

Reflecting on Systemic Change

Three areas of research apply to institutional reflective practice in Leading for Change: organizational change, institutionalization, and student retention and success.

Organizational Change

A key element of Leading for Change is awareness of participating institutions' systemic change processes. Two models – which are very much in step with one another – inform an approach to assessing systemic change.

The Documenting Effective Educational Practices project examined initiatives at 20 four-year colleges and universities that had higher than predicted graduation rates along with higher than predicted scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE). This project yielded many lessons learned about institutional change; in particular, researchers¹ stressed the importance of the following practices:

- Staying the course and having key people work on the initiative over an extended period.
- Providing leadership from every corner and acknowledging that effective leadership for student success is not concentrated exclusively in the executive ranks.
- Putting someone in charge, while also making the process collaborative, including using a group akin to a community of practice.
- Getting and keeping the right people through making institutional priorities clear in hiring processes.
- Cultivating a campus culture that makes space for differences.
- Avoiding overload.

Another study² identified the following research-based higher education change principles:

- Promote organizational self-discovery.
- Be aware of how institutional culture effects change.
- Realize that change in higher education is often political.
- Lay the groundwork for change.
- Focus on adaptability.
- Construct opportunities for interaction to develop new mental models.
- Strive to create homeostasis and balance external forces with internal environment.
- Combine traditional teleological tools such as establishing vision, planning, or strategy with social cognition, cultural, and political strategies.
- Be open to a disorderly process.
- Facilitate shared governance and collective decision making.
- Articulate core characteristics.
- Focus on image.
- Connect the change process to individual and institutional identity.
- Create a culture of risk and help people in changing belief systems.
- Be aware that various levels or aspects of the institution will need different change models.
- Realize that strategies for change vary by change initiative.
- Consider combining models or approaches to help develop a systematic and systemic process of change that works with individuals, acknowledges change as a human process, is sensitive to the distinctive characteristics of higher education, is context-based, achieves balance of internal and external forces, and is open to creativity and leveraging change through chance occurrences.

Institutionalization

¹Kuh, G.G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J. (2005). Never Let it Rest. *Change*, July/August, pp. 44-51.

²Kezar, A. (2001) *Understanding and Facilitating Change in the 21st Century: Recent Research and Conceptualization*, ERIC Digest, ED457763.

A related important area of research is institutionalization, or sustainability, of change process outcomes and indicators of sustainability or institutionalization.

Institutionalization occurs on three levels: structural, including changes in organizational design that accommodate continued innovation; behavioral, including knowledge of the behavior, the behavior itself, and preferences for the behavior; and cultural, including normative consensus and values (Curry, 1992, p37).³ The study of systemic change needs to consider operating structures, processes, and functions (Curry, 1992, p90).

Based on our prior assessment of the institutionalization of civic engagement initiatives, we draw the following distinctions between institutionalized and marginalized practices:

AN INSTITUTIONALIZED PRACTICE IS:	A MARGINALIZED PRACTICE IS:
Routine	Occasional
Widespread	Isolated
Legitimized	Unaccepted
Expected	Uncertain
Supported	Weak
Permanent	Temporary
Resilient	At-Risk

Our experience with K-16 change initiatives has demonstrated that policies, budgets, and personnel are key institutionalization indicators in educational settings. The structure of Leading for Change allows for both cross-campus and site-specific institutionalization indicators that take into account relevant structures, processes, and functions.

Student Retention and Success

Understanding how campuses retain and graduate students is a key part of institutional reflection. There is a large body of research in this area. Thirty years ago Chickering and Gamson developed principles for good practice in undergraduate education that have been widely adopted by campuses seeking to retain students.⁴ These practices employ six powerful forces – activity, expectations, cooperation, interaction, diversity, and responsibility – and include the following:

- Encouraging contact between students and faculty.
- Developing reciprocity and cooperation among students.
- Encouraging active learning.
- Giving prompt feedback.
- Emphasizing time on task.
- Communicating high expectations.
- Respecting diverse talents and ways of knowing.

These practices hold meaning for different kinds of students. The key is the ways in which institutions implement them. Chickering and Gamson argue that successful implementation requires a strong sense of shared purposes; concrete support from administrators and faculty leaders for those purposes; adequate funding for the purposes; policies and procedures consistent with the purposes; and continuing examination of how well the purposes are being achieved.

³Curry, B.K. (1992) *Instituting Enduring Innovations: Achieving Continuity of Change in Higher Education*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 7, pp. 37, 90. Washington D.C.: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.

⁴Chickering, A. W. & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. *AAHE Bulletin*, V39, #7. pp. 3-7.

Vogelgesang examined the impact of college on the development of civic values through the lens of race and gender using Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) data.⁵ Her work confirms other findings that students who are involved in curricular and co-curricular activities are likely to realize greater benefit from the college experience than those who are not (however, different kinds of experiences may benefit different groups). Her results support the notion that in order to be successful, students need to perceive a campus climate that is, at a minimum, non-hostile, and at best supportive of their development.

Long and Bettinger examined the effectiveness of college remediation in addressing the needs of under-prepared students.⁶ They found that in 2003 only 32% of students left high school academically prepared for college (the percentage was 20% for Black and 16% for Hispanic students). They also found that

- Students in remediation have better educational outcomes than students with similar backgrounds and preparation who were not required to take the courses.
- Over five years, math and English remediation appeared to reduce the likelihood of transferring to another institution.
- Under-prepared students without the remediation courses are more likely to drop out of college and less likely to complete their degrees.

Too often, retention efforts, especially those targeting particular groups of students, end up marginalized and at risk of fading away. What distinguishes *Leading for Change* is its emphasis on systemic change, maximizing the chances that the campuses' change efforts will be institutionalized and sustained.

Organizational change, institutionalization, and student retention and success are three interrelated areas that can be both strategies and outcomes, and can be useful domains within which to assess institutional transformation relative to a diversity agenda.

⁵Vogelgesang, L. J. (2001). The Impact of College on the Development of Civic Values: How do Race and Gender Matter? Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

⁶Bettinger, E. P. & Long, B. T. (2005). Addressing the Needs of Under-Prepared Students in Higher Education: Does College Remediation Work? National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series, Working Paper 11325.