

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE: MAKE ASSESSMENT WORK FOR *INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE*

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DRAFT

There are voices from the future that are vigorously calling our names. They are embodied in the success visions and expectations that inform and guide our educational initiatives. These voices are filled to overflowing with hopes vis a vis challenges and radiant visions of provocative possibility. Grounded in these visions are the potential outcome promises of our educational interventions: notably, the expected changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, aspirations, orientations (habits of mind and practice), relationships, conditions, etc. The voices embody the future “best self” of each of our students/participants as well as the voices of the world that is expecting to receive them as well-prepared to face and shape the dynamically diverse challenges of the 21st century. Key voices include potential participants in a course, workshop, program or other structured learning and development opportunity. In what ways and to what extent are educators attuned to the full spectrum of these voices--their hopes and expectations? More specifically, whose voices do you hear in full voice and which ones do you heed? How do you know this—evidential cues, clues and signposts? To what extent would which voices agree with your self-assessment given their experience of you and with you?

SELF AS INSTRUMENT AND INTERPERSONAL VALIDITY

Answering these questions call for vigilance and honesty in assessing the ways in which one is aided or hindered by one’s own voice, social identities, experiences, and perspectives. They spotlight "interpersonal validity" issues—the soundness and trustworthiness of how one uses oneself as knower, inquirer and engager of others. Enhancing this form of validity demands responsive self-awareness through constantly expanding and polishing one’s sociocultural lenses and filters: notably, one’s portals into empirical and intuitive worlds vis a vis the perceptual elements deemed worthy of notice or not. What is judged to be substantive versus noise and extraneous variation.

Educating for excellence summons educators to cultivate the self as diversity-grounded, responsive instrument: one who understands the self within dynamically diverse contexts (including power and privilege hierarchies) at a particular point in time and who also understands the contexts embodied in the self based upon one’s social identities and roles via socialization, status allocation and distribution processes across time. Without that ongoing personal homework, we cannot accurately judge the quality and resonance of our perceptions, transactions and meaning-making interpretations. This is especially challenging when our capacity-building work--descriptions, interpretations and evaluation processes--involves communications across diversity divides, notably, salient dimensions of human difference that make a substantive difference in social patterns of access, process or success.

The excellence, as well as ethical, imperatives of our personal homework agenda dictates deep knowledge of one’s own lenses, filters and frames. Doing so helps one remain expansively open, light on one’s feet and responsive to many diverse voices. The quality of one’s self-assessment is contingent on the ongoing development of *multilateral self-awareness*: knowing and understanding oneself from one’s own vantage point as well as the vantage points of those with whom one is communicating and working. This requires a diversity-conscious mindset and skillset to craft and

work self-to-self, self-to-others and self-to-systems relational processes. Through enhancing multilateral self-awareness, we increase prospects for interpersonal validity—self as diversity-grounded knower, inquirer and engager of others. Such validity is context-specific—both situational and relational. It, thus, requires constant re-calibration through a lifelong learning and reflective practice journey.

Authentically hearing the full spectrum of voices through their multifaceted channels of communication will help us more fully know and better understand the wide range of hopes, needs and success vision expectations. They and we must *keep our eyes on the prize* in the midst of dynamic cross-cutting demands and often turbulent social relations. What is “the prize” that various constituencies seek to keep their eyes on while vigorously exhorting us to do the same? The ultimate prize resides in our students/participants: who they and we want them to be and become. Breathing life into and putting wheels under these success visions call for responsively designing rich learning and development opportunities that offer both *mirror* (comfort zone) and *window* (stretch zone) experiences. We can facilitate and promote this through strategically balancing culturally-congruent *challenge* and *support*.

Developmental evaluation facilitates and supports such responsive design and implementation efforts. Since evaluation is, at its core, about judgments in determining value, merit and worth, it is imperative that educators understand the pivotal roles and implications of diverse lenses, filters and frames for valid and ethical judgment-making as well as for responsive designs of intervention activities. With an expansively refined set of polished lenses and filters, educators can serve as *mirror-time stewards* and cultivate others’ capacities to do the same. Doing so increases the prospects of each of us empathically seeing, hearing and feeling through multiple perspectives. Learners will greatly benefit from educators crafting such *sacred grace spaces* for authentic and productive border-spanning communications where diverse students/participants can hear and engage each other in full voice. Doing so will increase the prospects for each speaking into their mutual listening and learning in ways that summon our *best selves*. This is a lifelong transformational work agenda.

CATALYZING EXCELLENCE THROUGH MULTIFACETED CHANNELS: THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

As we walk in and engage the world, many lessons and insights emerge that can benefit others. We are frequently enriched by learning challenges as well as opportunities. I invite each of us to embrace a commitment to proactively share this wealth with others in a variety of informal as well as formal venues and channels that responsively speak into the listening of the full array of learners. Such wealth includes the spectrum of generative knowledge, skills, attitudes, orientations that one has gained through formal and informal schooling, on the job experiences, lived experiences, etcetera. Bottomline, the wealth is embodied in proficiencies derived from “textbooks of the self” as well as “textbooks on the shelf” experiences, from relational knowledge and skills as well as instrumental/task-oriented knowledge and skills, from any light-spreading and shadow-chasing experiences.

We are all both learners and teachers regardless of organizational position or title. When we seriously embrace a responsibility to proactively “share the wealth,” we increase the probability of responsively teaching for and with excellence in a wide variety of settings. We are also more likely to teach in learner- and learning-centered ways that are culturally congruent and contextually-responsive. Through such micro-level processes, we increase the prospects of creating and sustaining an authentically inclusive and vibrantly responsive learning organization.

Conventional ways of teaching speak loudly. What matters most is the WHAT and, thus, a focus on the teacher and curricular/cocurricular content. For educational excellence, what ultimately matters is not so much what is taught but rather what is caught and taken away from a given teaching/learning context. Consequently, what matters just as much if not more than WHAT is WHO—notably, the learner and what they bring to the learning situation. Student affairs educators are uniquely situated for learner-centered teaching in that the WHO is central to their title whereas the WHAT is at the center of most other professions and disciplines. A powerful contribution that student affairs can bring to teaching is an adaptation of its conventional focus on the whole student—its student-centeredness. Consequently, student affairs educators should confidently stride forward with a flourish and full recognition of their ahead-of-the-curve gifts and talents vis a vis the scholarship of teaching and learning. Bottomline, one needs to start a teaching project agenda with a foundational focus on the WHO rather than simply the what. ...TRANSITION...

Furthermore, the best teacher and the best teaching occurs when undergirded by *conscious competence*—knowing that one knows—and remaining in touch with how one came to know. This is congruent with the research of Csikszentmihalyi and others which suggests that the greatest openness to learning probably occurs in the “arousal stage” of *conscious competence* than in the “flow” stage of *unconscious competence*.” These understandings move the teaching/learning focus beyond singular preoccupations with substantive content and learning-outcomes destinations to also include mindful explorations of the learning journey process and the pedagogical scaffolding for bridging the gap. Such a focus paves the way for sustainability, i.e., self-generative processes and intrinsic benefits.

CONCEPTUALIZING A CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Educational initiatives are significantly enhanced if they are informed by a comprehensive contextual framework that more fully characterizes the patterns and flows of exposure and experience as students navigate and negotiate campus environments. A holistic framework for examining teaching, learning and workplace resources increases the prospects for real understanding, engagement and continuous development towards excellence. A comprehensive model of an institution’s educational environment includes the following broad domains:

- ❖ ***Teaching and learning community:*** Who’s present and engaged among faculty, staff, administrators and students?: Who’s here? Who matters? Who belongs? Who decides?
- ❖ ***Teaching and learning infrastructure:*** To what extent do members of the educational community have a richly diverse and representative spectrum of resources to work with?
- ❖ ***Teaching and learning process:*** How do they put it all together? To what extent and in what ways are salient dimensions of diversity represented and appropriately engaged: *Window*-versus *Mirror*-Experiences for Whom?

These complementary components have relevance at the individual program/course micro level as well as the more macro campuswide levels. It is also important to look beyond such current institutional profile parameters to consider salient dimensions of the institution’s sociohistorical legacy and image as well as its larger sociohistorical and sociopolitical context.

MAXIMIZING EXCELLENCE POTENTIAL THROUGH RESPONSIVE CAMPUS AND CLASSROOM CLIMATES

Higher education climate issues challenge us to understand how individuals and groups holistically perceive and experience their college or university environments. Colleges and universities are complex social systems that are characterized by more than relationships among individuals and groups. They are also defined by institutional values and goals, traditions, structural arrangements,

organizational protocols and procedures, etcetera. In their comprehensive review of the research literature reported in “Enacting Diverse Learning Environments,” Sylvia Hurtado et al found that higher education studies specify campus climate as “the current perceptions, attitudes and expectations that define the institution and its members.... [it is] conceptualized as malleable and distinguishable from the stable norms and beliefs that may constitute an organizational culture.” (p.1) Campus climate assessments seek to understand the campus environment from multiple vantage points as perceived and experienced by diverse individuals and groups. Diversity-related attributes include salient dimensions of human difference that make a substantive difference in social patterns of access, process or success.

Given the array of diverse vantage points, to what extent does entering your campus—and its various classrooms and service delivery contexts—represent a *mirror*- or a *window*-experience? More specifically, with whose sociocultural rhythms is it congruent versus dissonant? Whose ways of being, doing, knowing and engaging are experienced as valued and, thus, privileged? Who and what ways are presumed worthy and competent and, thus, who matters? Welcoming institutional rhetoric and pronouncements ultimately matter little if not reflective of the lived campus and classroom realities for diverse groups. Whether intended or not, does the default meta-message seem to *cross-talk* welcoming campus and classroom invitations? In reality, too many experience the embodiment of this ethnocentric chant: “Come join us and be just like us—and, please, do strip the stuff that does not fit!” For diverse learners, the strong message is that one is a guest, at best, in somebody else’s house. Being “forced” to dwell in the shadows of such conditional ethnocentric inclusion and tolerance fails to nourish excellence. One may survive such abridging experiences yet not thrive and manifest the full spectrum of excellence that ethnorelative inclusion enables.

Tending to and addressing these issues calls for culturally- and contextually-responsive information-seeking, development assessment and engagement strategies that facilitate the full spectrum of campus constituencies stepping forward in full voice—each speaking directly and on its own behalf.

MAKING EVALUATION WORK FOR EXCELLENCE: A CORE RESOURCE FOR EDUCATORS

Employing the contextual framework noted earlier—teaching and learning community, infrastructure and processes—requires a comprehensive scan of the environmental context for teaching and learning. This kind of institutional assessment strategy should engage multiple voices and vantage points to facilitate boundary-spanning processes of mutual discovery, learning and development. Such practices expand and enhance the prospects for understanding and appropriately engaging a wide array of educationally-relevant factors and processes. Excellence summons each of us to bring forward our best selves in full voice to do our best engaging, our best learning and our best work while simultaneously helping others do the same.

Employing this more holistic framework supports faculty, staff and administrators who operate as student-centered *educators* and not simply as teaching/profession-centered *instructors*.

Educators—in student affairs as well as academic affairs--move beyond simply being expert information disseminators and master performers to also being master communicators and life transformers. Master communicators engage in empathic perspective-taking that models and promotes bridge-building border crossings and border-crossing bridge building. In contrast to instructors, educators deliberately vision what they want their students to look like, learn and be able to do—ideally in capacity-building partnership with students themselves. *Educators start where their students (or other service recipients/participants) are and craft the curricular, cocurricular and pedagogical scaffolding that bridges the gap between the being, the becoming and the yet to be.* Educators create a responsive and respectful educational environment that embraces,

builds upon and engages the many dimensions of diversity. The result is an appreciatively affirming teaching and learning process that is conducive to the full engagement and development of all members of the college community.

Throughout such a process, developmental, formative and summative assessment/evaluation tools and strategies serve as critical developmental resources that inform and improve as well as prove. More specifically, they contribute to relevant knowledge creation, to continuous development towards excellence as well as to accountability compliance verification. At their best, course and workshop design and implementation processes are intimately intertwined with assessment, evaluation and improvement processes. Together, they offer a robust vision-guided, learning-grounded developmental life cycle.

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION: A BEGINNING-TO-END INTERVENTION RESOURCE

When we mainstream evaluation processes, we spotlight systematic inquiry and judgment-making *in the service of* an envisioned intervention and its success vision. As capacity-enhancing resources, they enable the intervention as well as the interveners. Michael Patton's concept of developmental evaluation most closely reflects this approach. This form of evaluation involves mindful "R&D" that guides the design, implementation, and refinement of an intervention by "infusing evaluative questions, data, and logic" that supports empirical evidence-based decision-making. (Patton, Evaluation Encyclopedia. 116) Developmental evaluation magnifies the *inform* and *improve* drivers vis-à-vis the *prove* drivers for evaluation. Ideally, such evaluation processes inform and support mindfully proactive intervention processes that become part of the natural rhythms of life and living. Developmental evaluation helps educators and students discover and declare their *best self*--specifying visions of provocative possibility for all that they can be and become. They can then envision and construct *appropriate* (congruent with sociocultural codes of engagement) and *effective* (yields the envisioned outcomes) **SCAFFOLDING** that bridges the divide between the now and the yet to become.

"WHO" AT THE CENTER

To frame efforts for mainstreaming evaluation and to guide program/course/unit development and refinement, I have created a student-/participant-centered, developmental intervention and evaluation model. This iterative spiral model facilitates planful design, development, assessment, evaluation and redesign for continuous improvement. Diversity-groundedness is a critical attribute within this model because one needs to know and understand the implications of salient dimensions of human differences that make a socially-patterned difference for access, process and success within a given context. To maintain perspective, one needs to start with and stay grounded in the WHO then followed by the WHAT, notably, the intervention's outcome expectations and promises.

The center of this model and, thus, the focus of all efforts, is the **who**. *Who* is doing the learning and development? *Who* is providing the teaching and other intervention activities and *Who* is doing the evaluative judgment-making regarding the quality and depth of learning/development? *Who* discerns and determines what is learned by whom based upon what? How do we know what we claim to know? What judgment criteria and protocols inform these decisions and, thus, what are the evidential cues, clues and signposts? It is important to consider *who* not simply as functional roles or personality characteristics but also in terms of salient and relevant dimensions of human difference. One needs to know and understand the implications of such differences from multiple vantage points in order to understand and effectively work within a given sociocultural and sociopolitical context.

Given these issues and considerations, who are your intervention's stakeholders: persons or groups that care about or can influence your destiny. To identify your primary or key stakeholders, I suggest that you and your colleagues brainstorm expansively and then prioritize within and across various constituency groups. Key stakeholders are individuals and groups that have a high investment of resources (including their time and energy) as well as a high expected impact of the intervention.

These considerations apply whether "the student" is enrolled in college classroom or cocurricular activity or whether a colleague—faculty, staff or administrator—enrolled in a workshop, retreat or other personal/professional development opportunity. The design process starts with clarifying the *WHO*—*who* is being taught and *who* is teaching (or providing other services or products)—then followed by the *WHAT*, notably, the expected outcomes. Once grounded in the *who*, the *what* can be explored followed by deliberative inquiry regarding **By What?, For What?, So What? and Now What?**

USING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION TO ACTUALIZE YOUR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS VISION

HONORING YOUR OUTCOME PROMISES

1. **WHAT? WHAT THE PROGRAM WILL DO: *SUCCESS VISION AND OUTCOME PROMISES***

What desired state of affairs does the program, course or unit aim to create for whom? What tangible evidence will exist if those goals are attained for the targeted student/participant populations—notably, changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, orientations, aspirations, relationships, conditions, etc.? What are they expected to look like, learn and be able to do as a result of exposure and involvement? Addressing these questions involves processes for getting clear on the current reality—**What Now?**—while envisioning future states and possibilities—**What Becoming?**

- ❖ **WHAT BECOMING?** What is the *success vision*, and related outcome promises, that you commit to for yourself vis-à-vis your teaching/learning or other intervention project? Describe the *transformation agenda* that you envision as a bridge which scaffolds students'/ participants' current state and their future possibilities. Toward what ends are you aiming? What is the success vision—"prize" that you and they need to keep your eyes on? This involves concretely visioning one's work so that one can more proactively work one's vision. It works if you work it—mindfully, deliberately and intentionally!
- ❖ **WHAT NOW?** Lay the foundational groundwork through a *baseline assessment* of needs and resources—both at the individual and the more macro levels. What do you know and understand about yourself as an academic affairs or student affairs educator within the context of relevant sociocultural, power, privilege, and other social structures? What are the program/course/project expectations calling for from you? Specifically, what are the requirements of the work compared with what you bring? In this particular context what are the attributes that you have to work with (assets/resources) versus those that you have to work on (needs, limitations, blindspots, blankspots, triggers, issues) vis a vis students'/participants' needs and resources, the success vision and the teaching/learning context? Consider your answers both from your own vantage point and from various

stakeholders' vantage points. Given multiple stakeholder perspectives, which of your attributes are perceived as relevant and can be engaged to catalyze and support the success of the teaching/learning or other intervention project?

2. BY WHAT? HOW THE PROGRAM DID IT: *ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS*

Through what curricular/cocurricular materials, pedagogical strategies, processes and practices, etcetera--within a given timeframe--did your intervention seek to effect the desired changes in outcomes for which segments of the student/participant population? What concrete steps were taken and strategies implemented as a means of breathing life into and putting wheels under the success vision in order to deliver on the outcome promises. **By What?** addresses "how" questions that make explicit the actual change mechanism and pathways for actualizing the success vision. To do so requires multiple voices and vantage points through engaging the intervention provider as well as the recipients/participants.

*The Intervention Transformation Bridge scaffolds
the being, becoming and yet to be.*

3. FOR WHAT1? WHAT THE PROGRAM DID 1: *TARGET GROUP EFFECTIVENESS*

Who am I expected to serve and how fully and well have I served them? In what ways and to what extent are envisioned processes and activities actually implemented and experienced by whom, when and where?

- ❖ **To what extent has the program/course/unit served all of the expected population segments in need of its services?**
 - *Eligible Target Population Segments versus Actual Program Participants*
- ❖ **How completely has the program/course/unit served those who have received its services across the relevant target population segments?**
 - *Services Requested versus Services Available and Received*
- ❖ **If appropriate, what are the reasons why your program/course/unit could not fully serve all of the eligible target population segments?**
 - Lack of funds, staffing problems, scheduling problems, access problems, differences in the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of the intervention strategies across population segments (differences in cultural/contextual relevance and responsiveness)

4. FOR WHAT2? WHAT THE PROGRAM DID 2: *EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES EFFECTIVENESS*

In what ways and to what extent has the program/course/unit been successful in meeting its goals and objectives and actualizing its success vision *for whom?* Disaggregated across relevant population segments, possible indicators may include increased enrollment; increased knowledge and/or skills; improved academic performance (test, course or cumulative grades); increased persistence to the completion of a course, a term, an academic program and/or degree requirements; enhanced capacities for team work and other social relations skills; "improved" relationships; etcetera.

Collect and analyze data that will reveal the variations in program effects that are associated with differences in student/participant *tenure* including length of time on campus or in other settings, in a problematic situation, etcetera. Also important are differences in the timing,

frequency, duration and regularity of *exposure* to program/course/unit services and experiences.

5. SO WHAT? SENSE-MAKING, MEANING-MAKING AND SIGNIFICANCE

In what ways and to what extent do which stakeholder voices agree about progress in attaining the success vision for whom? What are the patterns of convergence and divergence among stakeholder constituency groups? How do we know what we claim to know—evidential cues, clues and signposts? For whom do these developments and results matter and why?

**USING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION FOR CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT
TOWARDS EXCELLENCE:**



NOW WHAT1? INCORPORATING LESSONS LEARNED

Compare the success of intervention components in order to reach an overall summary assessment of the program/course/unit. To what extent is success balanced overall across components and across diverse groups of participants. Are there similar patterns and levels of success, or lack of success, in meeting the intervention’s goals and objectives? If some components are weaker than others for some population segments, what are some possible reasons for those patterns and to what extent are those variances “tolerable,” given the configuration of student/participant needs and overall priorities and resources?

Assessment and evaluation are most useful and valuable when proactively embraced as self-diagnostic resources for continuous improvement—an iterative, interactive process. Savvy student affairs and academic affairs educators systematically use assessment and evaluation tools and strategies as a student-/participant-centered resource for critical and creative reflection, empowered self-improvement and strategic image management. Documenting improvement initiatives is especially crucial when educational outcomes fall short of stakeholders’ expectations. They concretely verify that educators are vigilant and proactively responsive to the needs for change in order to ensure excellence.

PAST IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS. Identify in-process changes made during an intervention to improve its quality and effectiveness, e.g., modes of service delivery, staffing practices, policies, procedures, etcetera. Monitor changes in the organizational context of the program/course/project operations via changes in the relevant array of services and/or products they provide. Such improvement efforts may have been informed by evaluative feedback from the target student/participant population as well as by other evaluative assessments.

CONTINUING THE FLOW TOWARDS EXCELLENCE!

NOW WHAT2? MAPPING OUT AN IMPROVEMENT AGENDA

FUTURE IMPROVEMENT PLANS. Recommend and explain what needs to be done or changed in order to strengthen a specific program/course/unit in the context of related modes of service or product delivery (the organizational matrix). Identify any anticipated changes in resources vis-a-vis the current or projected needs of the student/participant population(s).

This holistic model will more likely naturally resonate with learner- and learning-centered educators. Such resonance is enhanced to the extent that student affairs educators fully embrace the whole-student spirit of their profession. ...

To what extent and in what ways are we honoring our mission and freely sharing the wealth. What lives have we touched through our sharings? What difference have we made and how do we know? Have we not only done no harm but, even more importantly, have we left our students--and others who we serve--better off as well-grounded 21st century citizens who can serve as architects of their own lifelong learning journeys. To what extent would which voices agree with our self-assessmen?

KEEPING OUR EYES ON THE PRIZE!

**SELF AS INSTRUMENT AND LIFELONG PROJECT IN PROCESS
REFINING OUR SOCIOCULTURAL ANTENNAE AND
ENHANCING OUR EXCELLENCE-ENERGIZING COMPETENCIES**

MAKING EXCELLENCE INCLUSIVE: DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

The Association of American Colleges and Universities, with support from the Ford Foundation, spearheaded a research agenda that spotlights the integral interconnections among diversity and educational quality initiatives. It places these intersections at the center of campus planning and practice. The *Making Excellence Inclusive* project is designed to help colleges and universities fully integrate these efforts and embed them into the core of academic mission and institutional functioning: *“Through this initiative, AAC&U re-envision diversity and inclusion as a multilayered process through which we achieve excellence in learning; research and teaching; student development; institutional functioning; local and global community engagement; workforce development; and more.”*



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