

Practical Approaches to Building a Culture of Evidence-based Decision Making to Support Student Success



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**What is very much
needed in this time
is space (6 feet),
compassion, and
grace.**

**Thank you for your
commitment
today.**



The coronavirus pandemic draws needed attention to the underlying inequities in our education system, society, and economy...

At the same time, the nation is undergoing a reckoning with systemic racism that is at the foundation of these disparities

Colleges and universities must set a path to a more equitable higher education system



How to Reorient Assessment and Accreditation in the Time of COVID-19 Disruption

Jillian Kinzie

AMONG THE MANY ISSUES FACING higher education during COVID-19 is uncertainty about the status of student learning outcomes assessment and accreditation. Will necessary shifts in course assignments and assessments affect completion, particularly for those scheduled to graduate this year? Will a suspension (or slowdown) of program-level assessment put the institution out of compliance with state regulations or accreditation requirements? If accreditation visits are postponed, will the institution find its federal funding in jeopardy? All of these concerns are understandable, and it is good to have them aired and discussed.

However, the disruptions caused by COVID-19 may also provide an occasion for some useful rethinking of assessment. What those disruptions underscore is that decisions about assessment and accreditation must, above all, be sensitive to current realities and do what is best for students and faculty. Rather than aiming for compliance, or sticking with the plan to “just give students the exam and asterisk the results,” now is the time to prioritize what people need and embrace compassion-driven assessment, and reassess the fundamental goals of assessment.

To help think about the issues at hand, I offer some practical suggestions for course- and program-level assessment and accreditation demands. Then I suggest we take advantage of this moment to make some meaningful improvements to assessment and accreditation.

Realistic, Compassion-Driven Course- and Program-Level Assessment

Course-level assessment questions occupy a significant amount of the disruption

conversation bandwidth. A key topic is the choice to shift to pass/fail grades. Some argue this is an expression of compassionate relief, while others see it as unfair to students, or worse, a violation of federal standards for satisfactory academic progress. In the urgency to assure fairness, some have insisted on implementing online proctored exams, and huge amounts of energy have gone into creating systems to forestall such worries. Others have suggested that this may be the time to modify assignments and exams to make them less amenable to cheating—for instance, inviting students to draw connections between academic learning and the circumstances defining their daily life in this uncertain time.

Debates about these kinds of choices are tough, but they are also fruitful in that they often bring into focus the course outcomes that are really most important and attainable. Some may no longer be feasible, and others may rise up in importance. Consideration of the twin questions “What’s really most important for students to learn in this course?” and “What might better assure this learning?” can help reorient the course and instruction, and inspire creativity about what counts as a demonstration of achievement. Once recalibrated, course-level assessment reporting could document the revised outcomes and a discussion of the evidence of learning achievements in spite of the crisis.

Likewise, program assessment activities might usefully be redesigned to invite faculty to reflect on the learning outcomes that are most essential, observe what worked well online, and record what was sacrificed because it could not be reformulated in the shift to remote teaching and learning. Such formative assessments will be invaluable in shaping programs for the (uncertain) next semester and beyond.

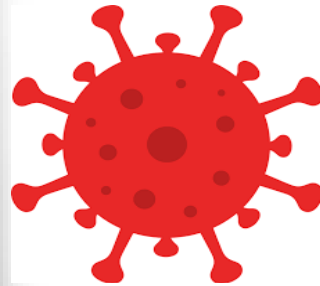
Given the known challenges students and faculty are having accessing the internet and materials, and simply finding physical space for studying, this is not the time to assess in the “normal” way. Instead, let’s capture the learning that has occurred with creativity and reframed assessments. Then we should invite students and faculty to reflect on what had to be let go, with what consequences, and learn what this suggests for subsequent semesters and for program assessment as a whole.

Leverage Flexibility in Accreditation

Accreditors and even the federal government have provided some cover for the many uncertainties facing institutions of higher education right now. The interruption of instruction related to COVID-19 required the federal government to offer flexibility in the application of the standards and processes of accrediting organizations. Accreditors, in turn, announced provisions for the temporary relocation of instruction to distance learning. Colleges and universities that had accreditation self-study or interim reports due this spring were granted extensions, and scheduled site visits were postponed or made virtual.

These announcements help resolve some uncertainties about assessment that institutions face today. Even more, they may be a useful reminder that the most important thing institutions can do in these circumstances is make decisions that are sensitive to current realities, document action, reflect on what can be recouped, and value this formative assessment to inform future work.

Lingering uncertainty about what accreditors expect can fuel a compliance approach that aims for the path of least resistance. This would be especially



Assessment Update Issue 32:4 July-August 2020

- Realistic, Compassion Driven Course & Program Level Assessment
- Leverage Flexibility in Accreditation
- Reorient Assessment (offer students more agency, equity, prioritize most important learning outcomes)



Poll

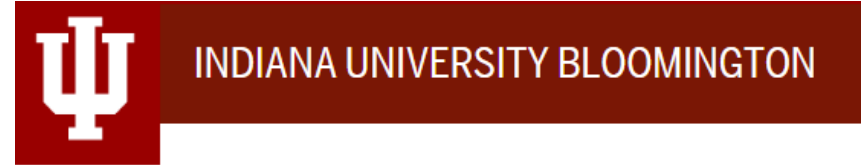
Which of the following did you accomplish during CV-19 work from home?

Answers:

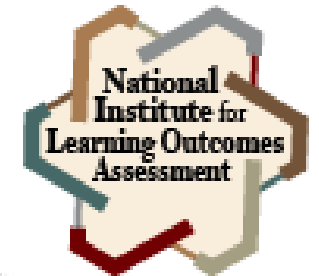
- Baking bread
- Demonstrating helpful (or fun) tech tools to coworkers
- Learning something while being the homeschool teacher
- Going a day without hearing: “You’re muted”
- Completing a TikTok challenge
- Identifying birds in your yard



Jillian's Perspective



My points of view on data, evidence, equity and student learning and success: Higher education scholar of student development, success, effective educational practice, assessment, quality improvement, and teaching & learning

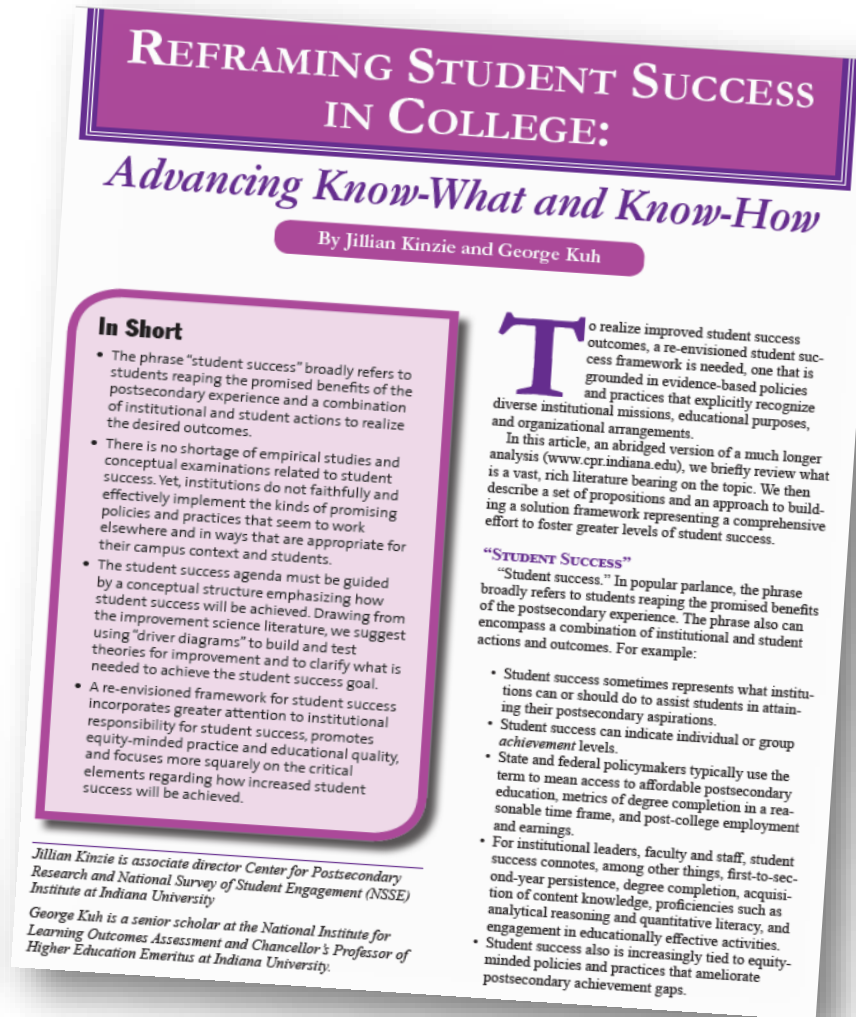
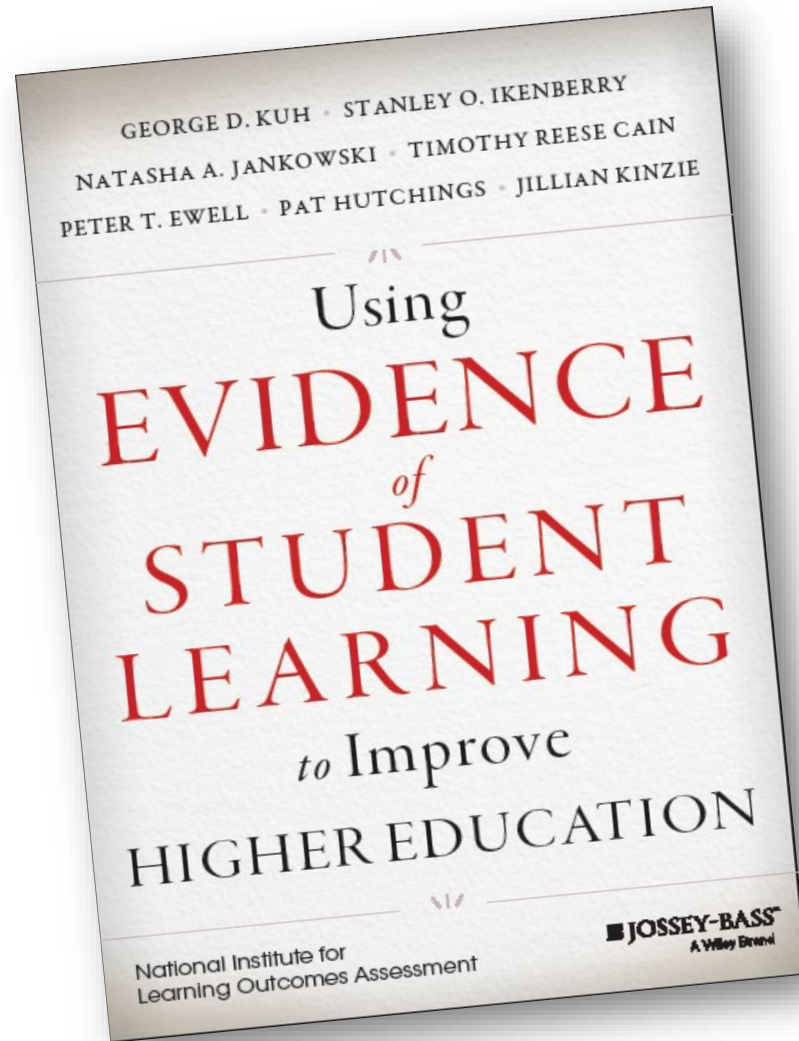


National Institute for
Learning Outcomes Assessment
Making Learning Outcomes Usable & Transparent

**6.4 million students @
1,600 4 yr. institutions**

- **Accreditation peer reviewer**
- **TEAC, CAEP former board member**

Student success and equity matter more today than at any other time in U.S higher education



Reframing Student Success in College
Kinzie & Kuh (2017)
Change magazine

**“Student success”
can be understood
in its simplest form
as getting students
into and through
college to a degree
or certificate.**



Evolutionary Timeline for Student Success

Retention hinges on students sense of commitment (Tinto)

1970

Focus on transitions, first-year experience, access

1990

Declining enrollments led to EM, focus on student populations

1980

Access & graduation concerns, institutional accountability

2000

Affordability,

STUDENT SUCCESS in COLLEGE

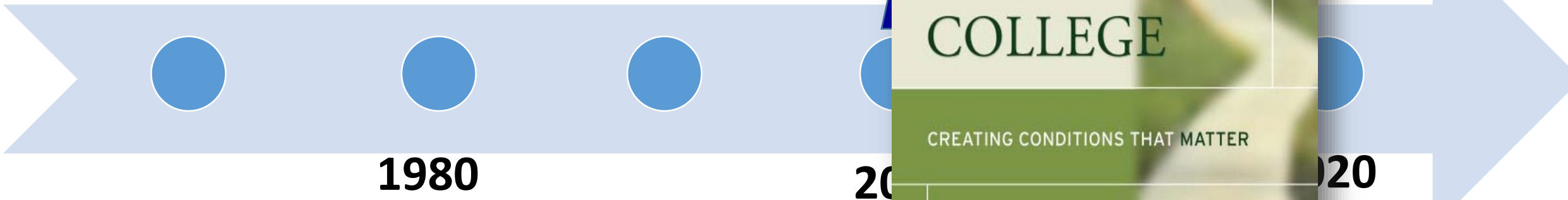
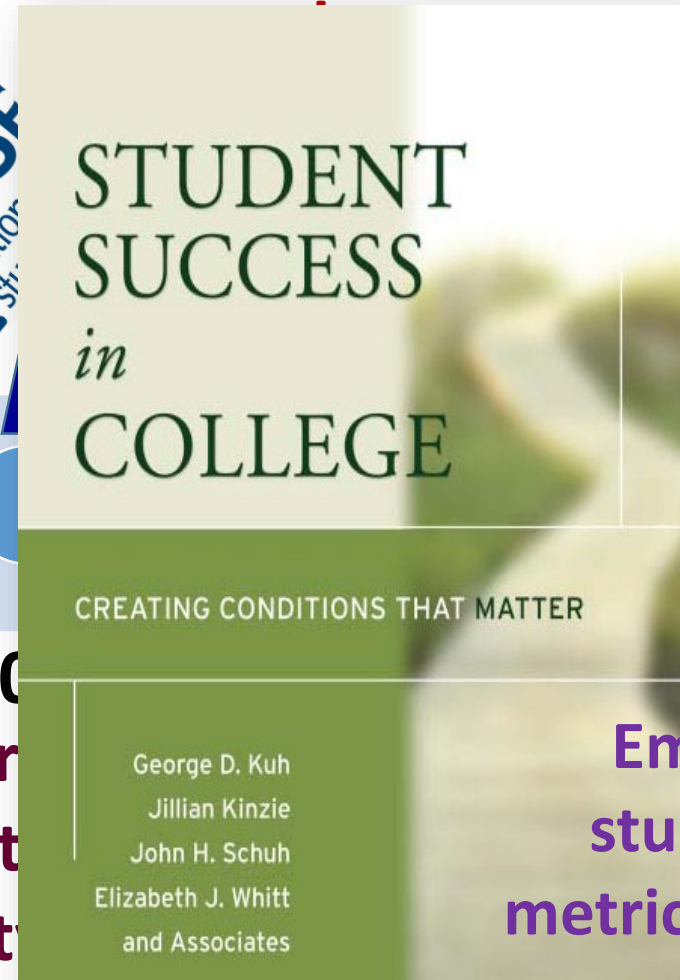
CREATING CONDITIONS THAT MATTER

George D. Kuh
Jillian Kinzie
John H. Schuh
Elizabeth J. Whitt
and Associates

Analytics, quality learning, equity

Employability, student success metrics, transparency

2020



21st Century Student Success Goal

More students completing the degree they start, in a high quality educational experience that prepares them for 21st century workforce.



Student Success

**Equity: Closing the Racially
Minoritized Student
Experience & Outcome Gaps**

**Quality: Completion through a
quality student experience and
quality learning**

Data in Higher Education

Predictive Analytics

Data-Informed



Dashboards

Big Data

- **Higher education institutions are data rich**
- **Information about enrollment, credit hours earned, retention, faculty, teaching & learning, students' experiences, advising, community engagement, use of services... are stored in numerous systems (but typically, these systems do not share data)**
- **Institutions must implement strategies to connect the dots; that is, they must find a way to combine and “relate” the data to create more complete pictures**



Data now available allow institutions to deeply examine evidence and understand patterns and trends that can help leaders throughout campus navigate their day-to-day decisions.

Data can be used to enhance teaching, learning, and advising; to inform curriculum reinvention and program renewal; and to monitor and address student success outcomes.



However, Available Data is Not Enough

The issue becomes how to think strategically and analytically about **which data matters**, **how it will be used**, and **who needs to use it**.



How does data about your undergraduate students' help you be smarter about student success?



Susan Whealler Johnston,
NACUBO Pres/CEO



Poll

How effective is your institution at using data to aid and inform campus decision-making?

	Provosts Responses (2020)
a. Very effective	22%
b. Somewhat effective	64%
c. Not too effective	12%
d. Not effective at all	1%

[2020 Survey of College and University Chief Academic Officers](#) by *Inside Higher Ed*.

How do we shift from being “data rich and information poor” to creating a more advanced culture for data use?



Not Data Driven, but Data-Informed



Data Don't Drive

Purpose-Driven, Data-Assisted, Data Inspired

Data and Predictive Analytics: Two Views

“You just have to drown the bunnies”

Mount Saint Mary’s University, made the news in 2016 with the Presidents plan to improve their retention rate by requiring new students to take a survey, and then use answers to identify those who were likely to drop out. Those students would then be encouraged to leave to boost retention by 4-5%



Georgia State University, uses information about students to help them succeed

“Georgia State is showing, contrary to what experts have said for decades, that demographics are not destiny. Students from all backgrounds can succeed at comparable rates.”

-- Tim Renick, Vice Provost, GSU

Higher Education Data Analytics Framework

CULTURE

- How might leaders create a culture that values data-informed decisions?
- How can business officers empower staff across the institution?
- In what ways might business officers collaborate across the institution?

CONTINUOUS CHECK IN

- ✓ Does my institution support a data-informed culture?
- ✓ Is everyone on campus empowered to use data?

HINDSIGHT

What happened?

Why did it happen?



INSIGHT

What is happening today?

Should we act on this information?



FORESIGHT

What might happen?

How can we achieve better outcomes?



RETURN ON INVESTMENT

What are the outcomes?

How has data improved our processes and outcomes?



CAPACITY

- What tools do we need to facilitate a data-informed culture?
- What skills do our staff need?
- Do we have the necessary data?

CONTINUOUS CHECK IN

- ✓ Does my institution have the human resources needed?
- ✓ Does my institution have the technology to support data analytics?

Postsecondary Data Partnership

Measure Student
outcomes.

Grow student

success.



Postsecondary Data Partnership



Data-Informed Framework

- Interactive dashboards
- Powerful filtering tools
- Simpler reporting to third-party education organizations
- An analysis-ready file
- Benchmarking data

Joining the PDP is a solid 1st step to gain a fuller picture of student progress and outcomes, but a data culture must also be cultivated

What facilitates the development of a culture of decision-making using a data-informed framework?

What are the features of a data-informed culture?



1. Grass Roots, Participatory Efforts to Bring Data into Meetings, Committees, Conversations

- Empower everyone – deans, department chairs, faculty, staff, even students - to “speak data”
- Start routine meetings (departments, cabinet, staff, committees, etc.) by discussing a relevant data point, or the state of a metric,
- Participants take responsibility for data presentations
- User-friendly dashboards to promote a common focus
- Data acts as a powerful trigger for group learning about inequities in educational outcomes



2. Create occasions for people to come together for collective reflection & meaning making

People come together to identify questions about student success and equity, and to consider data

- *Data is not “the answer” but an invitation to deliberation and conversation*



Academic Performance in Gateway Courses

Gateway Courses Can Quickly Derail Students



When I saw the grade distribution in my course by race-ethnicity and Pell status, I was shocked by the inequitable pattern

What's a reasonable target for DFWs in Gateway courses?
How do your faculty explain Gateway performance?

3. Assemble a Student Success Data Team

- **Field a team to oversee student success data, to monitor and interpret, and connect others to data**
- **The team can train others in using the PDP dashboards**



4. Begin with a Question

Organize data conversations around issues educators care about

(not around the data point, or source of evidence)

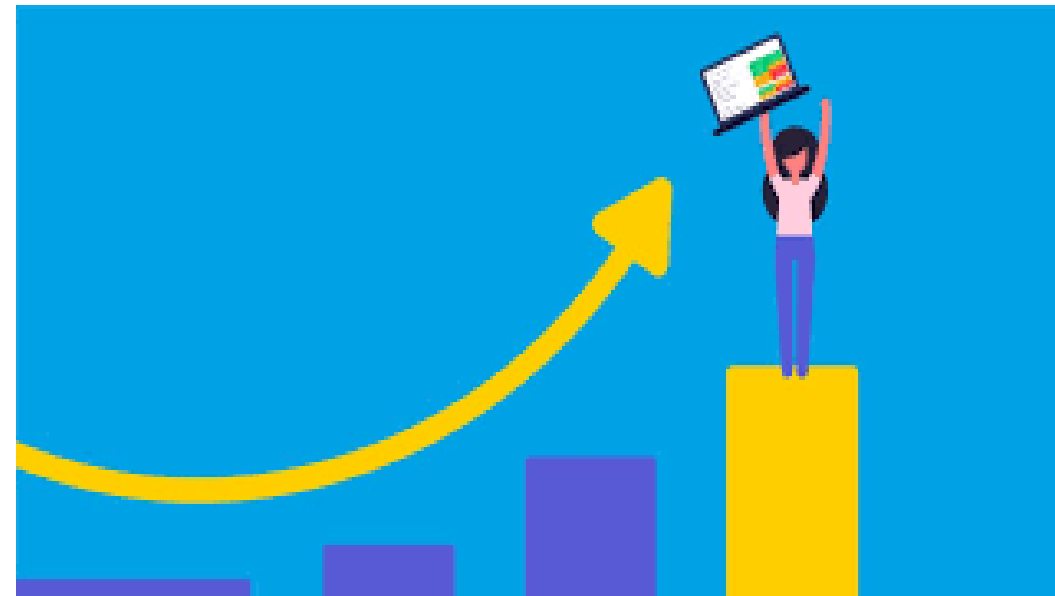
Examples: Are this years first year students on track to persist to the second year? Is the likelihood of progression different by race/ethnicity or among income groups? Are students in the College making better progress given our new first year seminar course and experiences?



5. Eyes on the Prize, but Focus on Most Proximal Data that can be Improved

- Graduation, Employment, Graduate and Professional School Enrollment are distal metrics
- The likelihood of improving those distal outcomes increases if the focus is proximal things more within the immediate control of the participating leaders and practitioners
- Distal metrics require early intervention

Focus on indicators of student progress for early intervention



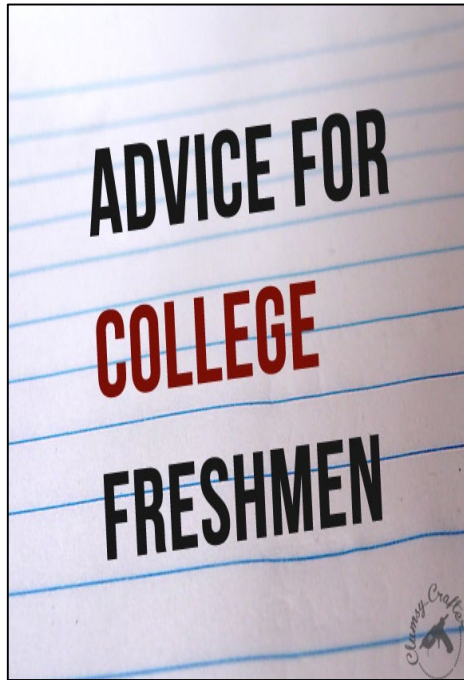
6. Ensure Everybody Counts in your Counts



- Disaggregate data by demographics (racially minoritized, other underserved student populations) to study inequity
 - **Use Person-Centered Approaches*** that emphasize people do not behave monolithically when sorted into groups based on identity
 - Limits normalizing the experiences of majority populations
 - Helps protect small sample sizes
- Approach:** Start with the outcome NOT groups – for example, create credit accumulated terciles (Low 0-20, moderate 21 – 29, or high 30 +) then display proportions in terciles by first-generation status of race-ethnicity
- Then examine the results: Where are students more or less represented in terms of low credit accumulation, vs. moderate or high?

*see Malcolm-Piqueux, L. (2015). Application of person-centered approaches to critical quantitative research. New Directions for Institutional Research, 163

7. Expose Myths and Respond with Data



- Take a light load your first semester; don't stress academics!
- I was kind of worried when he told me 12 units, but I figure my advisor knows what he's doing.

Academic momentum is real: the number of credits accumulated in the 1st year sets a trajectory that influences later chances of degree completion.

What do your data demonstrate to counter this advice for new students?

8. Require Concrete Plans Linked to Data

- Foster the development of concrete plans linked to the evidence
- Plans should call on programs and units to report what actions will be taken in response to data
- Allocate institutional resources to support implementation of plans
- Communicate an *A priori* design of how plans will be evaluated (what will success look like?)



9. Require Action on Data

- Map the transition from planning to action
- Encourage prototype or pilot testing proposed plans with feedback mechanisms to inform the final design
- Support, fund action on data
- Commission internal or external evaluators



10. Close the Loop, and Showcase the Data-Use Story

- **Loop-closing refers to monitoring and evaluation processes to assess the impact of implemented plans**
- **Share broadly how data were used to support student success**



Poll

Which of the following is the greatest barrier to a data-informed culture?

- a. Data silos
- b. Using data as a hammer
- c. Hiding bad-news data
- d. Treating data as if it speaks for itself
- e. All of the above



Barriers to the Use of Analytics in Higher Education

Cultural Barriers



61.8% CAMPUS
SILOES



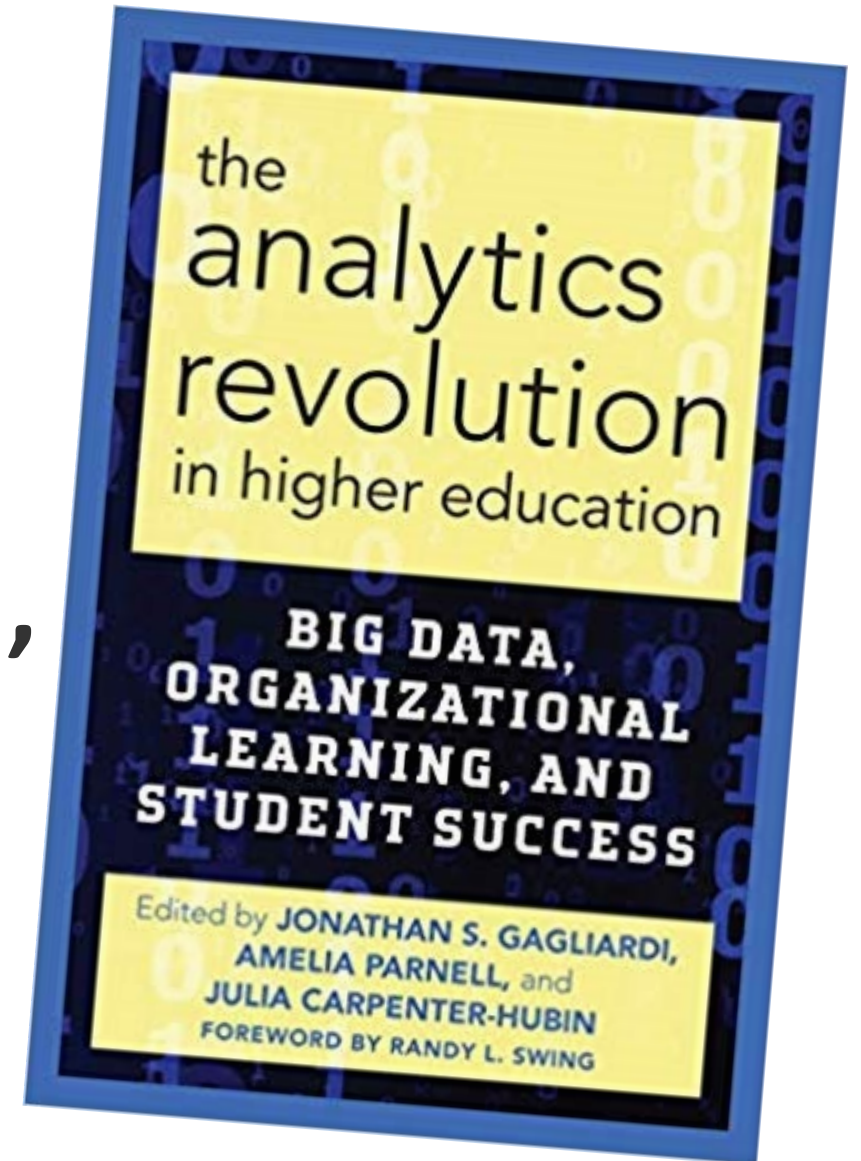
53.8% FEAR IT WILL BE USED
TO PUNISH PROGRAMS



50.4% MISTRUST OR
MISUNDERSTANDING
OF GENERATION AND USE

to harness the power of analytics, institutional leaders need to create a campus-wide culture that understands, values, and uses analytics as part of the regular responsibilities

If a campus doesn't have a culture that has focused primarily on using data effectively, and data systems and analytics are implemented, you'll find shadow systems, Excel systems, and apprehension about sharing data





Data are an institutional strategic asset and should be used as such

Association for Institutional Research, EDUCAUSE, and the National Association for College and University Business Officers. 2019. *Analytics Can Save Higher Education. Really.* <https://changewithanalytics.com/>

Ultimately, data do not make change . . . people do

Build relationships across departments, educate colleagues about the value of data, and report on outcomes. Data are not going to give you a decision...it's what you say and do about the data that matters.



- 
- **What questions, comments do you have about creating a data informed culture?**
 - **What practical ideas from this session might you focus on in your work with the PDP?**