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Andrew J. Pearl

The University of Alabama

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Getting Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

From the Associate Editor

Dr. Andrew Pearl is director of Community Engagement, Research, and Publications in the Center for Community-Based Partnerships at The University of Alabama

I recently had the pleasure of spending a week in Elon, NC to attend the second summer of the Research Seminar on Capstone Experiences, which is organized and facilitated by Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. The goal of the seminar is to facilitate “multi-institutional research on capstone experiences using a mixed-methods approach to conduct qualitative and quantitative research...to investigate capstone experiences as a high impact practice” (<https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/cel-seminars/ce/>). Capstones are project-based culminating experiences, often at the end of a degree program, that require students to synthesize, integrate, and apply what they have learned (Kuh, 2008).

This has been an incredibly valuable personal and professional experience for me. Through the Research Seminar, I am a part of a five-member multidisciplinary, multinational team with a broad goal of better understanding how diversity, equity, and inclusion intersect with capstone experiences in higher education, and how to use this information to better understand how to universally design capstone experiences to maximize learning for all students. My colleagues—from Deakin University (Australia), Portland State University (United States), the University of Calgary (Canada), and the University of Exeter (United Kingdom)—have helped to push me toward new theoretical, conceptual, and methodological ways of thinking, and, in the spirit of self-improvement and growth, I have been working on getting more comfortable with being uncomfortable.

In her entertaining and poignant TED Talk from 2017 entitled “Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable,” Luvvie Ajayi talks about the importance of avoiding the temptation to remain silent in the face of injustice and telling sometimes difficult truths in order to build bridges toward common ground. I believe this message is applicable to higher education. If we do not push ourselves out of our comfort zones, we do a disservice to our students, our communities, and our institutions.

Taking the easy path will only reinforce the normalization of dominant social structures.

Our work on capstone experiences requires that we ask difficult questions, many of which are relevant to service-learning, another high-impact practice. As identified by Mitchell (2008) in her review of traditional vs. critical service-learning pedagogy, the inertia of the institutional and societal status quo can make it difficult for service-learning to fulfill its promise of ethical social change. It is only when scholars, practitioners, students, community members, and other stakeholders come together in authentic partnerships to “analyze the interplay of power, privilege, and oppression” (p. 62) that we begin to effect sustainable change. I think it is important for us all to reflect on and consider our roles and how we would like to situate our community engagement work.

For those of you who are interested in reading about some extreme examples of getting more comfortable with being uncomfortable, check out *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins.

References

- Goggins, David (2018). *Can't hurt me: Master your mind and defy the odds*. Lioncrest Publishing: <https://lioncrest.com/>.
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