Considering Disruptive Innovations that Improve Student Engagement

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Improvement in Higher Education

- Reform on higher education agenda for a quarter-century
- Calls to improve undergraduate education more insistent in recent years
- Demands for accountability and evidence of quality have pushed many colleges and universities to launch significant reform initiatives.

Challenges to Improvement in Higher Education

- Implementing large-scale, transformational change in colleges and universities is difficult, due in part to complexity and governance practices (Cuban, 1999; Birnbaum, 2000).
- Overall, research on institutional change suggests that “institutional transformation” is rare and that, if change is possible, it is most likely to be incremental (Kezar, 2001).

Change is Hard. Yet, Some Institutions Are Doing It!!!

What Can we Learn About Improvement From NSSE?

NSSE measures the extent to which students engage in and are exposed to effective educational practices
- 1,500 institutions have NSSE results
- Data provide institutions with diagnostic information about practices associated with learning

Research Opportunity

- 1,400 baccalaureate-granting institutions participated in NSSE between 2000 & 2009
- Most participated on a cyclical basis
  - Many with multiple administrations by 2009
  - Is change detectable in institution’s NSSE results?
  - How does the institution account for improvement?
Learning To Improve Study Design

532 institutions (at least 4 NSSE admin)
Quantitative Analysis to detect evidence of change

Phase 1
Identified 220 institutions change on at least 1 measure

Phase 2
64 institutions positive change (questionnaire, document review, scan)

Phase 3
8 case studies positive change

Phase 1: Detecting Change

- Analyzed data from institutions with at least 4 administrations (2004-2009)
- Look for trends in NSSE measures
  - In either direction
  - Many found, nearly all were positive
- Identified more than 200 institutions with improved scores on at least 1 measure

Overview of Findings

- Positive trends outnumbered negative ones, by a margin of nearly 7:1
- A trivial fraction saw scores decline across multiple administrations
- Positive trends detected across the spectrum of institution types
- NSSE results suggest institutions ARE improving

Measures Examined

- Level of Academic Challenge
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Course-Related Faculty Interaction
- Out of Class Faculty Interaction
- Higher Order Thinking
- Integrative Learning
- Experiences with Diversity
- Active & Collaborative Learning
- Collaborative Learning
- Supportive Campus Environment
- Support for Success and Enrichment
- Support for Academic Success
- High Impact Practices

Examples: FY Active Learning

- A - Private Medium Doc
- B - Large Private Urban Doc
- C - Large Public Masters

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09
30 35 40 45 50 55
Broad Patterns

- More trends for first-years than for seniors
- Most common trends were Active & Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction
- Many cases with multiple trends

Propositions about Change

1. The first-year experience more amenable to improvement or more commonly targeted for improvement
2. Institutions investing in particular efforts
   - Ex: promoting active & collaborative learning and interaction with faculty; endorsing particular broad-based change in a way that spans class levels
3. Capacity for sustained, positive change not limited to small colleges, privates, or residential institutions; Nor is change limited to those with low baseline performance

Phase 2: Questionnaire

Findings

- All but 4 institutions reported implementing change efforts that contributed to improved results
- Primary motivators for change:
  - Institutional commitment to improving
  - Data revealed concern
  - Faculty interest in improving undergraduate ed
- Not much of a motivator: accreditation
- Not motivators: external forces, state mandates, national calls for accountability

What Accounts for Observed Changes?

- Involvement in External Initiatives - Foundations of Excellence, Teagle Foundation, AAC&U LEAP project...
- Presidential/Provost Leadership
- Meaningful Strategic Planning process
- Improvement aspects of accreditation: SACS QEP; HLC AQIP; WASC
- Real campus problem - persistence, diversity incident

What Seems to Facilitate Change?
Phase 3: Site Visits

Preliminary Findings

- **Culture, culture, culture**
  - “Positive restlessness” (Kuh et al., 2005)
  - Mission focus
  - Risk-taking ethic
  - Use of data

- **Some role for structure**
  - Relationships among institutional research, assessment, center for teaching & learning

Site Visit Themes: Conditions for Change

1. Grants, Pilots, External Initiatives
2. Stability & Trust in Leadership
3. Physical space/ create new learning spaces
4. Comprehensive & Targeted strategic planning
5. Data Informed & Culture of continuous improvement
6. Strong role of faculty - impact of generational change
7. Intentional partnerships of administrative areas - Student and Academic Affairs

Reflective Discussion at your Table... (5 min)

- What are the reasons for pursuing assessment on your campus?
- Where is IR situated? What is the relationship between IR, Assessment, and the improvement of student learning? How is student affairs involved?
- Who are influential players in using data to improve, or in other change projects on your campus?

Are Practices Associated with Change “Disruptive Innovations”???

Innovations Vital to Improvement

- Practices at some institutions seem to be “disruptive innovations” in that they apply new values, potentially change the market, or effectively displace how things were being done.
- Not likely to qualify for Clay Christensen’s complete definition.
Possible Disruptive Innovations for Institutional Change

1. Grants, Pilots, Involvement in External Initiatives to create culture of new ideas, collaboration, challenge, accountability
2. Repurposing Institutional Research (IR) to facilitate data informed change
3. Grassroots leadership expands who is involved, strengthens partnerships, encourages risk

Grants, Pilot Projects, Involvement in External Initiatives

- Grants supported initial work, and then were sustained at Santa Clara
- Multiple Teagle grants at Augustana provided opportunities for widespread faculty involvement
- Foundations of Excellence at Ohio University

Repurposing Institutional Research

- Southern CT created Office of Assessment & Planning to bring IR into broader planning efforts - rejected old notion of IR staff as “short order cooks”
- IR staff as collaborators; supporters of institutional change; at the table for educational discussions.

Grassroots Leadership

- Trust in the talents of VPSA, Dean of Students, Deans, director-level staff, Center T&L
- Spread involvement and share data

Try something, no penalty for failure

A Closer Look at Change on One Campus

Mark Salisbury, Augustana College, Rock Island IL

Augustana College

- Institutional Research and Assessment Office
  - Dr. Mark Salisbury
  - Director of Institutional Research and Assessment
  - Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs
- Dr. Kimberly Dyer
  - Research Analyst (Part-Time)
Institutional Research and Assessment Vision Statement

The Institutional Research and Assessment Office propels the Augustana teacher, student, and scholar community to actively embrace a culture of improvement that is mission-centered and evidence-based.

Institutional Research and Assessment Mission Statement

The Institutional Research and Assessment Office gathers, examines, interprets, and applies evidence to improve student learning and maximize educational effectiveness at Augustana College. We cultivate this process of perpetual improvement in three ways.

• Collect a wide range of evidence to inform decision-making
• Consult with faculty, staff, and administrators to facilitate successful engagement in the entire assessment process
• Collaborate with faculty, staff, and administrators to utilize evidence in designing and implementing pedagogical, programmatic, or policy improvements

Repurposing Institutional Research

Apply the concept of backwards design to a position/campus office

– If the goal is institutional improvement, then IR can be a facilitator of organizational learning

Using Grants and Pilot Projects to Launch Wider Change Initiatives

Participation in national or multi-institutional projects

– From a link in a chain to a web of influence
• Using Grants and Pilot Projects to Launch Wider Change Initiatives
  – Participation in national or multi-institutional projects
  – Gather committees and working groups to spread awareness, information, and influence

• Grassroots Leadership
  – Lead from behind . . .
  – Empathy, trust, and transparency
  – My role as “talent management”

• Change is possible.
  • What is the status of improvement on your campus?
  • To what extent are these “disruptive innovations” present on your campus?
  • What might help facilitate organizational learning or create a culture for improvement?
Thinking about Change: Organizational Learning

- Learning reflects interpretation of experience; encoded into organizational routines and standard operating procedures (Daft & Weick 1984; Fiol & Lyles 1985; Levitt & March 1988)

- Does learning mean improvement? Theorists differ.
  - We embrace the perspective that learning is improvement-focused (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Torres & Preskill, 2002)

For Discussion: What Qualities Facilitate Organizational Learning?

Qualities of the...
1) individual(s) in the role of IR, Assessment, Center for T&L etc.
2) working relationship between the Dean, Provost and IR and Assessment
3) organizational culture and leadership for assessment and improvement

Understanding Improvement

Organizations that improve... create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving, and they set in motion the internal processes by which people progressively learn how to do what they need to do in order to achieve what is worthwhile.

(Elmore in Fullan, 2001)

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Discussion

For more information: see NSSE Web site “Learning to Improve”, and Annual Results 2012 (download from Web site).
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