Direct Connection to Policy Area 4 of The Illinois Commitment

Achieving Diversity through Online Inter-Institutional Collaboration
University of Illinois - Springfield

What issue or need is addressed by the effective practice?
The objective of the inter-university online collaboration is to bring diversity of views and perspectives into class discussions and projects at both institutions. This is facilitated by having students from UIS, a down-state university with a high percentage of white students, and CSU, an urban university with a high percentage of African American students, interact in discussions and work together on projects. Northeastern Illinois University, which has the highest percentage of Hispanic students among state universities, has been added to the collaboration.

Description of the effective practice:
The University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) and Chicago State University (CSU) have developed an online teaching partnership. Under this partnership, UIS has provided assistance to CSU as it develops its online program, thus allowing CSU to serve more students. The universities also have offered joint classes in which a class from one university is paired with a class from the other university to allow the students in those two classes to share discussions or work on a project together using online learning tools. Students enroll at their own institution and receive a grade from the faculty member at that institution. The faculty teaching the courses work together to share their expertise and to promote meaningful exchanges among the students at the two institutions.

For example, students in the "Internet in American Life" class at UIS and the "Web and Society" class at CSU participated in a weekly combined online discussion forum. The discussions addressed case studies and research questions related to the impact of the Internet on American society. The students in these two classes also were joined by students from a third institution, Columbia University Teachers College in New York, for a synchronous online session with audio exchanges. The online collaboration provided the opportunity for students at these institutions to hear the views of a more diverse group than would have been possible in a traditional class at one of the universities.

How does this practice achieve sustainability?
Faculty members are intrigued by the opportunity to break down institutional boundaries to engage colleagues and students at other institutions to facilitate cross-cultural discussions. In addition to the collaboration discussed above, other joint undertakings have occurred among classes in English, African American Studies and Education. There is a growing list of faculty members at both institutions who are interested in collaborations (see http://online.uis.edu/partners/csu/index.aspx).

What are the results/measurable outcomes?
The results to date include enhanced understanding and learning among the participating faculty and students, improvements in teaching methods, and interests in continuing and expanding the partnership. Students have been exposed to a broader range of experiences. For example, in a collaboration with two education classes, UIS students were exposed to more case studies using Chicago schools and CSU students were exposed to more case studies using rural down-state schools.

The UIS-CSU collaborative model also has sparked interests in other online teaching collaborations. For example, a UIS professor has proposed a joint class with a professor from a university in Poland.

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Effective practices are submitted to the Illinois Board of Higher Education as a component of the annual institutional performance report. Additional effective practices may be found in the annually published compendium and a searchable database.