Knowing the path versus walking the path:

Moving from gathering to using data to improve student experience

31st Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience

February 2012
Effective possession of a piece of knowledge—that involves knowing how to use that knowledge, when required, for the solution of other theoretical or practical problems. There is a distinction between the museum-possession and the workshop-possession of knowledge. A silly person can be stocked with information, yet never know how to answer particular questions.

— Gilbert Ryle (1945)
Overview

- How much students grow
- What helps them grow
- Using that knowledge for improvement
Wabash Study

- 49 institutions
- 17,000 students
- Longitudinal

Purpose
- Identify practices and conditions that promote liberal education
- Use that information for improvement
Academically adrift
Limited Learning on College Campuses

Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa
Four-year change

Moderate/high growth

No growth/decline

Change (SD)

Critical thinking

Start | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4

0.44
Four-year change

Critical thinking  Moral reasoning  Universality-diversity awareness  Socially responsible leadership
Political & social involvement  Openness to diversity/challenge  Academic motivation
Need for cognition  Attitude toward literacy  Psychological well being
Moral reasoning: 62% moderate/high growth, 27% no growth/decline
Critical thinking: 57% moderate/high growth, 30% no growth/decline
Socially responsible leadership: 52% moderate/high growth, 35% no growth/decline
Psychological well being: 51% moderate/high growth, 37% no growth/decline
Need for cognition: 49% moderate/high growth, 37% no growth/decline
Universality-diversity awareness: 42% moderate/high growth, 46% no growth/decline
Attitude toward literacy: 36% moderate/high growth, 53% no growth/decline
Political & social involvement: 35% moderate/high growth, 58% no growth/decline
Openness to diversity/challenge: 31% moderate/high growth, 61% no growth/decline
Academic motivation: 27% moderate/high growth, 66% no growth/decline

Moderate/high growth
No growth/decline
Four-year change

Moderate/high growth

Need for cognition
- Top 25%: 1.4
- No growth/decline: -0.6

Critical thinking
- Top 25%: 1.0
- Bottom 25%: -0.9
What have we found in the Wabash Study?
What have we found in the Wabash Study?

What we already knew
What have we found in the Wabash Study?

What we already knew

But ...
Things that made a difference in the Wabash Study

• Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty and Staff
  – Faculty interest in teaching and student development
  – Out-of-class student/faculty interactions
  – Organization, preparation, clarity, prompt feedback

• Academic Challenge and High Expectations
  – Hard work, challenging assignments and interactions
  – Higher-order assignments, integrating ideas and information

• Interactional Diversity
  – Meaningful interactions
  – Serious conversations
Why is overall growth so “blah”? 
Quantity matters
Activities that predict growth

- Participated in study abroad
- Served as an orientation leader
- Held a leadership position in a student club, campus organization, residence hall, or fraternity/sorority
- Served as an RA
- Participated in leadership training
- Served as a peer educator in a non-academic area
- Engaged in community service or volunteer work
Number of activities in which 4th year students report participating

- None: 6%
- One: 17%
- Two: 25%
- Three: 24%
- Four: 15%
- Five: 8%
- Six: 4%
- Seven: 1%
Interactional diversity

- Have you attended debates or lectures on a current political/social issue during this academic year?
- How often have you had serious discussions with student affairs staff whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from your own?
- Does your institution emphasize encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds?
- How often have you had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own?
- How often have you had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values?
- Have you participated in racial or cultural awareness workshops during this academic year?
- How often have you had discussions regarding inter-group relations with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views)?
- How often have you had meaningful and honest discussions about issues related to social justice with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views)?
- How often have you shared personal feelings and problems with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views) while attending this college?
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Frequency of discussions w/ diverse peers about inter-group relations

- Never: 9%
- Rarely: 29%
- Sometimes: 33%
- Often: 20%
- Very often: 9%
Frequency of good practices in the 4th year

- Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions: 76
- Academic Challenge and High Expectations: 67
- Interactional Diversity: 47
Good practices don’t have the same impact on everyone
**Differential impact of interactional diversity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>High SAT/ACT</th>
<th>Low SAT/ACT</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Political views</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - smaller</td>
<td>Yes - larger</td>
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Infusing programs with research-based good/high impact practices may not improve the impact of your programs

Context and Quality Matter
**Tuning for impact**

- Research-based good/high impact practices are a great *starting point* for improving programs
- Ongoing, assessment-based tuning must follow to ensure that the structure and application of those good practices has impact on *your* students
- The means simultaneously assessing educational conditions and outcomes
**More information**

- **About the Wabash Study**
  - [http://www.centerofinquiry.org](http://www.centerofinquiry.org)

- **About Wabash Study findings**
  - [http://www.centerofinquiry.org/study-research/](http://www.centerofinquiry.org/study-research/)

- **About the Teagle Assessment Scholar Program**

- **About the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium**
  - [www.hedsconsortium.org](http://www.hedsconsortium.org)