

## Optimizing the First-Year Experience for Student Learning and Success

Ohio State University – First Year Experience Conference




**Jillian Kinzie**  
IU Center for Postsecondary Research  
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## Agenda for Higher Education

- Increase postsecondary access
- Enhance educational quality
- Ensure student success



## College Attainment Report: The Challenge is Urgent



- ALL colleges and universities **must marshal the resources to make completion a priority**
- **Change campus culture** to boost student success
  - Create student-centered culture
  - Improve the academic experience
- Institutions can and must take steps to increase the chances that students will be successful, and **ensure that students are active, engaged participants**


ACE College Attainment Report, January 23, 2013

## Today's Student Learning Agenda

- ✓ Improve student learning
- ✓ Create enriched, quality learning experiences
- ✓ Increase student success – graduation rates, learning outcomes, post-graduation goals...
- ✓ Ensure skills, knowledge for 21<sup>st</sup> century




## Student Behaviors & Activities Associated with Student Persistence & Success



- **Faculty-Student Contact** (important for first-gen, racial-ethnically diverse students)
- **Peer Interactions** (meaningful connections, peer teaching, tutoring)
- **Experiences with Diversity** (transforming for students)
- **Co-curricular Activities** (really important for persistence)
- **Student Satisfaction** (influences sense of belonging)

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


## OSU and Student Learning & Success



**93%** first-year retention rate!  
Model FYE program, First Gen support...

**79%** 6yr. grad rate!

**Race-ethnicity, First-Gen, Low-Income?**  
*What is the quality of learning?*



## We know a lot about What Matters to Student Learning & Success

The challenge is using what we know.

Aligning resources, removing impediments, to optimize success for all students.



## Optimization



an act, process, or methodology of making something (as a design, system, or decision) as fully perfect, functional, or effective as possible

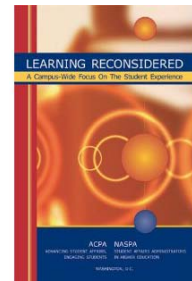


If you had the power to make 1 change at OSU to optimize student learning and increase success what would it be?



## Purposeful Pathways to Transformational Learning

A transformative education repeatedly exposes students to *multiple opportunities for intentional learning* through the formal academic curriculum, student life, collaborative curricular programming, community-based, and global experiences.



*Learning Reconsidered (2004)*

## What We Know About Student Learning and Success

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**.

11

## Designing for Student Success

No matter what program or practice a college implements, it is likely to have a greater impact if its design incorporates the following principles...



## Design Principles for Student Success



### A Strong Start

- ❖ Institutional publications accurately describe what students experience
- ❖ Ensure students' earliest contacts and first weeks incorporate experiences that foster personal connections and enhance chances of success
- ❖ Structured Orientation, First Year Experience
- ❖ Meaningful first day of class!!!

## Design Principles for Student Success



### Clearly Marked Pathways

- ❖ The many choices students face as they navigate college can create unnecessary confusion – *create coherent pathways*
- ❖ Make plain to students the resources and services available to help them succeed
- ❖ Redundant early warning systems and safety nets

## Design Principles for Student Success



### Integrated Support

- ❖ Connect with students where they are most likely to be: the classroom -- build support, such as skills development & supplemental instruction, into courses rather than referring students to services separate from the learning experience

## Connect students in multiple ways to resources for learning



- Connect students to academic support resources by *requiring* use of writing center, peer tutors, study groups,
- Online, mobile, kiosk support services
- Engaging, *high-challenge* research support groups, writing centers, *academic clubs*, & *co-curricular activities*

## Students don't do optional!



- Guide students to what is important to do
- Require visits to advisor, tutoring, writing or math center -- knit-in to assignments, connect to residence

*What do you require of students?*

## Design Principles for Student Success



### High Expectations & High Support

- ❖ Students do their best when the bar is high but within reach. Setting a high standard and then giving students the necessary support — academic planning, academic support, financial aid, and so on — makes the standard attainable.

## Design Principles for Student Success

### Intensive Student Engagement

- ❖ Promoting student engagement is the overarching feature
- ❖ Make engagement inescapable for students



*Engaged learning is a gateway to the desired outcomes of college.*

Students who engage more frequently in educationally purposeful activities both in and outside the classroom get better grades, are more satisfied, and are more likely to persist and graduate.



Advice for first-years from Ohio State faculty:

"Become engaged. Become entangled. Sit in the front row."

## Taking Stock of OSU FYE initiatives

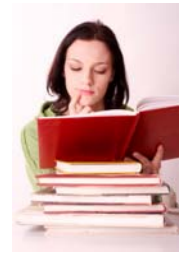
- ✓ Orientation
- ✓ Presidents Convocation
- ✓ Buckeye Book Community
- ✓ Success Series
- ✓ First Year Leadership Collaborative

*How many students take part?  
Are some students underserved?  
Are programs effective?  
What do programs contribute to learning and success?*

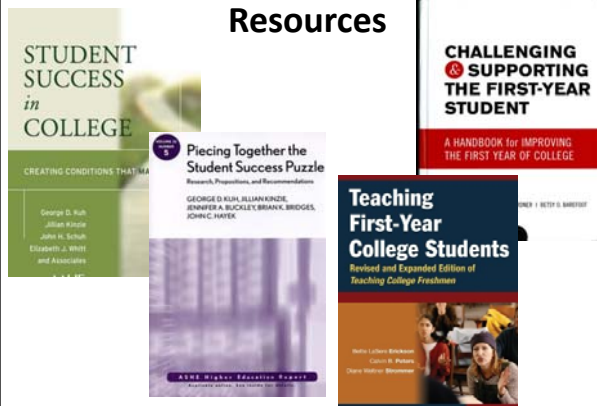


## The Magical World of the First College Year

- Educators have assigned **special importance** to the first year of college as the **foundation** for the college experience.
- The first year is a **distinct** time period – **intentionally designed** to produce specific experiences and outcomes
- The first college year is **too important to leave to chance.**



## Designing for Student Success Resources



## Focus on Educational Practices in the First Year

**NSSE measures of educational practices may be best used to focus on the effectiveness of the first year of college—a period of time during which the greatest developmental impact of postsecondary education occurs.**

Study on the effectiveness of the NSSE benchmarks  
Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich  
(Change, Jan/Feb, 2010)



**Engagement in effective educational activities in the first year is essential to student persistence & success**

25

### High-Impact Pedagogical Practices in the First Year

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class on assignments
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project as part of course
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with faculty outside class
- Received prompt feedback on your academic performance
- Worked harder than you thought
- Worked with faculty on activities outside coursework (committees, student life, etc.)
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with others
- Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity and those who differ from you - religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values

### Power of Peers

- “Student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development” (Astin, 1993)



- Peer learning is an effective, engaging pedagogy for all students

### Power of Timely Feedback

- New students need immediate feedback to understand what is expected
- Feedback in **first 3 weeks** to modify behaviors accordingly



Engagement had a **stronger** effect on **first year grades & persistence** to the second year for underprepared (low ACT) and historically underserved students (first-gen, students of color)



### Value of High-Impact Practices in the First Year

- **First Year Seminars**
- **Learning Communities**
- **Service Learning/Community-based projects**



## Do First Year Students Invest Enough Time in their Studies?

- Average FY spends **15** hrs per week
  - Women spent 1 hr. *more* than men
  - First-generation devoted 1 hr. *less* per week
  - Major differences – Engineering 5 hrs. more
- Faculty no longer hold to 2 hrs. for every 1 in class  
FSSE results show time *faculty expect is only slightly higher* than what students report



## What About Transfers?

- Transfer students less engaged than students who started at the institution
  - No differences on study time, discussing assignments with faculty
- Institutions of all types need to consider early and ongoing programs to engage transfer students.



## The Simple Truth:

At institutions where educators, particularly faculty, use effective educational practices more frequently, students are more engaged overall and gain more from college.



(Faculty Survey of Student Engagement – FSSE)

## NSSE Measures Student Engagement

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 undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from college
- Items represent behaviors associated with student learning & development



## What is Student Engagement?



Student engagement is the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities – practices shown to be related to desired educational outcomes



## OK, but what is Engagement?

- Challenging academic work
  - High expectations
  - Deep approaches to learning
- Quality involvement with faculty
- Enriching activities and high-impact practices
  - Active and collaborative learning
  - Powerful educational experiences
- Supportive peers, faculty, staff, campus



## NSSE's Big Idea

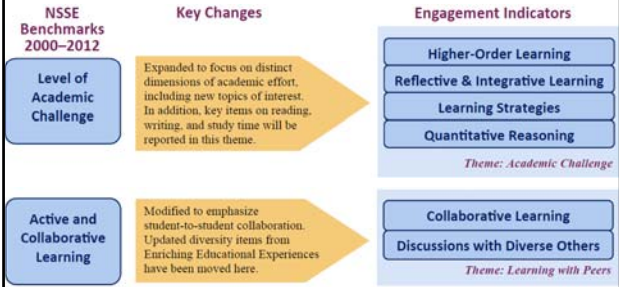


- Ask students about their experience
- Focus on *behavior*: empirically confirmed effective practices

## The Updated NSSE

10 Engagement Indicators (FY & SR)

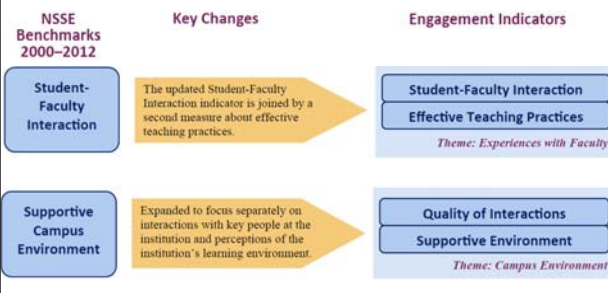
From Benchmarks to Engagement Indicators and High-Impact Practices



## The Updated NSSE

10 Engagement Indicators (FY & SR)

From Benchmarks to Engagement Indicators and High-Impact Practices



## NSSE Results at Ohio State

- **NSSE Participation:** 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013
- **OSU NSSE 2013** – about 1,000 First-Year & 500 Seniors responded
- **Comparison institutions:** AAUDE - Iowa State, Michigan State University, Tulane, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Kansas, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, University of Washington-Seattle

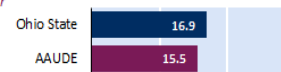
## OSU NSSE 2013 Engagement Indicators

Theme	Engagement Indicator	Your students compared with AAUDE	
		First-year	Senior
Academic Challenge	Higher-Order Learning (HO)	--	--
	Reflective & Integrative Learning (RI)	▽	--
	Learning Strategies (LS)	--	--
	Quantitative Reasoning (QR)	--	△
Learning with Peers	Collaborative Learning (CL)	▽	△
	Discussions with Diverse Others (DD)	△	△
Experiences with Faculty	Student-Faculty Interaction (SF)	--	▽
	Effective Teaching Practices (ET)	--	--
Campus Environment	Quality of Interactions (QI)	--	--
	Supportive Environment (SE)	△	△

▲ Your students' average was significantly higher (p<.05) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.  
 △ Your students' average was significantly higher (p<.05) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.  
 -- No significant difference.  
 ▽ Your students' average was significantly lower (p<.05) with an effect size less than .3 in magnitude.  
 ▼ Your students' average was significantly lower (p<.05) with an effect size at least .3 in magnitude.

## NSSE Results at Ohio State A Focus on First Year Students HIGH Performing Items – Strengths:

First-year Average Hours per week studying



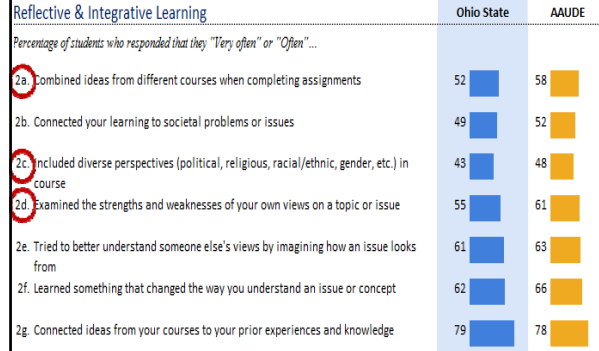
- Institution emphasizes...
  - Attending campus activities and events (...) (SE)
  - Providing support for your overall well-being... (SE)
  - Providing opportunities to be involved socially... (SE)
  - Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds...(SE)
  - Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (SE)

## NSSE Results at Ohio State A Focus on First Year Students

### LOW Performing Items – Areas for Growth:

- Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments (RI)
- Worked with other students on course projects or assignments (CL)
- Asked another student to help you understand course material (CL)
- Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material w/other students (CL)
- About how many...courses have included a community-based project (service-learning)? (HIP)

## OSU Reflective & Integrative Learning in the First Year



## Some Educational Activities are Unusually Effective

Growing evidence that "high-impact practices" provide substantial educational benefits to students



[High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access To Them, and Why They Matter (2008) AAC&U]

## HIPs Put Student Learning at the Center

- High Engagement (Peers, Mentors, Unscripted Questions)
- High Effort (by Students)
- High Reward (for Learning)



## HIP Effectiveness Research Led to Prescription:

All Students  
Do 2...  
one early,  
one later

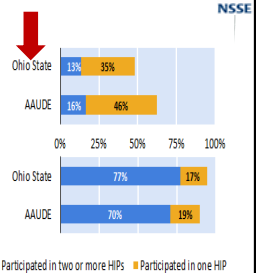
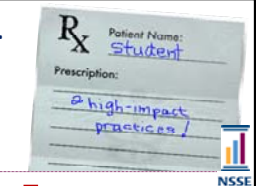


## Prescription for High- Impact Practices OSU Results

### High-Impact Practices (HIPs)

Due to their positive associations with student Learning Communities, Service-learning and retention, special undergraduate opportunities are designated "high-impact." For more details and statistical comparisons, see your High-Impact Practices report.

- First-year**  
Learning Communities, Service-Learning, and Research w/Faculty
- Senior**  
Learning Communities, Service-Learning, Research w/Faculty, Internships, Study Abroad, and Culminating Experiences





## High-Impact Practice Participation

### • To think about...

- Do all students have access to HIPs?
- What student populations might be less likely to participate in HIPs?



## Strengthening the Student Learning Environment

*Which educational practices and experiences might be worth exploring to optimize student learning and success?*



## Engaging Institutions Take Action on Evidence!!

- Focused on data that were actionable, not immutable institutional or student characteristics
- Evolved from simply gathering data to using evidence to guide changes.

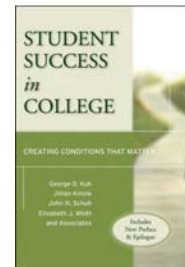
***“Positive Restlessness”***

***“Talking all the time about what works well and what needs to be fixed”***

51

## Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality

- Students, all staff, and faculty are partners in educating students
- Faculty & student affairs educators fuel the collaborative spirit
- Student ownership is fostered
- Caring, supportive community



52

## Partnerships to Enhance Quality

Student Success, as a desired outcome of higher education, is more likely to result from institutional environments characterized by *strong partnerships* that link academic and student affairs professionals, faculty and students.



53

## Educationally Effective Institutions: Promote Partnerships for Success

- *Student Affairs staff*
- *Students*
- *Administrators*
  - *Faculty*
  - *Community*
  - *Staff*



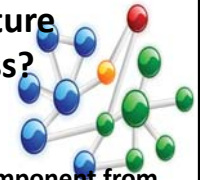
## The Value of Campus Partnerships

- Key component to creating environments that foster student success
- Powerful vehicle for launching and institutionalizing policies & practices and complementary programs such as first-year initiatives, general education, service-learning...
- Factor in creating educational improvements
- Essential during times of dwindling resources

55

## Ask: Is this the Best Structure to Foster Student Success?

A study of students' experience in advising at UTEP resulted in a shift of responsibility for an advising component from student affairs to a unit in academic affairs.



*How did Student Affairs react?*

*"I gave up designs about territory long ago. Yes, one might look at this move as a loss for student affairs, but now we are better partners working to support students."*

– VP Student Affairs

## NSSE Study of Educational Improvement: What Improves the First Year (FY)?

- Self study – FoExcellence, Accreditation
- Partnerships = AA+SA+CTL+Tech+Faculty<sup>2</sup>
- Peer mentoring/teaching/learning support
- Enhanced, common FY experiences
- Themed learning communities paired with high-impact practices
- Improving success in “gateway courses” – writing, math, science

57

## Partnerships: Addressing Sophomore Year Success

### Pace University (NY)



#### “Sophomore Working Group”

comprised of faculty, academic administrators, & student affairs professionals, focused on developing an “experience” for sophomores to enhance academic commitment, persistence and success

**Created:** Pace Plan, Sophomore Kick-Off, Career Exploration Course, One Stop Services

58

## Robust Partnerships Between Student & Academic Affairs

- Change facilitated by a robust partnership between academic & student affairs



## Sustaining Student Success: Lessons About Partnerships

- Good will among colleagues is not enough to launch, let alone sustain, partnerships
- Bridge partners by keeping ends in mind - *student learning outcomes and success!*
  - Easier to do when mission & strategic plan emphasizes student learning & success and when institution is focused on these ends



59

## Successful Partnerships between Academic & Student Affairs

- Partnership is not simply about “developing a program together” but exhibiting mutual understanding and developing an ethos that values a broader, reinforcing educational mission
- Requires dialogue to develop trust and mutual understanding

Arcelus, 2011 61

## Possible Partnership Optimization Topics at OSU

- Increasing service learning, community-based research projects
- Enhancing in/out of class collaborative learning experiences
- Ensuring more reflection exercises & experiences
- Linking course, campus, and community ideas in more intentional ways
- Connecting diversity experiences to courses and increasing reflection



## Guide and Evaluate the Quality of Partnerships

Consider principles of good practice



[www.jngi.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/7-Principles.pdf](http://www.jngi.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/7-Principles.pdf)

## Making Partnerships Possible

- Create an ethos for collaborative work
- Kezar & Lester’s (2009) 3 Stage Model:
  - Building Commitment to Collaboration
  - Committing to Collaboration
  - Sustaining Collaboration



## Partnerships are Possible

In fact, they are essential to educational environments that foster learning and success



65

## Discussion and Comments

Jillian Kinzie, PhD.  
 NSSE Institute  
 Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research  
 1900 East 10th Street  
 Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419  
 Bloomington, IN 47406  
 Ph: 812-856-5824  
 Fax: 812-856-5150  
[jikinzie@indiana.edu](mailto:jikinzie@indiana.edu)



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