

# Mind the Gap: Assessing Expectations and Experiences in the First Year of College



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## Why Mind the Gap? Current Concerns for Student Learning

Colleges and universities, for all the benefits they bring, accomplish far less for their students than they should. -- Derek Bok

At a time when the quality of postsecondary education seems to be slipping, participating in engaged learning activities promises to prepare students for a lifetime of continuous learning so that they and the country stay competitive in the global marketplace -- George Kuh

The first year presents a unique opportunity to engage students in the habits of learning. -- John Gardner

## Students and the College Experience

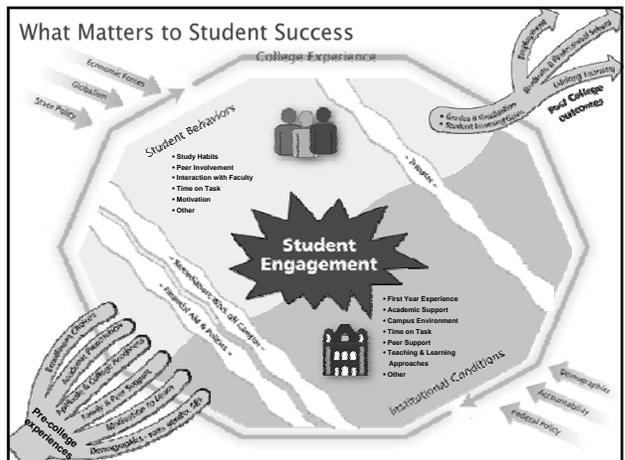
- ♦ College-going stakes higher today than at any point in history
- ♦ 45% students in 2yr-colleges depart during their first year, & 1 of 4 leave from 4-yr schools
- ♦ 51% of high school grads have reading skills necessary for college; 25% of students in 4-yr colleges need 1 yr of remedial coursework
- ♦ Enrollment & persistence rates of historically underserved students lagging

## Student Success in College

Student success - defined in a broad, all-encompassing manner includes: *academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives including graduation, and post-college performance.*



[http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Kuh\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Kuh_Team_Report.pdf)



 **What *Really* Matters in College: Student Engagement**

 *The greatest impact appears to stem from students' total level of campus engagement, particularly when academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular involvements are mutually reinforcing...*

Pascarella & Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 2005, p. 647

 **What *Really* Matters in College: Student Engagement**

 *Because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of college impact, institutions should focus on the ways they can shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement.*

Pascarella & Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 2005, p. 602

 **Good Practices in Undergraduate Education**  
(Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)

- ✓ Student-faculty contact
- ✓ Active learning
- ✓ Prompt feedback
- ✓ Time on task
- ✓ High expectations
- ✓ Respect for diverse learning styles
- ✓ Cooperation among students

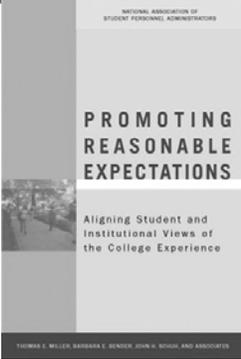


 **Principles of Good Practice for the First College Year: Recommendations**

- Institutional commitment by leaders, faculty, staff, and governing boards
- Focus on student learning both inside & outside the classroom
- Encourage student affairs-academic affairs partnership
- Offer challenge and support
- Communicate high expectations
- Foster an inclusive and supportive campus climate
- Conduct systematic assessment
- Create an atmosphere of dignity and respect for first-year students
- Teach students strategies and skills to succeed
- Get faculty involved
- Encourage students to assume responsibility for their success

*Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College* By M. Lee Upcraft, John N. Gardner, Betsy O. Barefoot, and Associates, Jossey-Bass, 2005 Pg. 515-517

 **Expectations matter**

 **PROMOTING REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS**  
Aligning Student and Institutional Views of the College Experience

- ♦ Miller, T., Bender, B., Schuh, J, and associates (2005). Promoting Reasonable Expectations: Aligning Student and Institutional Views of the College Experience. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

 **Mind the Gap: Expectations vs. Experiences in the First Year**

- ♦ Consequences for unmet expectations are high. Disappointed students fail to optimize their college experience, leave institutions, and sometimes abandon higher education all together.
- ♦ Institutions must explore students' expectations and focus more on communicating their expectations of students than on meeting student expectations, and challenge educators to refocus on helping students develop more appropriate expectations and on working to meet those expectations.

Miller, T; Kuh, G.D., & Schuh, J.H. (2005). *Promoting Reasonable Expectations: Aligning Student and Institutional Views of the College Experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**What do new students expect from college? Are expectations met?**

**What major expectations do students bring with them to your institution??**

- ♦ “A lot will be demanded of me.”
- ♦ “Courses will be challenging.”
- ♦ “I may not get all ‘As’ in college”
- ♦ “I hope to make lots of new friends.”

**What do new students expect from college? Are expectations met?**

**Are there differences based on student background characteristics?**

- ♦ Students who attend liberal arts colleges have higher expectations for engagement overall
- ♦ First-generation college students have lower expectations for involvement in various college curricular and co-curricular activities
- ♦ Underrepresented students tend to have very high expectations for graduate and professional school, higher than those of White students, but they attend graduate and professional school at much lower rates than they expect to—rates that are lower than those of their White counterparts

**Responses to expectations – experience gap...**

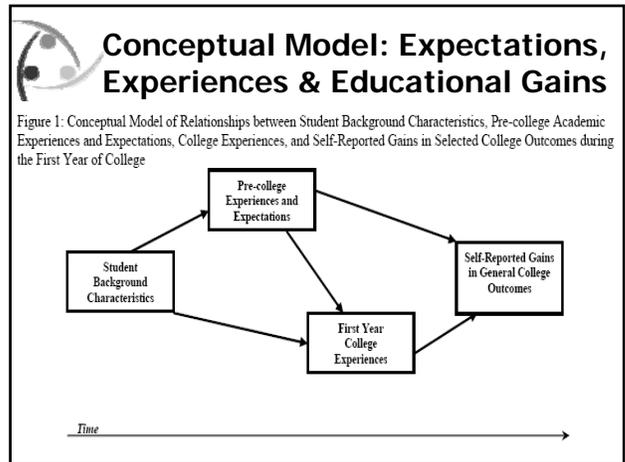
1. Increase institutional fit. However, for students who have limited choices about where they can attend, this point is moot.
2. Responsibility is on institutions to adjust and meet expectations rather than blaming students for low or high expectations.
3. Various findings demonstrate that faculty and administrators often have low expectations of students—lower than students have of themselves.

**Responses to expectations – experience gap...**

4. Students are not working as hard in college as they expected to or that they are satisfied with college despite being academically disengaged. The message here is clear: Faculty have a responsibility to create the challenging learning environments that students expect to find in college.
5. Be mindful of how expectations shape behavior, find ways to learn about students’ expectations, take care to articulate expectations for students, monitor how well you’re doing.

**What do we know? how do we assess expectations?**

- ♦ Research on effective educational practices and expectations (Schilling & Schilling, 2005; Miller, Kuh, Schuh, 2005; AAC&U Greater Expectations, 2002; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005)
- ♦ Cooperative Institutional Research Program – 40 years of data on entering students
- ♦ College Student Experience Questionnaire Research Program (CSXQ & CSEQ)
- ♦ National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)



## What is NSSE?

- ♦ A survey that provides an annual snapshot of student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development.
  - ♦ Results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.
  - ♦ NSSE items represent empirically confirmed 'good practices'; they reflect behaviors associated with desired outcomes of college.

## NSSE Overview

- ♦ The "NSElings"
  - ♦ The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (2003)
  - ♦ The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (2004)
- ♦ Additional Surveys
  - ♦ The Law Student Survey of Student Engagement
  - ♦ The College Student Experiences Questionnaire
  - ♦ The College Student Expectations Questionnaire
  - ♦ The High School Survey of Student Engagement\*
  - ♦ The Community College Survey of Student Engagement\*

\* Not administered by the Center for Postsecondary Research

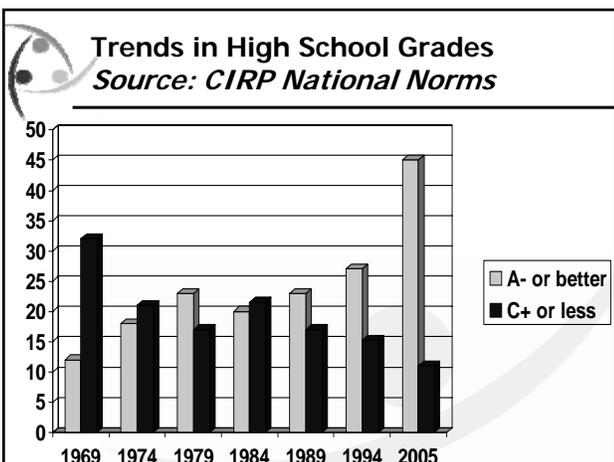
## NSSE suite of instruments to mind the gap

Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement	National Survey of Student Engagement	Faculty Survey of Student Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Annual survey of first-year students at baccalaureate degree-granting institutions</li> <li>♦ 2005-2006 pilot administration at 70 institutions</li> <li>♦ Administered prior to start of classes, usually at orientation or welcome week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Annual survey of first-year and senior students</li> <li>♦ 2006 administration at 571 institutions</li> <li>♦ Administered during the spring semester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Parallel survey to measure faculty expectations for student engagement</li> <li>♦ 2006 administration at 131 institutions</li> <li>♦ Administered during the spring semester</li> </ul>

## First Year Students High School Experiences: Past as Prologue

**High School Experiences:**

- ❖ 58% took at least one advanced placement class in high school
- ❖ 62% felt their high school was academically challenging
- ❖ 89% reported grades of B or better with 44% reporting either A and A-
- ❖ 98% took four or more years of English, 79% had four years of math, 62% science, 60% history or social studies, and 31% foreign language
- ❖ 51% participated on an athletic team; 35% in band, choir, or theater; 34% in academic clubs; and 19% in student government.



## High School vs. College Classrooms

**Differences between High School and College Classrooms:**

- ❖ 82% of entering students frequently asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions in their senior year of high school – only 61% did so in the first-year college courses.
- ❖ 65% worked with other students on project in their senior year of high school but only 41% did so in their first year of college.

## What Students Expect of College

**College Expectations:**

- ❖ 14% are uncertain as to whether they will graduate from their current institution and 3% are certain they will not
- ❖ 92% expect grades of B or better
- ❖ 72% expect to spend 15 hours or less per week relaxing and socializing
- ❖ Only 17% expect to spend more than 25 hours per week studying

## What can we learn about the first college year from BCSSE, NSSE and FSSE?



- Gaps between...
  - student expectations and experience?
  - faculty expectations and students' experience?
  - gender and racial-ethnic gaps in students experience?



## What do first-year students do?

1. What percent of full-time first-year students study, on average, more than 15 hours per week?

- (a) 18%
- (b) 23%
- (c) 34%
- (d) 41%
- (e) 50%

**c. 34% NSSE FY;**

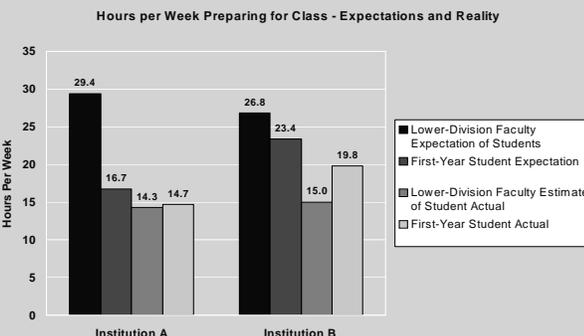
## Worrisome Gap?

### Time spent studying

- ◆ First-year students average about 13-14 hrs. per week studying
- ◆ 60% of entering students expected to spend more than 15 hrs per week preparing for class
- ◆ Entering first-year students EXPECT to study more than they actually do in college
- ◆ Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) data indicate that faculty expect students to spend more than twice that amount preparing (estimated 24-30 hrs. a week for FT)

## Gap between faculty expectations, student expectations and actual practice

Hours per Week Preparing for Class - Expectations and Reality



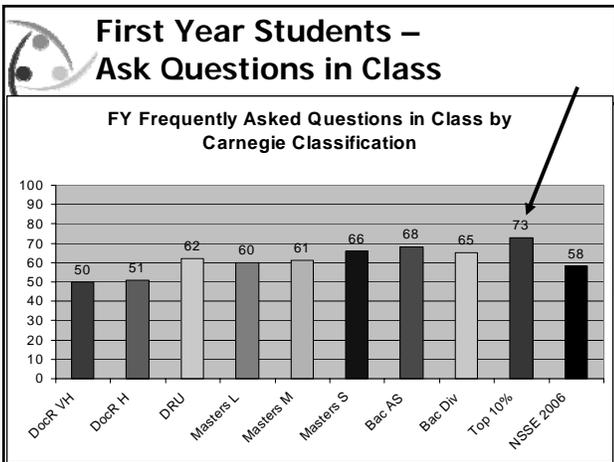
Institution	Lower-Division Faculty Expectation of Students	First-Year Student Expectation	Lower-Division Faculty Estimate of Student Actual	First-Year Student Actual
Institution A	29.4	16.7	14.3	14.7
Institution B	26.8	23.4	15.0	19.8

## What do first-year students do?

2. What percent of first-year students frequently ("very often" + "often") asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions?

(a) 28% (b) 35% (c) 47% (d) 58% (e) 65%

**d. 58% NSSE FY**



### What do entering students expect?

3. What percent of entering students expect to spend no time participating in co-curricular activities during their first year of college?

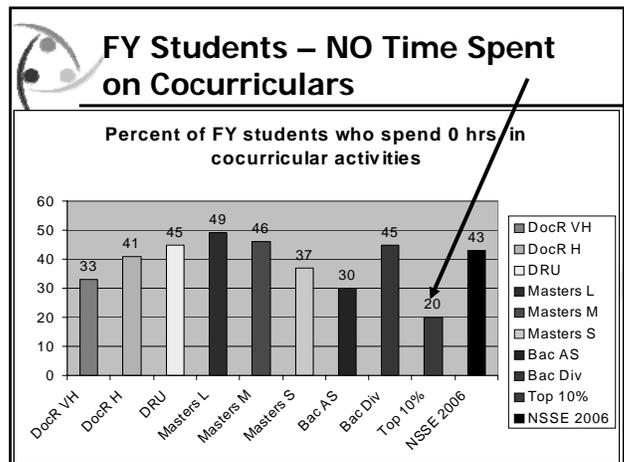
**6% report 0 hours**  
**66% expect to spend between 1-10 hours per week**

### What do first-year students do?

3a. True or False.

Almost half of all students spend no time on co-curricular activities.

**True.**  
**43% NSSE first-years, 48% seniors report 0 hours**



### Student Engagement Quiz

4. True or False?

Male students spend more time than female students relaxing and socializing.

**True**  
**False**

### Gender Differences in Engagement by First-year Students (source: NSSE 2006)

Female Students More Engaged	Male Students More Engaged
Community service or volunteer work	Tutored or taught other students
Hours per week preparing for class	Hours per week relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, etc.)
Hours per week providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	Hours per week participating in co-curricular activities
Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	Exercised or participated in physical fitness activities
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	Discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
Foreign language coursework	Number of problem sets (problem-based homework assignments) that take less than an hour to complete
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	Research project with faculty member
Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, dance, or other theater performance	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework

### Expectations and Engagement

❖ Entering students expectations about leisure time was close to the actual hours they spent relaxing and socializing – 23% expected to relax and socialize for more than 15 hours per weeks and 27% were actually doing so.

❖ ***A match!...*** too bad.

### What do first-year students do?

5. What percent of first year students report they frequently (“often or very often”) received prompt feedback on their academic performance?

(a) 27% (b) 35% (c) 44% (d) 53% (e) none of the above

**d. 53% NSSE first-years**

### FSSE & NSSE comparison Prompt Feedback

 <b>FACULTY</b> gave prompt feedback often or very often	Lower Division	Upper Division
	<b>93%</b>	<b>93%</b>
 <b>STUDENTS</b> received prompt feedback often or very often	1 <sup>st</sup> yr. Students	Seniors
	<b>53%</b>	<b>64%</b>

### What do first-year students do?

6. What percent of first-years frequently\* prepared 2+ drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in?

(\* % very often and often)

(a) 65% (b) 56% (c) 43% (d) 31%

**b. 56% NSSE FY**

Entering students see this activity as having **MIXED** importance

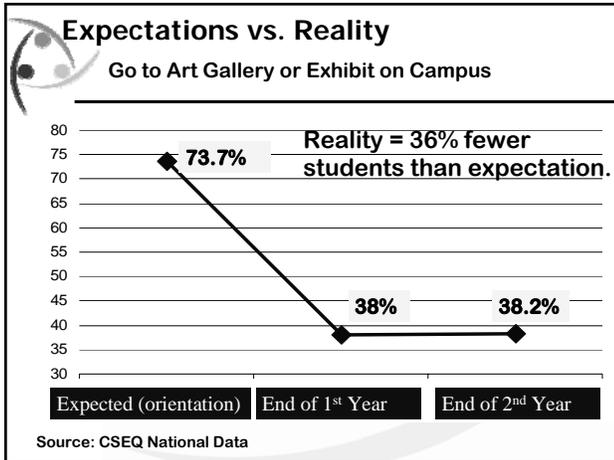
### What first year students do

7. What percent of first-year students never attended an art exhibit, play, dance, or other theater performance?

(a) 2% (b) 15% (c) 27% (d) 33% (e) none of the above

**c. 27%** (as compared to 27% for Doc-Int and Doc-Ext, 28% for Master's, 15% for Bac-LA and 29% for Bac-Gen)

Group	Percent
Doc-Ext	27%
Doc-Int	27%
Master's	28%
Bac-LA	15%
Bac-Gen	29%
NSSE 2006	27%



### Participation in Arts Events

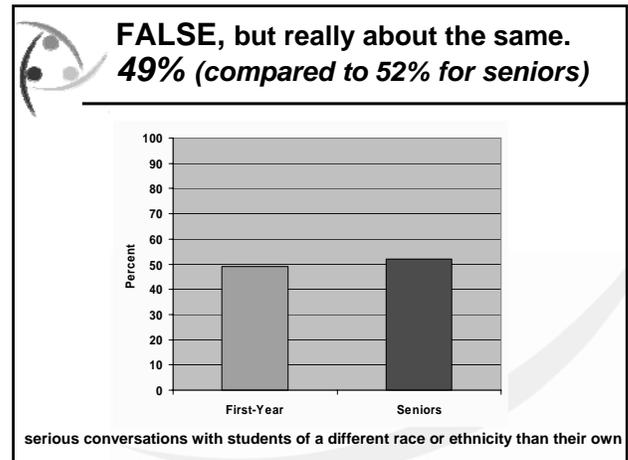
- ♦ The frequency with which first year students went to fine or performing arts events is positively related to the emphasis students perceived the institution placed on attending campus events and activities.
- ♦ Communicating clear expectations and providing structured opportunities to participate is necessary.

### What do first year students do?

True or False:

8. First-year students report having serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than their own *more frequently* than seniors.

True  
False

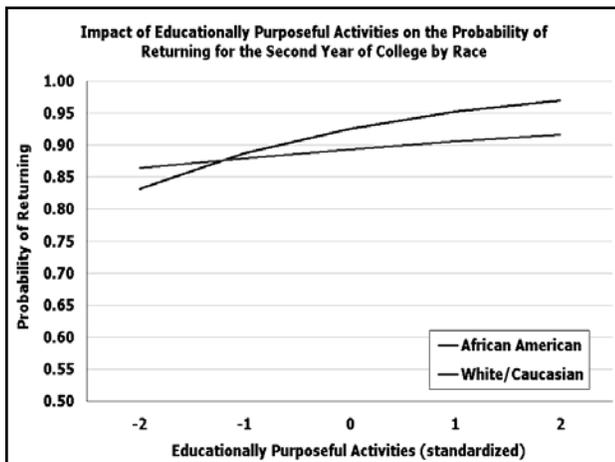
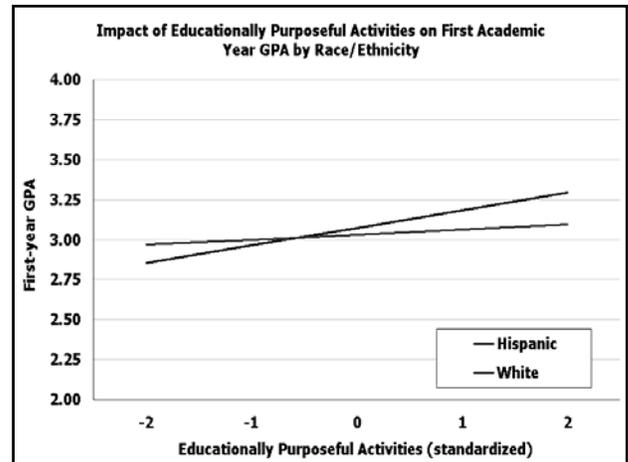
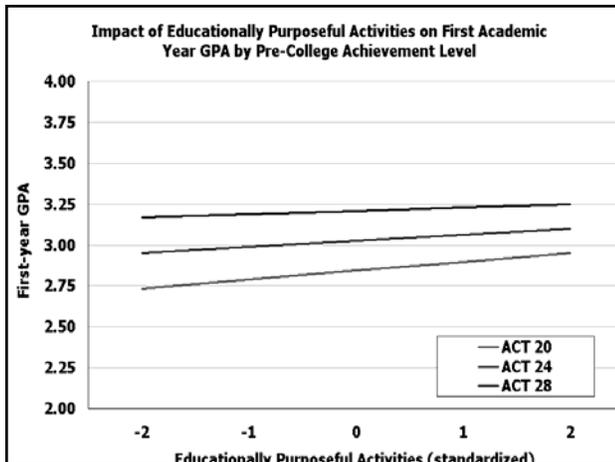


### Interactions with Diverse Peers

- ♦ BCSSE results:
  - ♦ About 32% expected strong emphasis on interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds, BUT SAID THIS WAS NOT THE CASE
  - ♦ Those with high expectations that their institutions would emphasize this reported that their expectations were not met, most students had mixed expectations for diversity
  - ♦ Liberal arts college students diversity expectations were higher overall, but still left a gap between expectations and experience

### Underserved Student Gaps: Compensatory Effect of Engagement

- *Student engagement positively related to FY and senior student grades and to persistence between the first and second year of college at the same institution*
- *Engagement has compensatory effect on FY grades and persistence to the second year of college.*



### Conclusions: New Student Expectations, Engagement and Success in College

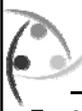
1. Path to student success begins pre-college, shaped by high school experiences and early experiences with institution
2. BCSSE and NSSE data show that first-year students expect to do more during the first year of college than they actually do

### Conclusions: New Student Expectations, Engagement and Success in College cont'd

3. **Overall pattern:** Students initial expectations for their academic involvement is **less than faculty might wish**, and their actual engagement is *even less*
4. *Students set in place in their first semester of college the pattern of time allocation that will serve them across their years in college*
5. Educators need to detail the specific activities that will lead to success in college

### Putting Students on Pathways to Success

- ♦ Structure of the curriculum and the arrangement of resources can increase the odds that students engage in productive activities.
- ♦ Showing newcomers what they must do to succeed in college is necessary but not sufficient. Also important is an infrastructure of support, including early warning systems, redundant safety nets, reward systems, and ongoing assessment.
- ♦ By identifying the gaps between entering students' expectations and their level of engagement in the first year of college, institutions can target their efforts to create educationally effective programs for new students



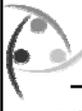
### Effective Educational Practices to Address Gaps

- ♦ **Fort Lewis College** requires multiple drafts of papers before submitting – “drafting” – new students have low expectations for this practice at entry, but majority end up doing it frequently because it is built into Freshman Academic core courses.
- ♦ Must teach students (and faculty) how to participate actively in class – not enough to encourage “ask questions!!” but to structure, help students monitor their participation (Clickers, quizzes, think-pair-share, learning goals). **“Seminar” at Evergreen State College.**



### Effective Educational Practices to Address Gaps

- ♦ **GA Tech** recruits students with arts interests and talents to make the place more enjoyable, & to help students become more multidimensional; expand outlets for participation on campus
- ♦ **Cultural Events Requirement at Winthrop University** - by graduation, students are required to attend 3 cultural events for every 20 hours completed at Winthrop, not to exceed 18 cultural events.
- ♦ **North Carolina Central (HBCU)** promotes cultural exposure via Lyceum, and **WSSU FY Seminar instructors** teach students how to participate in arts events



### Socialization to Academic Expectations

**Wheaton** new students read a common book and essays by faculty that respond to the reading. Assigned readings, faculty responses, and the website combine to introduce incoming students to preferred ways to grapple with intellectual issues.



### Focus Attention on Student Success

Community celebrations of scholarship  
**UMF** hosts “Spring Symposium” a day when no classes are held and all students, faculty, and administrators are given the opportunity to present research, artistic, intellectual, & other creative projects, and learn from others.  
**Michigan** and **Wabash** conduct spring research presentations where first-year share their work with the campus.

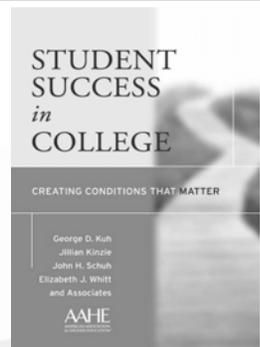


### Redundant early warning systems: “Tag Teaming”

- ♦ **Wheaton** first-year student advising team includes faculty, student preceptors, librarians and administrative staff.
- ♦ At **Ursinus, Miami, and Wheaton** representatives from both academic affairs and student affairs serve as academic advisors.



### Additional Examples of Effective Educational Practice from Strong Performing Institutions





## DEEP Lesson: Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success

- ❖ Make plain to students the resources and services available to help them succeed.
- ❖ Some guideposts tied directly to the academic program; others related to student and campus culture.
- ❖ Institutional publications accurately describe what students experience.
- ❖ Efforts tailored to student needs.
- ❖ Mutually reinforcing student expectations and behavior, institutional expectations, and institutional reward systems.
- ❖ Redundant early warning systems and safety nets



## Recommendations

Lay out the path to student success

- Draw a map for student success*
- Front load resources to smooth the transition*
- Teach newcomers about the campus culture*
- Create a sense of specialness*
- Emphasize student initiative*
- If something works, consider requiring it*
- Focus on underengaged students*



## "We value what we measure"

Wise decisions are needed about *what* to measure in the context of campus mission, values, and desired outcomes.



*"If you don't measure it, you can't manage it..."*



## Institutional Examples: Assessing the First Year Experience



## Focus on desired pedagogy



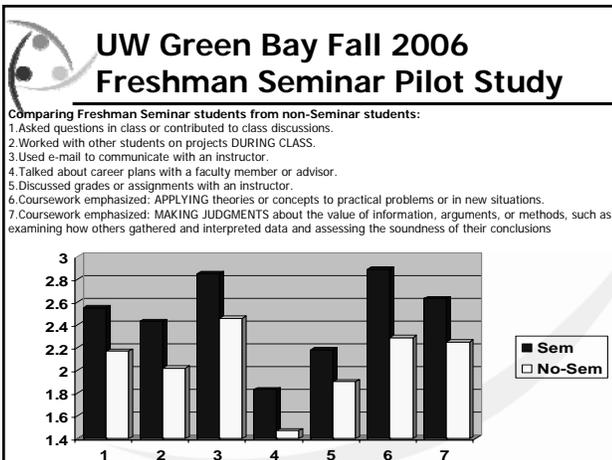
- ◆ First-year students less involved in service learning than JMU desired.
- ◆ Workshops conducted to encourage faculty to adapt courses to include service learning
- ◆ Studied change in participation of students and instructional practice



## Improving teaching & learning



- ◆ NSSE and CIRP pointed to problems with first year students' academic engagement, but WTAMU desired more holistic picture of students' experience
- ◆ Conducted "Student Engagement Audit Focus Groups" – 2 focus groups per college to discover what faculty and students found educationally engaging and identify classroom experiences that were engaging and disengaging



- ### California State University, Chicago
- ◆ Seven principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education
  - ◆ NSSE results indicated need to focus on first-year experience
  - ◆ Campus-wide task force used selected NSSE data to determine how well students were doing and to pinpoint areas that needed improvement
  - ◆ First step - philosophy of First Year Experience distributed to entire campus

- ### Plymouth State University
- ◆ Student Affairs reviews NSSE data to assess out-of-class support
  - ◆ NSSE and institutional survey data used to revise General Education program
  - ◆ NSSE results supported grant application for faculty development center
- 

- ### St. Olaf College
- ◆ Committee on First-Year Experience (CoFYE), first-year curriculum faculty & student life staff conducted self-study, used NSSE results to compare St. Olaf FY to peers on key indicators, & conducted focus groups with students and faculty using questions similar to NSSE items to gain insight into their results.
  - ◆ Self-study report serves as baseline for assessing change and to launch revisions to First-Year Experience
- 

- ### Truman State University
- NSSE results showed need for improvement in academic advising:
- ◆ Implemented professional advisors in residence halls
  - ◆ Based on NSSE and internal survey, 50% faculty were interested in advising workshop
  - ◆ Recommendation to provide faculty with regular workshops and advising newsletter
  - ◆ VP of Academic Affairs to carry out comprehensive assessment of advising on campus
- 

- ### University of Akron
- ◆ Distribute campus-wide philosophy
  - ◆ More emphasis on diversity in FY and Gen Ed. Courses
  - ◆ Reward system for faculty teaching FY courses
  - ◆ "One Voice" syllabi – common components in FY curriculum
  - ◆ Promote service learning, mentoring, undergraduate research
  - ◆ Foster student-faculty interaction
  - ◆ Student Success Seminar
-



## Worcester Polytechnic Institute

- ◆ NSSE results showed FY students were less engaged than seniors
- ◆ New FY interdisciplinary, inquiry-based seminars; better integration of disciplines; engaging introductory courses
- ◆ Associate Dean appointed to Office for the First Year
- ◆ Assessment plan in development with NSSE indicators as key component





## Assessing Expectations and Experience at Your Campus

**Before & After**  
Identify pre-college educational experiences and capture what students expect in terms of involvement in activities that matter for their learning to assess the extent expectations matches first year experiences and in what ways students change in the first year.

**Pre/post surveys**  
pretest at orientation  
posttest at end of the first year  
match on student id numbers



## "Pre/Post" Survey Pairings

CSXQ-CSEQ	BCSSE – NSSE	CIRP – YFCY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Identify student expectations at orientation with CSXQ.</li> <li>◆ Use CSEQ at end of first year (or later) to compare expected vs. actual experiences.</li> <li>◆ Addresses student time use and self-reported gains.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ BCSSE launch in 2007. Use at Orientation or before classes begin.</li> <li>◆ NSSE among most popular current instruments.</li> <li>◆ Measures student engagement in the learning process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ CIRP Freshman Survey has 40 years of longitudinal data.</li> <li>◆ YFCY has both independent and linked questions for analysis of change over first year of college.</li> </ul>



## Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)

- ◆ Measures entering first-year students' academic and extracurricular activities in high school, as well as the importance students place on participating in related educationally purposeful activities during college.
- ◆ Results help faculty and staff understand behavioral patterns students established prior to entering college and the factors that influence their engagement after they matriculate.
- ◆ Information is used to design orientation and first-year experience programs.
- ◆ Registration is currently open. <http://bcsse.iub.edu>



## Reflecting on Your Campus:

- ◆ How do first year students learn what it takes to succeed?
- ◆ What rituals or traditions signal student success?
- ◆ What signature programs exist for assuring student success?
- ◆ What warning systems or safety nets are in place for intervention?
- ◆ How do you know???



## What we know about student learning...

- ◆ Educators must be concerned with the learning environment – in *and* outside the classroom, socio-cultural aspects and physical settings – in which students interact with peers, the content, educators and others, and the implementation of strategies that help guide the student toward the intended outcomes



*Last Word on Student  
Success....*

*"We don't want students to  
go through school,  
but for school to go through  
them."*

*Faculty member, Fayetteville State University*



**Questions &  
Discussion**

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