

**Assessment Matters:
Proving and Improving
the First Year of College**

Campus Connections
Southern Connecticut State University
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Successful Assessment....

Creates Action

To....

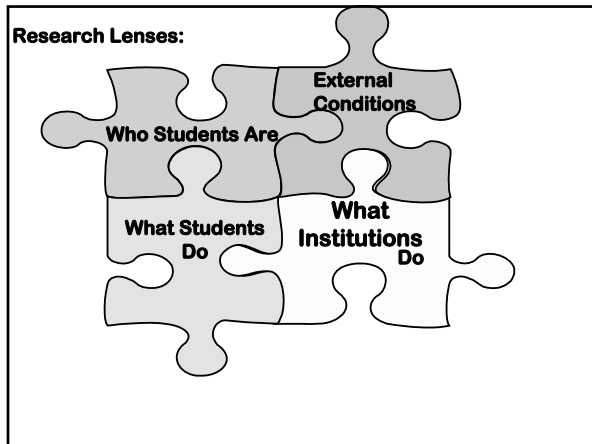
**Continue Effective Practice
or
Initiating Change (improvement)**

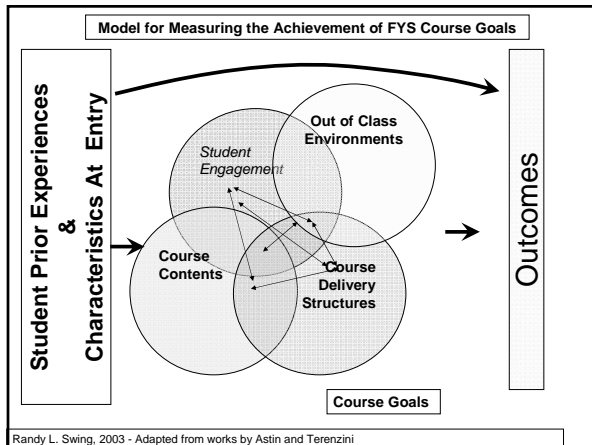
On too many campuses assessment...

efforts are measured by the weight of
“shelved research” – unused

proves that “the problem” is not in the
institution’s control

creates lots of “interesting findings” but
nobody is interested



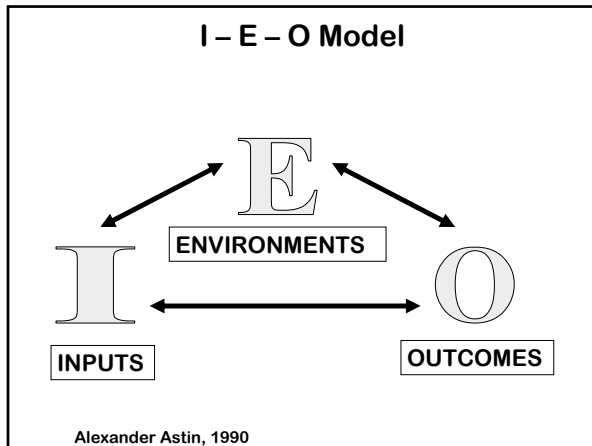


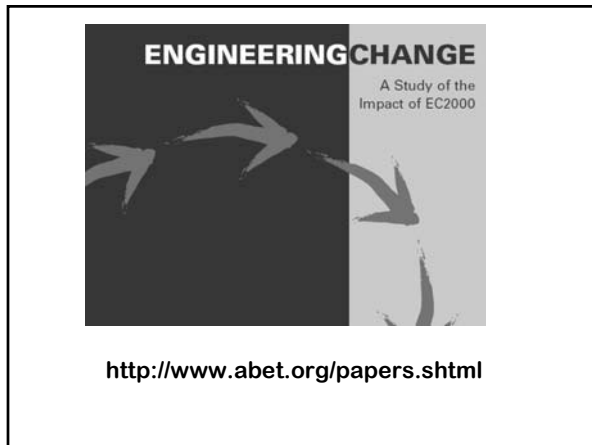
**Assessing Improvement
in Computer Skills**

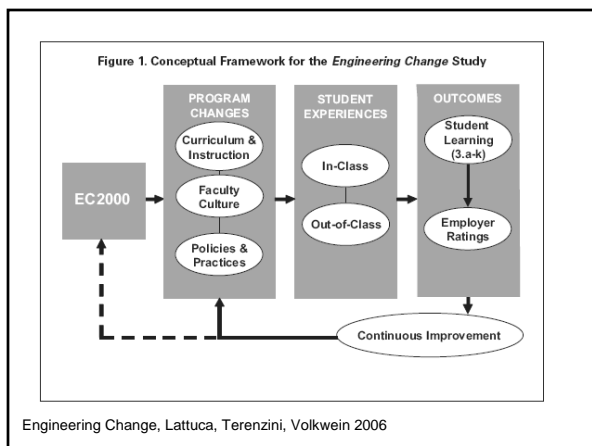
Entering Freshmen Pretest
Rising Junior Posttest

Gen. Ed. "Computer Intensive" Designators

Findings:
Gains in Computing Skills
No Correlation with "C" Designators
Best predictor - Living in a Residence Hall







Testing Assessment

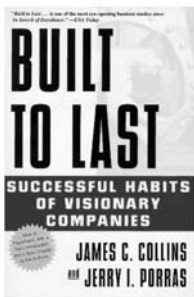
- What impact has assessment had on student learning?
- What impact has assessment had on institutional practices?

Engineering Change, Lattuca, Terenzini, Volkwein 2006

Point 1

Is assessment producing change (and confirming existing practices) on your campus?

Momentum Theory



Academic Momentum

Credits in First Year

“Less than 20 credits by the end of the first calendar year is a serious drag on degree completion.”

Continuous Enrollment

“..continuous enrollment increases the probability of degree completion by 43%.”

Withdraw without penalty

Withdrawal from 1 of 5 courses attempted...
“cuts the probability of completing the degree in half”

Source: Adelman, The Toolbox Revisited, 2006

Academic Momentum

Summer Terms

“More than 60% enrolled in summer terms”

End of first-year Grade Point Average

GPA above 2.25 and upward trend

Return or Purposeful Transfer

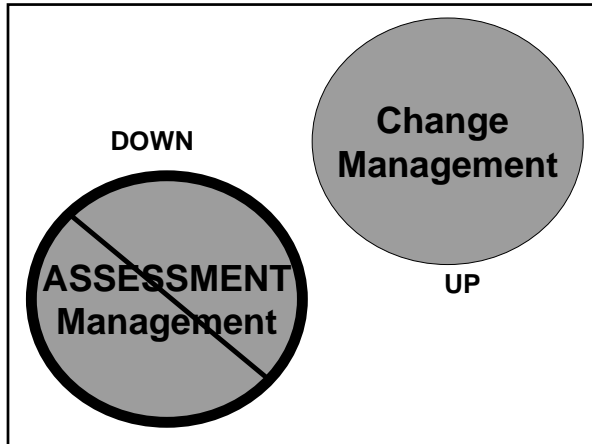
Transferring is not necessarily bad.

Source: Adelman, The Toolbox Revisited, 2006

Point 2

Are you building on theories, hypotheses, and national research?

Are you “bringing it home”?



Assessing Writing

Academic profile:
 One essay written in 45 minutes. Writing graded on a 4 point scale. Grading is done by local professors using the ETS scoring rubric. "Once trained, a professor can grade 40-50 essays per hour." Each essay is scored by two judges. "Therefore, 6 faculty could score 200 papers in 3 hours."

Accuplacer:
 Essay written on a computer immediately graded using artificial intelligence. The score includes a holistic grade with sub scores for focus, development, organization, and sentence structure.

Asset
 36 multiple choice items in 25 minutes. Covers grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, writing style, and writing structure.

Compass
 Students "find and correct errors in essays presented on the computer screen." Includes test items about punctuation, basic grammar, sentence structure and rhetorical skills (strategy, organization, and style).

CAAP
 Two essays each written in 20 minutes.
 72-item, 40 minute multiple choice test of standard written English.

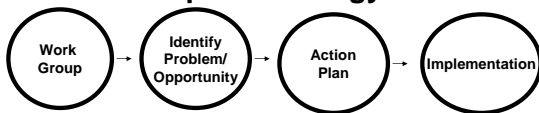
Point 3

Change is a political process. The facts may not move people.

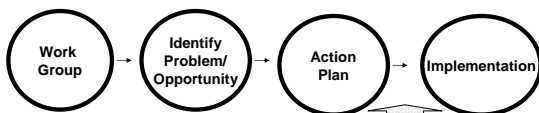
Debating, questioning, exploring options are the natural strengths of academics.

The timing of the debate matters!

Hopeful Strategy



- Identify the Problem/Opportunity
- Craft Solution
- Announce Solution
- Implement Solution



**UNTIL WE REACH REASONABLE CONSENSUS ABOUT THE PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY....
MOVING TO ACTION IS UNLIKELY**

Point 4

Anticipate and embrace debate. Limiting debate may speed the process but also reduce impact.

What matters in first-year seminars (in a nutshell)

Two decades-long debate focused on course structures. . .

- **how many credit hours?**
- **who teaches?**
- **what topics (study skills, orientation, interdisciplinary topics, etc)?**
- **grades or not?**
- **mandatory or elective?**

Four Types of Academic Seminars

1. **COLLEGE TRANSITION THEME**
orientation, study skills, managing transitions
2. **SPECIAL ACADEMIC THEME**
interdisciplinary, selected topic
3. **DISCIPLINE BASED**
introduction to major, department, discipline
4. **REMEDIAL/STUDY SKILLS**
study skills for a high-risk population

Which is best?

Leading Predictor Variable
Engaging Pedagogy

To what degree did this course include. . .

- a variety of teaching methods?
- meaningful class discussions?
- challenging assignments?
- productive use of classroom time?
- encouragement to speak in class?
- encouragement for students to work together?
- meaningful homework?

Findings

1 credit courses have lower engaging pedagogy scores on average

3 credit courses have highest engaging pedagogy scores on average

BUT the OUTLIERS told the real story.

Some teachers out performed the system they were given

others underperformed....

Point 5

The “average” often masks the truth.

Disaggregate data.

Watch the outliers.

The Future of Assessment?

Movement from developing techniques of assessment to managing change that is informed by data.

The Future of First Year?

End of the Darwinian educational philosophy

Rise in targeted treatments to specific first year subpopulations

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