EPISTEME

Understanding and Supporting Equity-Centered Student Success Routines and Practices for Impact
Insights

December 2023
EPISTEME for Moore Philanthropy

MP
MOORE PHILANTHROPY

Table of Contents

Introduction

This research, funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to Moore Philanthropy, is dedicated to advancing equity-centered student success initiatives and fostering institutional transformation within US higher education institutions.

Previous studies supported by BMGF have underscored the pivotal role of mid-level leaders (MLLs) in driving transformation efforts, but more insights on these critical 'users' were needed to begin designing solutions that address institutional challenges.

The current research seeks to identify strategies for enhancing and supporting MLLs in their pursuit of equity-centered student success through the utilization of public goods.

We conducted a study to investigate how student success efforts are constituted, managed and routinized by MLLs and their institutions. Instead of centering MLLs as "users" (their behaviors, mindsets, habits, barriers/challenges, etc.), we centered their organizational practices and (formal and informal) organizational systems.

Our aim was to identify the scaffolding and mechanisms that underlie successful collaboration and coordination around student success in order to develop ECSS-centered public goods.

Research Team

Dr. Funke Sangodeyi is the founder of EPISTEME Research and Strategy, LLC. She has led projects for C-suite clients across a range of industries and has 10+ years of experience in qualitative research, UX research, and strategy consulting. She holds a PhD in History of Science from Harvard University, an MPhil in History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Cambridge, and a Bachelor's in Molecular Biology from Harvard.

EPISTEME clients include Meta, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Hims & Hers Health, and Jamaica National Group.

http://www.epistemestrategy.com

Dr. Tiffany Polite is the founder of FGM Consulting and served in a variety of programmatic, administrative, and leadership roles focused on improving experiences in and the quality of higher education for over 10 years. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Studies with a specialization in higher education and student affairs from The Ohio State University, is a Certified Strategic Foresight Practitioner, an alumna of the National Inclusive Excellence Leadership Academy, and a Professional Certified Coach.

Her professional agenda centers around understanding the dynamics of power, organizational design, and institutional change processes in decision-making, practice, and policy, with particular emphasis on the role of institutions and organizations in the creation and perpetuation of inequitable social outcomes.

MLL Research Project Overview

Research Focus

Organizational and administrative practices for and challenges to advancing ECSS work

| Insights | Opportunities | Opportunity Areas | Innovation Briefs | Public Goods |

From Insights to Innovation Briefs for Challenges of Practice

1. Reviewed prior BMGF work and other research on student success, equity in higher ed, MLLs, and organizational behavior

2. Conducted **33** interviews with MLLs from **16** institutions and collected ECSS-related materials

3. Bottom-up analysis of interviews and materials to identify emerging themes, shared needs, solution strategies, and pain points across institutions

4. Developed 80-question survey for an expanded pool of MLLs to refine insights and identify insights-driven opportunities for investment

5. Prioritized opportunities by potential impact and feasibility based on participants' feedback captured in a follow-up survey and BMGF input

6. Streamlined prioritized opportunities into 3 Opportunity Areas: 1) Initiative Operations, 2) Understanding Students, and 3) Faculty Buy-in

7. We discussed all three opportunity areas over the course of the Community of Users workshop at BMGF (November 1-3), but initiative operations provided our core design challenge. We tackled the 6 thorniest challenges of practice across the initiative life cycle as identified by study participants.

Participating Institutions

Amarillo College

Austin Community College

Boise State University

Cal State University, Stanislaus

Cal State University, San Marcos

College of Staten Island, CUNY

Elizabeth City State University

Fayetteville State University

Florida International University

Fort Valley State University

Grand Valley State University

Lehman College

Nevada State University

Norco Community College

Northern Arizona University

Portland State University

Sinclair Community College

Southern Connecticut State U.

University of Guam

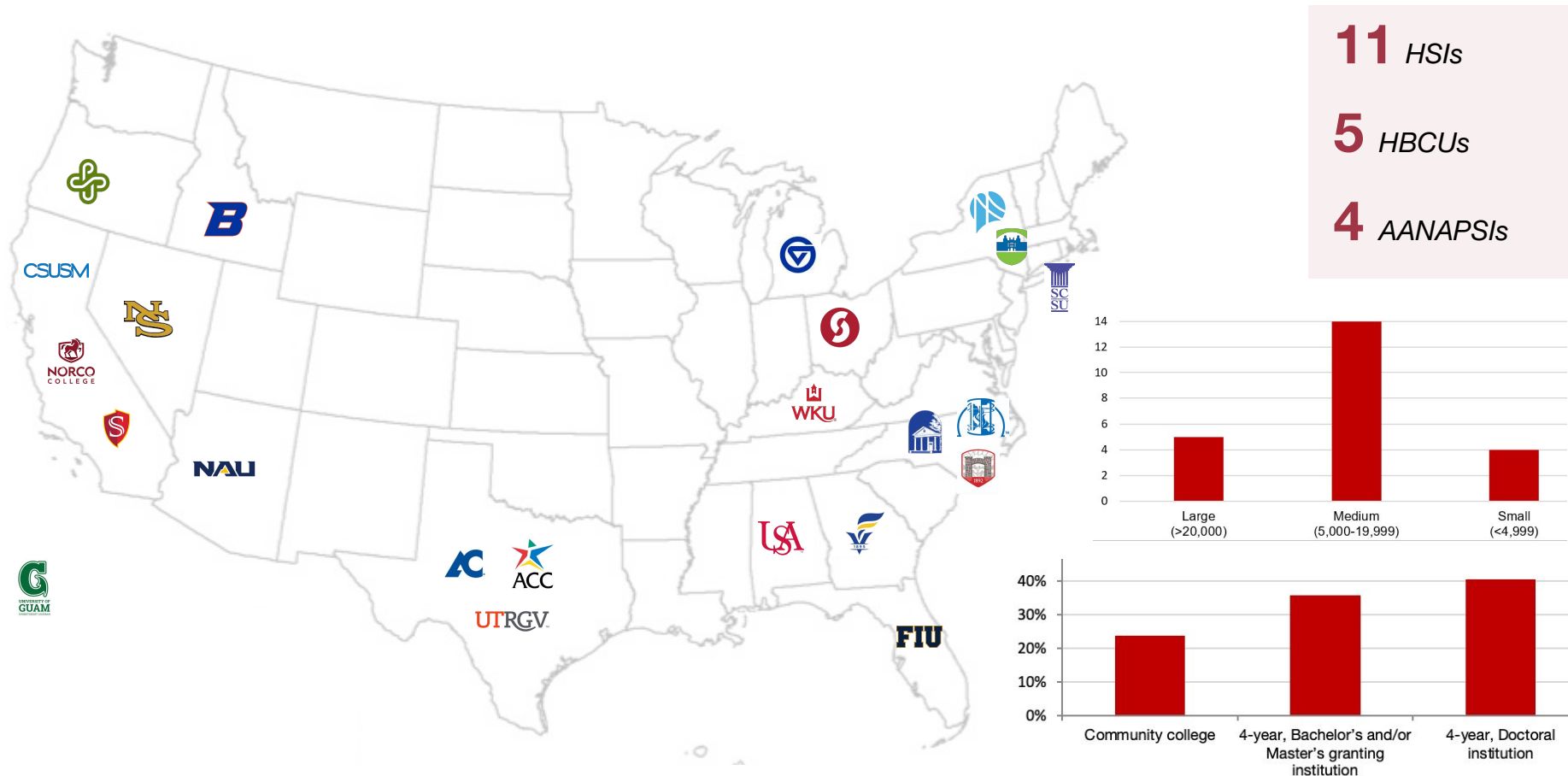U. of Southern Alabama

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley,

Western Kentucky University

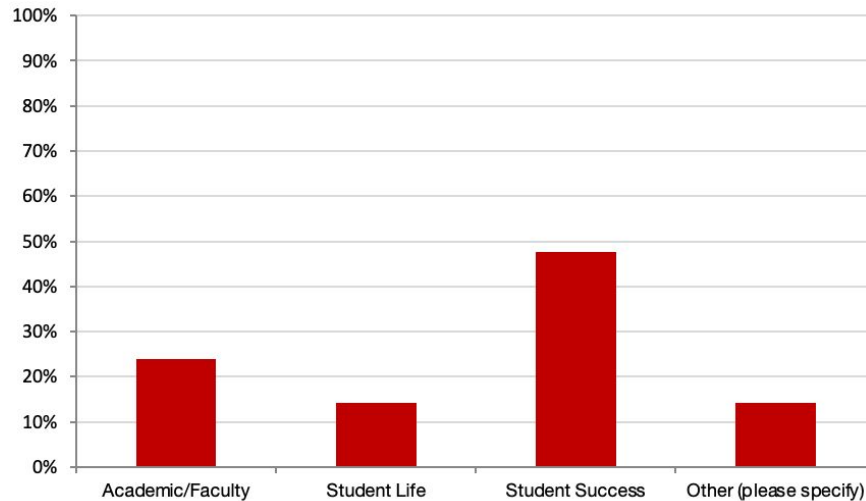Winston-Salem State University

Participating Institutions

23 total and 16 in core research group: all regions represented except the Plains; undergraduate enrollment ranges from < 2,000 to 46,000+

11 *HSIs*

5 *HBCUs*

4 *AANAPSIs*

Participating Mid-Level Leaders

46 total; 33 in core research group

45%

% of respondents for whom data analysis is a primary job responsibility

Who participated

- Functional Unit leaders (14)

- AVCs/AVPs of Student Success, Student Engagement, Student Affairs, etc. (13)

- Deans, faculty, and other academic leaders (8)

- VPs of Student Success, Student Affairs, Strategy, Undergraduate Studies, etc. (8)

- Data Leaders and analysts (VP for Institutional Effectiveness, Manager of Research, AVP of Admissions and Recruitment, etc.) (6)

Participating Mid-Level Leaders

Chad Atkinson	Manager of Research and Chair of the IRB	Sinclair Community College	Mary Cruz	Interim Associate Dean	University of Guam
Melissa Bader	Professor of English & Guided Pathways Faculty Lead	Norco College	Alisha Davis	Assistant Vice President of the Social Justice Centers and Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs	Grand Valley State University
Gary Brown	Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs & University Advancement	Elizabeth City State University	Laurie Dickson	Vice President for University Strategy and Senior Associate to the President	Northern Arizona University
Victor Brown	Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Educational Effectiveness	Lehman College	Heather Dunn Carlton	Associate Vice President for Student Engagement & Wellbeing/Dean of Students	Cal State Stanislaus
Susan Brown	Assistant Vice President, Office of Strategic Analysis and Institutional Reporting	UT Rio Grande Valley	Tavoria Freeman	Director of the Bronco One Stop	Fayetteville State
Patricia Burke-Williams	Advising Manager for STEM Career Community & Equity Summit Lead	Sinclair Community College	Andrea Garrity	Executive Director of Student Success	Portland State
Becky Burton	AVPAA	Amarillo College	John Georgas	Senior Vice Provost for Academic Operations	Northern Arizona University
Lawrence Camacho	Dean Enrollment Management & Student Success	University of Guam	Cierra Griffin	Executive Director for Adult Learners, Transfer, and Military Students	Fayetteville State
Nicole Carr	Associate Vice President, Student Academic Success	University of South Alabama	Tuesdi Helbig	Director, Office of Institutional Research; Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Planning	Western Kentucky University
Jonikka Charlton	Associate Provost of Student Success Dean of the University College	UT Rio Grande Valley	Sean Hunter	Director	Boise State University
Roddrick Chatmon	SACSCOC Liaison/ Program Coordinator/Associate Professor	Fort Valley State University	Tenisha James	Interim Vice President Planning & Development	Norco College
Bridgette Cram	Vice President for Academic Affairs	Florida International University	Molly Kerby	Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness	Western Kentucky University

Participating Mid-Level Leaders

Karla Knepper	Director of Academic Advising	Sinclair Community College
Laura Lucas	Director, Strategic Initiatives	Austin Community College
Willie Martinez	Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Engagement & Academic Success	Austin Community College
Ernesto Olmos	Senior Director of Advising and Completion	Amarillo College
Jennifer Ostergren	Dean of the College of Education, Health, and Human Services	California State University San Marcos
Marlena Pangelinan	Vice Provost, Institutional Effectiveness	University of Guam
Ralf Peetz	Dean of Science and Technology	College of Staten Island, CUNY
Katie Pereyra	Senior Director of Student Success Operations and Strategy	Florida International University
Amy Pifer	Director of First-Year Experience	Amarillo College
Dana Poole	Executive Director of Student Success & Retention	Elizabeth City State University
Catherine Preston	Senior Director, Academic Advising & Transfer Services	University of South Alabama
Gregory Robinson	Vice Provost for Student Success	Nevada State College
Ana Rummer	Associate Vice Chancellor Student Affairs Operations	Austin Community College

Yolanda Seabrooks	Director, Academic Strategic Partnerships and Initiatives	Morgan State
Susan Shadle	Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies	Boise State University
Kathy (Doria) Stitts	Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs	Winston-Salem State
Sandip Thanki	Associate Vice Provost of Institutional Effectiveness	Nevada State College
Tracy Tyree	Vice President for Student Affairs	Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
Tracy Tyree	Vice President for Student Affairs	Southern Connecticut State University
Daniel Velez	Associate Vice President of Admissions and Recruitment	Grand Valley State University
Erica Wagner	Vice Provost of Student Success	Portland State
Conrad Walker	Dean of Students and Assistant Vice President	Lehman College
Cori Watkins	Data & Research Analyst	Portland State
LaMonica Wilhelmi	Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students	Winston-Salem State

Insights

Most of our insights map onto the PRPAM Continuous Improvement Model

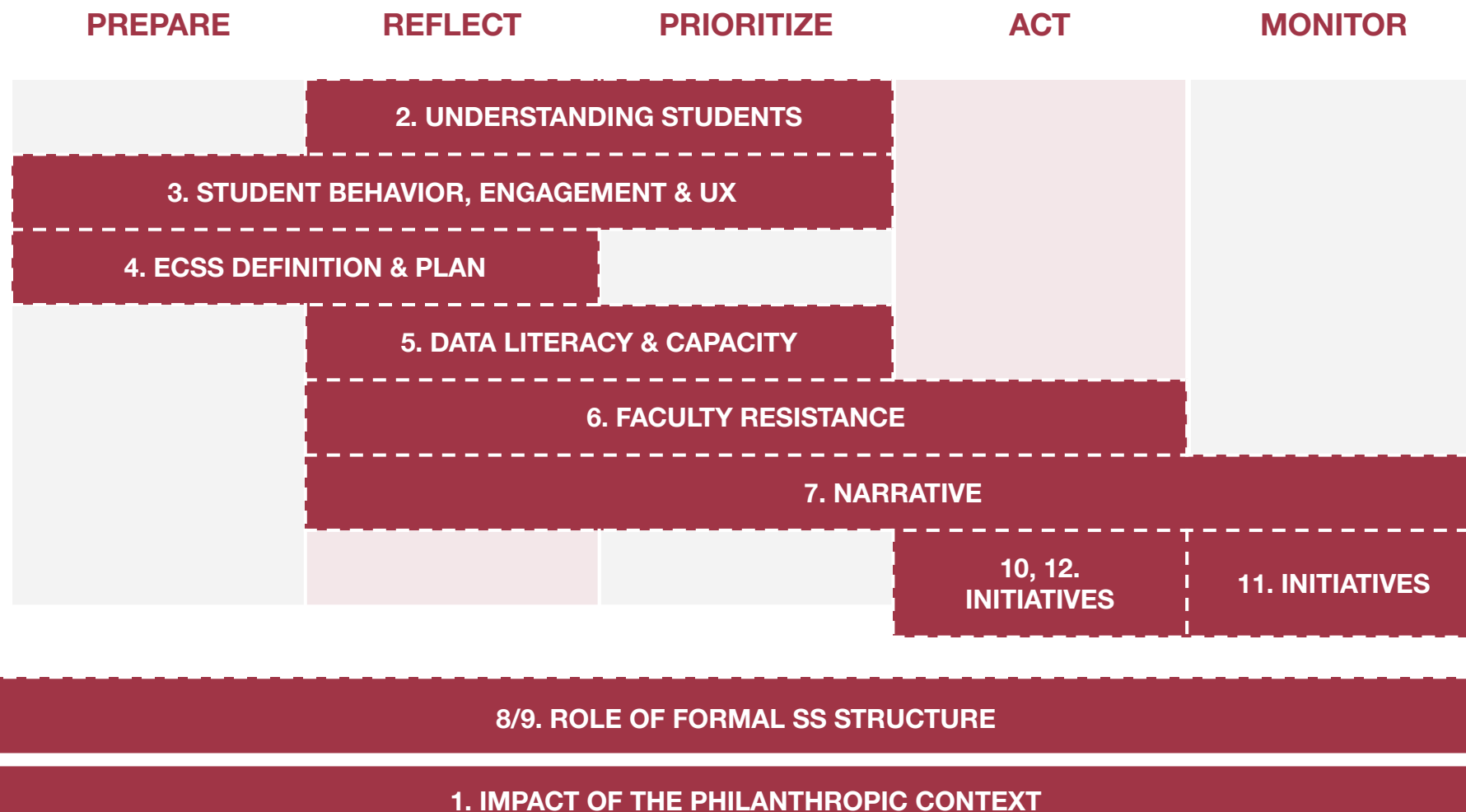| PREPARE	REFLECT	PRIORITIZE	ACT	MONITOR
Review, analyze and consider student success initiatives and goals	Gather information and people to reflect on goals, progress and plans	Review data, discuss alternatives and prioritize in order to initiate/proceed with plans to address gaps	Make changes and investments in people, processes, and technology in order to address gaps	Monitor progress against goals and support the changes made

Insights Mapped onto PRPAM Model (at the Institution Level)

PREPARE	REFLECT	PRIORITIZE	ACT	MONITOR

2. UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS

3. STUDENT BEHAVIOR, ENGAGEMENT & UX

4. ECSS DEFINITION & PLAN

5. DATA LITERACY & CAPACITY

6. FACULTY RESISTANCE

7. NARRATIVE

10, 12. INITIATIVES

11. INITIATIVES

8/9. ROLE OF FORMAL SS STRUCTURE

1. IMPACT OF THE PHILANTHROPIC CONTEXT

Insights Summary

1 The **philanthropic approach** to funding drives fragmentation in ECSS efforts at institutions and can make building sustainable efforts more difficult

2 Institutional stakeholders (especially faculty and the Board) struggle to move past antiquated and/or inaccurate notions about their student body and often **don't understand what it means to be a student today**

3 Institutions are using **student experience mapping, student behavioral data and student engagement data** to help rationalize holistic ECSS efforts and to **deepen their understanding of students**

4 Many institutions don't have a **consensus definition for what student success should mean**– much less what equitable student success should mean

Institutions are increasingly **setting clear goals for their unique equity challenges** as part of their strategic planning, but **struggle to operationalize** them

5 Most institutions we studied are **disaggregating data and have data analysis capacity**, but **MLLs struggle to interpret and deploy it for ECSS**

6 **Faculty resistance** to actively engaging in ECSS efforts is a major challenge; even when faculty believe they are committed to ECSS goals, they resist change

Insights Summary

7 — **Narrative** has been identified as a powerful tool for communicating the impact of institutional ECSS efforts, yet this remains an underutilized mechanism for creating buy-in

8 — **SS units** formally live within an assistant or associate VP/VC portfolio and seem to **lack intentional student-centered design**– but share some core structural components

9 — **Centralized SS units** seem to produce the most streamlined, organized and effective ECSS efforts – and SS unit structure can impact ECSS challenges

10 — Institutions that deployed deliberately structured **"project teams" in ECSS initiatives** had a more robust and effective approach to ECSS work

11 — The biggest challenges to ECSS initiative work lie in 1) **monitoring and evaluating impact** …

12 — … and 2) **solution exploration & development**

External & Institutional Pressures

INSIGHT #1

The philanthropic approach to funding drives fragmentation in ECSS efforts at institutions and can make building sustainable efforts more difficult.

Leadership and MLLs are committed to increasing equitable outcomes at institutions, but face external challenges to sustaining ECSS efforts

External Imperatives

- Different philanthropic organizations' priorities
- State & federal funding priorities
- Board priorities
- Civil, social, and political unrest

Implications

- External pressures create inefficiencies and fragmentation on the ground that the existing institutional infrastructure must absorb and respond to. Re-orienting around these changing priorities is challenging along process, resource and organizational lines.

- Often MLLs must focus on funding bodies' priorities rather than the needs of their institution's students.

- The need to navigate the politics of funding bodies can limit MLLs' agency and effectiveness in addressing student needs.

"We're trying to build and sustain a culture of student success so that there are more people engaged in the work; that way, if one leaves, the work can continue. However, the time-limited funding, usually via grants, is a killer. We haven't found a way around that in any systematic way."

Philanthropic Interventions: Pros and Cons

PROS	CONS
• Funding for resource-constrained institutions	• Time-limited
• Funding for under-resourced or neglected needs, challenges and populations	• Can shift emphasis away from most pressing needs, challenges and populations (because philanthropic institutions have their own priorities)
• Ability to circumvent/avoid institutional and/or local politics	• Need to understand and navigate philanthropic institutions' politics
• Catalyzing innovation and new methods and approaches	• Newness for newnesses sake– incentives are towards trying new things, not refining or building on old methods
• Advances and accelerates collaboration and cross-functional engagement	• Support ends and the work reverts back or the institution is left with the complexities of change prompted by the effort
• Data-informed decision-making and assessment for ECSS efforts	• Lack of standardization of required metrics for reporting; Duplication of metrics and reporting in siloed, resource-constrained environments

Implications of these "cons" exacerbate existing challenges to sustaining ECSS in institutions

CONS

Time-limited | Can shift emphasis away from most pressing needs, challenges and populations (because philanthropic institutions have their own priorities) | Need to understand & navigate philanthropic institutions' politics | Newness for newnesses sake– incentives are towards trying new things, not refining or building on old methods | Support ends and the work reverts back or the institution is left with the complexities of change prompted by the effort | Lack of standardization of required metrics for reporting; Duplication of metrics and reporting in siloed, resource-constrained environments

KEY CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINING ECSS EFFORTS

Staff Turnover

Efforts may die out or suffer when the person championing it leaves or takes on other formal responsibilities; already time limited grant-funded personnel exacerbates this

Burnout

Due to initiative overload, SS staff and "equity champions" who are usually involved in ECSS initiatives hit a wall/capacity and often absorb the work once funding runs out

Resource Constraints

Continued state divestment; Time-limited (internal or external) funding; no strategic budget; no pathway for internal scaling

Bias towards the New

The next philanthropy-driven "new thing" comes up and energy and effort for the sustained efforts gets shifted away from existing efforts and no systematic feedback loop for learning from past efforts

Boredom

"We get bored easily with working solutions. We are great at creativity and rallying around a cause. But when we have made changes and starting "working a plan" we get tired and retreat to older habits."

Political Landscape

External political realities - Board, locally, state or federally-driven - can limit, hinder, or end efforts

These challenges deepen the gap between institutional and student needs

Institutional Needs

- Align with the status quo and meeting the interests of those in control

- Primary concerns are resources, reputation, and competitiveness

- Place emphasis on real-time outcomes and positive results

- Typically in alignment with policies and practices that incentivize maintenance of the system and structure as it currently exists

Staff Turnover
Burnout
Resource Constraints
Bias towards the New
Boredom
Political Landscape

Student Needs

- Focus on inclusivity and meeting the needs of unique populations

- Primary concerns are security, wellness, safety, and experience

- Place emphasis on immediate needs and future-oriented outcomes

- Precipitate institutional collaboration and equity-mindedness

- Elicit use of innovative strategies to diffuse knowledge and intervene on behalf of students

Though senior leadership is largely aligned with MLLs' vision for ECSS and equity, they struggle to balance student needs and institutional imperatives – and the metrics they prioritize.

Traditional SS metrics prioritize institutional needs rather than the needs of students – and consequently miss critical factors that can drive better, more equitable outcomes

Many MLLs complain that their institutions lack a holistic enough approach to ECCS

Study participants were split (13 vs. 14) on whether their institutions had a holistic enough definition of SS. Those who *did*n't believe their institution's approach was holistic enough noted the following discrepancy between their institution's narrow definition and what they believed it should include

Centering Institutional Needs

- Completion/graduation
- Retention
- Persistence

Holistic Approach: Centering Student Needs

- Career preparation
- Reduction of financial stress
- Sense of belonging
- Personal growth
- Post-graduation success

- Social-emotional wellbeing
- Connectedness
- Engagement in student life
- Equity in the classroom and coursework
- Intersectional equity gaps

"Student Success" is defined by our system as graduation rates. We are currently trying to expand that definition, but ultimately the system definition is the one we need to follow. When we present on student success to the Board of Regents, we're generally presenting on graduation rates and our student population. Beyond that, our definitions are more philosophical and difficult to measure."

Senior leadership and SS leaders must demonstrate the institutional and business impact of ECSS and develop an effective institution-wide approach to operationalizing ECSS

Demonstrating Business Impact

Our respondents largely had confidence in their leadership's support for equitable student success and commitment to equity, but worried about the support of the board and business/funding stakeholders.

Because funding is tied to core metrics and these drive operations, the case for ECSS must be framed in terms of its impact on an institution's bottom line.

Developing an Effective Institution-Wide Approach

Our respondents felt leadership lacked the clarity, awareness, bandwidth, will, and/or resources to provide the level or type of support student success teams need.

Centering students' needs, not the institution's needs, to drive better outcomes for both

MLLs see institutional problems like dropping enrollments, matriculation challenges and stubborn equity gaps as related to a fundamental misunderstanding of student needs, but it is difficult for them to demonstrate impact of ECSS efforts and to identify the most effective interventions.

MLLs want to be able to demonstrate centering students in the right ways and approaching ECSS holistically can help boost their institutions' bottom line.

Opportunity

1) How might BMGF help reform the philanthropic approach to funding higher ed initiatives to promote sustainability?

Centering Students

INSIGHT #2

Institutional stakeholders (especially faculty and the Board) struggle to move past antiquated and/or inaccurate notions about their student body and often don't understand what it means to be a student today.

MLLs generally believe that key institutional stakeholders lack a deep enough understanding of students

Study participants stressed that advancing equity requires a very clear understanding of who an institution's students are and their needs. Study participants largely felt senior and academic leadership, other mid-level administrators and front line staff **did** know this– but the faculty and board lagged behind.

Preparedness

Meeting students where they are

*"**We need to be student ready.** It would be helpful to shift the culture around student interventions and more on institutional interventions. **Rather than preparing students, how do we design courses and resources that meet students where they are at**? This is a gap I see often."*

Profiles

Understanding who they are and where they come from

*"We need to fully understand the students we serve today and who we will be serving tomorrow. **This goes beyond race/ethnicity, but fully understanding personas of our students** so that we can work towards properly serving the students we have and helping address the very real life circumstances that are around."*

Professions

Understanding where they are going (and the environments they will need to navigate)

*"We need to understand more about what our students need to get the job or move on to the next level of education in a modern world. …**Academia is lagging behind industry in understanding what success means in a business world.** We are too disconnected and refuse to listen."*

"The College Student": 70% of respondents believed institutions still held an antiquated notion of who a prepared student is.

Aspiration vs. Reality: 80% of respondents saw a need to serve the students who are at the institution– not those the institution may strive to enroll.

Understanding Students: Some key barriers to ECSS that are often not front of mind for boards and faculty

Key Barriers to Student Success (*adapted from EAB*)

Pre-college Academic Preparation	**Family Expectations and Self-sufficiency**	**Climate**	**Financial**
Limited access to college-prep academic support *Poor ESL reading and writing scores*	*Low familial awareness of college-going lifestyle* *Student self-efficacy*	*Low sense of belonging* *Engagement and responsiveness of faculty to students*	*Financial aid verification processes* *Needing to work while enrolled in college*
Pedagogy & Academic Experience	**College Navigation**	**Policies & Procedures**	**Post-Graduate Outcomes**
Academic recovery *Completion of online courses*	*Likelihood to register late for courses* *Unproductive credit accumulation*	*Mismatch between credit accumulation & financial aid rewards* *Impact & knowledge of transfer credit articulation policies*	*Internship participation rates* *Impact of student debt*

INSIGHT #3

Institutions are using student experience mapping, student behavioral data and student engagement data to help rationalize holistic ECSS efforts and to deepen their understanding of students.

MLLs are experimenting with and institutionalizing ways to develop, deepen and share this student understanding

Key Challenges

- Antiquated notion of who a prepared student is—particularly in schools that source the local community for enrollment

- A gap between existing student population and students institution is striving to enroll

- Antiquated notions of what a successful student is

- Understanding the "real world" environment students will enter post-graduation

How Institutions Address These Challenges

- Individual and cohort assessments (e.g. CSI)

- ECSU is using the CSI to not only identify students, but to assess general profile of students

- Developing personas

- Focus groups

- Sharing population data & qualitative stories about student body to board and faculty in key meetings

- Community outreach/events

- Listening sessions

"I think often in higher education many stakeholders forget the student voice, so reminding them of who their students are and where their students are academically and personally will help all stakeholders serve students better. Storytelling is always a great option when trying to help the stakeholder see the bigger picture."

Student Experience Mapping

12 (of 22) institutions used student experience mapping in various ways

Mapping the journey to completion

Austin CC, FIU, Grand Valley State, Lehman, Nevada State College, Portland State U, Sinclair CC, UTRGV, Winston-Salem

Mapping the student experience

Austin CC, Elizabeth City State, Grand Valley State, Nevada State College, Portland State U, UTRGV

Cross-functional collaboration to develop interventions/solutions

Austin CC, FIU, Grand Valley State, Nevada State College, Portland State U, UTRGV, Winston-Salem

---

Lehman: Blueprint for Success

Institutions like Lehman College have developed their own student journeys to track student progress *Lehman College's* <u>Blueprint to Success</u>

ACC: Wayfinding

ACC is mapping how students navigate and engage with the institution at critical touchpoints (student experience)

NSC: Exploration for Interventions

Some institutions are using student experience mapping to help rationalize interventions as part of a collaborative problem-solving approach to student challenges

MLLs want to find ways to include (more) student behavioral and engagement data to identify student pain points, challenges– and potential solutions

80% of study participants believed that **student behavioral data** is key for understanding equitable student success,

but only **33%** of participants were using it

84% of study participants believed that **student engagement data** is key for understanding equitable student success,

but only **33%** of participants were using it

Student Voice

Most institutions have mechanisms to capture student voice, including:

- Focus groups
- Surveys at key milestones (e.g. end of year), points of contact
- Student representative or government involvement in SS meetings and processes

Student Behavior

Some schools can track library use and number of times a student leaves the dorm if an issue is flagged by someone or triggered by the system (roommate, RA, professor, counselor, hold, etc.). Some MLLs are using this data to identify behaviors that nudge core SS metrics (grades, persistence and retention).
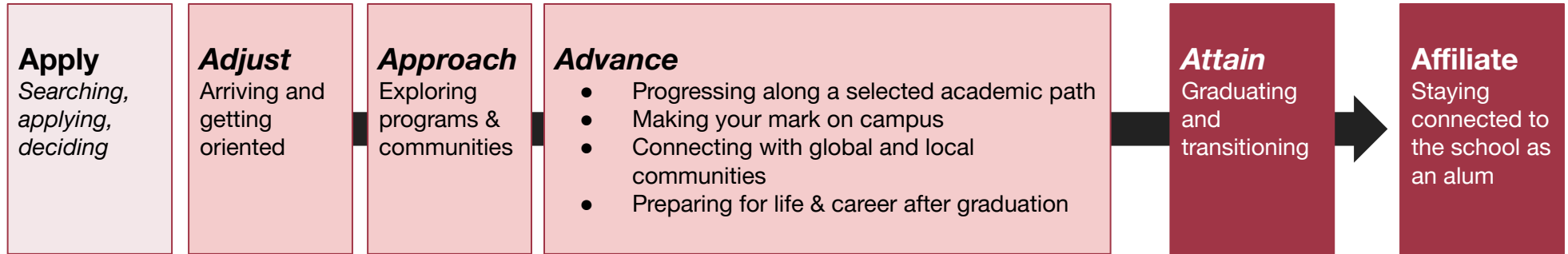
Student Engagement

Participation and involvement in student life and campus activities are also important measures that can point to a more holistic view of student well-being, but there is difficulty in collecting these data, as well as as with making sense of their impact when integrated with academic measures

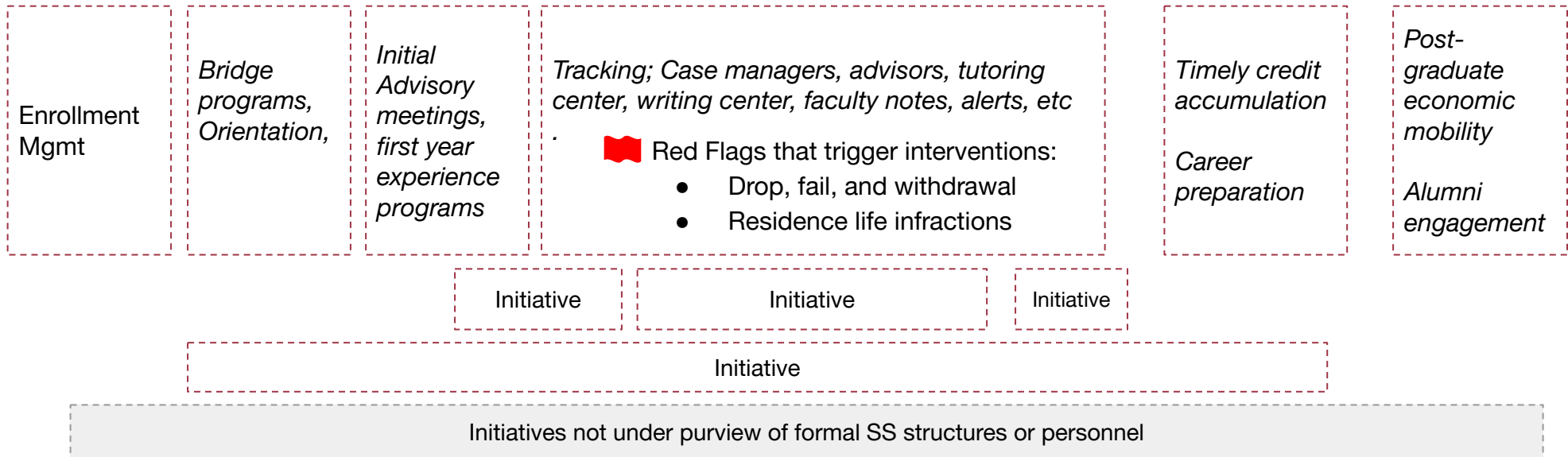*"Some of the engagement data is very difficult to access from a variety of systems; the behavior data is more frequently accessed. Disaggregating to tease out group differences requires time and resources we don't have , and because it's not a stated priority of executive leadership, we are only able to do specific work when it is part of a project we take on to answer questions, or when it is grant supported."*

SS infrastructure scaffolds across the student journey, but often in piecemeal and makeshift ways

Student Journey *(adapted from [Brightspot Strategy](#) & [EAB](#))*

Apply *Searching, applying, deciding*	**Adjust** Arriving and getting oriented	**Approach** Exploring programs & communities	**Advance** • Progressing along a selected academic path • Making your mark on campus • Connecting with global and local communities • Preparing for life & career after graduation	**Attain** Graduating and transitioning	**Affiliate** Staying connected to the school as an alum

Student Success Infrastructure

Enrollment Mgmt	*Bridge programs, Orientation,*	*Initial Advisory meetings, first year experience programs*	*Tracking; Case managers, advisors, tutoring center, writing center, faculty notes, alerts, etc .* 🚩 Red Flags that trigger interventions: • Drop, fail, and withdrawal • Residence life infractions	*Timely credit accumulation* *Career preparation*	*Post-graduate economic mobility* *Alumni engagement*

Initiative	Initiative	Initiative

Initiative

| Initiatives not under purview of formal SS structures or personnel |
|---|

Students have to navigate a landscape of often confusing services that are not structured around their needs
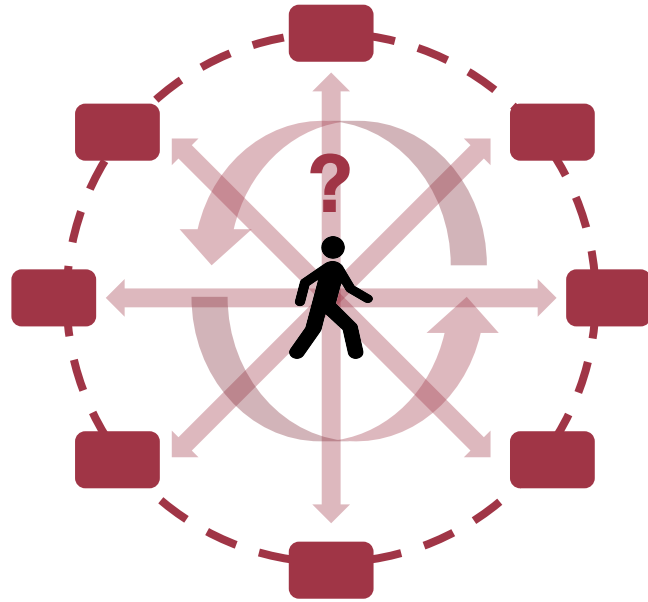
Lack of SS Infrastructure
Students are often **passed off and bounced around** between departments and offices and must proactively seek out guidance and support because it's unclear how to navigate available resources
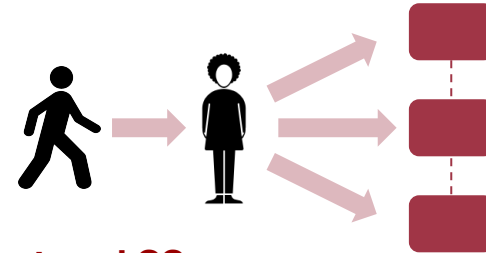
Loosely Structured SS
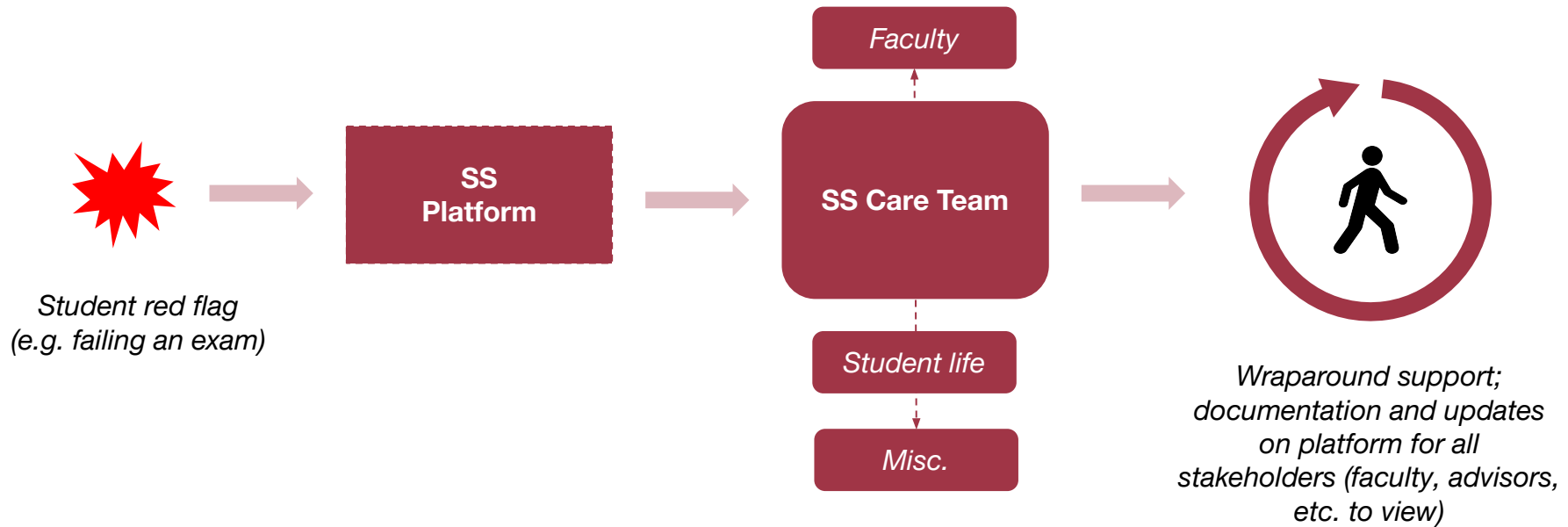Students typically have to find a **compassionate staff member** they can depend on for guidance

One-Stop Shop
All SS services and offerings

Centralized SS Units
Students are able to engage **one-stop service units for support**

More sophisticated SS models are aligned with and address students needs in real-time and provide wraparound care

SS Platform

SS Care Team

Faculty

Student life

Misc.

Student red flag (e.g. failing an exam)

Wraparound support; documentation and updates on platform for all stakeholders (faculty, advisors, etc. to view)

Sophisticated SS Models

A **red flag triggers** direct support and guidance from faculty and staff (coordinators, advisors, etc.). A care/cross-functional team is alerted via a student success tech platform, which allows for continuous and collaborative support for that student.

EPISTEME

35

Opportunities

2) How might BMGF help institutions and their Boards better understand their students and "meet them where they are" along their journey?

- **Understanding Students**

  - Who are they (needs, histories, aspirations, goals)?

  - Experience mapping (navigating the institution)?

  - Journey mapping (navigating through their degree/credential)?

- **Focus on University Boards**

  - How to foster student-centered mindsets to redefine Board orientation to ECSS?

  - How to integrate Boards & their roles into institutional transformation efforts?

- …?

3) How might BMGF help institutions capture, track and deploy student behavioral and engagement data?

- …?

SS Infrastructure

Infrastructure

ELEMENTS OF A DIVERSE STUDENT SUCCESS INFRASTRUCTURE
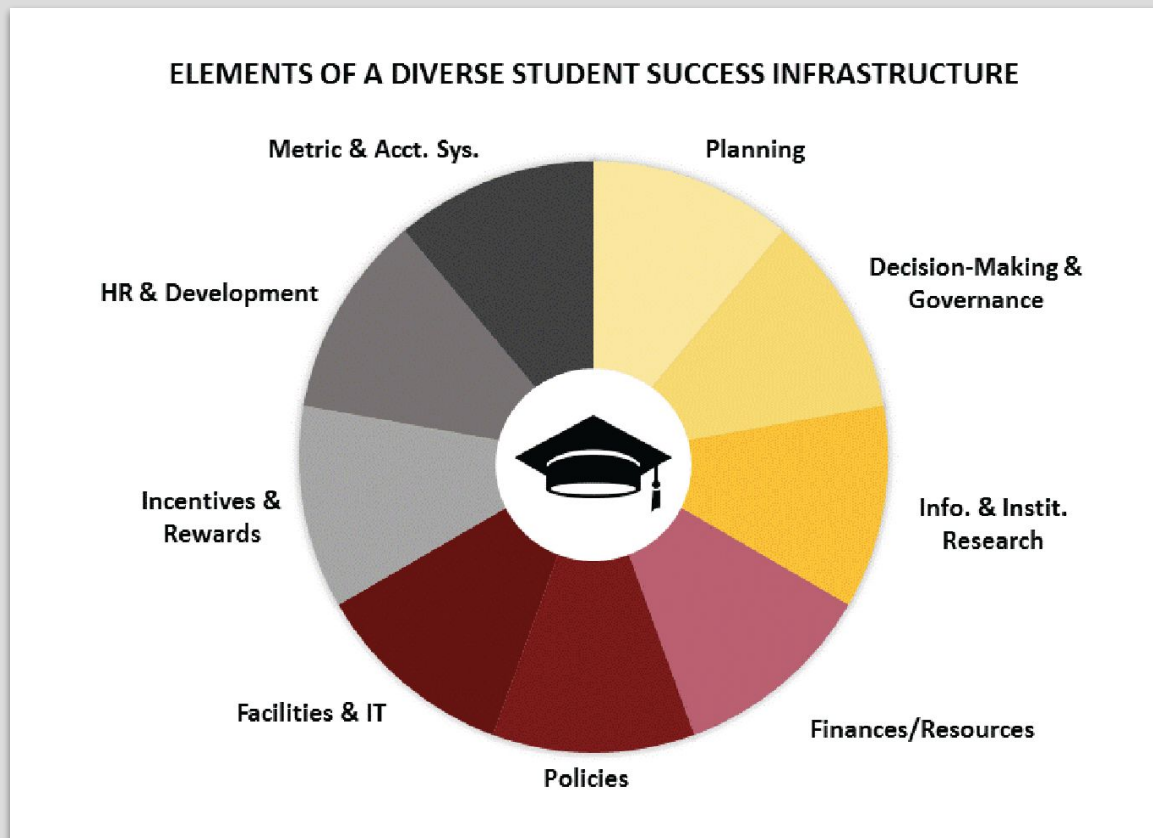
Dr. Kezar's Framework

Integrating ECSS into Institutional Infrastructure

Infrastructure helps with three core areas related to change and systemic support for student success: implementation, sustaining efforts and cultural change.

We used Dr. Adriana Kezar's framework to investigate how institutions and identified some key pain points and opportunities. identified a few key insights regarding these elements of Dr. Kezar's framework.

INSIGHT #4

Many institutions don't have a consensus definition for what student success should mean— much less what equitable student success should mean. Institutions are increasingly setting clear goals for their unique equity challenges as part of their strategic planning, but struggle to operationalize them.

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Decision-Making & Governance
Pain Point: Defining ECSS for the Institution

Not all institutions have a formal, much less clear or consensus definition of student success, but almost all our study participants agreed that having one was critical for ECSS

Only 1/2

of institutions had a clearly articulated definition of what "student success" means according to the MLLs we interviewed, but

36 of 37

participants believe that having a clearly defined and well-articulated student success framework is critical

---

*"My experience has been that if a school has clearly defined what student success means to them and what their student success goals are, then it is more likely that there will be dedicated infrastructure and resources dedicated to the work. This also usually means the work will be successful because there's dedicated leadership and senior leaders have made it an institutional priority. Schools where there isn't an infrastructure for student success are usually the ones **where an assumption is made that success will flow naturally from faculty just doing what they do in the classroom (and as advisors). Lack of clarity about what you're trying to impact usually means that there's not deep expertise in student success work**."*

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Decision-Making & Governance

A clear ECSS definition is fundamental because it can help …

Identify clear, measurable goals

*"**Defining student success is a first step in achieving it.** When there is a clear definition, measurable goals can be developed along the necessary strategies and tactics to achieve those goals throughout the organization with the appropriate resources-human, financial, technological, facilities, etc."*

Identify the right metrics

"Definitions spawn metrics which drive efforts. If measures are selected without significant care, there can be unintended consequences when attempting to meet goals that are defined in terms of those metrics."

Rationalize project planning & priorities

"The definition of student success determines the parameters for which we can plan and initiate projects."

"If equity and success are not clearly defined, they won't happen to specific groups. We need to be intentional and targeted."

Guide allocation of resources

"The lack of a definition for student success, leaves lots of room for interpretation and ensures that needed resources may or not be placed appropriately."

Elevate the institutional over the individual & streamline efforts

"Without a clear definition of student success, there is a tendency to view it through an individual lens rather than measured against the collective definition. It's like having a bucket of Legos and no directions. We can all build something, but we won't use all the pieces or agree on the construction method. We need a strong definition upon which we can build."

"Without a definition, individuals are left to craft their own ideas. This could lead to fragmented effort."

Clarify stakeholder roles & responsibilities

"A clear definition of student success would aid in the development of action steps that would provide all stakeholders with a clear vision of who would be responsible for achieving that goal."

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Decision-Making & Governance

Institutions are increasingly setting clear goals for their equity challenges as part of their strategic plans, but struggle to operationalize them

Setting institution-specific ECSS targets and metrics beyond core metrics

~1/2 **of institutions** included in the study have defined their own institution-specific metrics and goals that target their unique equity challenges as defined by leadership's priorities, federal, state or industry funding, and data analysis of equity gaps/challenges.

A critical component of planning is to determine how to rationalize the status quo– to tie the existing reality, which is often chaotic and fractured, with a new vision– often driven by a leadership change.

Only **30%** of MLLs surveyed said that their institutions have taken an inventory of ECSS programs and initiatives across the institution, despite what is typically a patchwork landscape for ECSS efforts.

Planning

- **NSC's intentional strategic plan development process**

- **Norco' Community College's 15 KPIs**

Institutions who have done/are doing this: ACC, Grand Valley, Norco CC, NSC, NAU, PSU, UTRGV

- **Norco's "Equity Crosswalk"** to review and assess all ECSS efforts across the institution to identify redundancies and impacts in one overview

- **FIU ComPASS (Communication Protocol for Accountability and Strategic Support)**

INSIGHT #5

Most institutions we studied are disaggregating data and have data analysis capacity, but MLLs struggle to interpret and deploy it for ECSS.

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Data & Institutional Research; IT
Pain Points: Data capacity, literacy and analysis

Access to and use of data for ECSS is increasingly standard at institutions, but MLLs struggle with using it

Access to and use of data dashboards among MLLs and/or their staff is routine at our institutions (~**90%** of respondents), and **half of our institutions had data capacity structurally embedded in SS units**. However, MLLs were concerned about student populations that seemed neglected in favor of traditional students (e.g. online students).

Disaggregation to understand differential outcomes and routine cross functional data-sharing is occurring for many institutions (**60%** of our sample).

However, routine assessment of individual efforts and cross-functional synthesis and interpretation isn't happening for most (**20% and 30%** respectively).
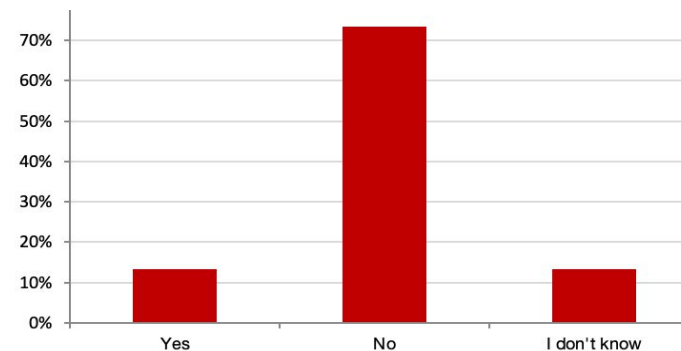
70% of respondents said they use data regularly in ECSS, but people don't know what to do with it

Some institutions have developed data coaching and training initiatives for staff, but few have incentivized them

Is data training available to faculty/staff?
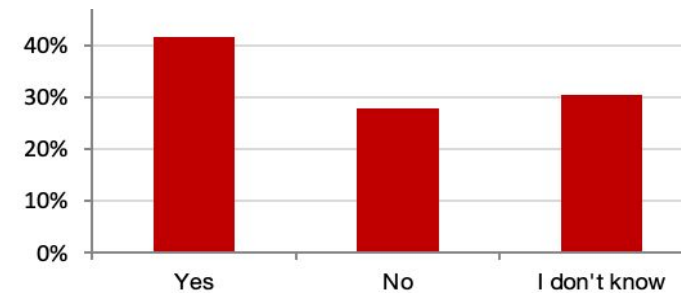
Are there incentives for participation?

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Data & Institutional Research; IT

Institutions are using data in 4 key ways with varying degrees of sophistication in ECSS work, but all are struggling with the bedrock issue of data literacy

Critical Need for Transformative Use: Data Fluency
How do I explore and analyze the data?

Identifying problems Defining and clarifying barriers and challenges	**Understanding problems** Seeking root causes of and contributors to problems	**Exploring options and developing hypotheses for solutions to problems**	**Assessing effectiveness of interventions that address problems**

Baseline Need: Data Literacy
How do I read and interpret the data correctly?

90% of MLLs surveyed had access to a dedicated team they could go to for data support, but most lacked continuous access to robust analytical capacity for their needs (for exploration and analysis) if they didn't possess it themselves

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: IT, Facilities

Pain Points: Tracking Students across the Institution and throughout their Journey

A lack of integrated platforms & old systems make monitoring, intervening and collaborating around student challenges more difficult

The technological platforms used by many institutions to track student progress, identify equity gaps and student success challenges, and to guide problem solving are clunky and not integrated.

The most sophisticated institutions use these systems to centralize information about students that advisors, faculty members and admins can access and have built-in mechanisms to reach at-risk students (either pre-emptively or after the fact). Schools are trying to move towards a more proactive model for early intervention before there is a catastrophe that knocks a student off course. Though most institutions had a SS platform with early alerts, utilization varied, especially amongst faculty.

Many institutions are undergoing a tech overhaul and trying to do it in a way that includes all stakeholders for the rebuild.

**Facilities as a source and partner for student behavioral data**

Some institutions (e.g. ECSU) partner with facilities to track student movement and behaviors as a way to identify changes in student behavior that may signal a need for support.

MLLs who didn't have this capacity were eager for access to this kind of behavioral data for SS interventions and to better understand student experience.

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Finances & Resources; Decision-Making & Governance
Pain Points: Strained and/or Inconsistent Financial Resources
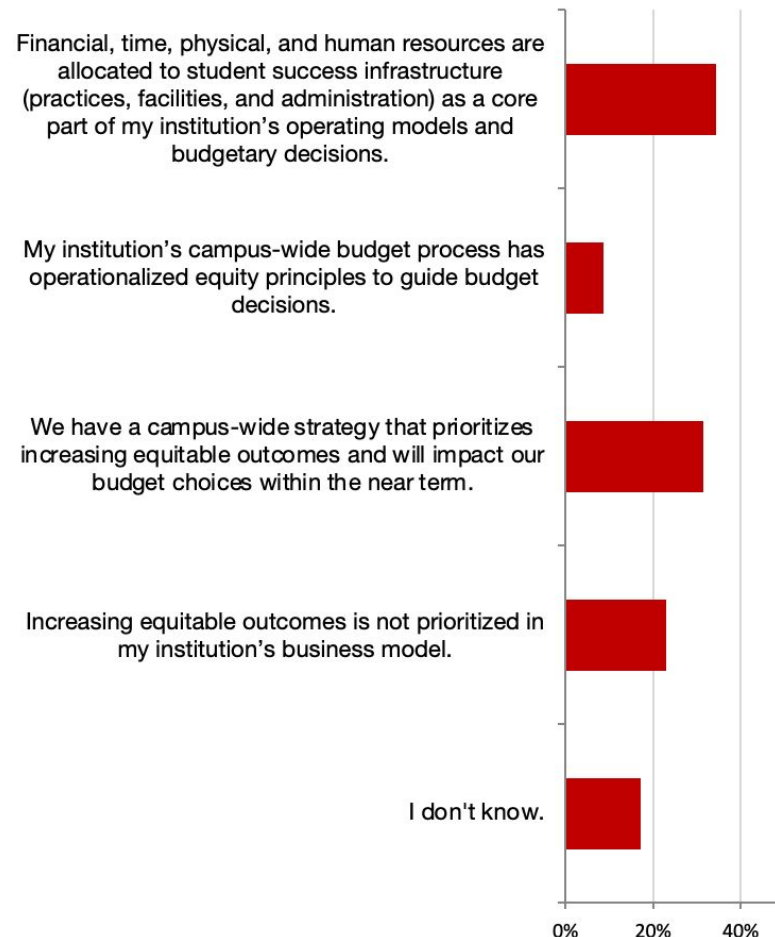
Patchwork financing and intra-institutional jockeying for financing in a resource-constrained environment is a consistent challenge.

Institutions are trying to make a greater case for increased budgeting by building budgeting models that show how ECSS efforts directly impact the institution's bottom line–or at least try to show how impacts boost core metrics.

"One thing I have done is I've been able to do do a model with the budget director, which says for every 1% increase in overall retention, that equals a million dollars in revenue for the university. And that is a thing that faculty and deans have latched onto because they know that our financial state is not great. So folks can start to see "oh, 1% That's not that much. We can do that." And then we regularly are showing them, "look we've increased this by 2%-- that's $2 million." So that can can help even though schools and colleges don't necessarily see that $2 million dollar increase trickle down to them."

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Human Resources & Development; Incentives & Rewards
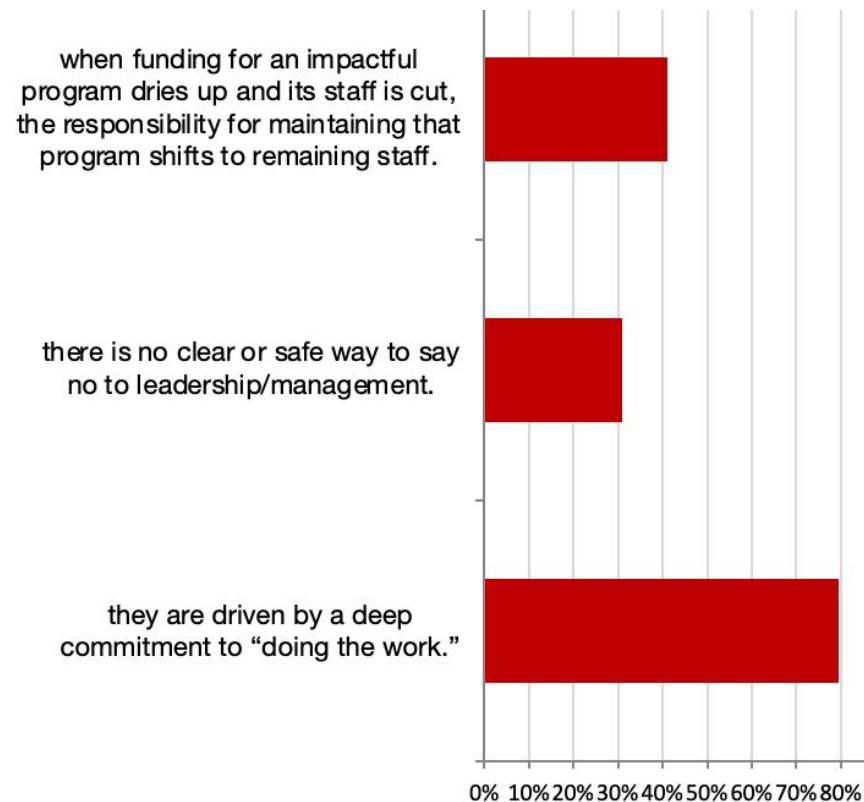
Pain Point: Burnout

This is a persistent problem for ECSS efforts and ranked as the biggest issues. There are not enough people to do the work– and "programmitis" leads to initiative overload for those involved.

Some schools offer incentives and project management support to help ease the burden on ECSS staff, but the introduction of new initiatives and efforts and staff turnover often means that core staff and equity champions get saddled with more work because they are deeply committed to it.

"Burnout and having a limited number of people engaged are problems being addressed in part by the model of having faculty and staff volunteer for committees and workgroups, rather than being assigned. The idea is that those working on the program bring particular interest, passion, and/or skills to the project that will help with sustainability and success. There is also an awareness of the need to scale across our service area, and for plans to be developed early to do so in a sustainable way."

Most student success leaders/personnel may take on additional equity-minded initiatives/work despite being over capacity because…

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

- when funding for an impactful program dries up and its staff is cut, the responsibility for maintaining that program shifts to remaining staff.
- there is no clear or safe way to say no to leadership/management.
- they are driven by a deep commitment to "doing the work."

INSIGHT #6

Faculty resistance to actively engaging in ECSS efforts is a major challenge; even when faculty believe they are committed to ECSS goals, they resist change.

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Human Resources & Development; Incentives & Rewards
Pain Point: Buy-in

Though MLLs surveyed said the majority of faculty generally consider helping students succeed as part of their responsibility, there were several key challenges to getting buy-in:

60% said faculty blame equity gaps and poor (or dropping!) student success metrics on their students	**60%** said faculty feel unfairly attacked or blamed for poor outcomes.	**50%** said faculty can be dismissive of SS expertise and assessment from "staff" rather than academic peers

*"Faculty leadership can be resistant to assuming responsibility for priorities that come from senior leadership. Faculty believe that they have bought in [to ECSS], but the student experience suggests otherwise. Faculty struggle to prioritize needed changes that might impact the viability of departments, programs, courses, or other aspects of their work. **Faculty are more faculty-centric than student-centric**."*

Which Faculty are most resistant?

Our MLLs mentioned older, tenured faculty as most resistant, while the newest, youngest faculty were most engaged. Some mentioned STEM fields as more resistant to engaging with ECSS efforts than other fields; and doctorate-granting institutions tend to have the most stubborn faculty.

Key Infrastructural Touchpoints: Human Resources & Development; Incentives & Rewards
Getting Faculty Buy-in for Equitable Student Success Efforts

Most common strategies to boost buy-in

- Sharing faculty and department-specific student success data with faculty (85%)

- Building relationships with deans and dept. chairs (78%)

- Offering stipends for participation in student success initiatives (75%)

- Attending key faculty meetings (66%)

- Framing student success programs/efforts as providing a service/support for faculty, not just for students (63%)

- Listening & centering faculty needs and interests (59%)

- Showing proof of concept to other faculty and departments by piloting student success programs with adjacent and equity-minded departments (59%)

Other strategies used to boost buy-in

- Allocating student success time as service work

- Leveraging leadership to apply pressure downward on or communicate with faculty

- Appealing to your leadership to engage with their counterparts in other units to communicate the need for new approaches and perspectives around student performance as a component of student success

- Providing resources/support for onerous administrative and project management tasks

- Supporting faculty "pet projects" or incorporating them into SS efforts

- Faculty peer-to-peer mentorship (for transformation cohorts)
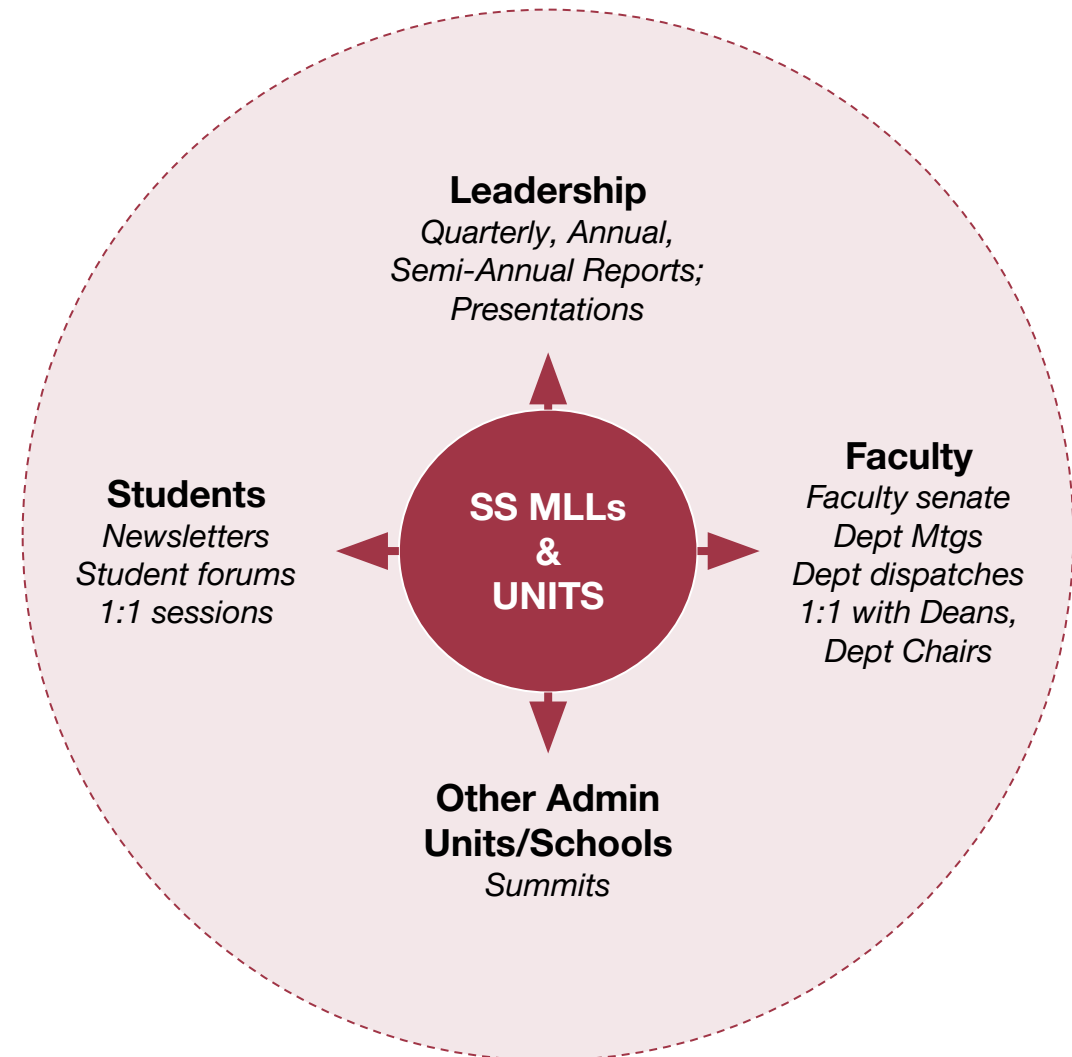
INSIGHT #7

Narrative has been identified as a powerful tool for communicating the impact of institutional ECSS efforts, yet this remains an underutilized mechanism for creating buy-in.

MLLs socialize ECSS across the institution in key ways, but can struggle to convey impact or excitement when sharing updates and data share outs

"More and "shorter" narratives shared with all staff; regular student profiles shared, not just one time a year at commencement, but throughout the year would be helpful. How to equip the institution - again - resources! Each of us have a story to share but there is not a place to catalog those stories in any valid way."

"If there was a better understanding among senior leaders of what we actually do--and the metrics associated with that—it would be easier to get them to endorse and amplify the narrative. However, they are operating at a high level with an almost exclusive connection to retention, graduation, economic mobility, research dollars, etc., so I don't really foresee getting them to take anything other than a 30,000 foot view to the impact of the work. Now, if we had someone whose responsibility it was to help amplify these narratives, that would be great, but we're a large institution and that would take a fair number of people."

Leadership
Quarterly, Annual, Semi-Annual Reports; Presentations

Students
Newsletters
Student forums
1:1 sessions

SS MLLs & UNITS

Faculty
Faculty senate
Dept Mtgs
Dept dispatches
1:1 with Deans, Dept Chairs

Other Admin Units/Schools
Summits

Leveraging Narrative for ECSS Efforts

Why Narrative Matters

Explanatory Power
Qualitative data can provide valuable insights into the "why" behind metrics and equity gaps

Stories Stick
Narrative is more impactful, compelling and memorable to stakeholders and can humanize equity challenges in a way that quantitative data can't

Student Experience
The story of institutions is the story of students and the impact of ECSS efforts are most meaningful through the lens of their experiences– yet their voices are too often minimized or missing

KEY CHALLENGES TO LEVERAGING NARRATIVE IN ECSS EFFORTS

Quantitative Bias

- Institutions are increasingly numbers driven and qualitative data can be dismissed as anecdotal

Finding the Right Balance

- SS MLLs struggle with combining individual stories with broader measures to avoid overemphasizing single cases

No systematic storytelling infrastructure with needed expertise & tools

- Stories and qualitative data are often not integrated with quantitative data in compelling, systematic and intentional ways
- No clear way for developing comprehensive and consistent ECSS narratives and disseminating them across the institution

Collecting Qualitative Data

- **Representativeness**: Concerns about the representativeness of participants in qualitative data collection.

- **Participation**: Challenges in collecting qualitative data, such as low response rates for surveys and difficulties in conducting focus groups.

- **Resources & Bandwidth:** Resource limitations and bandwidth constraints affecting the ability to collect, analyze, and integrate qualitative data effectively.

How Institutions Are Deploying and Routinizing Narrative
How, when and where to deploy it

Audience Targeting

Building narratives around powerful external imperatives and goals that resonate with external stakeholders and community audiences *(e.g. ECSU & social mobility; Fayetteville State & Adult, MIlitary, and Transfer Students)*

Rich Storytelling

Using multimedia, videos, etc to illustrate a key challenge or tell a story about a community or student groups; project successes or failures (*e.g. Sinclair, NAU*)

Institutionalizing Student Voice in ECSS Routines & Deliverables

Annual surveys, point of service surveys, focus groups, involving students in governance and decision making with student representatives; including qual as well as quant data in reports and presentations as a baseline *(e.g. U of Guam)*

Disseminating Stories

Highlighting student stories through media sources, social media, institutional websites, and other platforms.

Building Personas

Using personas as a way to peg equity challenges and interventions to student's experience and journeys in a way that humanizes and personalizes these challenges *(e.g. Lehman College)*

"We've been very successful in creating the narrative of our student Maria. Maria is frequently mentioned in our discussions, as we strive to provide the necessary services to help her succeed. Our Advocacy and Resource Center was established to support our Maria's and remove non-academic barriers."

Opportunities

4) How might BMGF help institutions develop a clear, holistic definition of ECSS and a plan for operationalizing it?

5) How might BMGF help institutions deepen and broaden data capacity (literacy, analysis & exploration) for ECSS efforts?

- Facilitating data literacy, discovery and exploration (training, tools, sandboxes)?

- Helping the sector institutionalize data literacy and analytics as a core competency for staff and faculty to develop?

- …?

Opportunities

6) How might BMGF help institutionalize faculty involvement and commitment to ECSS?

- **Understanding faculty motivations and resistance?**
  - Focus on faculty as individual professionals/needs/aspirations/barriers
  - Focus on departments/units/local institutional context
  - Focus on what professionalism means in academia writ large
- **Training/tools/frameworks for curricular reform?**
  - Faculty aren't empowered or equipped to be higher education professionals (rather than disciplinary experts) and there is typically little pedagogical and curricular support available.
- …?

7) How might BMGF help institutions facilitate narrative development for ECSS?

- Collecting + synthesizing qualitative data?
- Multimedia/Rich Story-making?
- Integrating qual and quant?
- Amplifying and incorporating student voice?
- Personas and other tools?
- …?

SS Structures & Organization

INSIGHT #8

SS units formally live within an assistant or associate VP/VC portfolio and seem to lack intentional student-centered design— but share some core structural components.

SS structures seems to grow organically according to capacity and need, not intentionally designed to support students

General Organization

- Operationally (financial aid, registrar, advising, etc.)

- Support-based (tutoring, writing centers, one stop centers, etc.)

- Aligned with senior leader responsibilities (faculty, data analytics, advising, online learning)

- Miscellaneous functions (e.g. grants, coaching, library, etc.)

Faculty Not Included

Only 2 institutions listed faculty under the purview of SS

Data

Half of SS units had data support embedded: In some institutions, SS MLLs had these data skills themselves and tried to upskill their teams *(e.g. ECSU)*; other institutions formalized this capacity as part of the SS unit *(e.g. FIU, PSU)*

Innovation

This seems to be an emerging capacity at some institutions *(PSU, NSC and WSSU in our sample)*

INSIGHT #9

Centralized SS units seem to produce the most streamlined, organized and effective ECSS efforts – and SS unit structure can impact ECSS challenges.

SS Structure: One Centralized Unit

"It ensures that there is a very narrow perspective on whose work truly impacts student success outcomes when …, there are a number of other offices that actually contribute to student success that meet the needs of students besides admission, tutoring, other coursework supports."

Key Strengths

- Tighter coordination across efforts

- Clearer processes for evaluation and monitoring

- Clearer sets of metrics/goals to aim towards

- Clearly folded into standard operating procedures

- Potentially easier to identify and prioritize student challenges/needs and design interventions intentionally

Key Challenges

- A tightly organized structure may be too aligned with leadership's priorities and may miss solutions or problem identification coming from outside of the SS infrastructure. It may limit what kinds of interventions are invested in, regardless of student impact because of political considerations and structural inequities

- A narrow perspective

Institutions with this Structure

Amarillo College, College of Staten Island, CUNY, Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville, FIU, Grand Valley State, Lehman, Nevada State College, PSU*, U Guam*, U Alabama, UT Rio Grande Valley

Some institutions have a hybrid structure for SS; see slide 61.

SS Structures: Loose Collection of Departments + Siloed Staff

A loose collection of departments with a general mandate

Key Strengths

- Opportunities for innovation/experimentation

- Culture of collaboration

- Less political tension

Key Challenges

- Avoiding duplication of effort

- Role allocation

- Accountability

Institutions with this Structure
Austin CC*, Cal State Stanislaus, Northern Arizona U*, U Guam*, Winston-Salem State*

Siloed staff embedded in individual departments and/or schools

Key Strengths

- Greater degree of independence

- More space for individual-driven efforts tailored to the needs, priorities of specific units/depts

Key Challenges

- Avoiding duplication of effort

- No institutionalized monitoring function

- Fragmentation of efforts

- Local view of SS that may not connect to broader institutional needs/challenges

Institutions with this Structure
Austin CC*, Boise State U*, Norco CC, PSU*, Sinclair CC*

Some institutions have a hybrid structure for SS; see slide 61.

SS Structures: No Formal Structure + Hybrid Structures

"There are multiple efforts across campus and no single office or person responsible for monitoring the impact of the data."

"We have a 'centralized' SS office that focuses on strategy & project management, and SS staff in schools & departments across campus."

Key Strengths

- Greater degree of independence
- Opportunities for innovation & experimentation
- More space for individual-driven efforts

Key Challenges

- Avoiding duplication of effort
- Lack of accountability
- No institutionalized monitoring function: *"Once we implement, we don't take time to analyze the results of the implementation."*
- Fragmentation of efforts

Not Mutually Exclusive

- Not mutually exclusive: depends; where you sit in the institution may determine the SS structure (e.g. different schools or colleges within a university)
- Some particularly SS-centered and mature institutions have a combination of all (e.g. PSU)

Institutions with this Structure

Boise State*, California State San Marcos, Fort Valley U, Northern Arizona U*, Sinclair CC*, Southern Connecticut State, Western Kentucky U, Winston-Salem State*

Institutions with Hybrid Structures

Austin CC, Boise State, PSU, Northern Arizona U, Sinclair CC, U Guam, Winston-Salem State

Hybrid structures

Comparing Implications of Structure Regarding ECSS Efforts

MLLs with centralized SS units rated their ECSS efforts as more mature & streamlined than their peers

Strongly agreed that their institutional leadership's definition of equity was *not* too narrow	More likely to have undergone some kind of institution-wide inventory process for ECSS efforts	Most likely to say their institution's ECSS efforts were coordinated

Biggest Pain Points for ECSS Efforts

	Initiating	Rationalizing & Coordinating	Sustaining
Centralized	Inertia	Too much time and attention spent putting out fires vs. strategic problem solving	Time-limited funding; network of people to lead and to do the work
No formal structure	Limited network of people to lead and do the work	Loss of institutional knowledge from dead or abandoned initiatives	Time-limited funding, lack of sustainability plans, orphaned efforts & burnout
Loose collection	Inertia	Difficulty getting visibility into what is happening across the institution; no formalized or centralized process for initiating programs	Burnout, network of people to lead and to the work, orphaned efforts, lack of sustainability plans
Embedded/Siloed	Limited network of people to lead and do the work	Bandwidth	Time-limited funding; burnout

Opportunities

8) How might BMGF help institutions support innovations in or intentional redesign of SS unit structures?

9) How might BMGF help institutions overcome ECSS challenges unique to their SS structure?

ECSS Initiatives

INSIGHT #10

Institutions that deployed deliberately structured "project teams" in ECSS initiatives had a more robust and effective approach to ECSS work.

Using a structured project team approach for initiatives seemed to facilitate ECSS efforts

Common Components of Project Team Approach
Project charters, sourcing across the institution for roles, incentives (financial or service), RACI charts to indicate clearly defined roles and responsibilities, time-limited frame (1-2 years), allocated project management & data analysis support, regular touchpoints with team members and with SS leadership/advisory team, goals and metrics plan, sustainability planning*

½ of our sample's participants had this approach at their institutions; these tended to be community colleges and 4-year colleges vs. doctorate-granting institutions.

Institutions with a Project Team Approach*
Amarillo, ACC, College of Staten Island, ECSU, FIU, Fort Valley State, Grand Valley, Lehman, Nevada State, Norco, Northern Arizona U, PSU, Sinclair, Guam

Institutions without a Project Team Approach*
Amarillo, Boise State, Cal State Stanislaus, Cal State San Marcos, Fayetteville, Grand Valley, Nevada State, Northern Arizona U, Sinclair, Southern Connecticut State, Guam, U Southern Alabama, UTRGV, Winston-Salem

Example: Portland State University
PSU has institutionalized a project management approach to streamline efforts and make it easier to juggle the work to great effect and has built templates, forms and guides for initiative coordination and facilitation.
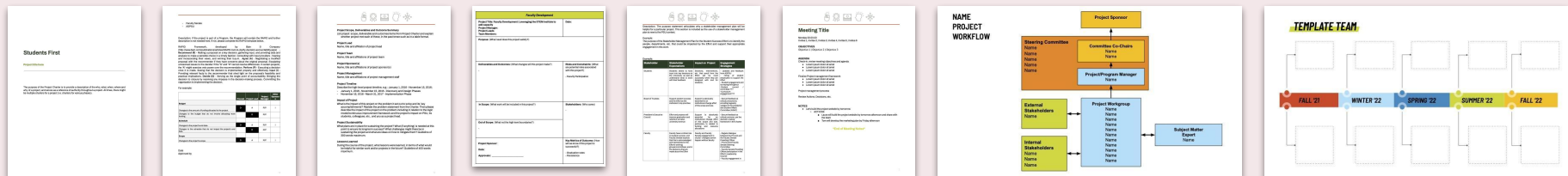
Some institutions have a hybrid, inconsistent approach in different units; the overlap between categories reflects this.

Institutions with project teams had a more streamlined and deliberate approach to ECSS challenges overall

Institutions with project teams were more likely to have coordinated, inventoried ECSS efforts that reflected leadership's institution-wide goals; and were much more likely to have clear ECSS-specific metrics and goals to target.

At these institutions, there was also a more holistic approach to ECSS in general– and MLLs felt more empowered to say no to leadership regarding initiative overload, approach and "programmitis."

	Institution has ECSS-specific metrics & goals?	Institution takes a holistic approach to ECSS?	ECSS initiatives have been inventoried?	ECSS efforts are coordinated?	Difficult to say no to leadership?	Local ECSS efforts reflect Institutional goals?
Project Teams	2:1*	2:1*	3:2*	3:1*	17%	70%
No project Teams	1:2*	1:2*	1:5*	1:2*	50%	32%

"In Student Affairs at Austin CC, once a "strike team" has completed their one year stint; that new program, service, or center should be successfully launched with some resources. If deemed necessary, they then launch into becoming an Emerging Program. They will be monitored for 3-5 years by the Emerging Leaders Advisory Board who will help them set their KPIs and OKRs, review monthly success reports, and help identify and report up any blockers this "start-up" or emerging program is encountering. While this is not how ALL programs are being treated, we needed to start somewhere."

*Ratio of strongly agree/agree vs. disagree/strongly disagree on 5-point Likert scale

Data, Tech & Tools: Project teams reflect a more data-driven and innovative culture around ECSS

Institutions without project teams presented a greater burden on ECSS leaders, and were less likely to disaggregate data or have access to real-time data for ECSS goals. Though many struggled with clunky and unintegrated technological platforms and systems, this was a bigger challenge for MLLs at institutions without project teams.

Institutions without project teams were also much less likely to use student journey mapping in their ECSS work.

	Clunky & unintegrated tech platforms?	Limited network of people engaged in the work?	Student journey mapping?	Data disaggregation?	Access to real-time data for ECSS goals?
Project Teams	2:1*	40%	50%	83%	80%
No project Teams	3:1*	70%	25%	33%	40%

"We get daily data files from student support departments helping us measure engagements. Student behavioral data are collected and managed/utilized by our CARE team."

*Ratio of strongly agree/agree vs. disagree/strongly disagree on 5-point Likert scale

INSIGHTS #11 & 12

The biggest challenges to ECSS initiative work lie in 1) monitoring and evaluating impact and 2) solution exploration & development.

The Initiative Life Cycle
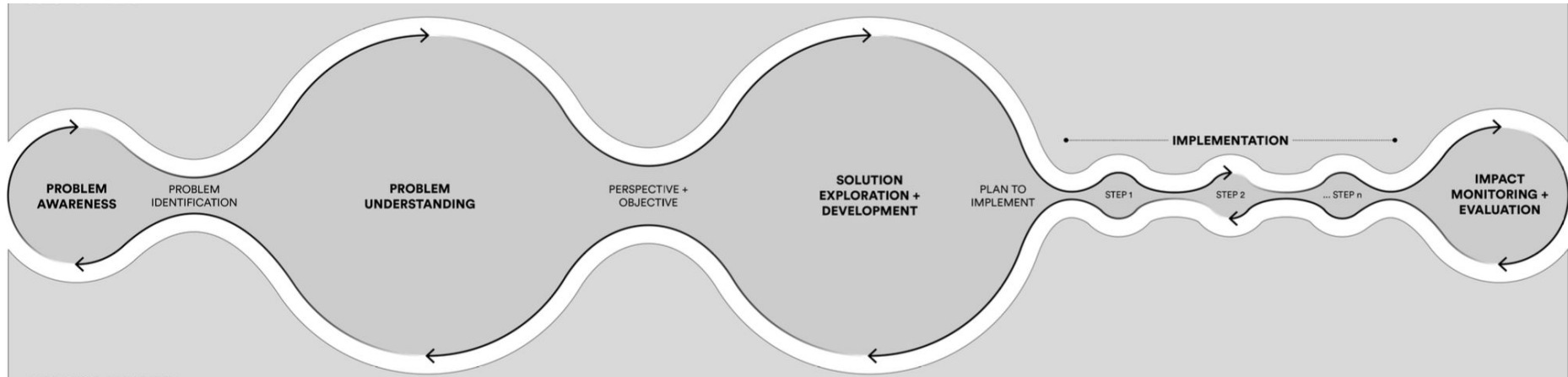
from Artefact Study 2022

This cycle reflects how things work at the institutions of

75%

of study participants.

90% with project teams;
50% without teams
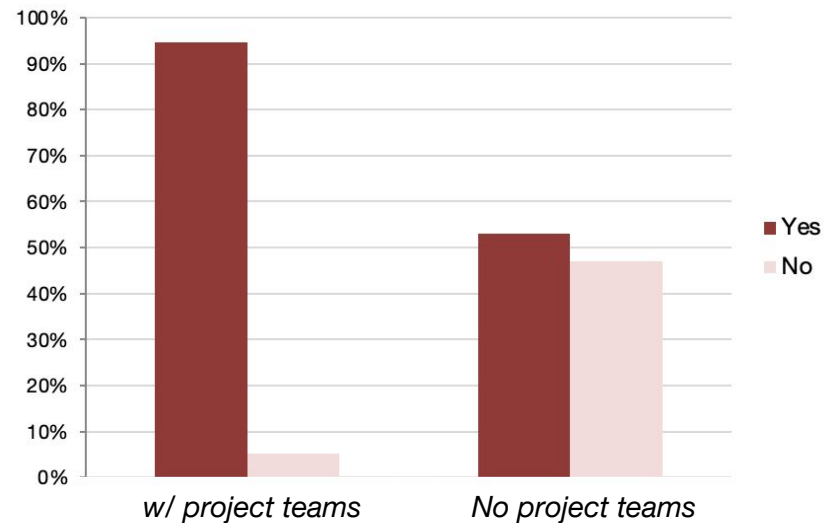
What's missing:

- Piloting before full-scale implementation
- Iteration
- Scaling initiatives
- Sustainability planning

The Initiative Life Cycle: Biggest Pain Points
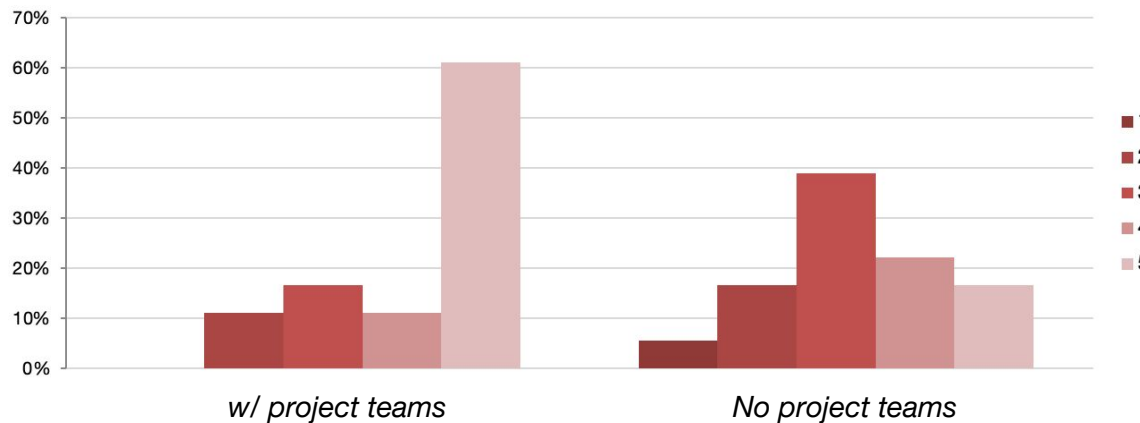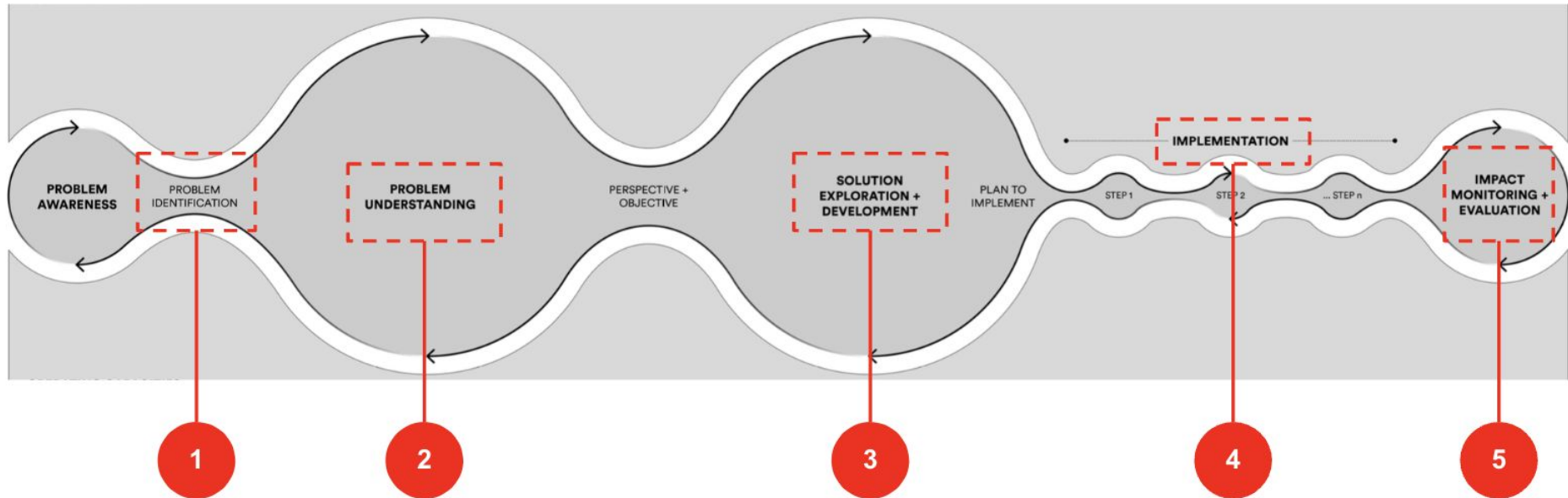
- Biggest pain points for Institutions with project teams: **Impact Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Biggest pain points for Institutions without project teams: **Solution Exploration and Development**

Impact Monitoring & Evaluation
Reflections from the field

54%
of survey respondents have difficulty determining what metrics to use and how to measure them

Measuring Impact

"Agreeing on the proper metrics and structuring the intervention in a manner in which it can be accurately assessed is exceptionally difficult. Absent RCT design, it is very hard to determine how much a given initiative has affected student outcomes."

"It feels as if, often, student success initiatives that are not clearly tied to academic success are hard to measure because of how qualitative they are."

"Given the sheer number of efforts that we have, it can be challenging to isolate the impact of specific efforts."

Boredom

*"We get bored easily with working solutions. We are great at creativity and rallying around a cause. But when we have made changes and starting "working a plan" we get tired and retreat to older habits."*

Impact → ROI

"ROI in higher ed is one of the hardest things to measure. We are very good at showing impact, but translating that into ROI I think needs to be more of a focus to convince external stakeholders & funders and internal stakeholders (e.g. CFO etc...) why these initiatives work to save money and why we need to invest more."

Data Integration

"We often struggle to show impact of various initiatives due to lack of consistent data collection practices, and to the use of disparate, disconnected systems that make it difficult to aggregate data. It often requires intensive manual processes to produce summary statistics on the effectiveness of various initiatives, and our ability to do so is limited by competing demands on staff time."

Technology Integration

"We all need to use one system. Currently, we have office 365 products; however, there's no direction on the single tool that everyone should use."

Capacity & Time

"Collecting "new" data to assess initiatives and impacts, especially in a rigorous manner, requires more staff/capacity. We may even hire to implement, but we rarely invest in the evaluative component."

Impact Monitoring & Evaluation

KEY CHALLENGES TO EVALUATING ECSS EFFORTS

Measuring Impact
Technology Integration
Capacity & Time
Data Integration

Measuring Impact	Technology Integration	Capacity & Time	Data Integration
Leadership increasingly wants evidence of how initiatives impact ROI, but it is difficult to calculate	Fragmented, often legacy and outdated systems	Overburdened staff; lack of capacity or budget for evaluation	Disparate data sources, types and repositories

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

Measuring Impact	Technology Integration	Capacity & Time	Data Integration
• Identification of measurable outcome goals in advance of the project • Using lead/lag indicators or KPIs/OKRs to monitor efforts in real-time • Exploring data through statistical analyses to see which additional available information has an impact • Engagement with external consultants for guidance on assessment • Creation of an assessment team	• Investing in new integrated systems and involving multiple departments across the institution in the scoping/development of a customized enterprise system	• Using software to automatically generate specific assessments for stakeholders • Building capacity by providing professional development around data literacy and analysis	• Implementation of an enterprise system to integrate disparate data systems • Working to get a dashboard that will hold all data

EPISTEME

Solution Exploration & Development

Reflections from the field

Effective & Customized Data Use

"We know that our students are not persisting to earn degrees and that there are equity gaps in those experiences, but our approaches to address those problems have been either based on national best practices (that may or may not be relevant to our students) or simply based on anecdotal information. We need to to ensure that we are focusing on the right things."

Navigating Politics & Egos

"We have too many chiefs and too many "know-it-alls."

"There are preconceived notions of what the problems and solutions are by most faculty and staff. These notions often align with satisfying their own self-image and a savior mentality. Data does not change their opinion and they continue down fruitless and unnecessary paths."

Limits on Solutioning Field

"We lack the ability to control many aspects of the institution that impact equity, such as the student experience within the classroom."

Lack of Student Input

"Nobody wants to listen to the students. Student voices are very important in the work."

Resources: Time & Money

"Because resources (especially finances) are tight, any solution is dependent on our ability to identify adequate funding and people to work on the initiative."

70% of survey respondents said initiative overload and a limited network of people driving "the work" were the biggest impediments to solution development for ECSS initiatives

Solution Development: Practicalities

KEY CHALLENGES TO INITIATING ECSS EFFORTS

Resistance to Change

Faculty and other institutional stakeholders are comfortable with the status quo and resist innovation that impacts how they do their work

Initiative Overload/Burnout

SS staff and "equity champions" who are usually involved in ECSS initiatives have no capacity for new ones

Resource Constraints

Human, material (tools, space, software), technical (e.g. data analytics capacity, IT, subject matter expertise), financial

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

- Forming committees with user input to get around those stuck in the past
- Bringing more people to the table early on to have conversations and share concerns
- Making regular reporting out part of our senate and strategic operations to normalize/institutionalize ECSS efforts
- Bringing in outsiders to help influence the culture

- Shifting to a volunteer model for certain initiatives
- Faculty burnout committees
- Scaling down initiatives
- Limiting new initiatives & combining old ones
- Cut less effective efforts and reassigned those involved
- Aligning external and internal initiatives around a core set of metrics and goals
- Leadership sponsors work to combat initiative overload

- Incorporating financial data warehouse for data-informed budgeting
- Recruitment of additional ECSS champions
- Formation of strike teams to address resource problems
- Ensuring adequate compensation as an incentive
- Inviting new perspectives

Opportunities

10) How might BMGF help institutions develop project team approach/infrastructure?

- …?

11) How might BMGF help institutions facilitate impact monitoring and evaluation for ECSS initiatives?

- Measuring impact & ROI?
- Technology integration?
- Data integration?
- …?

12) How might BMGF help institutions facilitate solution exploration and development for ECSS initiatives?

- Resistance to change/limited solution space?
- Incorporating student voice?
- Expanding capacity (human, data analysis expertise, project management support, etc.)?
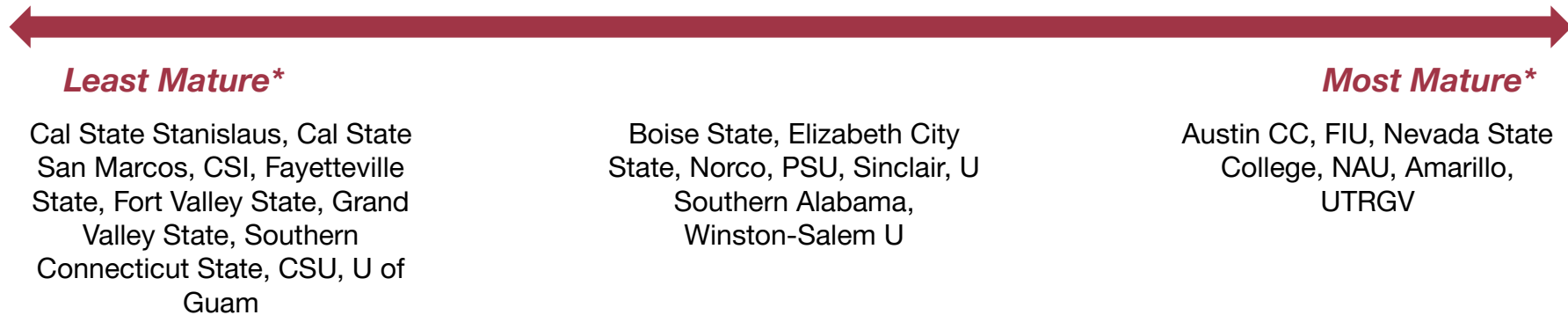- …?

Testing the I-I-I Framework
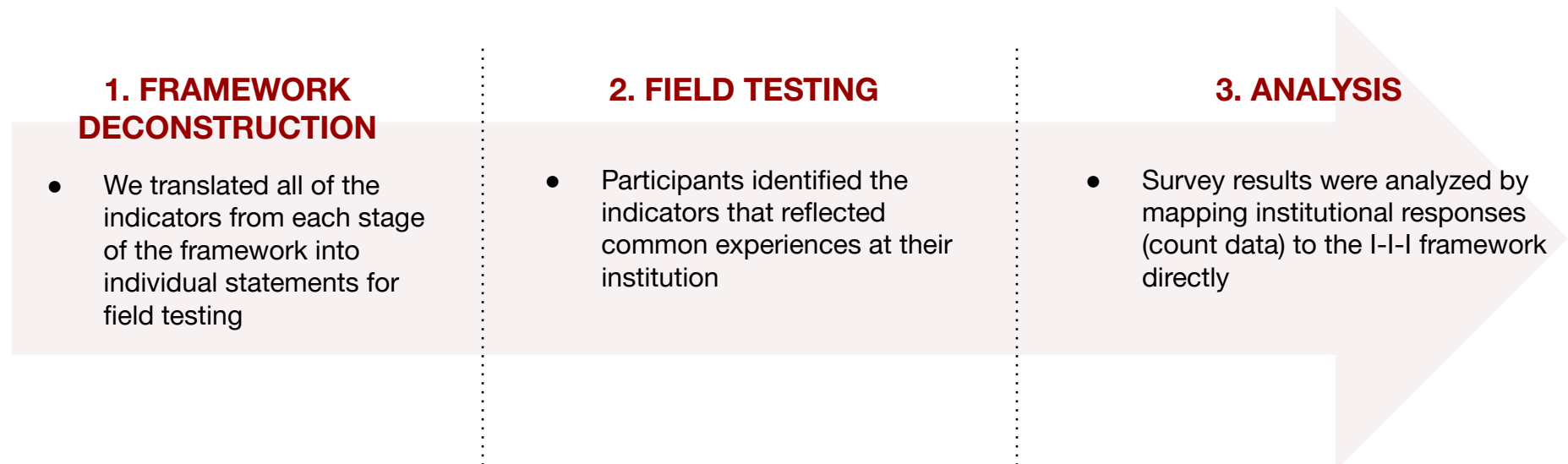
The I-I-I Framework

This framework was developed by BMGF as a tool for assessing institutional maturity in key transformation areas that drive continuous improvement in support of equitable student success.

	Initiate	Incubate		Iterate/Sustain
	How might we help institutions generate momentum and rationale for change?	*How might we help institutions systematize discrete student success efforts into a campus-wide transformation agenda that connects mission, vision, and strategy?*		*How might we help institutions develop people and routines that best sustain equitable transformation?*
Routines	Routines remain unit-based, and few are campus wide. Institutional wide routines tend to focus on general operation.	Start of new, cross-functional teams to look at shared data, metrics to transparently learn and plan for next steps	Smaller routines connect to larger routines (cross-functional, institution level). Routines, roles, and platforms are formalized.	Cross-functional teams gather to identify barriers to student success by examining data that show loss and momentum points. Teams gather at predictable and established times with a senior leaders for awareness and accountability. Mid-level leaders meet more frequently with more detailed information to identify, track, and resolve barriers. There are structures and processes for ensuring accountability vertically and horizontally for resolving success issues by race and income.
Structure	Remains largely unchanged but awareness for change has become more evident through diagnostic tools	Small scale change begins with a clear focus on addressing specific student success problems (e.g., first-to second-year retention, course sequence, advising)	Shared and centralized institutional resources are evident. These resources allow leaders and teams to align around definitions and integrate campus routines.	Formalized academic and staff structures: organizational, procedural, departmental, and functional personnel metrics/goals are refreshed and recast to orient approaches and time toward equitable student success. These structures are designed to scaffold and animate the business model of the institution.
Culture	Campus has transformation champions who are embedded in units across campus but a whole institution change narrative remains early	Leaders roll out a campus change narrative and speak to the role of individuals. Campus-wide equity work begins to take root.	Changes in attitudes, beliefs, values are aligned with equitable transformation. Culture change is evident beyond the core change agents.	Equitable student success is core to the cultural norms at the highest levels of leadership and the board and throughout academic and staff departments, typically manifesting in hiring practices, goal tracking and accountability, etc. Student experience problem-solving is a standard part of each department meeting and the cross-functional mechanisms that bring academic and operating functions together. These cultural norms are supported by engaging and involving students in defining problems and solutions.
Business Model	Remains unchanged but diagnostics tools are leveraged to identify the need for change	New campus-wide strategy for transformation leads to different budget choices that prioritize equity	Campus-wide budget process has operationalized equity principles to guide budget decisions	Financial, time, physical, and human resources are allocated to student success practices, facilities, and managerial routines in addition to or as a replacement of more traditional college and university operating models and budgetary decisions.

Mapping the Institutions against the Framework

Least Mature*

Cal State Stanislaus, Cal State San Marcos, CSI, Fayetteville State, Fort Valley State, Grand Valley State, Southern Connecticut State, CSU, U of Guam

Boise State, Elizabeth City State, Norco, PSU, Sinclair, U Southern Alabama, Winston-Salem U

Most Mature*

Austin CC, FIU, Nevada State College, NAU, Amarillo, UTRGV

How We Tested the Framework across our Institutional Sample

1. FRAMEWORK DECONSTRUCTION

- We translated all of the indicators from each stage of the framework into individual statements for field testing

2. FIELD TESTING

- Participants identified the indicators that reflected common experiences at their institution

3. ANALYSIS

- Survey results were analyzed by mapping institutional responses (count data) to the I-I-I framework directly

*Institutional maturity as determined by # of survey responses per framework stage by institution

Mapping the Institutions against the Framework: Heat Map

	Initiate *How might we help institutions generate momentum & rationale for change?*	Incubate *How might we help institutions systematize discrete student success efforts into a campus-wide transformation agenda that connects mission, vision, and strategy?*		Iterate/Sustain *How might we help institutions develop people and routines that best contribute to equitable transformation?*
Routines	Routines remain unit-based, and few are campus-wide. Institution-wide routines tend to focus on general operation.	Start of new, cross-functional teams to look at shared data and metrics to transparently learn and plan for next steps.	**1)** Smaller routines connect to larger routines (cross-functional, institution level). **2)** Routines, roles, and platforms are formalized.	**1)** Cross-functional teams gather regularly to identify barriers to student success by examining data that show loss and momentum points. **2)** Teams gather at predictable and established times with senior leaders for awareness and accountability. **3)** Mid-level leaders meet more frequently with more detailed information to identify, track, and resolve barriers. **4)** There are structures and processes for ensuring accountability vertically and horizontally for resolving success issues by race, ethnicity, and income.
Structure	Remains largely unchanged but awareness for change has become more evident through diagnostic tools and reflection.	Small scale change begins with a clear focus on addressing specific student success problems. *(e.g., 1st to 2nd year retention, course seq, advising).*	**1)** Shared and centralized institutional resources are evident. **2)** These resources allow leaders and teams to align around definitions and integrate campus routines.	Formalized academic and staff structures: organizational, procedural, departmental, and functional personnel metrics/goals are refreshed and recast to orient approaches and time toward equitable student success. These structures are designed to scaffold and animate the business model of the institution.
Culture	**1)** Campus has transformation champions who are embedded in units across campus **2)** but a whole institution change narrative remains early.	**1)** Leaders roll out a campus change narrative and speak to the role of individuals. **2)** Campus-wide equity work begins to take root.	Changes in attitudes, beliefs, and values are aligned with equitable transformation. Culture change is evident beyond the core change agents.	**1)** Equitable student success is core to the cultural norms at the highest levels of leadership (including the board of trustees) and **2)** throughout academic and staff departments, typically manifesting in hiring practices, goal tracking, and accountability, etc. **3)** Student experience problem-solving is a standard part of each department meeting and the cross-functional mechanisms that bring academic and operating functions together. **4)** These cultural norms are supported by engaging and involving students in defining problems and solutions.
Business Model	Remains unchanged but diagnostics tools are leveraged to identify the need for change.	New campus-wide strategy for transformation leads to different budget choices that prioritize equity.	Campus-wide budget process has operationalized equity principles to guide budget decisions.	Financial, time, physical, and human resources are allocated to student success practices, facilities, and managerial routines in addition to or to replace more traditional college and university operating models and budgetary decisions.

Fewest Responses ▬▬▬▬▬▬ *Most Responses*

Mapping the Institutions against the Framework
Individual participant responses

	Initiate *How might we help institutions generate momentum & rationale for change?*	**Incubate** *How might we help institutions systematize discrete student success efforts into a campus-wide transformation agenda that connects mission, vision, and strategy?*		**Iterate/Sustain** *How might we help institutions develop people and routines that best contribute to equitable transformation?*
Routines	*Austin CC x2, Boise State, Cal State San Marcos, Grand Valley, NSC, PSU x2, U Guam*	*Amarillo, Austin CC, Boise State, Cal State Stanislaus, Fayetteville State, FIU x2, NSC, NAU x2, PSU x2, Sinclair x2, USA, UTRGV x2, WSSU*	*1) Amarillo x2, Austin CC, Boise State, CSI CUNY, NSC, NAU, Norco, UTRGV* *2) Amarillo, Austin CC, FIU, NAU, USA, UTRGV x2*	*1) Amarillo, Austin CC, Cal State Stanislaus, FIU x2, NSC, NAU, SCSU, USA, UTRGV* *2) Amarillo, Austin CC, ECSU x2, FIU, NSC, NAU, Sinclair, U Guam, UTRGV, WSSU* *3) Amarillo, Austin CC, Cal State Stanislaus, CSI CUNY, ECSU x2, FIU, Grand Valley, NSC, NAU, Norco, PSU, USA, UTRGV, WSSU* *4) ECSU, NAU, Norco, UTRGV*
Structure	*Cal State San Marcos, CSI Cuny, Grand Valley, PSU, U Guam, USA, WSSU*	*Austin CC x3, Boise State x2, Cal State Stanislaus, ECSU x2, Fayetteville State, NSC, NAU, PSU x2, Sinclair, SCSU, U Guam, USA*	*1) Amarillo x2, Austin CC, ECSU x2, FIU x2, NAU x2, Norco, Sinclair, UTRGV, WSSU* *2) Amarillo x2, Austin CC x2, Boise State, FIU x2, NSC, NAU, Norco, PSU, Sinclair x2, USA, UTRGV*	*Amarillo, Austin CC, FIU x2, Grand Valley, NAU, Sinclair, USA, UTRGV, WSSU x2*
Culture	*1) Austin CC x2, Boise State, Cal State San Marcos, Cal State Stanislaus, CSI CUNY, ECSU x2, Grand Valley, NSC, NAU, PSU, SCSU, USA, UTRGV* *2) Amarillo x2, Austin CC, Boise State, FIU, NSC, NAU, Sinclair, U Guam*	*1) Amarillo x2, Austin CC, Cal State Stanislaus, ECSU, FIU, Grand Valley, NSC x2, NAU x2, Norco, UTRGV, PSU, Sinclair x2* *2) Amarillo x2, Austin CC x2, CSI CUNY, ECSU, NSC, NAU, Norco, SCSU, Sinclair, U Guam, UTRGV, WSSU*	*Amarillo, Austin CC x3, FIU x2, NSC, NAU, Norco, Sinclair, UTRGV, WSSU*	*1) Amarillo x2, Austin CC x3, Boise State, Cal State Stanislaus, ECSU, FIU, NSC, NAU, U Guam, WSSU* *2) Amarillo, Austin CC, FIU, NSC, Norco, SCSU* *3) Amarillo, Austin CC, ECSU, NSC, Sinclair* *4) Amarillo x2, Austin CC x2, Boise State, ECSU, NSC, NAU, PSU x2, SCSU, USA, UTRGV x2, WSSU*
Business Model	*Boise State x2, Cal State Stanislaus, CSI CUNY, NSC, PSU, SCSU, USA*	*Amarillo, Austin CC, ECSU, NSC, NAU, Norco, PSU, Sinclair, U Guam, UTRGV, WSSU*	*Amarillo, Austin CC, UTRGV*	*Amarillo, Austin CC, FIU x2, NSC, NAU, Norco, PSU, Sinclair x2, UTRGV, WSSU*

84

Common Challenges across Institutions

- Business model is the least understood/integrated
- Formalization of x-functional & institution-level SS processes, platforms and roles
- Structures and processes to ensure accountability vertically and horizontally for resolving SS challenges by race, ethnicity, and/or income– or other priority groups
- The [lack of] influence that equity objectives have on hiring practices, goal tracking and accountability, etc. throughout academic and staff departments.
- Equity-minded student experience problem-solving as a standard part of department meetings and x-functional mechanisms that bring academic and operating functions together.

Reflections from the Field

Routines

Challenge of Sustainability
"MLLs work on cross-divisional efforts, but roles and infrastructure for the work are not yet institutionalized. If current MLLs left, the whole thing would have to start over from scratch."

Response as Routine
"If executive leadership choose to prioritize - they would join the Student Success Team for a meeting and state the charge."

Business Model

"[Equity] is part of our strategic plan, but no real change has occurred. Just a great deal of talk."

Structure

Inconsistent Scaling
"We are large and some things are more established than others, so for certain things we are better structured and further along and for others we still haven't scaled."

Roles and Responsibilities
*"This is complicated and not strategically coordinated at the executive level. **The awareness is present, but the next step to structural changes is not.** Specific units have grant funded work or small boutique programs to increase equitable outcomes. These efforts are done at the MLL level, not at the executive level."*

Culture

Scaling Equity
"There are many people (beyond the equity champions) who bought into the work, but it hasn't reached all the corners of the university yet."

Equity Champions
"We are very weak at this at the institutional level. There are "pockets of greatness" but it's largely the result of particular efforts of specific people across various units. It is coordinated a bit by the Student Success Team - however the team's priorities don't necessarily reflect strategic efforts of executive leadership."