Award Title

The E.P.I.C. Journey Sanctioning Model

Awards Categories

Housing, Residence Life, Contracted Services, Judicial and related

Executive Summary

The E.P.I.C. Journey philosophy was developed to address an increasing number of behavioral and scholastic dishonesty cases at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). As we reviewed our over 1600 discipline cases yearly, we categorized many of the cases as having root causes in the underdevelopment of four distinct skill sets: engagement with the university, personal development, interpersonal development and community membership. E.P.I.C. is a conduct model designed to provide the practitioner with a protocol to assess those areas and sanction the students’ underdeveloped areas as a means to transform decision making patterns. This process allows administrators to meet students where they are at in their development and enhances due process through incorporating student perspective. E.P.I.C. addresses the underlying factors contributing to student choices that diverge from the University’s standards.

The E.P.I.C. Journey Sanctioning Model encompasses a complete view of the student rather than a myopic perspective of the infraction. It entails giving students an interview based assessment during their educational meeting. The results of this assessment inform the creation of purposeful, sequential and active sanctions (journey sanctioning) that allow the student to develop competencies that were found to be underdeveloped during their education meeting. As a result, retention is improved by:

•transforming the lens that practitioners use to approach student conduct by infusing student development theory perspectives into educational meetings

•utilizing motivational interviewing to develop a willingness and confidence to change

•developing journey sanctions paired with inactive standing such as probation, suspension, etc. that balance the interest of the student and the university

•assigning a mentor to develop their engagement with the university

This holistic approach forms an intentional personal journey aimed at transforming decision-making patterns. The results reveal students moving from troublesome behavior to those who are retained and focused on completing their academic and personal goals.

The E.P.I.C. Journey team includes a cross section of staff dedicated to upholding university wide standards and student success in Student Conduct and Community Standards, Housing and Residence Life, Campus Living Villages, Counseling Services, and the University Police Department, with housing professionals serving as additional conduct practitioners. The E.P.I.C.
Journey team is further expanded to include E.P.I.C. Mentors. Faculty and staff members from varying departments and disciplines are assigned to mentor the student and serve as connection points between the student and his/her university experience. E.P.I.C. reminds us that each student’s journey is unique and in order to be successful, we must first assess their needs and their compatibility with our campus beliefs. E.P.I.C. is a completely cross-functional initiative adaptable in any format addressing student conduct and expectations.

Since its implementation in 2007, the E.P.I.C. Journey Sanctioning Model has continued to improve practice and change the way we look at discipline in college. The legal implications of discipline and codes are not lost. This model blends managing risk, due process and student development while keeping policies standard. E.P.I.C. reminds us what is possible when we support our students’ ability to change.

**Award Description**

**Introduction**

Though only a step in the journey of life, college can often be described as an E.P.I.C. journey in itself. We wanted to take a holistic approach to each student meeting to both create an intentional and productive conduct experience utilizing the tools described below.

As we investigate alleged violations, we also assess each student in the relation to the following skill sets.

- **Engagement:** Desire to be a part of the full University experience.
- **Personal Development:** Transforming your mind, body and spirit for your own enrichment.
- **Interpersonal Development:** Enhancing ones skills of sharing and advocacy as well as collaboration and good decision making.
- **Community:** An environment characterized by mutual respect, personal responsibility, and an inclusive perspective.

Assessing these dimensions along with use of motivational interviewing creates a change focused environment that eliminates the adversarial nature of addressing conduct. Motivational interviewing is a directive counseling technique utilizing self motivational statements (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). The student code of conduct did not have to be altered to use these tools. We enhanced practitioner efficacy, and developed a new approach to sanctioning.

E.P.I.C. aligns with the theory of developmental discipline, the philosophy that universities have the opportunity to become facilitators in the lives of students and create environments for transformational learning (Dannells, 1997; Keeling, 2006; Lake, 2009). Universities struggle with creating adversarial feelings for students (Lipka, 2009). There is a great benefit in addressing violations in less adversarial and more developmental ways (Dannells, 1997). Many processes in college conduct are designed to provide the student with an informal discussion and
this interactive exchange between judicial officer and student is a powerful opportunity for learning,

Positive Impact on Student Learning, Retention and Success

The E.P.I.C. Journey initiative impacts student success by individualizing each student’s educational meeting or hearing. Students learn through experience and the impact of learning outside the classroom has been widely studied. Our initiative focuses on the students that few remember to teach and develop. E.P.I.C. addresses student learning, retention and success by transforming the college experience of our most at risk students through sanctions that transcend punishment. Even those violations that call for suspension periods are addressed as return journeys where future matriculation is discussed and encouraged. Specific boundaries are established to quantify their return. Additionally, E.P.I.C. mentors teach new approaches both from the code of conduct perspective and the campus climate. Students are provided new skills, and they learn that a violation is not always black or white. They learn to view standards, values and beliefs as being important to success.

Relevance to Institution Mission

The mission of UTSA is a dichotomy of access and excellence. Although on a path to tier one status, UTSA maintains its focus on access and is a Hispanic serving institution. This natural tug of war is reflected in the openness of our conduct approach. Students from varying backgrounds and different violations receive the level of discipline needed on an individual basis. The use of the E.P.I.C. model in this setting encourages an environment where prepared and underprepared students learn from positive dialogue and discovery despite the circumstances that drew our attention to the student.

In our progress toward tier one status research and innovation are fostered. We implemented an approved research study in 2010 investigating markers of change and reflection for our students who have experienced E.P.I.C. Through analysis of reflective papers, pre and post sanction spectrum assessments and surveys; we were able to gain more information about how students change during the conduct process.

Addressing Student Needs and Critical Campus Issues

Campuses are often concerned with behavioral issues which manifest themselves in alcohol and other drug instances, welfare concerns, safety issues, and disruptive behavior. The violations that we address range vary widely in categories such as alcohol, drugs, theft, assault, and scholastic dishonesty. For some campuses, the answer is a concrete, legalistic approach of providing sanctions in response to violations without considering the individual. E.P.I.C. is different in that regard. All of our cases where violations are determined are adjudicated through the E.P.I.C. model and receive inactive and active sanctions through hearings and administrative disposition. Inactive sanctions are consistent for the violation category and reflect loss of privilege and change in standing such as probation. This includes suspension level cases as we prepare them for future enrollment with return journeys. We enhance our ability to address critical issues when we pair that with active sanctions designed to address the skill sets. The student is involved in the
process of creating the journey and understands the purpose of each sanction and the reason for
the expectations.

Importance of Collaboration

E.P.I.C. involves each and every division across campus. Faculty serve as mentors and students
meet with them to discuss their research areas and interests. Students visit financial aid to
investigate the work they do, gain insight about the federal process, and learn of additional
resources they qualify for. Advisors step out of their role in assigning class schedules to discuss
how behavior might impact career choices, and career counselors help freshmen see how their
choices today matter tomorrow. Sanctions are recruited from the campus and community
continually encouraging the involvement of others. The model is easily translated to others and
has taken the mystique out of student conduct. Police officers can describe the process to
students in the field, housing professionals are able to hold educational meetings while building
community and mentors see student violators as at-risk students in need of development.

Conclusion

The E.P.I.C. Journey Sanctioning Model was presented at two NASPA annual conferences.
Through these presentations, practitioners found the tools useful and campuses have begun or
explored the implementation process. We were recognized by the Association for Student
Conduct Administration (ASCA) with the Innovation Award and Institutional Award of
Excellence in 2011 for these efforts.

When we envision discipline, we picture the office, the heavy code of behavior and the penalties.
As we view conduct today, envision E.P.I.C. A student is seated before you without engagement
to the campus community and failing in interpersonal relationships or succeeding in the same to
the point of self-destruction. UTSA responds by offering the journey including residence life
programming, campus resources, personal exploration experiences and mentoring. It requires
few financial resources. It only requires the improvement of the practitioner’s approach and the
development of sanctions as tools. We utilize this holistic approach in every educational meeting
to create an intentional and productive conduct experience for the student while promoting
retention, learning and success.

Dannells, M. (1997). From discipline to development rethinking student conduct in higher

campus-wide focus on the student experience. Washington, D.C.: American College Personnel
Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Assessment Data

The E.P.I.C. Journey Sanctioning model is guided by overarching learning outcomes. These outcomes guide the training and development of the model as well as sanction creation. They are in addition to individual outcomes created for students.

As a result of participating in an E.P.I.C. Journey, students will:

1. Develop an enhanced awareness of self
2. Identify and utilize support networks
3. Recognize their sanctions as a personalized journey
4. Take an active role in their development.
5. Integrate their knowledge of self and community standards into healthy decision making patterns
6. Reduce the discrepancies between their choices and their desire to succeed
7. Articulate their willingness and confidence to change
8. Accept ownership over their college experience

In 2010, we implemented an approved research study to examine student change within the conduct process. In addition to our continued assessment efforts, the study allowed us to examine our learning outcomes more closely and gain a better understanding of reflection and change. Practitioners selected one dimension to serve as the focus on their journey (E, P, I or C). We examined completed sanctions to see if the sanctions influences development along the spectrum in the same areas targeted.

To measure this change and growth, we used three different types of instrumentation:

1. A survey was given to students at the conclusion of their conduct experience, when they submit their completed sanctions to Student Conduct and Community Standards
2. A student’s development along the E.P.I.C. Spectrum was directly measured by comparing the results of a pre-intervention E.P.I.C. Spectrum Assessment with the results of a post-intervention E.P.I.C. Spectrum Assessment.

3. Reflective papers, completed by students as part of their assigned sanctions, were evaluated by a rubric to analyze learning, level of reflection and change.

Sanction Return Survey Results

Of the 585 students who responded to the sanction return survey to date: (Responses were reflected on a likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree where appropriate. Survey is administered on a rolling basis.)

97.7% felt the meeting and conduct experience was personalized.

94.5% answered either strongly agree or agree that they planned to make different choices in future as a result of the meeting and discipline experience.

84.3% answered either strongly agree or agree that their discipline experience transformed their decision making patterns.

When asked what aspects of their meetings made a positive difference students responded:

79.2% - how I was treated

65.6% - I felt that I was listened to

65.1% - they were interested in my success

Of the students who had a journey focused in engagement:

87.3% answered either strongly agree or agree that they know more about getting involved on campus.

88.4% answered either strongly agree or agree that they have taken at least one step to be more involved on campus.

Of the students who had a journey focused in personal development:

92.6% either strongly agree or agree that they have a plan to better match future actions/choices with their goals.

Of the students who had a journey focused in interpersonal development:

83.7% either strongly agree or agree that they have utilized one new strategy to improve my interactions with others.
Of the students who had a journey focused in community membership:

76.2% either strongly agree or agree that they have taken at least one step to match their actions with the values of their community.

85.9% either strongly agree or agree that they understand how their actions affect their community.

Pre and Post Spectrum Assessments

Student skill sets at the time of the preliminary meeting were measured using the E.P.I.C. spectrum. The spectrum scores each dimension for the student on a scale from 1 to 10 (low to high) through interview questions. Ratings are based on a stated consistency standard noting specific behavioral and language cues. A second identical measurement was taken following sanction completion during a follow-up meeting (1-2 months apart). As of this date, a total 83 pairings have been analyzed.

Change was statistically significant from pre to post spectrums across all dimensions (p = .000) with the greatest change occurring in the personal development and interpersonal development dimensions. The community membership dimension showed the most varied scoring and standard deviation noting that it is more diverse skill set to measure and it varies greatly per individual.

Analysis of Reflective Papers

As of this date, a total of 68 reflective papers have been analyzed in five categories. The categories were measured on a scale from 1 to 5 ranging from no evidence of awareness to reflective synthesis and change. Two experienced staff members scored the reflective paper rubrics and discussed responses to increase inter-rater reliability.

The staff developed rubric allowed reviewers to score instances of change talk in the areas of connection making (M = 3.81, SD = .833), addresses knowledge of E.P.I.C. (M = 3.18, SD = .668), evidence of learning (M = 3.75, SD = .968) and noted transformation (M = 3.78, SD = .978).

The categories of connection making and evidence showed the greatest markers for change. 69.6% (n = 48) of students scored a 4 or 5 on the rubric identically in those dimensions. This indicates that within the 1-2 month time frame students are beginning to make connections between the incident and future action; as well as processing learning.

Student Comments

Below are some of the many student comments (quoted verbatim) that were noted on the sanction return survey.

• All of this has made me a better person.
• The personality of the staff really made me feel comfortable to speak openly.

• I had a great experience, and felt I was listened to and cared about. I never felt scared, which only resulted in me wanting to succeed here at UTSA. Thank you!

• The rehabilitative and constructive approach that UTSA takes to discipline is in my opinion highly effective and meets the needs of the students while accomplishing the objectives of school.

• It was comforting to have a staff member who respected us

• I thought it would be a scary process, but I was pleased when I realized how nice he was and actually helped me.