

## Making Change: Insights about Improving Student Engagement

AAC&U Annual Meeting 2011, San Francisco

Alexander C. McCormick & Jillian Kinzie

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and NSSE



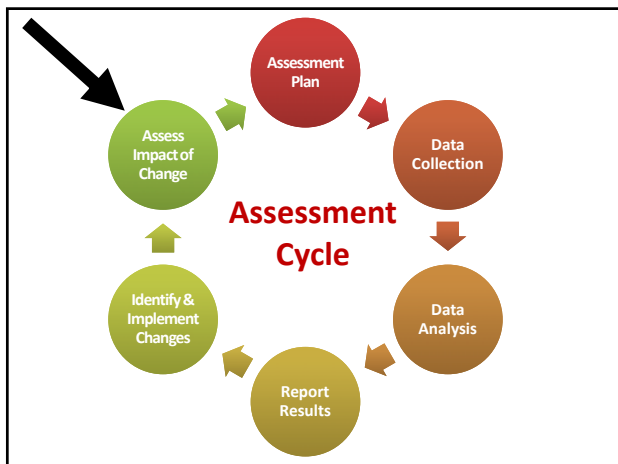
nsse.iub.edu

## Current Challenge

Although colleges and universities have increased *assessment activities*, there is less evidence that they have closed the assessment loop by following up to see whether changes undertaken have produced improvements.



4

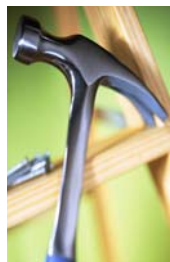


## What is Currently Important in Assessment?

- Multiple measures
- Diagnostic, milestone, and culminating assessments all necessary
- Wide range of assessment practices – basic to more complex – authentic assessment, student work, direct learning outcomes, “value-added”
- Measures of college-level learning by different majors, fields, levels
- **Demonstrate action on assessment results**
- **Quality improvement by measuring change**

## Your Improvement Activities

- What improvement initiatives do you have underway?
- How have you used data to inform these efforts?
- How are you monitoring the impact of the improvement effort?
- How will you know you’re succeeding?



5

## Our Interest in Improvement

- **Key Question:** Are institutions improving?
- **Proof of Concept:** Is NSSE achieving its institutional improvement aim?
- **Opportunity:** Institutions with multiple years of NSSE data makes it possible to assess change or stability in engagement over time.
  - Can NSSE results detect change on campus?
  - What can we learn about systematic improvement in colleges and universities?

6



NSSE annually gathers valid, reliable information on the extent to which students engage in and are exposed to proven educational practices that correspond to desirable learning outcomes.

- Results provide estimate of how students spend their time and what they gain from college.
- NSSE items represent empirically confirmed good practices: behaviors associated with student learning and development.

7

## NSSE Opportunity

NSSE's aim is to **improve** quality in undergraduate education

- ✓ Document strengths
- ✓ **Identify opportunities for improvement**
- ✓ Motivate wider use of effective practices
- ✓ Strengthen the learning environment



8

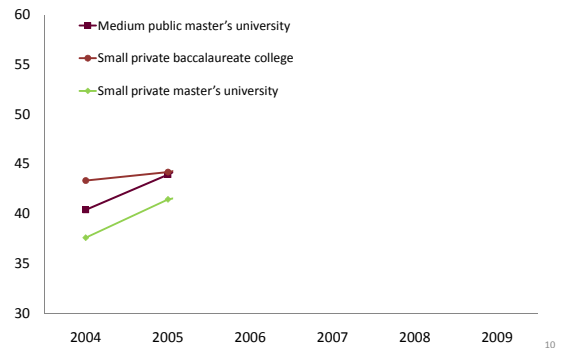
## Learning to Improve Study Spencer Foundation Funded

**Phase 1: Detecting Change & Making Observations about Assessment and Improvement:** Test different statistical methods to identify institutions where NSSE scales show significant change. Examine patterns of improvement in colleges and universities.

**Phase 2: Accounting for and Understanding Change:** After institutions are identified as showing change, can we learn more about what the institution did to effect change?

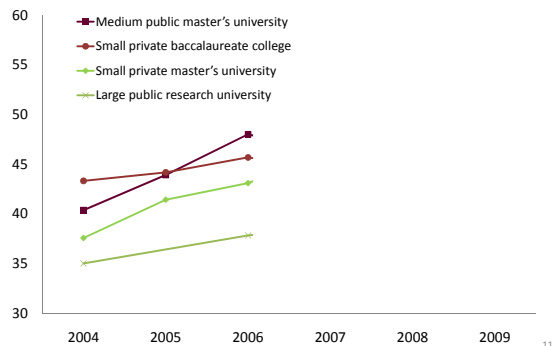
9

## Evidence of Improvement? FY Active Learning



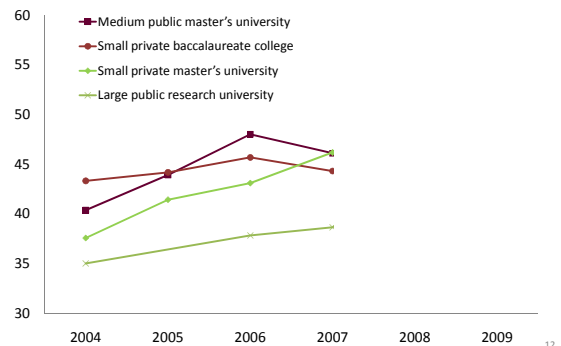
10

## Evidence of Improvement? FY Active Learning

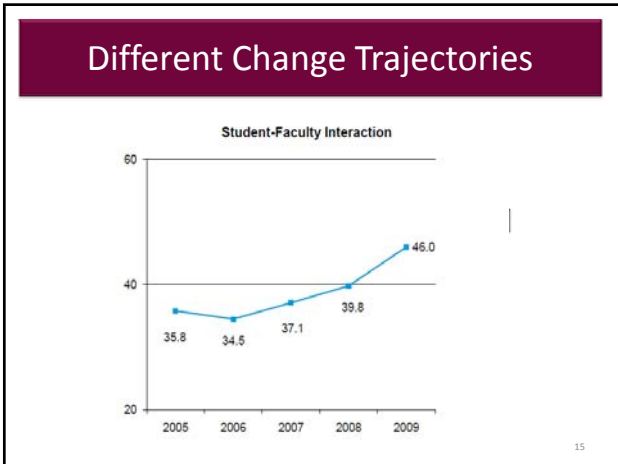
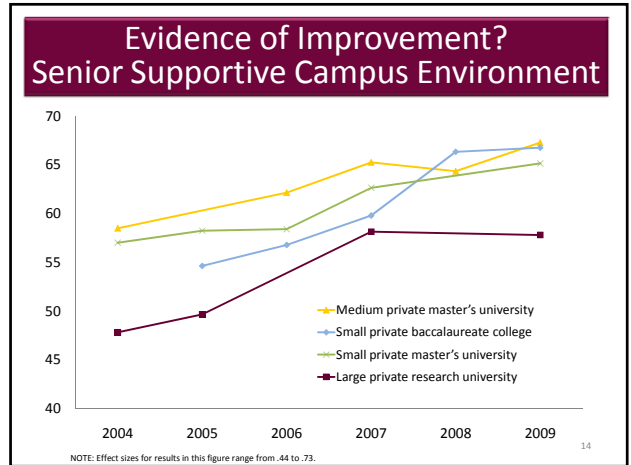
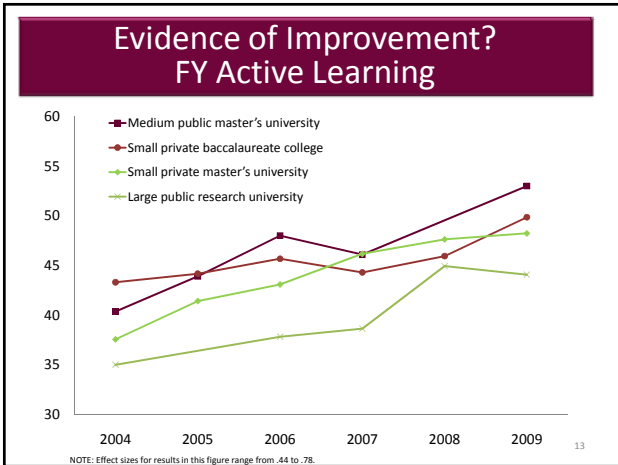


11

## Evidence of Improvement? FY Active Learning



12



### How Much Improvement? On What? Benchmarks, HIPs, & Deep Approaches to Learning

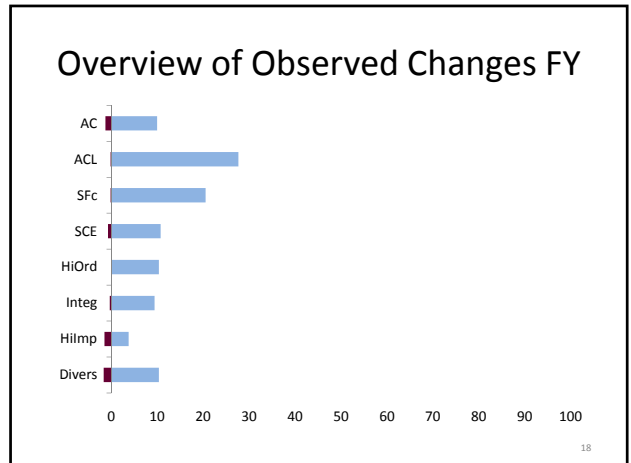
	AC	ACL	SFc	SCE	Deep HIOrd	Deep Integ	High-Imp	Diversity
<b>First-year (532)</b>	↑53	↑147	↑109	↑57	↑55	↑50	↑20	↑55
<b>Senior (533)</b>	↑41	↑116	↑91	↑96	↑36	↑29	↑26	↑34

All 2001-2009 institutions that participated in NSSE at least four times.

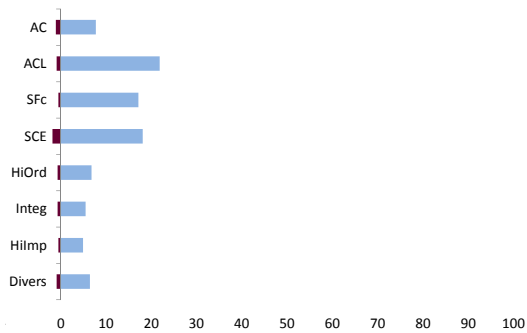
### How Much Improvement? On What? Benchmarks, HIPs, & Deep Approaches to Learning

	AC	ACL	SFc	SCE	Deep HIOrd	Deep Integ	High-Imp	Diversity
<b>First-year (532)</b>	↑53	↑147	↑109	↑57	↑55	↑50	↑20	↑55
	↓7	↓2	↓1	↓4	↓0	↓2	↓8	↓9
<b>Senior (533)</b>	↑41	↑116	↑91	↑96	↑36	↑29	↑26	↑34
	↓6	↓5	↓3	↓10	↓4	↓4	↓3	↓5

All 2001-2009 institutions that participated in NSSE at least four times.



## Overview of Observed Changes Sr



19

## Patterns of Change

- **41%** of institutions demonstrated a pattern of improvement in at least one measure for first-year students, & **28%** for seniors
- Percent of institutions whose scores *declined* across multiple administrations was trivial
- Change is possible (and it is detectable)
- First-year student engagement may be more amenable to improvement than senior engagement (or, more institutions have targeted the FYE for improvement).

20

## Patterns of Change

- **Parallel improvement** - same scale for FY and SR (reflect institutional focus on activity?)
- **Focused improvement by class year** - FY or, SR
- **Improvement around a theme/related scale** (classroom initiatives, faculty-related topics, diversity experiences, academic support)

21

## Findings Challenge Beliefs about Undergraduate Education

- Potential for improving is not limited to small institutions, privates, or those with low base-line performance
- Increasing FY engagement in active & collaborative learning is possible at large, publics
- Urban, commuter institutions can increase student-faculty interaction
- Students at medium and large institutions can experience high-impact practices

22

## Are Institutions Improving?

**Yes.**

Systematic improvement efforts have paid off.

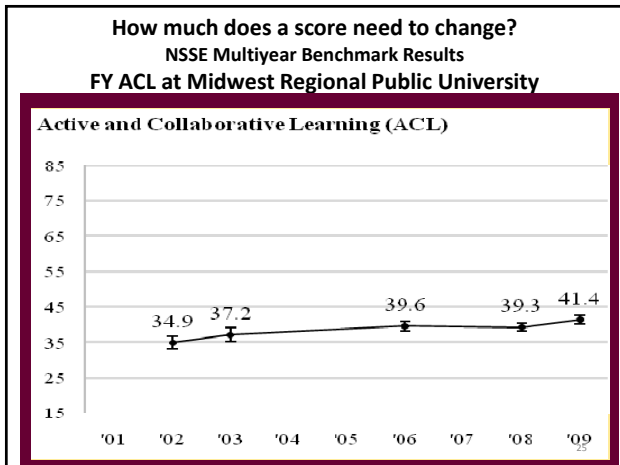


University of Texas-San Antonio

## The Good News:

- It is possible to improve NSSE scores on measures of effective educational practice
- Change is detectable in scores over time
- Institutions have generally been using results to guide reform efforts on campuses
- **However, we don't know how reforms happen, or if institutions are tracking or documenting their change story**





## Phase 2: Learning to Improve Project

### Learning to Improve Study

- More in-depth study of change from institutions' point of view.
- Institutions where change was detected:
  - Was the change planned?
  - Are they aware of their improved results?
  - What accounts for the improvement?

### Studying Improvement

- Change Group: 4 NSSE administrations beginning between 2001 – 2009
- Significant change (effect size  $\geq .4$ )
- Examine evidence of systematic change
  - NSSE benchmarks and scales, deep approaches to learning, & high-impact practices

### Learning to Improve Study

- Representatives from 60 institutions with improved scores responded to a questionnaire about their change efforts.
- Asked about motivation for change, actions, awareness of improved scores, key players in effort, etc.

## What Accounts for Change in Scores at Institutions?

## Intentional Reform?

What proportion of the 60 institutions reported that they had implemented change efforts that contributed to improved results?

a) almost all b) 2/3 c) about half d) a third

a) All but 4 institutions said **“Yes”** they had implemented change efforts that they believe account for results....>>> **3 unsure, 1 no**

31

## Motivation for Change

Rank

1. Institutional commitment to improving undergraduate education **1**
2. Faculty interest in improving undergraduate education **3**
3. Data revealed concern **2**
- ~~4. National call for accountability~~
- ~~5. Governing board mandate~~
- ~~6. State board or legislative mandate~~
7. Accreditation
8. Internal program review

32

## Motivation for Change

- What is motivating change on your campus?
- What has been most influential?
- What levers have advantaged your work to improve student engagement & success?



33

## Characterizing Change Efforts

- “Supersystematic”
- Targeted
- By-product of larger campus reform (e.g., Gen Ed)
- First-Year Focus
- Upper-Division Oriented (department unit of change?)
- Identity Refinement
- Distributed/Many Levers

34

## Type of Change: Identity Refinement

### Bryant University (RI)



- *“Refining, communicating, and enlisting support for the new mission drove the change effort. Bryant’s leadership understood the need to collect data to assess the outcomes of its change effort and to seek areas to improve.”*
- *“Bryant has remade itself over the past decade, but views its change efforts as an on-going mission to innovate and improve.”*

35

## Type of Change: First Year Focus

### University of Akron



- Participated in Foundations of Excellence self-study with goal to create a more vibrant first year experience.
- Used data to identify what worked and what needed improving in the first year.
- **Structured process** to study and implement reforms: FYE Task Force and Student Success & Retention Committee (faculty-administrative committee)

36



## Type of Change: By-product of Larger Reform Effort

### St. Joseph's College (CT)

- In 2005, the College implemented a new general education program. Courses counted in the general education curriculum must address three of four integral skills: oral and written communication, critical thinking, research and scholarship, or collaboration.



37

## What Facilitates Change?

- Involvement in Initiatives** – Foundations of Excellence; Teagle Foundation project to improve student learning; Bringing Theory to Practice; Wabash Study; 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

38

## What Facilitates Change?

### Westminster College (MO)

- Senior Leadership**
- Center for Teaching Excellence and the Focus on Teaching Committee -- both led by faculty**  
 “Senior leadership laid the foundation and provided consistent leadership for the conversations with trustees, faculty and staff to build momentum around initiatives....Westminster’s faculty provided professional development opportunities and mentored newer faculty, integrating them into campus conversations.”

39

## What Kinds of Changes Were Made?



40

## What Kinds of Changes Were Made?

- Programmatic**
- Structural**
- Expansion of initiatives**
- Targeted efforts to special populations of students**
- Curricular**
- Teaching & Learning**



41

## Change: Southern Connecticut State University

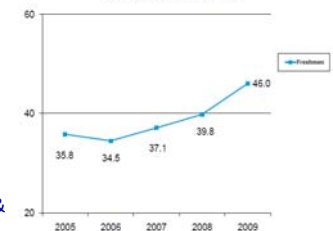


No First Year Experience in 2007; 50% students in FYE in 2007; All in FYE in 2009

### FYE components:

- Orientation
- Common read
- Learning communities
- Inquiry 101 seminar
- Academic tracking & early intervention
- Student success workshops
- Academic support workshops & study groups
- FYE program office

Student-Faculty Interaction



[www.southernct.edu/academics/academicaffairs/assess/](http://www.southernct.edu/academics/academicaffairs/assess/)

## Change: Pace University (NY)

Reform efforts throughout the entire university



- **Sophomore Year Experience** – enhanced Sophomore Advising; Career Exploration Course; Sophomore Kick- Off Day; Lambda Sigma Honor Society
- **Advising improvements** - Additional advisors; new first year advising model
- **Developed “One-stop” initiative for student services**

43

## Change: Quinnipiac University (CT)

QUINNIPIAC  
UNIVERSITY

- **Increased Integrated Learning & High Impact Practices by enhancing the undergraduate experience via:**
  - Embedding 10 Essential Learning Proficiencies more intentionally in University Curriculum and reinforcing through academic programs
  - Nurturing intentional learning and curricular cohesion via the QU Seminar Series – 3 required seminars that integrate a student’s connection to their local, national and global communities
  - Instructional support: the Faculty Collaborative for Excellence in Learning and Teaching

44

## Improvement & Positive Change

- **Implementing large-scale, transformational change in colleges and universities is difficult, but possible -- many institutions show real improvement**
- **Link data to develop solid foundation**
- **Improvement begins in small ways – so start something!**
- **Evaluate effectiveness of action. Celebrate and tweak.**

**CHANGE**  
WE CAN BELIEVE IN

45

## Discussion



- *If assessment doesn’t help improve teaching and learning activities and ultimately, student success... why bother with it?*
- **What improvement initiatives have you launched and how are you monitoring?**
- **What facilitates using data to improve undergraduate education?**

46

## Discussion and Comments

Jillian Kinzie  
Alexander C. McCormick

NSSE  
Indiana University Center for  
Postsecondary Research  
[jikinzie@indiana.edu](mailto:jikinzie@indiana.edu)

**“Learning to Improve Project”**



[nsse.iub.edu](http://nsse.iub.edu)