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Building Blocks for an Effective First-Year Assessment Plan

Jennifer R. Keup, Director

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How Assessment Can Feel…

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How We Want You to Feel…

Caveat

INTRODUCTION

Are you a "Faith-Based" Institution?

"Estimates of college quality are essentially 'faith-based,' insofar as we have little direct evidence of how any given school contributes to students' learning." RICHARD HERSCH (2005). *ATLANTIC MONTHLY*

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RST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
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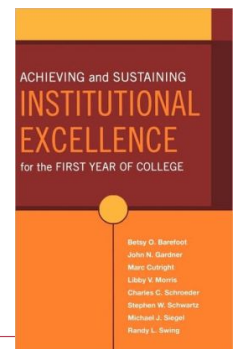www.sc.edu/fye

What is Assessment?

- "The **systematic** collection, review & use of information about educational programs for the purposes of **improving student learning and development**."

- "Any effort to **gather, analyze, and interpret evidence**, which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness."

- "The process of **gathering & discussing information** from multiple & diverse sources in order to develop a deeper understanding of what students know, understand, & can do."

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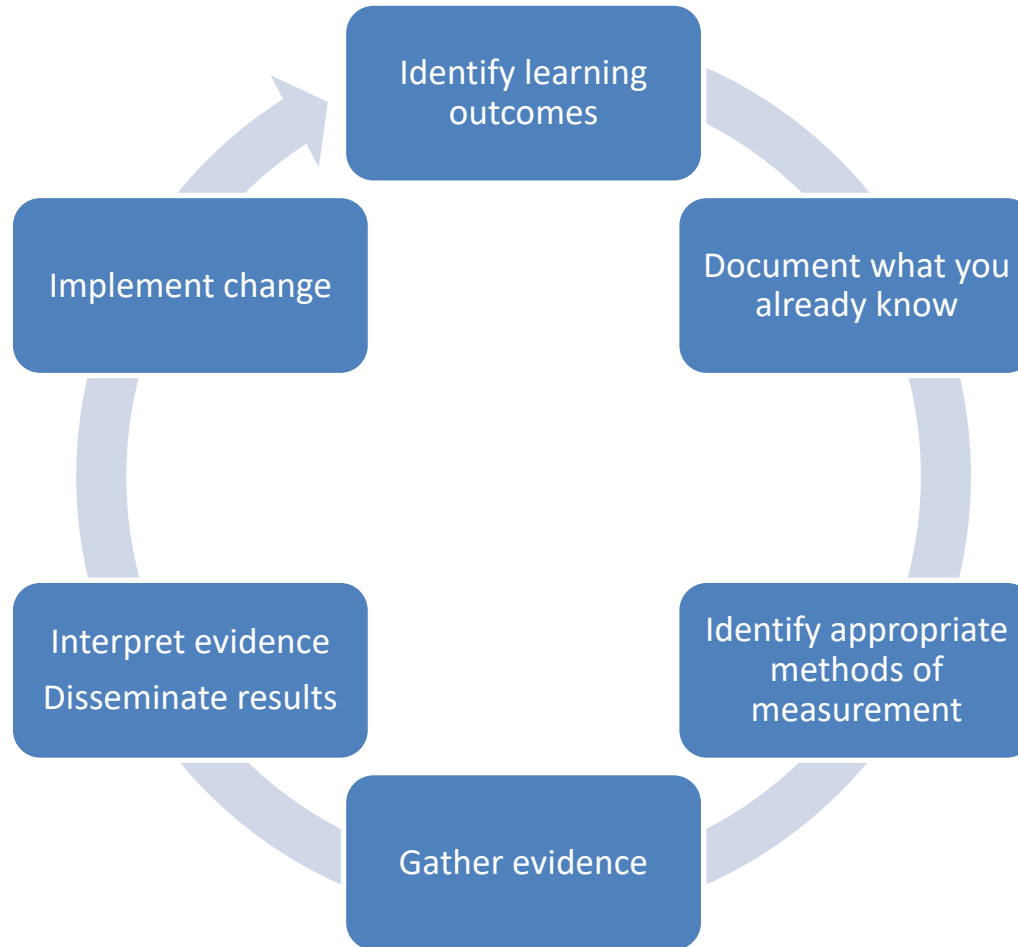
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What is Assessment?

- Effectiveness includes:
  - Student learning outcomes
  - Client satisfaction
  - Compliance with professional standards
  - Comparisons with other institutions
- Successful assessment **creates action**, in order to:
  - Guide good practice
  - Initiate change or improvement
- Critical part of strategic planning

Why Assess? Criteria for "Excellence"

- "**Evidence of** an intentional, comprehensive approach to **improving the first year** that is appropriate to an institution's type and mission."

- **"Evidence of assessment of the various initiatives that constitute this approach."**

- "**Broad impact on significant numbers of first-year students**, including, but not limited to special student subpopulations."

- "Strong administrative support for first-year initiatives, **evidence of institutionalization, and durability over time**."

- "Involvement of a wide range of faculty, student affairs professionals, academic administrators, and other constituent groups."

ACHIEVING and SUSTAINING
INSTITUTIONAL
EXCELLENCE
for the FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

Betsy O. Barefoot
John N. Gardner
Marc Cutright
Libby V. Morris
Charles C. Schroeder
Stephen W. Schwartz
Michael J. Siegel
Randy L. Swing

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Systematic Cycle of Assessment

Identify learning outcomes

Document what you already know

Implement change

Identify appropriate methods of measurement

Interpret evidence
Disseminate results

Gather evidence

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Why is assessment so hard?

Why is assessment so hard?

- Lack of support from leadership

- Lack of expertise

- Not enough resources
  - Human: staff support
  - Fiscal: $$$

- Fear of results

- Political landscape

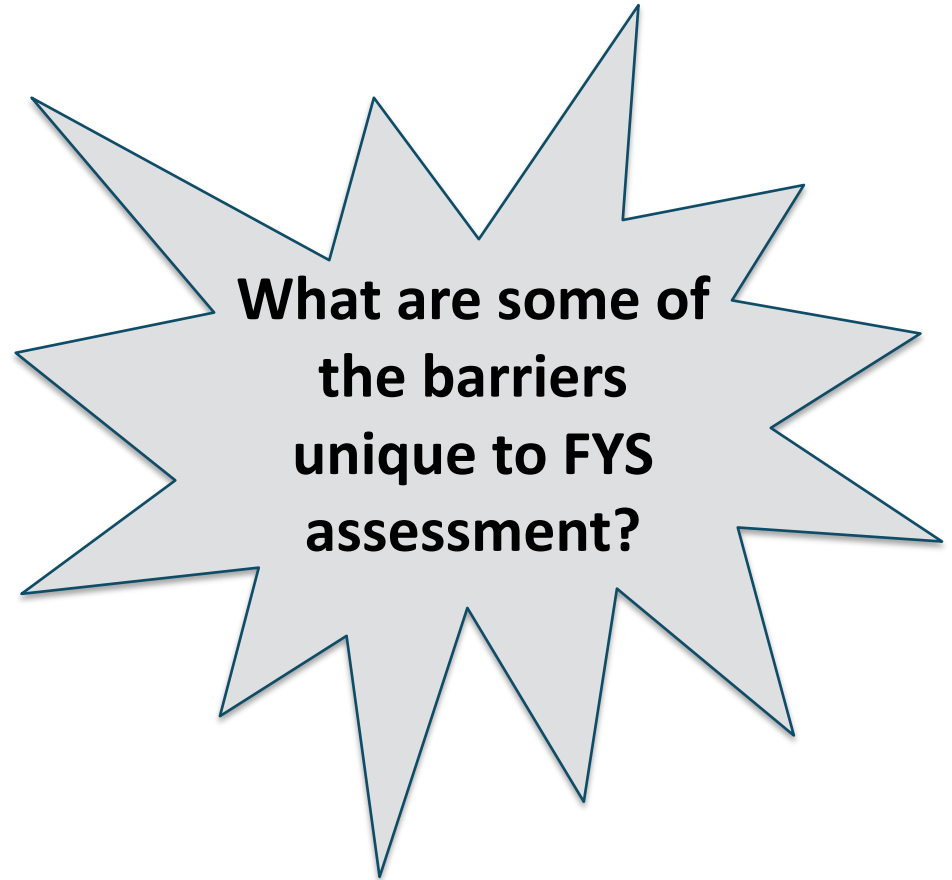# Why is assessment so hard?

- Lack of support from leadership
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What are some of the barriers unique to FYS assessment?

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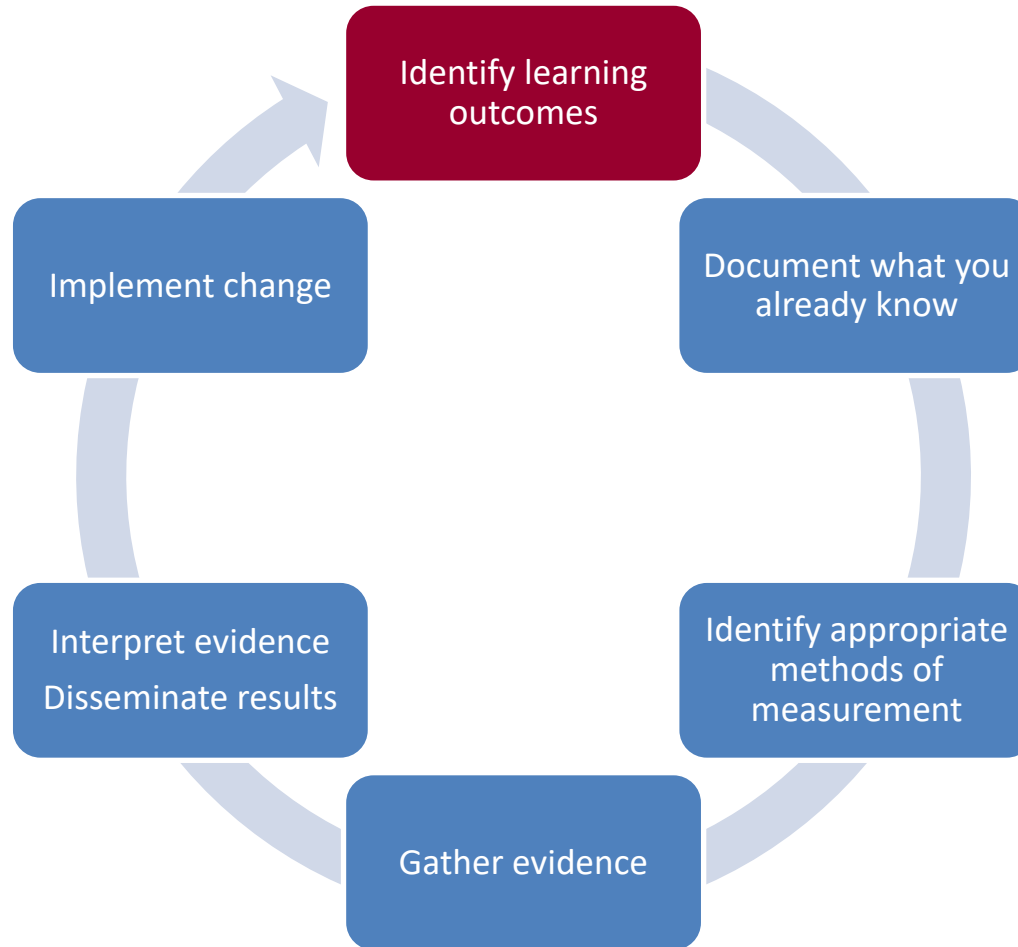UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Why is assessment so hard?

- Lack of support from leadership
- Lack of expertise
- Not enough resources
  - Human: staff support
  - Fiscal: $$$
- Fear of results
- Political landscape

- Retention focused
- Overreliance on anecdotal evidence
- No common outcomes
- Time for transition
- Tracking of students
- Learning is subjective
- Others?

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Section 1: What do you want to know?

Identify learning outcomes

Document what you already know

Identify appropriate methods of measurement

Gather evidence

Interpret evidence
Disseminate results
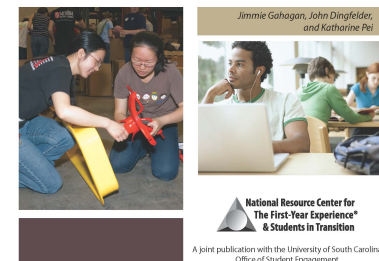
Implement change

Characteristics of Outcomes

- Express what the student will be able to know or do

- Focuses on product rather than process

- Must be <u>MEASURABLE</u>

- Detailed and specific

- Include action verbs

- Appropriate

- Manageable
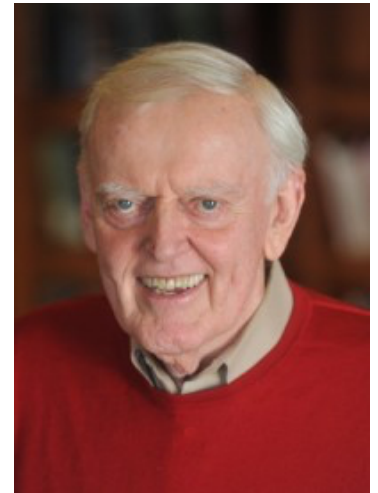
- Meaningful

- Balance achievable with aspirational

A Faculty and Staff Guide to
Creating Learning Outcomes

Jimmie Gahagan, John Dingfelder, and Katharine Pei

National Resource Center for
The First-Year Experience®
& Students in Transition

A joint publication with the University of South Carolina
Office of Student Engagement

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Toward a Definition of Outcomes

- Astin (1993):
  - Student outcomes refer to those aspects of the student's development that the institution either does to influence or attempts to influence through its educational programs and practices

- Bresciani (2006):
  - What the program intends to accomplish in regard to its services, research, student learning, and faculty/staff development

Program Outcomes:
Criteria for HIPs "Excellence"

- Creates an investment of time and energy

- Includes interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters

- Real-world applications

- High expectations

- Includes frequent feedback

- Exposure to diverse perspectives

- Demands reflection and integrated learning

- Public displays of accountability

Student Outcomes: Domains for FYS Outcomes

- Retention

- Academic skills/experiences

- Campus connection

- Interpersonal skills

- Personal development

- Employability

- Civic engagement/democratic citizenship

THE FIRST-YEAR
Seminar
Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success

Jennifer R. Keup and Joni Webb Petschauer

Designing and Administering the Course

Volume One

Examples of FYS Outcomes

- **Retention**
  - Persistence to the 2nd year
  - Graduation rates
- **Academic skills/experiences**
  - Analytical & critical thinking skills
  - Development of educational career goals
  - Declaring a major
  - Knowledge integration & application
  - Academic engagement
  - Academic achievement
  - Cognitive complexity
  - Study skills
  - Introduction to a discipline

- **Campus connection**
  - Knowledge of university requirements
  - Ability to identify, seek, & use organizational resources
  - Connection to campus community
  - Understanding history & traditions
  - Involvement in cocurricular activities
  - Satisfaction with student experience
- **Interpersonal skills**
  - Conflict resolution
  - Written & oral communication
  - Development of a social support network
  - Multicultural competence

Examples of FYS Outcomes

- **Personal development**
  - Time management
  - Identity exploration & development
  - Values clarification
  - Practical competence
  - Life management skills
  - Physical health
  - Emotional wellness
  - Moral and ethical development
  - Leadership skills

- **Civic engagement/democratic citizenship**
  - Participation in service
  - Engagement in philanthropy
  - Political awareness/engagement
  - Political activism/social advocacy
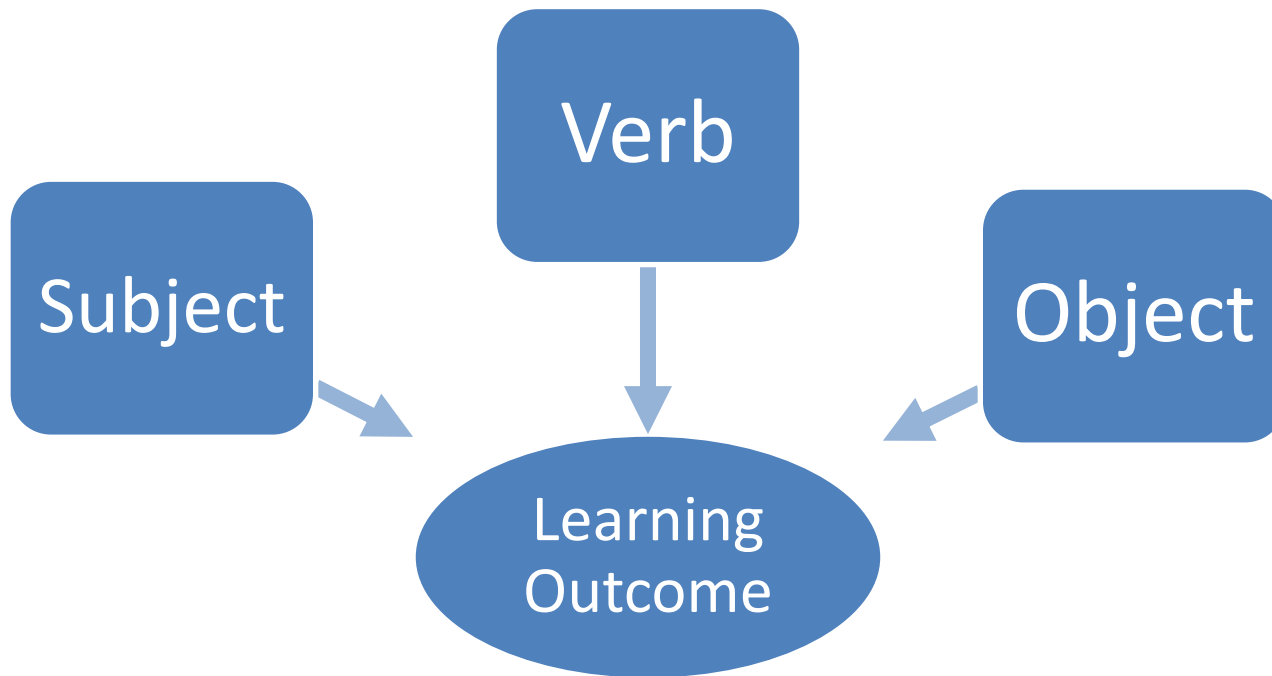 - Community involvement

- **Employability**
  - Analyzing a problem from various sources
  - Innovation and creation of new knowledge
  - Providing direction through interpersonal persuasion
  - Ability to integrate ideas and information
  - Applying knowledge to a real-world setting
  - Ability to coach and mentor others
  - Project planning and management
  - Engage in continuous learning
  - Desirability as a candidate
  - Initiative
  - Ethical decision-making
  - Professionalism
  - Ability to build a team

- **Others?**

FYS Objective (n=372)	%
Academic success strategies	48
Connection with the institution or campus	35
Knowledge of the institution resources/services	30
Analytical, critical thinking, or problem-solving skills	25
Introduction to college-level academic expectations	24
Academic planning or major exploration	21
Personal exploration or development	15
Common first-year experience	13
Student-faculty interaction	11
Writing skills	10
Retention or second-year return rates	8

Format of a Learning Outcome

Subject

Verb

Object

Learning Outcome

Writing Good Learning Outcomes

Subject – Verb – Object

- The subject of the outcome is the thing that is performing the action

- In the case of student learning outcomes, the subject is going to be students, either generally or a specific subset (e.g. peer leaders, learning community participants)

Writing Good Learning Outcomes

Subject – **Verb** – Object

- The Verb of the outcome describes the cognitive process or how the student will demonstrate learning

- Verbs are important because they will often determine the type and depth of learning which will have an influence on how the outcome is measured.

A Revised Taxonomy

Benjamin Bloom (1956)

- *A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*
- Emphasized cognitive aspects of learning
- Widely used in educational circles

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

- Emphasized cognitive processes of learning and added a knowledge domain
- Easily adaptable to many disciplines including higher education

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Levels of Cognitive Processing

Levels of Cognitive Process	Action Verbs
Remembering: Can the student recall or remember the information?	Define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, state
Understanding: Can the student explain the ideas or concepts?	Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase
Applying: Can the student use the information in a new way?	Choose, dramatize, demonstrate, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write
Analyzing: Can the student distinguish between the different parts?	Appraise, argue, compare, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test
Evaluating: Can the student justify a position or decision?	Appraise, argue, judge, defend, select, support, value, evaluate
Creating: Can the student create a new product or point of view?	Assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write

Writing Good Learning Outcomes

Subject – Verb – **Object**

- The Object of the learning outcome refers to the kind of knowledge you would like students to achieve.
  - Factual knowledge
  - Conceptual knowledge
  - Procedural knowledge
  - Metacognitive knowledge

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Steps to Creating a Learning Outcome

1. Determine the purpose of the program, course, event, or initiative

2. Reflect on your target population and your venue

3. Decided what kind of knowledge you want the student to gain

4. Decide on the level of cognitive process

5. Write the outcome, with subject, object, and verb

6. Evaluate the outcome:

    •   Is it measureable?

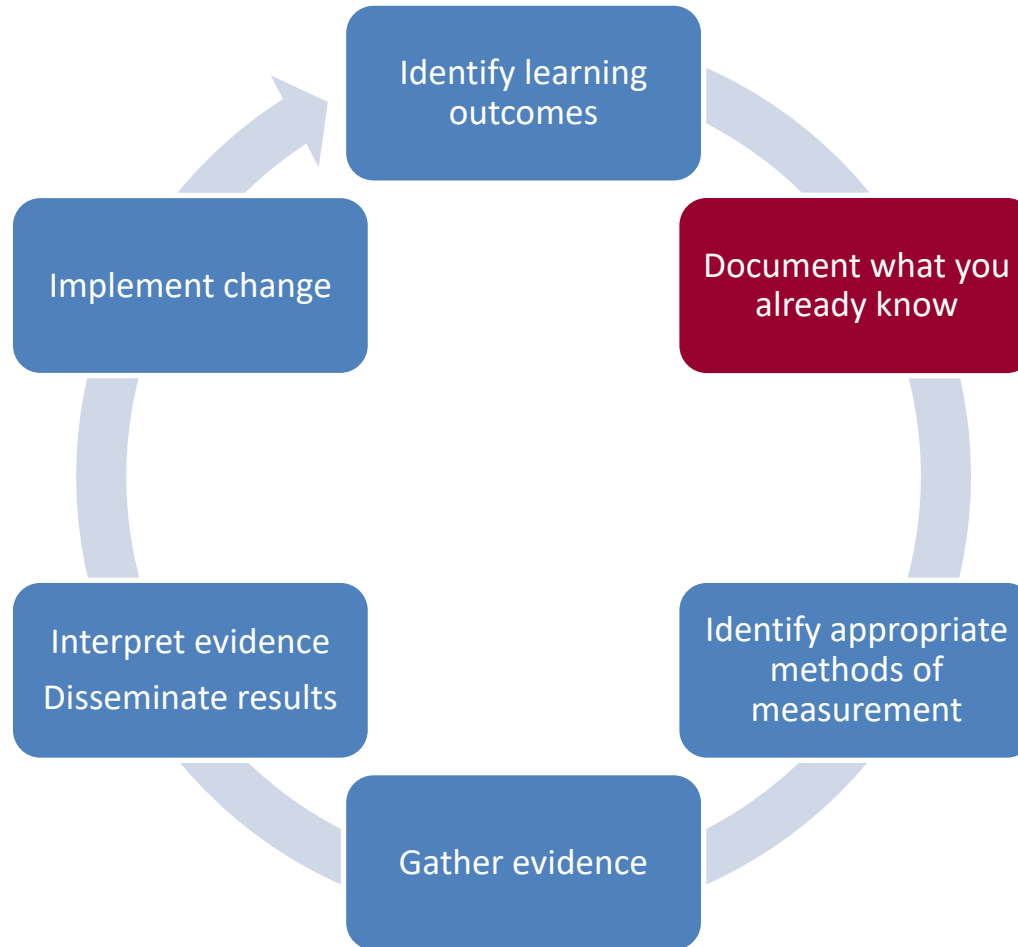   •   Is it meaningful?

    •   Is it manageable?

Let's Practice!

- What do you want students to learn or do as a result of participating in your FYS?

- What action do you want action do you want students to take as a result of participating in your FYS (*e.g.*, remembering, synthesizing, creating, etc.)?

- Write several learning outcomes related to your FYS.

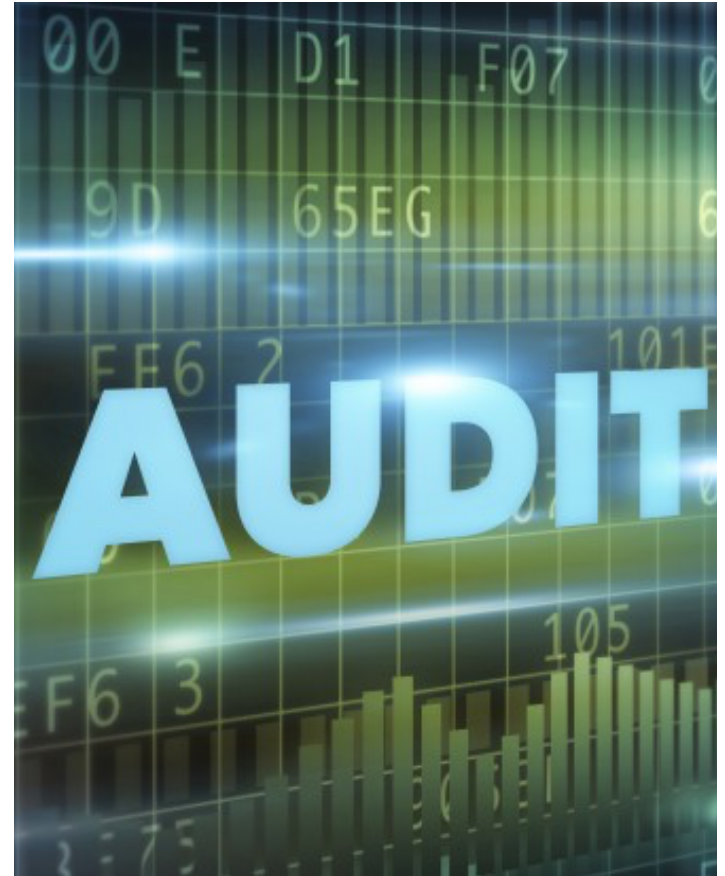- For each outcome, reflect on how this statement is manageable, meaningful, and measurable.

Section 2: What do you already know?

Identify learning outcomes

Document what you already know

Identify appropriate methods of measurement

Gather evidence

Interpret evidence
Disseminate results

Implement change

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Data Audit

- Examine existing data sources
  - Identify data sources ("What do you already have?")
  - <u>Organize</u> them into a usable information system ("How can you use it?")
- Determining what additional data are needed for evaluation, assessment, and decision-making

Document What You Already Know

- What data do you already have?
  - Who is collecting it?
  - Where is it being housed?
  - Are there plans for future data collection?
- Are these data currently being used?
  - If so, how are these results communicated?
  - If not, why not?
- How can you use data that has already been collected for your assessment needs?

"Data lust turns into data dust"

data AUDIT

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Other Data Audit Considerations

- Takes time!

- Is a political enterprise (Be prepared!)

- Should involve a team

- Best when grounded in an outcome or organizing framework

- Is a bit of a moving target
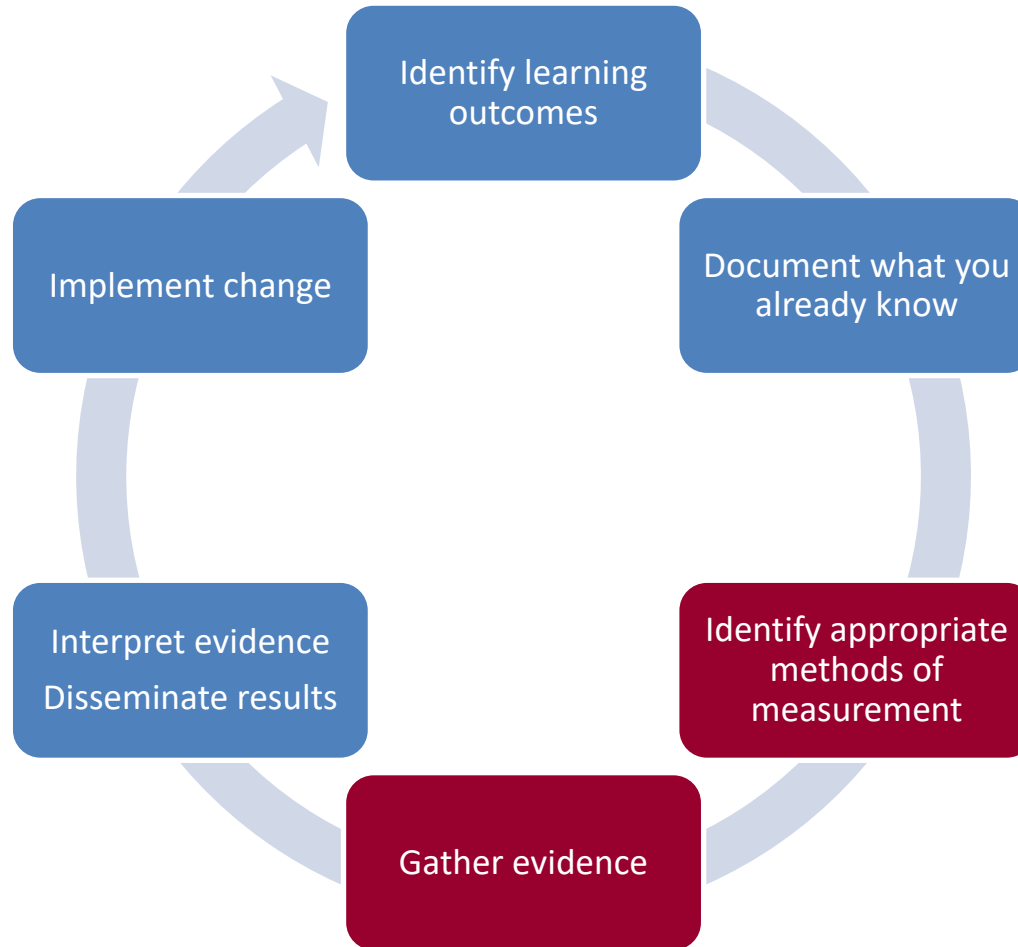
- You do not have to use all the data

- Contextual

Potential Sources of Data

Take one minute to list as many potential sources of data for first-year students and seminars on your campus as possible.

Remember your outcomes!

Section 3: Which assessment models?

The assessment cycle:
- Identify learning outcomes
- Document what you already know
- Identify appropriate methods of measurement
- Gather evidence
- Interpret evidence / Disseminate results
- Implement change

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Types of Assessment

- **Summative** – used to make a judgment about the efficacy of a program

- **Formative** – used to provide feedback in order to foster improvement.

FYE Assessment Strategy: Value Added

- Collects multiple kinds of data on the same cohort and controls for certain characteristics to approximate impact
- Answers: "Are our students improving, developing, and learning?"
- Longitudinal data
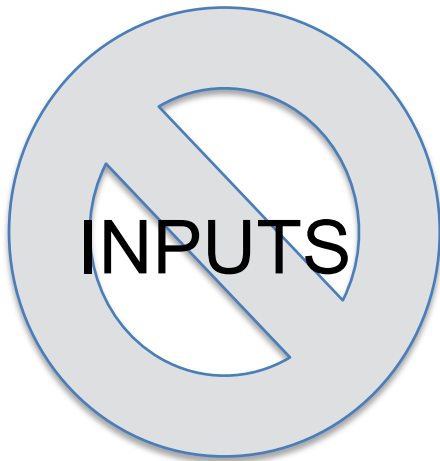 - Accounts for time
  - Explores change
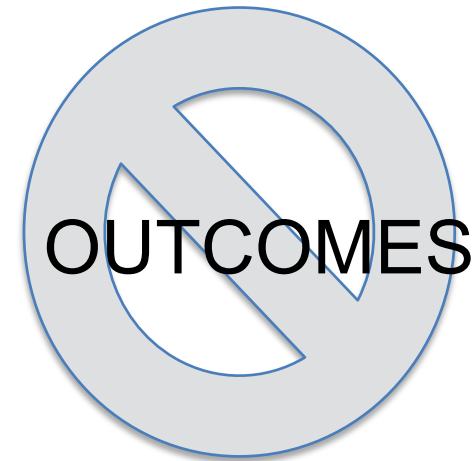 - Requires tracking

Assessment Strategies:
Astin's I-E-O Model

E ENVIRONMENTS

I INPUTS

O OUTCOMES

An Incomplete I-E-O Model: Environment Only Assessment

ENVIRONMENTS

INPUTS

OUTCOMES

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An Incomplete I-E-O Model: Outcome Only Assessment

ENVIRONMENTS

INPUTS

OUTCOMES

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An Incomplete I-E-O Model: Environment-Outcomes Assessment

ENVIRONMENTS

INPUTS

O

OUTCOMES

Identify appropriate "I"s and "E"s for one of your outcomes of interest in FYE assessment

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Assessment Strategies: Astin's I-E-O Model
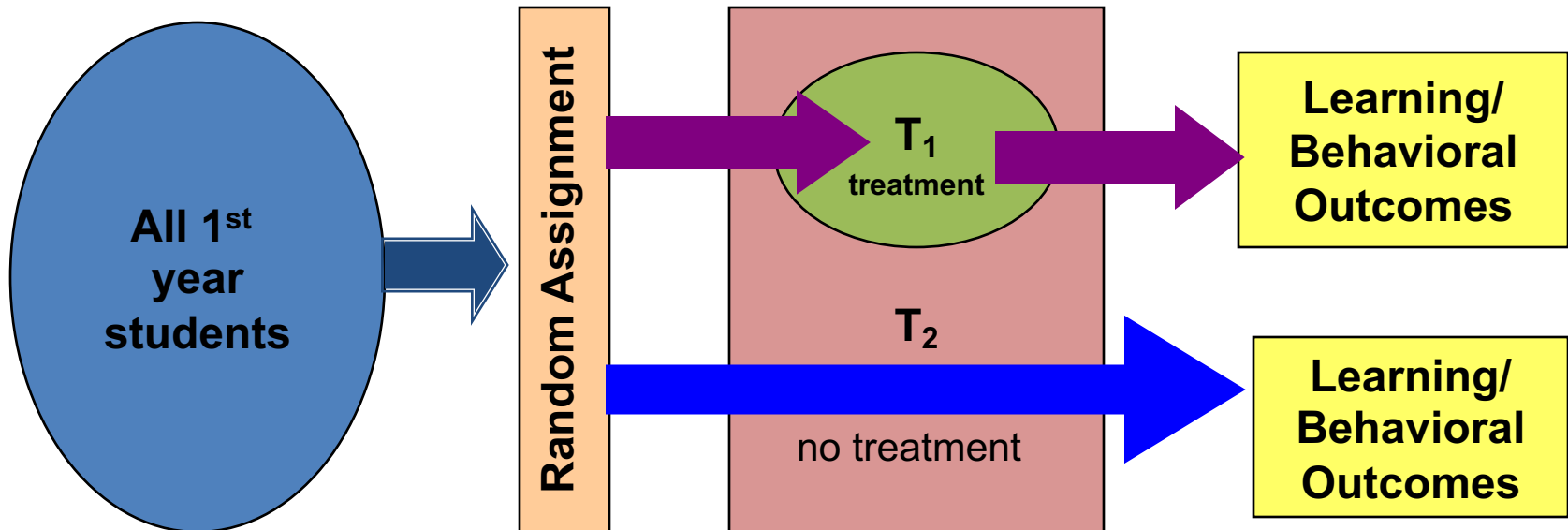

Environments:

Inputs:

Outcomes:

Considerations with a Value-Added Approach

- Motivation (for direct measures)

  – How do we ensure students take assessment seriously? Is there a hook?

- Is growth due to our interventions?

  – How do you control for all the variables that could influence the outcomes?
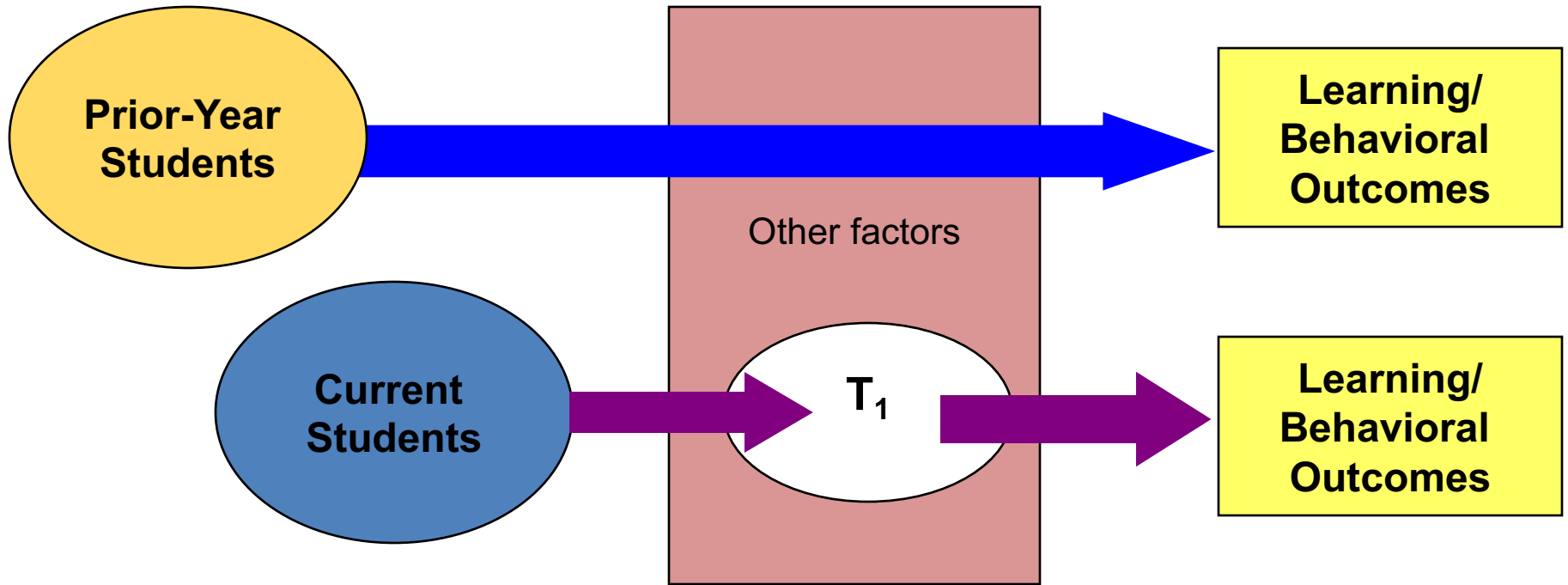
Other Considerations

- Do all types of students and sub-populations experience or benefit from the program in the same way?

  - Disaggregate data by sub-populations

    - Ex:

      - Minority
      - First-generation
      - Gender
      - Ability level
      - Transfer

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Model 1: An Experimental Design with random assignment to treatment or non treatment groups. Differences in outcomes can be directly attributed to level of participation in the intervention, because all other student characteristics and experiences vary randomly.

All 1ˢᵗ year students → **Random Assignment**

T_1 treatment → **Learning/ Behavioral Outcomes**

T_2 no treatment → **Learning/ Behavioral Outcomes**

(Rarely possible in educational interventions.)

Model 2: Mandatory intervention models do not have contemporary comparison groups.

Prior-Year Students → Learning/Behavioral Outcomes

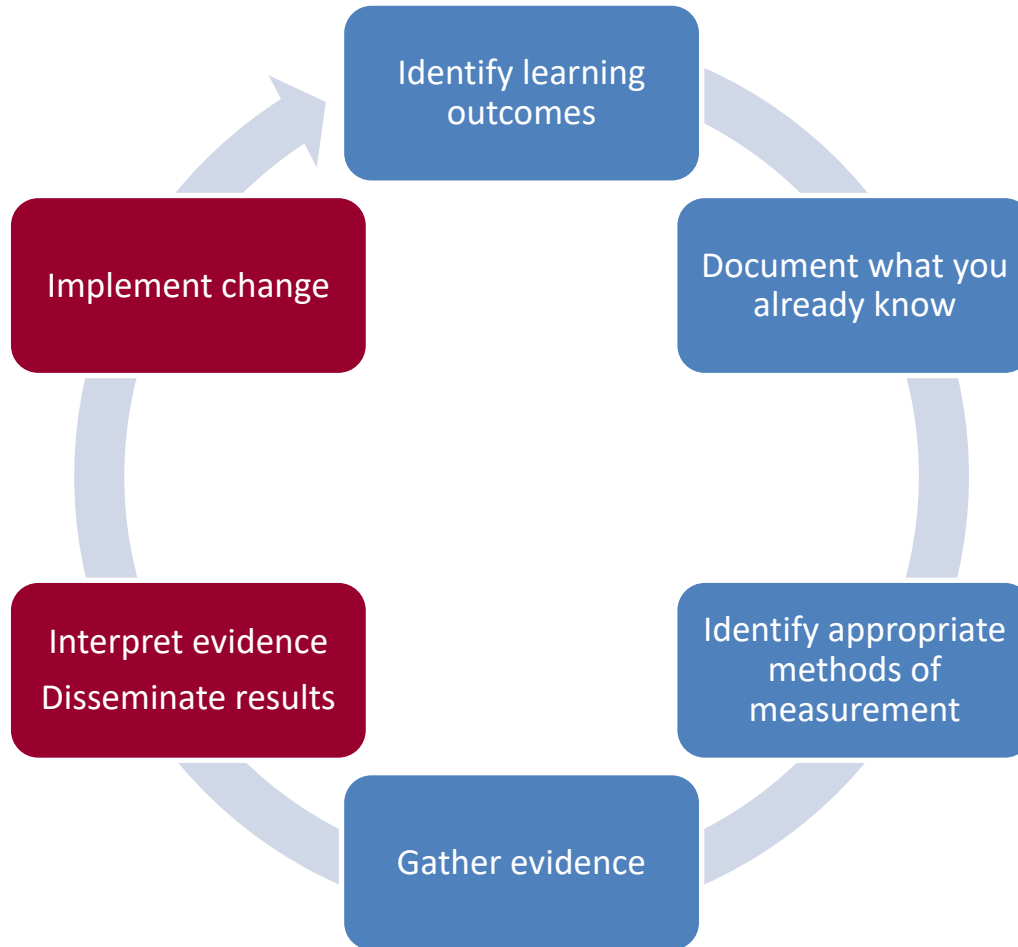Current Students → T$_1$ (Other factors) → Learning/Behavioral Outcomes

Use benchmarking (comparison to a similar external group) or be compared to students from prior years (before the intervention began.)

Similar Students → Learning/Behavioral Outcomes

Model 3: An elective intervention which does not fully meet the demand for enrollment produces three groups, 1) enrolled students, 2) students who wanted to but we denied enrollment, and 3) students who did not wish to enroll. Group 2 is a perfect control group for Group 1.

Section 4: What do we do now?

Identify learning outcomes

Document what you already know

Identify appropriate methods of measurement

Gather evidence

Interpret evidence
Disseminate results

Implement change

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Interpret Evidence

- Questions:
  - What conclusions can you draw from the data? How did you do? Are there students you are not reaching? Are there needs you are not meeting?
  - What other questions do the data raise? What other information might you need?
  - What are the implications for practice or what policy decisions would you make?

- Methods:
  - Disaggregate your data
  - Don't interpret in isolation

Implement Change

- Dissemination of results
  - Who needs to know this information?
  - How do they need to know the information?
  - When do they need to know this information?
- Purpose of assessment is to CREATE ACTION to:
  - Continue effective practice
  - Initiate change and improvement
  - **STOP** doing what is not working
- Changes lead to new outcomes and assessment plans
- Focus on <u>one</u> thing at a time
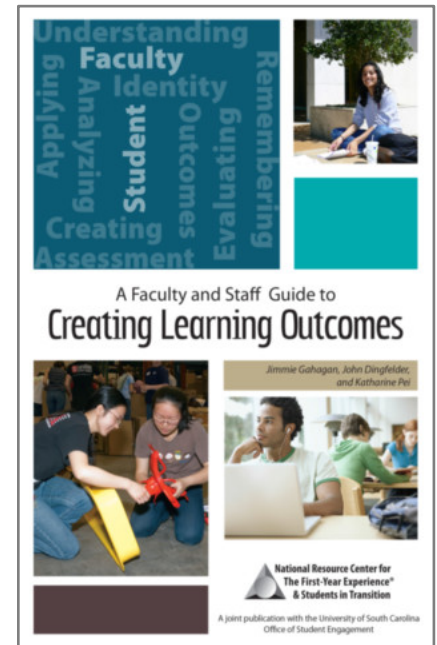
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Other Resources

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