

**Challenging Assumptions, Building Success:  
How Assessment can “Prove and Improve”  
the First Year of College**

**Virginia Assessment Group Conference**

November 17, 2005  
Virginia Beach, VA

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**The First Year is the  
Foundation of the Entire  
Undergraduate Experience**

**Session Overview**

A philosophy of assessment

Some hot topics to watch

First-year constructs “ripe” for assessment

**Assessment is best when it...**

merges passion and logic.  
is grounded in reality and lifted by aspiration.  
is guided by theory and open to new discovery.

**High Risk Factors (ETS, 2002)**

0-1 = low, 2-5 = moderate, 5+ = high



- academically under prepared  
single parent
- financially independent  
caring for children at home
- working more than 30 hrs/week
- first-generation college student  
being a part-time student
- college cost = significant issue

**Audience Survey**

First generation high school graduates?  
First generation college graduates?  
Started at a 2-year or open admissions college?  
Worked more than 20/week for pay in college?  
Are passionate for wide access to higher education?

**If assessment on your campus is  
“just the facts”...**

**you are missing the boat.**

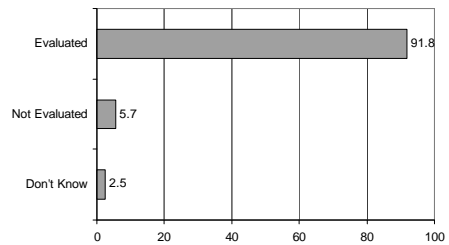
- Provide context
- Share the student voice
- Show your passion

## Current Practices in First Year Assessment

from a study by the  
Policy Center on the  
First Year of College

[www.brevard.edu/fyc](http://www.brevard.edu/fyc)

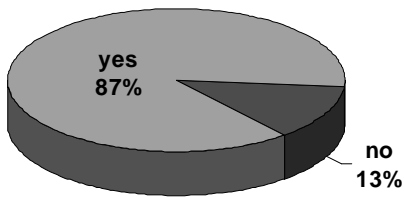
### Assessment of Orientation Programs



**Key finding:** Orientation programs are regularly evaluated

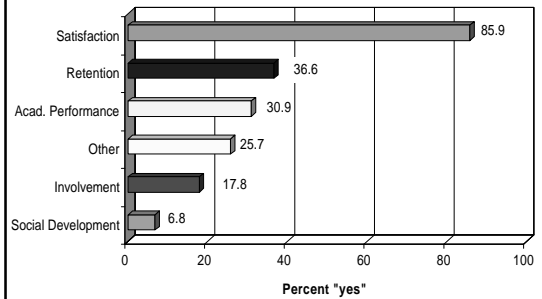
source: Current Practices Survey – Policy Center on the First Year of College

### Assessment of Residence Life Outcomes



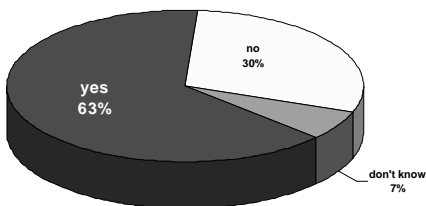
source: Current Practices Survey – Policy Center on the First Year of College

[Has] your campus . . . assessed any of the following residential life outcomes. (Please check all that apply.)



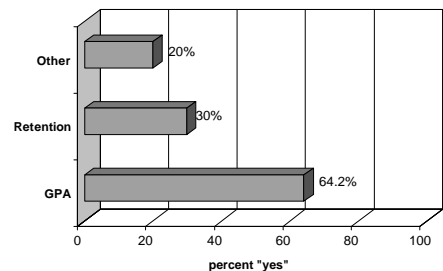
Residence life assessment is most frequently a satisfaction survey.

Is your system of first-year academic advising regularly evaluated?



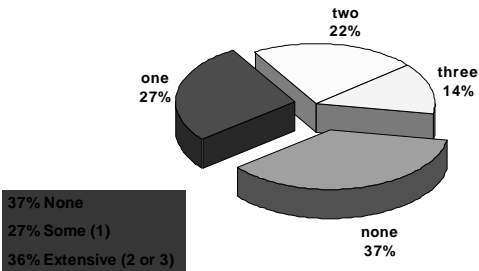
source: Current Practices Survey – Policy Center on the First Year of College

Does your institution conduct formal research investigating the impact of Greek membership on the following first-year outcomes? (Check all that apply.)

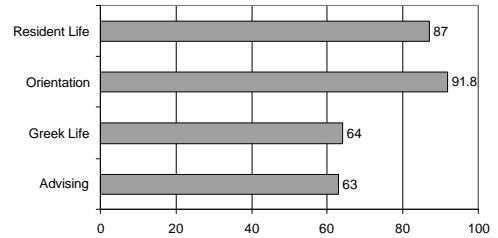


source: Current Practices Survey – Policy Center on the First Year of College

**Depth of Assessment  
Number of Greek Life Outcomes Studied**



**Summary:  
Assessment is common, but often limited to  
measures of satisfaction.**



**Percent That Assess FY Programs**

**Assessing Student Satisfaction**

is

**NECESSARY & APPROPRIATE. . .**

**But not sufficient.**

**The Great Debate  
Teaching & Learning Today**

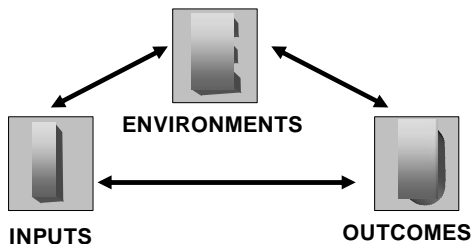
What matters most?

Who students are - attributes students bring to college (motivation, prior learning, etc.)

Or

What institutions do to engage students in educationally purposeful practices

**Value-Added  
I - E - O Model**

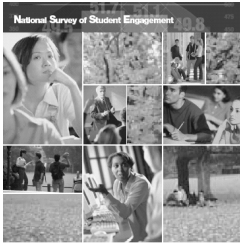


Summer Assessment Institute, August 5-7, 2001

**The great debate is launched. . .**

86% of the variance in outcomes can be explained by variance in inputs.

(Astin, 2003)



## National Survey of Student Engagement

(Community College Survey of Student Engagement)

Measurements of what students do.  
How they spent their time.  
Where they put their energies.  
How they use relationships.  
Etc.

## NSSE Key Findings

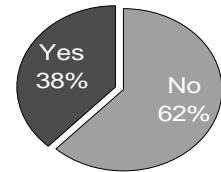
- What matters most is what students do, not who they are
- A key factor is the quality of effort students expend
- Educationally effective institutions channel student energy toward the right activities

## First Year Assessment Opportunities

(Try these on your campus!)

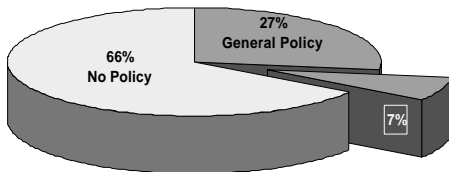


In the past five years has your institution studied the relationship of student class attendance to persistence, academic performance, or other outcomes?



\* n = 956  
Source: Current Practices Survey 2002- Policy Center on the First Year of College

## Special Attendance Policy for First-Year Students



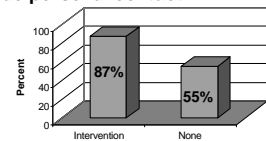
7% have a special policy on class attendance for 1<sup>st</sup>-year students

Source: 2001 Current Practices Survey (4-year institutions)

## A Study of Attendance Patterns

University of Mississippi  
Freshman Absence-Based Intervention (pilot)  
Experimental design (treatment & control groups)  
Students who missed 2 classes/8 weeks were reported  
Graduate student made personal contact

Cum GPA = C or better (end of term)

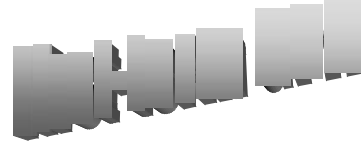
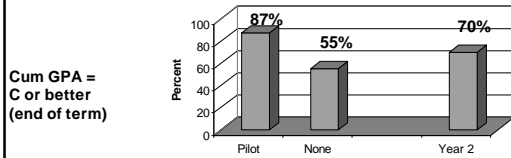


## A Second Study of Attendance Patterns

University of Mississippi

Pilot taken campus-wide

Students who missed 2 classes/8 weeks were reported  
Residence Hall Advisor made personal contact



First Year GPA

Bachelors in 6 yrs

Less than 2.25

26%

2.25 – 3.25

64%

Over 3.25

75%

Source: Descriptive Summary of 1995-1996 Beginning Postsecondary Students: Six Years Later (NCES 2003-151)

## Attrition “High Risk”

Risk Factors:

- academically under prepared
- single parent
- financially independent
- caring for children at home
- working more than 30 hrs/week
- first-generation college student
- being a part-time student
- college cost = significant issue

0 - 1 = low risk  
2 - 4 = moderate risk  
5+ = high risk

source: ETS, 2000

## What do you know about high risk students?

(5 or more of the risk factors)

(True or False)

High Risk Students are more likely to . . .

- come to class **unprepared**
- ask questions in class
- prepare 2+ drafts of papers/assignments
- report “working harder than they thought they could to meet instructor’s expectations”
- devote more time to class preparation (even though they also work more hours per week)

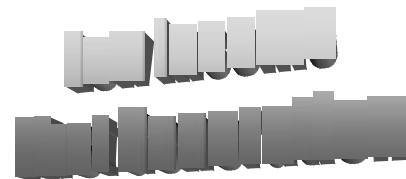
(True or False)

High Risk Students are more likely to . . .

come to class unprepared (11% fewer)  
ask questions in class  
prepare 2+ drafts of papers/assignments  
report “working harder...  
devote more time to class preparation (no difference)

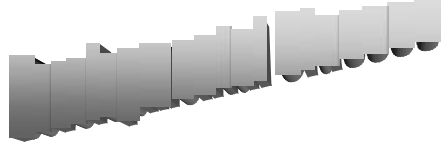
“High risk students exert more effort to succeed.”  
They fail when out-of-class conditions overwhelm them.

source: Engaging Community Colleges A First Look (2002 Findings)  
CCSSE, McClenny



- “...only 22 percent of college-qualified, low-income high school graduates earn a bachelor’s degree . . .
- compared to 62 percent of their high-income peers.”

Source: Brian K. Fitzgerald, “Missed Opportunities: Has College Opportunity Fallen Victim to Policy Drift?” Change July/August 2004



## Community College of Denver

- 2/3 of students are low income
- 72% attend part-time
- 2/3 first generation college students
- 10% physically handicapped
- 60% Latino, African-American, American Indian, or Asian
- Average age is 28

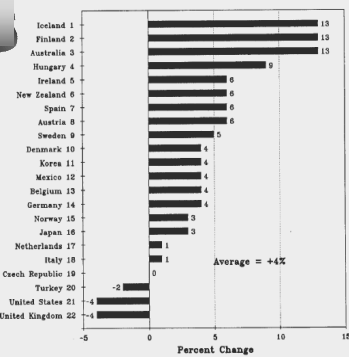
## Community College of Denver

. . . by the late '90s there were no significant differences in student success indicators— persistence, graduation, transfer, and more—based on race, ethnicity, age, or gender. By 1995, students who began their CCD experience in developmental studies were as likely to graduate as those who did not, and by 1999, enrollment in developmental education became a *predictor* of success.

### Case Management System

*Cutright and Swing (2005) in Achieving and sustaining institutional excellence in the first college year. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.*

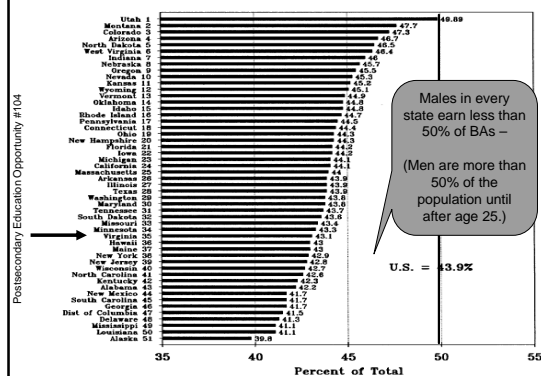
Change in 4-Year College Continuation Rates for Males in OECD Countries, 1998 to 2001



The college continuation rate (h.s. to college) for American males declined 4 points...

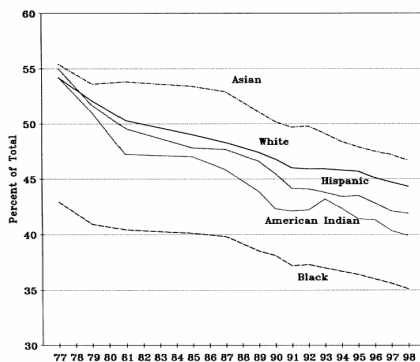
Females gained 1 point.

Bachelor's Degrees Awarded to Men by State 1998



Males in every state earn less than 50% of BAs – (Men are more than 50% of the population until after age 25.)

Bachelor's Degrees Awarded to Males by Race/Ethnicity 1977 to 1998



## Berea College – Retention Success

(Work college serving low income students South's first interracial and coeducational college.)

- Array of initiatives in and out of the classroom.
- advisor training
- curricular adjustments
- improvements in residence living
- admissions on "academic resources"
- Black Music Ensemble

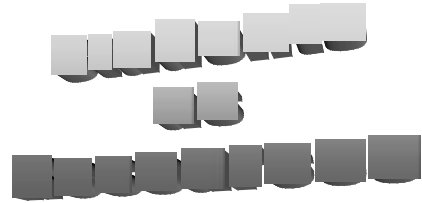
Result: 10% increase in retention overall  
Huge increase for Black students

Source: Powerful Partnerships, Ekman, Garth, Noonan, 2004

## Berea College – Retention Success

	Year/ 1-2 retention		
	1996	1998	2001
African- Americans less than \$25,000	64%	90%	91%
All Students less than \$25,000	63%	78%	82%

Source: Powerful Partnerships, Ekman, Garth, Noonan, 2004



“the student's peer group is the single most important source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.”

Alexander Astin, *What Matters in College?* (1993) page 398

## The Power Of Peer Effects

Randomly assigned roommates  
Randomly assigned lab partners  
(Williams, Berea, Dartmouth, Un. Of Maryland – College Park)

“Peer effects are real and significantly influence how much student learn.”

“Students with academically strong roommates simply do better academically than their own SAT’s would predict. They tend to “overperform” significantly.”

Source: Gordon C. Winston – Chronicle Review, 11/28/2003



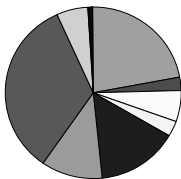
Economies of Time

Time on Task = Increased Learning

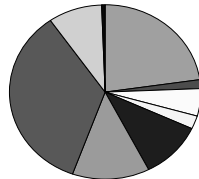


- Research by Karl & Karen Schilling
- Cross Sectional study  
1st year and 4th year students
- Students kept time logs

## Cross Sectional Comparison of Economies of Time



1<sup>st</sup> Year Students



4<sup>th</sup> Year Students

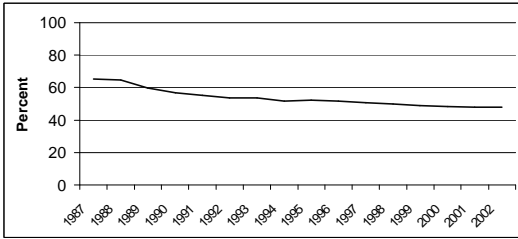
rounded data from Schilling study

## General Findings

- Economies of time do not change from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year.
- Students exchange time within segments, rather than across segments
  - Swap study in Class A for study in Class B, not from a different time component (personal, sleep, etc.)

**What do you know about the economies of time held by your students?**

# Alcohol Use

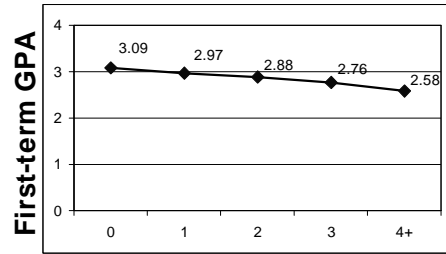


"Occasionally/Frequently" Drink Beer first-year students at entry to college

source: CIRP data, Astin/Sax

## First-Year Seminar Students

61 4-year institutions 31,000 students



Days per week... drink alcohol

source: FYI 2001 (national data)

## First-Year Class of 20 Students

- 8 students do not drink
- 6 drink once a week
- 3 drink twice a week
- 2 drink three times a weeks
- 1 drinks four or more times a week

Of the 12 who drink...

- 4...drink 1-3 drinks per event
- 4...drink 4-6 drinks per event
- 4...drink 7 or more drinks per event

source: FYI 2001 (national data)

## Drinking Impacts Retention *positively and negatively*

Students who never drink...

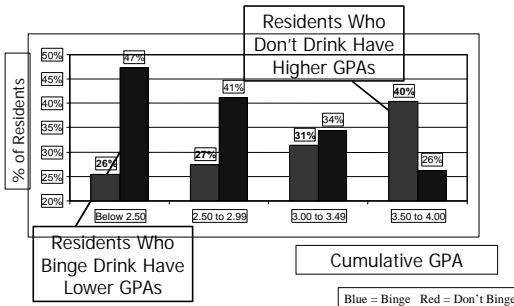
- express the lowest "sense of belonging" to the campus.
  - Even drinking one day per week is associated with a greater sense of belonging in the campus community.

Students who drink most frequently...

- report the lowest overall satisfaction with college
- report a higher intention to transfer to another institution.

Unpublished FYI 2001 study - 64 institutions

## Resident's GPA



Darlena Jones - EBI Residence Hall Study



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