The Value of “Looking Within” to Increase Student Engagement and Success

Jillian Kinzie
NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice
www.nsse.iub.edu
August 18, 2009
21st Century Students and the College Experience

- College-going stakes higher today any point in history
- 45% students in 2yr-colleges depart during their first year, & 1 of 4 leave from 4-yr schools
- About 1 in 6 first-year students are first-generation – and are likely disadvantaged in comparison to students whose parents had significant experience with the college or university setting
- Enrollment & persistence rates of historically underserved students lagging
Conditions Demand that Institutions:

- Intentionally design educationally purposeful activities that engage all students at high levels to achieve desirable learning outcomes.
- Deploy resources appropriately and provide all students explicit messages about success-oriented behaviors.
- Collect evidence about how well they’re doing & to use this information to enhance student engagement & success.
Assertions: Current focus on quality in higher education

- Current assessment and accountability climate drives a focus on institution-level summaries – *measures of central tendency*

- Such a focus limits the conversation about quality and improvement to the tip of the iceberg
Hard questions about current measures of quality

- Is quality *really* an institutional attribute?
  - Uniform across students?
  - Over the undergraduate career?
- Where and how does quality manifest itself?
  - Experiences in and outside the classroom
- Can we get to a more nuanced sense of quality?
Allocation of benchmark score variation

- Between institutions
- Within institutions
To Put It Another Way...

Students attending the same institution differ from each more than the average student at that institution differs from those at other institutions.
To address quality in undergraduate education...

1. Look more deeply at variation in student engagement and learning within the institution.
   - Where are the differences most stark?
   - Which students experience the greatest variation in important learning activities?
   - What are the barriers to engagement?

2. Narrow the gap between your least and most engaged students.
   - What can be done to improve the experience so as to narrow the gap?
What we know about variation in student experience

- Students beginning college vary greatly in their academic preparation, exposure to diversity, global experiences, motivation for matriculating, expectations for engagement, etc.

- College students face myriad pressures and challenges in the academic environment as they seek to maintain optimal performance or even to remain in the academic program.

- Many students fail to take advantage of experiences for learning that college provides.
Reflection: What implicit theories do you hold about student engagement?

- Why do students get engaged? Why are they disengaged?
- What, if anything, can you do to reverse disengagement?
- Why are some students engaged at high levels and others are not?
What We Know about Student Engagement
1. What percent of full-time first-year students study, on average, more than 20 hours per week?

(a) 12%  (b) 18%  (c) 30%  (d) 41%

b. 18% NSSE FY
Hours per Week Spent Preparing for Class 2001 - 2007

Figure 2: Average Hours per Week Spent Preparing for Class 2001 - 2007
Worrisome Gap? Time spent studying

- First-year students average about 13-14 hrs. per week studying
- Entering first-year students EXPECT to study more than they actually do in college
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) indicates that faculty expect students to spend more than twice that amount preparing (estimated 24-30 hrs. a week for FT)
- Gap between expectations and reality not the same at all institutions
Faculty mantra: students ought to spend at least two hours preparing for class for every hour inside the classroom...about 30 hours a week.

Students actual behavior doesn’t come close (13-14 hours)

But while this is happening students are still getting pretty good grades A's and B's, essentially for spending about half as much time as faculty members say is important.
2. What percent of first year students report they frequently ("often or very often") worked with other students on projects during class?

(a) 28%  (b) 35%  (c) 42%  (d) 55%

c. 42% NSSE first-years
3. 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%

d. 53% NSSE first-years
## FSSE & NSSE comparison
### Prompt Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACULTY gave prompt feedback often or very often</th>
<th>Lower Division</th>
<th>Upper Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENTS received prompt feedback often or very often</th>
<th>1st yr. Students</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why is Prompt Feedback important to student learning & success?

- Most useful feedback is timely, apt - provides opportunity for students to use information to improve their performance
- First-year (FY) students need immediate feedback to understand what is expected
- FY need feedback in first 3 weeks to modify their behaviors accordingly
- Pre-university study habits, and those developed in first couple months amazingly persistent
Who are the under-engaged? 20% of the students who anchor the bottom of the time and energy distribution, who spend almost no time at all on the things that matter to their learning.

The tragedy: “These students are sleep walking through college...they will be awarded the same degree as other students. But they've not sampled the curriculum or taken advantage of the cultural events on campus. They put very little time and energy into their own studies.” (Kuh, 2005, Declining by Degrees)
Identifying the Under-Engaged

- ASK simple questions about how much time they expect to spend studying, how hard they expect to work, how much they expect to work with peers outside of class, what they are concerned about in terms of academic work, how involved they expect to be in co-curricular activities etc.

- Ask similar questions of students on the first day of your class...
Student Behaviors & Activities Associated with Student Success

- Faculty-Student Contact (important for first-gen, racial-ethnically diverse students)
- Peer Interactions ("interaction with agents of socialization", peer teaching, tutoring)
- Experiences with Diversity
- Co-curricular Activities (important for persistence)
- Student Satisfaction (influences sense of belonging)
Institutional Conditions that Support Student Success

- Fostering student success means providing stimulating classroom experiences that encourage students to devote more time and effort to their learning and help them develop good study habits (Kuh et al. 2005b; Volkwein et al. 2000).

- Student affairs and academic affairs work together to improve the learning climate in and outside the classroom.
Connect the Under-Engaged

For institutional programs, practices to engage students at high levels they must:

- Involve a significant proportion of students
- **Be of high quality**, employ best practices, meet needs of your students & attend to campus culture
- Be knit into students experience – **be unavoidable**
- Be assessed, monitored, reviewed, improved, **be examined for equity gaps**
Implications

Examine engagement patterns within KU. How do experiences differ by major, student subgroups, race, SES etc. Who are the least engaged students? What can you do?
Think about a course you’re teaching this fall

- What is the range of students’ participation in engaged learning that you expect to see in this course?

- Is there a particular experience (group project, asking questions in class, community-based research project) that you anticipate seeing a greater range of student engagement?

- Are there certain subgroups of students (e.g., non-majors, those without some pre-reqs, first generation students, visual learners, students with weak writing skills) that you suspect are more likely to be under-engaged?