

SPOTLIGHTS

College Experiences in the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative

An Evaluation Activity

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Participate | Collaborate | Innovate

This vignette is the third in a series of college spotlights relating the experiences and benefits gained from participation in the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI).

The first two editions of Spotlights covered college participation in the Partnership Resource Team (PRT) technical assistance component of the initiative. This edition covers the goal-setting activities of a college using the IEPI framework of indicators component.

This latest vignette focuses on College of the Canyons' efforts to embed the IEPI framework of indicators into its existing planning processes and connect the indicators and goal setting processes to meaningful planning structures by building a human network of faculty, staff, administrators, and students to review evidence and set measurable progress on institutional goals.

The vignette is based on structured interviews with staff and leaders at College of the Canyons as well as a review of college planning documents and web resources.



Connecting Evidence, Building Human Networks:

Effective Use of the IEPI Framework of Indicators for Goal Setting

The task of moving from evidence to action for colleges and districts is far more challenging in practice than in theory.

Real-world settings bring together diverse constituent groups to dialogue on a wide range of issues, to set institutional priorities, and to build consensus on how best to take action to reach the larger, institutional goals.

This difficult work has been made all the more challenging in

the current era of accountability for institutions. Good intentions and hard work, once all that was needed to pass accreditation muster, are no longer enough.

Colleges must now show credible evidence of how they are making a difference in the lives of their students while also maximizing their use of resources.

Weaving federal, state, and local expectations together into one cohesive and integrated system has been particularly daunting for colleges, resulting over the last decade in an alarming number of accreditation recommendations and, in some instances, sanctions.

THE CALIFORNIA RESPONSE

In part to aid institutions in improving evidence-based decision making, the State of California in 2014 established the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative, a collaborative effort to advance the success of California's community colleges, thus reducing the number of accreditation sanctions and audit issues.

One component of the IEPI is the **framework of indicators**, a system of college- and district-level measures focused on four

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Dean of Institutional
Research, Planning, and
Institutional Effectiveness
at COC.*

key effectiveness areas: student performance and outcomes, accreditation status, fiscal viability, and programmatic compliance with state and federal guidelines.

The goal of the framework is to provide a consistent set of metrics across the California Community Colleges. Drawing heavily on existing indicators used in practice and other publicly available data, the framework identifies both short-term milestones as well as longer, more far-reaching measures of institutional quality.

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Importantly, colleges and districts are encouraged to experiment and innovate to reach the identified targets; as a result, no sanctions are imposed

by the state on institutions that do not meet their targets. By creating a safe zone for colleges to take risks, the framework frees institutions from the specter of penalty should best intentions prove unsuccessful.

While the travail of producing effectiveness is minimized under the framework, colleges still struggle with how to put the numbers to use when setting goals.

GOAL SETTING

"Two key things must happen for goal setting under the IEPI to be effective and useful," said College of the Canyons (COC) Deputy Chancellor Dr. Barry Gribbons.

"First, you must— to the maximum extent possible— embed the indicators into what the college is already doing as part of its existing planning processes. It can't be just another thing that colleges look at. That would be just added work.

"Second, you must get the participation and voice of all of the constituent groups

(IE)²: INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

College representatives are quick to point out that the effectiveness structure at COC that looks at data and garners constituent input has:

- **IMPROVED** communication, collaboration & integrated planning
- **IMPROVED** coordination of research, evaluation and development of plans submitted to the CCCCCO
- **CREATED** a common inventory of all activities supporting COC's student outcomes and institutional goals, and
- **FACILITATED** the review of progress on indicators relative to goals, the establishment of new goals, and reflection on the strategies used to achieve the goals.

“We have seen some great discussions in the meetings about the data. What impresses me most is the focus on improvement.”

*-Dr. Barry Gribbons
Assistant Superintendent and
Vice President at the
College of the Canyons (COC)*



Colleges must now show credible evidence that they are making a difference in the lives of students, how they are making a difference, and whether they are getting the most out of their resources.

(IE)²

(faculty, administrators, staff, and even students) throughout the process. Getting people to collaboratively look at the data and set goals together is essential,” Gribbons explained.

In this way, COC is mirroring the movement seen in organizational thinking today that pivots from hierarchy to human networking as the way to make important college decisions.

Integrating the use of data at the college level with the data at the unit or departmental level is another critical component for indicator success. COC, for example, uses information drawn directly from program review to measure progress on the objectives in the college strategic plan. Department objectives are thus tied to college goals.

“At COC, we have made the alignment of our program review processes and strategic planning with our performance indicators an institutional priority,” noted Dr. Daylene Meuschke, Dean of Institutional Research, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness. “It is a very inclusive process at COC; we involve people early and often,” observed Meuschke.

COC combines the examination of evidence for decision making and the networking of people in the name of its lead effectiveness committee. “We call our college committee ‘(IE)²’ to capture both institutional effectiveness and inclusive excellence,” Meuschke noted.

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As the committee’s work has expanded, (IE)² membership has grown in number from about 10 people engaged with the dialogue around data and target setting to approximately 35 people. The committee has six to seven meetings per year as well as a retreat each June.

“At the center of the committee’s work is the identification of unmet needs and how to meet those needs,” noted Meuschke. “When those needs are resource-based, the requests are integrated and reviewed by the COC President’s Advisory Council-Budget (PAC-B).”

Initial and augmented budget requests to meet student and college needs are input into COC’s web-based forms and ranked based on alignment with the goals. The decisions of the groups are transparent.

FOLDING IN THE FRAMEWORK

The notion of a network of professionals comes together as the College Planning Team, where experts, such as the Committee

for the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL), share findings.

For use of the framework indicators, the College Planning Team has historically included a performance indicators subcommittee, which collected the various sources of metrics, such as institution-set standards and key performance indicators (KPIs), and placed them into one location, producing a dashboard that displays short- and long-term numbers.

This work is now included in the (IE)² Committee to better integrate institution-set standards, other performance metrics, and indicators for initiatives such as Student Equity and Basic Skills with planning at the institution level and with specific initiatives.

Goals specific to the IEPI indicators are developed within this framework. Many of the goals are straightforward, such as having reaffirmed accreditation and no significant audit findings. However, other indicators sparked great discussion. For example, faculty, staff, and administrators were passionate about setting significant increases in degree and certificate completion numbers given the changes related to placement, acceleration in English and math curricula, and online student services, such as education planning and degree auditing.

Meuschke noted, “We take a holistic view of the numbers to get at the big picture. Multiple data points when seen together give us a better view than looking at just one set.” Meuschke continued, “However,



we also drill down into the data when appropriate for a closer look, like with our Student Equity Heat Map, which disaggregates the data into important sub-populations. It depends on how we will use the data.”

Data on the measures are presented visually to allow more team members to engage with the information.

Meuschke continued, “The (IE)² Committee is now developing work plans focused on developing strategies, programs, and services that will help us meet our IEPI indicator targets and ACCJC institution-set standards. The committee’s work is also focused

on the Canyons Completes initiative, which will advance completion of degrees, certificates, and skill-building courses for students through new and improved instruction, programs, processes, and services.”

“We have seen some great discussions in the meetings about the data. What impresses me most is the focus on improvement,” added Gribbons. “The enthusiasm of faculty and staff to innovate, implementing new ways to better serve students and improve their successful attainment of the goals, is inspiring.” ■

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