognitive skills, aspects of personal identity and self-concept, and broader sociopolitical, ethnic, racial, gender-role awareness and attitudes (Reason et al., 2007). Consequently, these events, which engage individuals intellectually, emotionally, and socially, likely contribute to the attainment of measurable higher education outcomes such as growth in cognitive and moral reasoning abilities or changes in attitudes and values towards openness to diversity (Mayhew et al., 2016). In addition, they may help to foster liberal arts habits of mind, such as the inclination to inquire and the pursuit of lifelong learning (Siefert et al., 2008).

The connection between OCCEs and student outcomes, however, has evaded the traditional modes of institutional assessment. This connection may be because, despite the prevalence of OCCEs upon college campuses, they generally fall outside the purview of academic planning and programmatic assessment. In addition, they are not central to standardized measures of student engagement and outcomes, which center on more active (e.g., committed student time or energy) modes of student engagement. For example, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) focuses on the frequency of "active participation" in specific co-curricular activities (Kuh, 2009, p. 18) to measure engagement, not the putatively passive attendance at lectures or performing artist series. Also, it does not assess the students' perceptions of the value of these experiences on their educational background, particularly how these experiences may affect them emotionally, socially, or cognitively.

Student Engagement & "The Other Curriculum"

While different theories of student engagement (see Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Kuh, 2009; Kahu, 2013; Pascarella & Terinizini, 2005) highlight various components of student behavior, cognition, or emotion, all generally agree that both curricular and co-curricular experiences matter greatly in explaining student outcomes. Several studies have linked higher levels of engagement (e.g., frequency, amount of time) in academic and co-curricular activities to higher levels of academic success (Hu & Kuh, 2002; Kuh, et al., 2008; Webber, et al., 2013) and student satisfaction (Webber et al., 2013; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). However, limits to this positive impact have been found, with negative effects found for those who over-extend (e.g., 1-2 standard deviations above the mean) their time or commitments (Bowman & Trolian, 2017).

While some level of involvement in "the other curriculum" is identified as a critical element of student engagement, the range of activities included in this construct, as well as the specific contribution of these activities to student outcomes, is less well explored. Moderate to high levels of out-of-class involvement, however, has been associated with higher levels of connectedness to the campus community. Specifically, those with moderate to high levels of participation in campus activities (e.g., intramural sports, conference and workshop attendance, student clubs, or community service) reported higher scores for the "teaching and learning," "residential experience," "diversity and acceptance," and "history and tradition" factors on the Sense of Campus Community scale (Elkins, et al., 2011). Similarly, Webber et al. (2013) found a link between more frequent participation in academic and social activities and improved academic performance (i.e., higher grades) and higher levels of satisfaction with the college experience. However, this study combined aspects of academic and curricular engagement (e.g., discussing assignments with faculty) with elements of social engagement (e.g., relationship with other students) and extra-curricular activities (e.g., participation in community service) such that the unique contributions of the social and extra-curricular engagement on outcomes could not be determined.

In daily activities, students engage in a wide range of activities that demand differing degrees of physical and mental energy that, especially cumulatively, may foster their development and connect to broader positive student outcomes. This cumulative nature of campus experiences is a component of some models of student engagement (Kahu, 2013). For example, students who routinely attended sporting events were found to have higher levels of esteem for, and consequently connectedness to, the institution (Clopton, 2009; Wann & Robinson, 2002). In addition, those who regularly attended college sporting activities, when controlling for level of

academic preparedness and academic achievement, were found to have higher graduation rates than those who did not attend sporting events (Schurr & Wittig, 1993; Wann & Robinson, 2002). The benefits associated with college sporting event attendance speak to the vital role of social connection, perceptions of the college environment, and integration of the campus experience in predicting academic and social outcomes (Pascarella, 1985; Pike, 2000). Most measures of student engagement, however, have missed these aspects of campus engagement.

Like sporting events, OCCEs have the distinct opportunity to promote engagement with and connectedness to the campus community. In addition, they have a distinct function of being able to connect the academic and intellectual elements of campus identity to the social. Nevertheless, despite the strong perception across higher education institutions that they are a valuable aspect of campus life (hence the amount of institutional resources used to support them), their role in engaging and supporting college student development has escaped significant attention in the research literature. Elkins et al. (2011) did find that 37% of their study sample reported at least occasional attendance in on-campus conferences, workshops, and fine arts events and, those who attended events scored significantly higher on the teaching and learning factor of the Sense of Campus Community scale. Similarly, an analysis of students' written self-reflections about their experience at OCCEs revealed discernible effect related to attitude formation, gains in new knowledge, or spurring new actions or behaviors, in approximately half of the over 360 essays reviewed (Tuten et al., 2015).

To fill the gap in our knowledge, this study sought to identify student perceptions of the value and role of OCCEs in their undergraduate education. We explored this connection via qualitative analysis of focus-group interviews with two cohorts of college seniors. We briefly describe our method before laying out the findings and implications of our observations.

METHOD

At a small, residential liberal arts institution of approximately 1500 students in rural central Pennsylvania, we conducted eight focus group interviews with first-semester fourth-year students across two different academic years (i.e., from the classes of 2014 and 2015, respectively). Because two of us were affiliated with the institution as faculty and had undertaken the investigation as a contribution to a broader program of institutional assessment, we had high levels of (1) access to students, (2) administration support, and (3) familiarity with the curriculum, the student body, and the cultural events program. The presence of a third author who did not share the same institutional affiliation helped bring an outside perspective to our analytic efforts.

For both academic years, students were recruited through academic programs that offered capstone and fourth-level courses in the fall semesters. Faculty members teaching these courses were asked to extend an invitation to students to participate. Participants were also entered into a raffle for gift cards as an incentive to attend. The focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed; the transcripts were then analyzed using a constant comparative method to identify motifs emergent within the corpus of text and generate a theoretical model of the contribution of on-campus cultural events to student engagement.

Participants

A total of 57 students, with an average of seven students per group (range 5 to 12), participated in the focus groups. Participants were 63% female and represented academic majors in Arts and Humanities (39%), Social Sciences (39%), and Natural Sciences (22%). The participants identified as White (86%), Hispanic/Latino (5%), Asian/Pacific Islander (5%), Black/African-American (2%), and Multi-racial (2%). Five percent also were international students. These race/ethnicity demographics of participants were similar to the institutional demographics of these years, which were White (79%), Hispanic/Latino (3%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2%), Black/African-American (2%), Multi-racial (2%), unknown (2%), with 9% international students, thus indicating our participant sample reflected the race/ethnicity aspects of campus. The two class years from which the participants in the focus groups were drawn comprised of 715 total students, so these 57 students represented just under 8% of this graduating cohort. This group of volunteers seems likely to be well-connected within the social

networks of their class community, in that it is reasonable to suppose that, to the extent that those who self-select to participate in a focus group about their undergraduate experience are different than those who do not volunteer, they are likely to be more outgoing and more socially connected and positive about that experience.

The first two authors served as facilitators of the eight focus groups. One of us, a male History professor, conducted six interviews; the other, a female Psychology professor, the remaining two. Both were faculty at the institution. We knew some of the participants from classes, from advising meetings, or as members of the campus community. In general, the facilitation process resembled a small seminar class in that the interactions were relatively informal, with students' familiarity and friendships with each other being the leading cause of that atmosphere. To ensure that all focus group sessions covered the same content area, the facilitators co-developed a schedule of questions to guide the focus group process, discussed below.

Data Collection and Analysis

This investigation was part of a larger project involving an intervention in the OCCE attendance of two cohorts of students. In the focus participants' first semester, their first-year writing course was randomly assigned to a differing course requirement of OCCE attendance (e.g., 0, 5, or 10). At the end of each semester, their reported attendance at OCCEs and social connection to campus were collected. Because these quantitative measures showed no immediate effects, we supposed that the effects of OCCEs were likely broader than campus connection and also might emerge later, as attendance may have a cumulative effect over time and students may need a chance to reflect on the experience within the scope of their college career. Hence, we decided to conduct focus groups with this group of students in their fourth year.

As Liamputtong (2011) notes, focus group methods in social science research are generally employed from a *symbolic interactionist* perspective, a "framework which greatly emphasizes the essence of meaning and interpretation as crucial human processes" (p. 16). Focus group methodology gives access to the collective sense-making and understanding that develops in interaction with others. For that reason, we chose to gather qualitative data from these cohorts as seniors, and we chose focus group interviews as an appropriate method to prompt the sort of retrospective sense-making we suspected would most clearly reveal the way that OCCEs affected the student experience. As we present excerpts from interview transcripts, we will characterize the speaker in terms of demographic and academic identifiers so that the reader can assess the dimensions of homogeneity within our participants, a feature that is desirable in focus groups (Corfman, 1995).

The interviews centered on students' experiences with on-campus cultural events throughout their academic experience. All of the focus groups began with asking students to independently recall and list any campus cultural events they remembered attending during their first year—that is, as far back as they could remember. Then the facilitator moderated a broader conversation about the group's experience attending on-campus events across the subsequent years of their college career. Facilitators had a general framework of questions related to campus event attendance. Not all questions were asked at each focus group. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. The focus group meetings were recorded and transcribed.

The transcripts were then iteratively coded, first for *turns* that are instances of response to facilitator prompts. Then transcripts were read twice for content, using a constant comparative method to identify *codes* that were motifs emergent within the corpus of the text and generate a theoretical model of the contribution of on-campus cultural events to student development. All transcripts were reviewed, with the researchers severally (at least in pairs) reading and reaching agreement on a set of codes and their assignment to turns. The transcripts ranged in length from 35 to 97 turns, comprising a total of 467 turns.

We examined the set of transcripts produced by the focus group interviews. We collaboratively generated a set of terms encompassing commonly expressed ideas about the attitudes, difficulties, and outcomes associated with students attending OCCE. Each author read two transcripts and generated an initial set of terms. Then, we read through a single transcript together to see how well the emergent categories applied to that portion of the data;

as a result, collapsing some categories that seemed to overlap and sharpening the criteria we used to determine edge cases. We then applied the coding scheme to the entire corpus, with the researchers in pairs re-reading individual transcripts and recoding as needed to ensure the systematic application of content categories.

FINDINGS

The interpretive coding process produced ten specific categories related to student outcomes associated with going to OCCEs (see Table 1). These gains included aspects of cognition (e.g., gains in knowledge or changes in ways of thinking) as well as social and emotional (e.g., broadening horizons, peer relations) and personal growth (e.g., understanding norms of social behavior).

Table 1. *Student Outcome Categories*

Learning and Cognitive Gains	**Definition**
General Knowledge	A claim demonstrating the acquisition of general, broad new information.
Content Knowledge	A claim that identifies specific knowledge gained through attendance at an event.
Related to Academic Program	A claim about the relevance of a cultural event to a student's academic major.
Events of Consequence	A claim expressing an understanding of a cultural event as a signal moment in the student's experience.
Broadening Horizons	A claim expressing some aspect of the liberal arts ethos or other appreciation for the breadth of human endeavor.
Spurred Action	A claim to have taken some action or exhibited some behavior in response to information gained by attending an event.
Social, Emotional & Personal Gains	**Definition**
Entertainment/Diversion	A claim to have enjoyed or appreciated an event or the virtuosity of a performer.
Peer Relations	A claim related to strengthening connections with friends or peers through attendance at an event.
Campus/Community Identity	A claim related to stronger identification with the campus or community.
Understanding of Social Norms & Behaviors	A claim related to the application of social standards, conventions, or expectations to behavior at events.

Learning and Cognitive Gains

The sub-category of *General Knowledge* reflected students' claims of understanding OCCEs as learning opportunities rather than entertainment. Most often, these comments referred to acquiring new information at lectures attended rather than at artistic performances. A Latina female elementary education student's statement, "My freshman year, I enjoyed the lectures that I went to, and I learned something new every time that otherwise I wouldn't have known anything about," reflects this category of responses. *Content Knowledge* claims, however, were identified when students referred to specific information that they had acquired because of attending an OCCE. A White male Politics student remembered attending a presentation on malaria during his sophomore year, and told us, "It was just interesting to see how through malaria, and a couple of other agents, that Latin America was conquered." Relatedly, some statements reflected specific gains in learning related to their particular academic area of study. These were categorized as *Related to Academic Program*, as when a White female Geo-Ecology student told us that a faculty member's talk on metabolic scaling she had attended was relevant to a course she was taking, since "you can actually apply those same concepts with trilobites and, like, fossils." Her

statement reflects this linking of new knowledge to her major area of study. A White female International Studies student said that OCCEs "round out what I do, my international studies course work . . . It gives me a little more depth of what I know, like with the Indonesian puppet [show]—I liked knowing about that and experiencing that."

Statements reflecting more depth to their learning that included an articulated awareness of the significance of this knowledge in their lives were labeled Events of Consequence. *Events of Consequence* were identified when students recalled experiencing an OCCE as a personally meaningful, significant, or consequential encounter that influenced their understanding of the world or themselves, or that influenced their plans for the future in a significant way (e.g., a student's decision about a major or to study abroad). For example, "I think it was the first event that made me think I was in college because usually when you're in high school, you get censored kinda from not the horribleness of the world, but kinda the darker aspects," reported a White female student who studied International Politics and Russian. "So this was the first thing I'd done in school that I'd really felt, I'm not an adult yet, but I'm on the cusp because I'm allowed to be shown these things, and I'm expected to understand or empathize." Other specific "events of consequence" mentioned with some frequency included listening to a Holocaust survivor and learning about genocides across the globe.

Another aspect of learning reflected in student comments had to do with their judgments about or understanding of the connection between OCCE and their own knowledge or learning. These comments reflected aspects of a liberal arts ethos or other appreciation for the breadth of human cultural endeavor and were categorized as *Broadening Horizons*. For example, a White female Environmental Science and Geology student told us that OCCEs "bring a different perspective to what I was used to," adding that "College is very different than rural, central Pennsylvania, and so you get to see different perspective, different views, and it makes you think." Others shared how a particular cultural event led them to become aware of significant world events of which they had no prior knowledge. "It was the Rwanda genocide, and that one really stuck out to me because 12 years of education and I had never heard of this genocide," commented a White male Politics student who played Division III football. "It was an event that I had no background of, no understanding of, and it was strange to me that something was to happen in history, and I had no idea. That really stuck in my mind."

Lastly, the final category related to student learning and cognitive gains was labeled *Spurred Action*. This category reflected students claims to have taken a specific action or exhibited some behavior (e.g., did further research on a topic, downloaded music of a musician they had seen, called a parent to share what they had seen or learned, discussed the event with friends during a meal) in response to attending an event. This category was linked to learning and cognitive gains, as statements about their behavior were reflective of patterns of thinking or were linked to aspects of learning or sharing of knowledge. Many of the actions were short-term, such as a White male Zoology student who shared that "I have been to a few of the speeches and just walking out with my friends . . . we would be talking about did you agree with it, was that a good speech? Or we will critique [it] over lunch the next day." But some actions were somewhat more consequential. "I remember going to one [event] freshman year…it was an art show. Ever since then, I've taken a lot more art classes than I would have thought. I've taken more than the requirement," a White male Business Management student explained.

In general, students disagreed about the degree to which relevance to their academic program was an important factor in whether they gained something from OCCE. A White male Accounting student thought that department-focused or -sponsored events were beneficial. "Stuff like that, if I have other obligations, I'll put that aside and rather go listen to him," he said. "But if there are cultural events that I think are interesting, but don't really pertain to my career path, then I won't really go out of my way to go see it." However, others had differing viewpoints. "The courses you take, you're kind of limited in how you think or what you can talk about," a White male Politics and Economics student observed, "so cultural events are a good way to expand that intellectual horizon."

Social, Emotional, and Personal Gains

Student comments also reflected a variety of gains in aspects of their own social, emotional, and personal growth. In these categories, students voiced the critical role of OCCEs in providing a space to be entertained and to con-

nect with their peers and the broader campus community in social and meaningful ways. In addition, they noted OCCEs provided an opportunity for them to be exposed to and practice norms of behavior in these various academic and cultural event settings.

Students repeatedly identified campus cultural events as providing a valued opportunity for entertainment, giving them a space on campus to have fun with their peers and divert their attention away from the daily stresses of their academic work. These comments comprised the category of *Entertainment/Diversion*. "I think I would have transferred out [of the school] if we didn't have cultural events….[the campus location] is a beautiful town but not very culturally diverse, and there's not much to do around here," shared a female White, Peace and Conflict Studies student who was a part-time employee in a community business. She continued, "Having the [cultural events series], having concerts, and dinners, and whatever, it enriches your experience. It enriched my experience. Just having something to do at night that isn't homework is nice. You can kind of relax." This category also reflected student appreciation for the talent or skill of the performer or lecturer. "I remember that this one guy was making all these noises that sounded like different instruments. I just thought that was mind-blowing," stated a White female Mathematics student. "I would say definitely, especially in music, which is definitely not my thing at all, to see someone achieve that high of a level of perfection was just really, really awesome."

In strengthening social ties and connections, the category of *Peer Relations* reflected student comments on the role of their peer group in attending events. These included being asked to go to an event with a peer, asking peers to attend events with them, or enjoying or appreciating watching their peers perform (e.g., theatre, orchestra). "I think I attended some orchestra thing, and I really liked that. I was really impressed that a lot of my teammates and classmates played these instruments, that I would have never guessed," noted a White female who studied Accounting and Financial Management. She went on, "I was like, 'Oh, you go to my concert. I'll go to yours.' We kind of exchanged attendance that way, which I enjoyed a lot because then I get to see my friends, like 'There's that guy in history that I had a class with, and he plays violin.'"

Attendance at events helped students feel connected to the campus community. The category of *Campus Community/Identity* reflected students' sense of personal connection to the campus, including attendance at certain events that spurred them to feel proud and a part of "who we are" and "what we stand for." A White female International Studies student said, "I guess for some of the other performances, it is nice to see the people that you know from different parts of campus or different —all together in the same place— it adds to the community feel."

Lastly, in the area of personal development, student comments reflected a formative role for OCCEs on their professional and social behaviors. These comprised the category of *Understanding Social Norms and Behaviors,* which encompassed comments ranging from identifying specific behaviors that signify a good audience member to the importance of engaging respectfully with peers and presenters. In addition, comments in this category reflected a clear awareness of expected as well as newly learned social norms for behavior in professional and community settings. "One of the best pieces of advice that I've gotten in my four years here," a White male student-athlete majoring in Politics told us, was "whenever you're at a presentation or a lecture like that, try to come up with at least one question that you could ask or something that you could get involved in a discussion with, and you'll walk away from that presentation, or lecture, so much better because of that." Sometimes this reflection revealed views of personal and professional engagement, as when a White female International Business Communication shared the comment, "if there's a speaker within your department or your field . . . even if you're not getting extra credit, you feel pressure [to attend]."

DISCUSSION

Students from a wide range of academic backgrounds identified the high value of OCCEs in their undergraduate experience and attested to the role of OCCEs in shaping their experience in numerous ways, including spurring the development of new knowledge or new ways of thinking, spurring changes in behavior, and facilitating connections to their peers and the institution. Their comments also revealed a striking distinction between those who viewed them as being more a transactional experience—attendance rewarded by extra credit, for example—

and those who saw them as part of a broader liberal arts education. One way in which this was manifest was the difference between those who sought to integrate OCCE experience as relevant to their academic program versus those who understood it as contributing to their general knowledge or expanding their worldly horizons.

The student comments revealed that OCCE attendance plays a variety of roles in the campus community, including providing them with opportunities to learn, be entertained, and share experiences with others. As such, these events not only play a part in engaging students intellectually but also socially with their peers, as a part of the campus community. Thus, these events can play a unique function in involving students and connecting them to the campus community. Stronger campus community connections have been tied to enhanced academic development (Carini, et al., 2006; Kuh et al., 2008; Webber et al., 2013) and increased retention (Carini, et al., 2006; Kuh et al., 2008; Wann & Robinson, 2002).

Although the greatest benefit for student growth has been attributed to out-of-class activities that require notable time and effort (Kuh, 1995; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Kuh, et al., 2008; Webber, et al., 2013), student comments related to attendance at OCCEs revealed an interesting range of influence across important areas of student development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and personal development. The range of student comments suggests that passive attendance at campus events plays some role in stimulating cognitive growth (including supporting gains in new knowledge), broadening awareness of the range of intellectual and artistic experiences that exist, and influencing behavior. In addition, student comments identified the vital role of campus events in supporting social connection and well-being by providing a diversion from the stress and day-to-day responsibilities of being a student. Similar outcomes emerged in a longitudinal study of engagement with cultural events and the arts that found a positive relationship between engagement with these activities and higher scores of general life satisfaction and self-reported health (Weziak-Białowolska, 2016). In connection to holistic development, patterns of behaviors established in college, such as regular attendance at public lectures and artistic performances, may play a valuable role in the shaping of well-rounded, well-engaged, and more satisfied. This connection should be investigated further in future research.

Also, in the domain of social and personal growth, student dialogue reflected the critical connection between OCCE attendance and connection to peers. Student comments identified clear value in how campus events served an important social function on campus. Whether by attending events with peers, discussing the events afterward with friends or family, or expressing awe or appreciation for peers' performances, students repeatedly identified the opportunities to connect with their peers in these ways, outside of class, as valuable. Kuh (1995) reports that students' interactions with their peers are connected to gains in interpersonal competence (self-awareness, social competence, self-esteem, and autonomy), humanitarianism (altruism, aesthetics), and cognitive complexity (reflective judgment, application of knowledge). Our findings, though more limited, are in accord with this observation. Consequently, institutional practices that effectively promote student interaction with on-campus events would likely serve to enhance these positive gains.

As identified by student comments, not all campus events are created equal or will have an equivalent effect on students. While some distinct events that we called *Events of Consequence* played a palpable role students' thinking and emotions, any given event seems likely to have had only an incremental effect on student development, particularly in changing cognitive skills (Terenzini et al., 1996) or attitudes towards diversity (Bowman & Trollian, 2017). The holistic perspective of student development (Kahu, 2013) suggests that it is the interplay of particular events and individual student factors (e.g., background knowledge, expectations, openness to new ideas) within the context of the institution (e.g., the value of new ideas in shaping thinking) that leads to growth. Our findings suggest that a student's orientation towards OCCEs as either transactional or developmental shapes the way that they engage with those events, and that this orientation is possibly a point of intervention for increasing their efficacy.

An interesting outcome linked to personal development was the theme of *Understanding of Social Norms and Behaviors*. This category of student responses included gains in awareness of appropriate audience behavior or expected behaviors in particular types of events (e.g., availability of food and drink at an art opening, ways to ask

questions at a lecture). Student responses expressed appreciation for learning new behaviors that helped them adapt to new situations and frustration when they felt others violated these expectations (e.g., being on a mobile device during a lecture, making noise when leaving before the end of a lecture). As colleges are continually asked to think about ways to connect learning to personal and professional life, student responses demonstrated that OCCEs could provide a professional setting in which students can gain and practice personal and professional skills outside of the classroom.

Institutional Practices to Support Cultural Event Programs

Higher education institutions often express a goal of holistically developing students to be well-rounded, active, and engaged citizens via the facilitation of their intellectual, social, and personal growth. According to Kuh (1995), students attributed approximately 11% of their growth and development in college to institutional climate and practices that shaped their thinking and behavior over time. In short, the values of the institution, as they are reflected in the student policies and practices for engagement, play a notable role in shaping lifelong learning or engaged citizenry (Pike, et al., 2012; Terenzini, et al., 1996). Thus, how institutions support and shape student engagement with OCCEs would likely make a notable impact on student thinking and behavior over time. As noted in numerous studies, student engagement in campus activities is connected to a variety of student factors, ranging from whether they reside on campus to the education level of their parents (e.g., Hu & Kuh, 2002). Consequently, to optimally engage most students, those planning campus events must consider the unique needs of their student body.

In addition, because of the variation in students' native and often unspoken assumptions about the purpose of on-campus cultural events, program administrators should extend some effort in developing and managing student assumptions about those events. A clear institutional value for the campus events, which includes how they are promoted and how they might intentionally connect to other aspects of the campus community (e.g., institutional learning outcomes), should be well-recognized on campus. How campuses articulate the value and role of OCCEs in shaping the campus climate and student experience and outcomes likely influences what students expect from them and, consequently, how they engage with the events (Hu & Kuh, 2002; Reason, et al., 2007). Such expectations could be reflected by the creation of external motivations for attendance (e.g., requiring event attendance), mainly aimed at those less likely to attend, and ensuring affordances for attention and knowledge retention. Thus, OCCE programming that is designed to support higher levels of student engagement may result in more positive student outcomes. Future research should explore the role of external motivations as well as different program structures and their connection to student gains, levels of engagement, or satisfaction.

This research may be of particular interest to those who oversee first-year programs. In understanding the role of OCCEs as a mechanism for connecting peers, for broadening horizons, and providing new experiences or ways of thinking. OCCEs could play a powerful role in students' transition to college. Because student experiences in their first year of college have been found to influence the degree to which students learn and change, particularly in the areas of social and personal competence (Reason et al., 2007), OCCE programs that serve a variety of functions (e.g., academic, personal growth, social interaction) may help students acclimate to the college environment. In addition, by emphasizing involvement in the events starting in the first semester, it may help students to acquire attitudes and behaviors that are reflective of life-long learning and engagement that will remain with them post-graduation. A longitudinal study examining how engagement with cultural events from the first semester through the college experience would help to better identify their influence over time.

Finally, how the broader campus community engages with OCCEs likely affects the student experience and, consequently, student outcomes. For example, institutional practices that support the active participation of faculty and staff in campus events may help to promote meaningful engagement with students outside of class. These intentionally designed, meaningful interactions with influence the degree to which students feel connected to their peers and the institution (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). An interesting outcome of these data was the category of Campus Community/Identity. This category reflected student comments about their identification as members of the campus community, including feeling pride for or elevated affinity to be a part of the community, both

personally and intellectually. Comments linked to these categories reflect a sense of connection, which has been associated with stronger student satisfaction as well as increased persistence (Elliot, 2002; Kuh et al., 2008). Cultural event attendance, therefore, can serve a crucial function in bringing students together as members of the broader campus community. Having faculty and staff engaged in these events also models lifelong learning and engagement, which may, over time, help to shape positive student attitudes and behaviors toward these values.

Directions for Future Research

The concept of student engagement is multi-dimensional, encompassing aspects of the student and the institution (Krause & Coates, 2008; Zhoc et al., 2019). This study broadened the concept of student engagement to incorporate student attendance at OCCEs. It also highlights how, for many students, engagement requires support at the institutional level to develop into intentional practice on their part. A challenging advance would be to design a scale to measure attitudes and understandings of the role of OCCE in the "other curriculum." Such work could elucidate the student view on a transactional versus a holistic understanding of their education. Based on this study's suggestion that OCCEs have positive outcomes for students, a study could design and assess interventions to enhance student engagement with OCCE, possibly isolating elements of student outcomes, such as cognitive development, to better understand gains in these areas. In addition, an examination of how aspects of individual student factors (e.g., economic background, gender, ethnicity), as well as other aspects of their campus engagement (e.g., involvement in student government, athletics), may differentially influence the student experience related to OCCEs would be a logical next step in this area of study. Lastly, a longitudinal assessment of how OCCE experiences and related outcomes mattered in the long-term for students would yield valuable insights on the role of the co-curricular campus activities in shaping adult professional and personal lives post-graduation.

CONCLUSION

This investigation provides initial observations about an under-examined area of the undergraduate experience. The range of outcomes articulated by the focus group participants speaks to broader questions about the role of higher education and the function of the academy during a time when academic institutions are under intense economic, political, and social pressure to demonstrate its value and focus on its core mission. In particular, students' willingness to regard on-campus cultural events, and indeed their co-curricular activities more generally, as an essential part of their college experience seems to reflect the extent to which they recognize their college years as an opportunity to develop "certain qualities of mind and heart requisite for reflective citizenship" (Delbanco, 2012, p. 3), beyond its role in their professional certification and career training. As institutions of higher education face the challenges of the twenty-first century, it will be increasingly important for them to articulate their position concerning the holistic development of students and be able to demonstrate how their institutional practices and co-curricular programs, including OCCEs, contribute to that part of their mission.

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