How a Culture of Inquiry & A Focus on Completion Can Help You Move the Needle on Student Success

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WICHE
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Acknowledgements

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  - Jobs for the Future
  - JBL Associates
  - Public Agenda
  - The Research & Planning (RP) Group

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Formalistic Doublespeak...

- Give your 1st reaction to the following list of words:
  - Accountability
  - Accreditation
  - Assessment
  - Continuous Improvement
  - Data-Driven Decision Making
  - Evaluation
  - Institutional Effectiveness
  - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
  - Learning Outcomes Assessment
  - Performance-based Funding
  - Program Review
  - Strategic planning
Recapturing the Movement...

• Vivid imagery from previous slide

• Faculty, Student Services folks & leaders have been beaten over the head with these phrases
  ✓ they are correct to analyze that they too often haven’t led to authentic improvement
  ✓ and the more formal the process, often...

• There is good news for our improvement efforts – you can do all of the things captured by those words in more authentic and less formalistic ways
Changing the Conversations...

• We have to make the conversation about things faculty, staff & administrators care about – students, their learning, and improving their outcomes and lives
• Not everybody will come along – but we don’t need everybody
• Org Change Thought: Red light / Yellow light / Green light
• People need to see their expertise acknowledged and integrated – and the effect of their efforts on outcomes
A Culture of Inquiry & Action
A RESOURCE for INSTITUTIONAL change
An Applied Inquiry Framework for Student Completion (CBD)

✓ Stage 1  –  Explore how to improve outcomes
✓ Stage 2  –  Gather meaningful evidence
✓ Stage 3  –  Discuss evidence broadly
✓ Stage 4  –  Use evidence to inform change
✓ Stage 5  –  Measure the impact of change
What is a Culture of Inquiry?

Institutional capacity for supporting open, honest and collaborative dialog focused on strengthening the institution and the outcomes of its students.
Explore how to improve student outcomes

Focus inquiry on designing approaches that improve student outcomes
How We Spend Our Time Matters...

- When was the last time you sat in a standing committee meeting on your campus that used evidence to explore a key student outcome for more than 20 minutes?

- What types of questions do we spend most of our organizational resources answering?
Malcolm Gladwell talks about the right question...

• Link to full video:
http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_on_spaghetti_sauce
The Right Question in the CC World...
Placement Tests & Cut Scores

• What was the problem we were trying to solve?
• I’d posit it was something like:
  ✓ “Can we find a short instrument that will help us assign incoming students to various levels of math & English?” Or...
  ✓ “How do we ensure higher levels of course success in transfer-level math & English courses?
• Are these the best questions? Why or why not?

✓ Note: current system of placement tests may not even be the best solution for this question: LBCC / CCRC
What if we tried to solve...

• What placement process is the most predictive of transfer-level course success?
  Or....

• What is the optimal curricular structure to ensure that the greatest number of students pass transfer-level math / English courses with appropriate rigor?
  Or....
More questions...

• What is the optimal math curriculum that produces computational learning outcomes that most students will need in the real world?

Or...

• Is writing about literature the optimal way to teach students the writing skills they need in their general education courses? What about in the real world?
Organizing Question of Improvement Science:

What problem are you trying to solve?
An Example from AB Tech in Asheville, NC...

• We have to make sure our improvement efforts to trying to solve the right problem
  ✓ “Right” is slippery – the problem at hand may be important, but it might detract us from a larger problem that is of much higher impact to improving student outcomes

• AB Tech’s “One Stop” Onboarding process
  ✓ Original problem they were trying to solve: “How do we address the chaotic and disconnected nature of the onboarding of our new students?”
As the AB Tech folks reflected on their efforts, they realized they might unintentionally communicate to students that it’s possible in four hours or one day to:

- assess interests
- match interests to careers
- pick a program
- register for classes
- figure out financial stability issues
- be ready for opening day
- be prepared for any bump in the road that might occur
Perhaps...

• A better question / problem to solve might be: “How do we ensure that students get the services they need – when they need them – as they move through their educational trajectory at our college?”

• Note that this still covers having a more streamlined onboarding experience – but recognizes that it sits in a larger context to be addressed
To sum up the starting line stage...

- More focus on asking the right question, and ensuring we know what problem we are trying to solve – actually less focus on the data per se
- Sometimes exploring the data can help you realize you’ve been asking the wrong question - The Right Pepsi vs. The Right Pepsis
- Traditional questions: enrollment, course success, material covered
- Emerging questions: improving outcomes - completion, progress, learning, labor market, equity
Gather meaningful evidence

Collect high-quality, meaningful evidence at the student support, classroom, program, and institutional levels
When gathering evidence, make sure you are focusing on the right data...
Progress Example:

Look for Examples from Four-Year Schools:

Retention & Progress at Georgia State

http://www.edtrust.org/higher_ed_practice_guide for more examples
A Mystery...

- The graduation rate at Georgia State University was 31% in the early 2000s
  - Not unusual for an urban, regional 4-year state university
- As they evolved their culture of inquiry, they asked a range of questions designed to identify factors they could work on changing to move the needle and improve this outcome
- So they looked at a common metric – Fall-to-Fall retention, but didn’t stop there...
First Year to Second Year Retention, Georgia State University

- FALL '00: 80%
- FALL '01: 82%
- FALL '02: 81%
- FALL '03: 83%
- FALL '04: 80%
- FALL '05: 81%
- FALL '06: 82%
- FALL '07: 83%
- FALL '08: 83%

Retention
First Year Retention & Progression Rates - Georgia State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Retention</th>
<th>Retained &amp; Sophomore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FALL '00</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALL '01</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALL '02</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALL '03</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>FALL '05</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FALL '06</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FALL '07</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALL '08</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ten Years later...

- GSU has implemented a wide range of targeted strategies – such as strong freshmen LCs, more structured programs of study, monitoring progress and customizing interventions / support strategies, accelerated dev ed
- The culture at GSU has continued to evolve into a deep culture of inquiry, action & improvement
- The graduation rate at Georgia State University is now 54% - a 75 percent increase in the last decade – with the same student population they started with
Discuss evidence broadly

Engage a variety of campus stakeholders in evidence-based discussions about improvements in practice
Key Concept: Data do not speak for themselves

Time & Space Needed to Explore Data,
Make Meaning & Generate Insight
Exploring Data Example: English & Math Preparedness & Success in GE Courses
Success in Psychology 101 for students simultaneously enrolled in an English course

English course taking profile for students in Psychology 101

Not in an English course: 67%
Taking an English Course: 33%

English 826 (Two Below)
English 836 (One Below)
English 100 (Transfer A)
English 110 (Transfer B)

Success Rate of those same students in Psychology 101

- Not in an English course: 64%
- English 826: 31%
- English 836: 48%
- English 100: 68%
- English 110: 75%

Note: Enrollments from Summer 2000 to Spring 2009; Success is defined as A/B/C/CR grade
Success in Psychology 101 for students simultaneously enrolled in an Math course

Math course taking profile for students in Psychology 101:
- Taking a Math Course: 37%
- Not in a Math course: 63%

Success Rate of those same students in Psychology 101:
- Not in an Math course: 64%
- Fundamentals: 43%
- Beginning Algebra: 51%
- Intermediate Algebra: 63%
- Transfer Level Math: 76%

Note: Enrollments from Summer 2000 to Spring 2009; Success is defined as A/B/C/CR grade.
Success in five highly enrolled GE courses by English enrollment level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychology 101</th>
<th>Speech 101</th>
<th>Economics 101</th>
<th>History 101</th>
<th>HSCI 101</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75% (Two Below)</td>
<td>73% (One Below)</td>
<td>73% (Transfer A)</td>
<td>74% (Transfer B)</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>48%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Enrollments from Summer 2000 to Spring 2009; Success is defined as A/B/C/CR grade
Success in five highly enrolled GE courses by English enrollment level

- English 826 (Two Below)
- English 836 (One Below)
- English 100 (Transfer A)
- English 110 (Transfer B)

Fitness 334 | Accounting 101 | Music 202 | Biology 250 | Sociology 101
---|---|---|---|---
Fitness 334 | 76% | 76% | 74% | N/A
Accounting 101 | 68% | 66% | 64% | 60%
Music 202 | 50% | 40% | 40% | 59%
Biology 250 | N/A | N/A | 40% | 50%
Sociology 101 | 58% | 37% | 31% | 74%

Note: Enrollments from Summer 2000 to Spring 2009; Success is defined as A/B/C/CR grade
STAGE 4

Use evidence to inform change

Implement changes in practice and policy based on analyses and discussion of college evidence
Use evidence to guide innovation

- In this context, research and applied inquiry are fundamentally interventionist in nature.

- We are not seeking absolute truths; rather we are looking for patterns of evidence that inform action-oriented decisions.

- Failure can be seen as an opportunity for learning, especially when outcomes are shared and used to inform further improvements in practice.
The process of inquiry is not a search for an absolute truth.

What to do when you reach the limits of your research and yet still face multiple choices?

And what do we do when the evidence is ambiguous?

Trust your expertise & choose!

We answer the questions that eliminate dead end solutions.
STAGE 5

Measure the impact of change

Evaluate the impact of practice changes on student outcomes
Final Thoughts on a Culture of Inquiry & Improvement
Final Reflections

• Creating or evolving your culture of inquiry isn’t magic; there are clear steps and resulting artefacts of such a culture

• Don’t focus too much on the data – the questions you ask are exponentially more important

• Remind yourself and your team to constantly ask: “What problem are we trying to solve?”
What we are shooting for...

- Great statement of the desired end state from a CC President at the Aspen / ATD Leadership Symposium:

  “A wider range of people on a campus ask a better set of questions about outcomes & act on their reflections to improve them.”
Find Out More

• The National Center for Inquiry & Improvement website
  www.inquiry2improvement.com

• Dr. Rob Johnstone, Founder & President
  rob@inquiry2improvement.com

• CBD Inquiry Guides on Applied Inquiry & Nuances of Completion:
  http://www.inquiry2improvement.com/publications-resources