Amplifying All Voices:
Evaluating Campus Organizations that serve Underrepresented Minority Students

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Presentation Overview

• Background & Evaluation questions
• Methodology
• Findings
• Implications for future evaluation & assessment in higher education
• Questions & effective practices discussion
University of Pittsburgh

Total Undergraduate Enrollment: 18,615

Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences: 10,822

White: 75.1%
Asian: 9.3%
African-American: 5.5%

Hispanic/Latino: 2.8%
Two or More Races: 3.0%
Race Unknown: 1.2%
Project Background

• Background
  o Low retention for underrepresented minority students
    • Race/ethnicity, 1st generation, low-income
  o Several campus programs address this program
  o Administrators wanted to know the effectiveness of these programs to inform an enrollment management committee
Evaluation Questions

1. What are the needs of underrepresented students at Pitt?
2. How are existing services meeting those needs?
3. Why do students affiliate with various groups?
Data collection strategies

- EXCEL – Pitt EXCEL
- FOCUS – Facilitating Opportunity and Climate for Underrepresented Students
- PIP – Partners in Progress
- RISE – Reaching Inside Your Soul for Excellence
- SSS – Student Support Services
Data collection strategies

- Survey
- Focus groups
Survey Administration Strategies

- February 4, 2014 – February 20, 2014
- 1387 students e-mailed
- 29.9% response rate (n=415)
- 20 $10 Cash Cards as incentives
- Two Kiosk Survey Stations (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RISE</th>
<th>EXCEL</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>PIP</th>
<th>SSS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unique Members</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RISE EXCEL FOCUS PIP SSS TOTAL
47 45 60 95 26 184
Focus Group Administration Strategies

• Phase I
  o Non-members of target organizations (n=18)

• Phase II
  o Members of target organizations (n=22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RISE</th>
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<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>PIP</th>
<th>SSS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
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</table>

• Phase III
  o Student leaders/mentors of groups (n=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RISE</th>
<th>EXCEL</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>PIP</th>
<th>SSS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
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</table>
Data Collection Challenges

• Clients not current on effective strategies for population/sample creation
• Fear that evaluation would decrease funding

• Students
  o Temporal – closing in on finals
  o Academics and Co-curricular activities
Survey respondent demographics

Looking at all survey respondents:

- 71.7% were female
- 46.4% were from Pennsylvania
- 56.3% of PA respondents from Allegheny or Philadelphia Counties
- 66.4% associated with CAS
- 42.1% were seniors and 27.9% were first years
- 16.1% of respondents identified as 1st generation college students (both parents did not attend college)
- 84.3% receive financial aid
- 21.4% financial aid/scholarships cover between 25% and 50% of tuition
- 56.3% live on campus
- 63.6% have a GPA greater than or equal to 3.00
What are the needs of underrepresented students at Pitt?

When asked to rate level of interest in 12 activities, opportunities, and experiences offered by target organizations:

- **All respondents were most interested in:**
  - Improving academic performance
  - Developing better relationships with faculty and professional staff
  - Becoming prepared for grad school and
  - Increasing leadership skills

- **All respondents not as interested in:**
  - Serving as a peer mentor
  - Receiving peer mentoring

- **Members of target organizations were significantly more interested than non-members of target organizations for each item (p<.05)**
What are the needs of underrepresented students at Pitt?

Focus group participants cited the following types of support as helpful to graduating from Pitt:

• Social needs
• Academic needs
• Financial competency
• Postgraduate planning
How are existing services meeting those needs?

Survey respondents’ satisfaction with target organizations:

- **Target organization members are most satisfied with**
  - Feeling a sense of community
  - Adjusting to college culture
  - Receiving academic support
  - Interacting with faculty

- **Target organization members are less satisfied with**:  
  - Getting involved in Pittsburgh Community
  - Meeting new friends
How are existing services meeting those needs?

Target organization member survey respondents’ perception of participation:

• Members are most likely to agree that as a result of participation they will:
  o *Earn a degree*
  o *Feel a sense of community*
  o *Be better adjusted to college culture*

• Members are less likely to agree that as a result of participation they will:
  o *Perform better on written assignments*
  o *Improved their GPA*
  o *Develop stronger relationships with peers*
How are existing services meeting those needs?

Survey Respondents’ familiarity with Pitt services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Non-Member</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational fitness services</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support services</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
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</table>

1.0 - 5.0 (Very unfamiliar – Very Familiar)
CAS EMC: How are existing services meeting those needs?

Survey Respondents’ utilization of Pitt services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-members</th>
<th></th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitt Buses/Shuttles</td>
<td>3.84*</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Labs</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Dining Venue</td>
<td>3.89*</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisor</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panther Central</td>
<td>3.43*</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>359</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Health Service</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Center</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.0 - 5.0 (Never – Very Often)

* Statistically significant at p<.05
How are existing services meeting those needs?

Target organization members receive academic support significantly more frequently* than non-members of target organizations from the following resources:

• Friends
• TAs
• Professors
• Staff
• Academic advisors
• Pitt-sponsored academic resources

*Statistically significant at p<.05
How are existing services meeting those needs?

Focus group participants perceived benefits as a result of their involvement in target organizations with respect to:

• Social needs
• Academic needs
• Financial competency
• Leadership development
• Relationships with faculty
• Postgraduate planning
Why do students affiliate with various groups?

• Peer interaction
Why do students affiliate with various groups?

Member of Target Organization: Factors Preventing Them from Attending Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXCEL</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>PIP</th>
<th>RISE</th>
<th>SSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td>39 (92.9%)</td>
<td>45 (81.8%)</td>
<td>87 (94.6%)</td>
<td>42 (89.4%)</td>
<td>19 (86.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td>14 (33.3%)</td>
<td>24 (43.6%)</td>
<td>32 (34.8%)</td>
<td>19 (40.4%)</td>
<td>9 (40.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td>11 (26.2%)</td>
<td>20 (36.4%)</td>
<td>30 (32.6%)</td>
<td>16 (34.0%)</td>
<td>4 (18.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflicts (events)</strong></td>
<td>16 (38.1%)</td>
<td>23 (41.8%)</td>
<td>38 (41.3%)</td>
<td>22 (46.8%)</td>
<td>8 (36.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflicts (meetings)</strong></td>
<td>16 (38.1%)</td>
<td>19 (34.5%)</td>
<td>36 (39.1%)</td>
<td>18 (38.3%)</td>
<td>9 (40.9%)</td>
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</table>
Why do students affiliate with various groups?

Non-member of Target Organization: Obstacles from Participating in Target Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic commitments (exams, papers, etc.)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unaware of the purpose of organization</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unaware of meeting times</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am unaware of special events</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I participate in other activities/organizations sponsored by Pitt</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not interested in participating in these groups</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why do students affiliate with various groups?

Non-member of Target Organization: Knowledge of Target Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSS</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISE</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIP</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXCEL</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.0 - 5.0 (No Knowledge – Great Deal of Knowledge)
Why do students affiliate with various groups?

Have you heard of this group? Would you join it?

- Phase I focus group participants could not easily identify group names based on de-identified descriptions.
- Phase I focus group participants were interested in specific aspects of groups including: one on one counseling or advising, peer mentoring, and ability to network with peers.
Conclusions

Why do students affiliate with various groups?

Evaluation participants are likely to join groups where they share similarities with other members, which develop a foundation for a strong community (e.g. academic interests, demographics).

Evaluation participants will likely join groups that are familiar to them.

Evaluation participants are likely to sustain engagement with groups if older members and staff leadership establish and maintain strong relationships.

Evaluation participants receive benefits from the time they invest in their participation.
Conclusions

What are the needs of underrepresented students at Pitt?

Evaluation participants are interested in improving academic performance, developing better relationships with faculty and professional staff, and becoming prepared for graduate school.

Evaluation participants expressed a desire to be informed of opportunities and resources that are available to support their needs socially, academically, financially, and help them plan for their future after they graduate.

Evaluation participants expressed a need for a more accessible/accurate method of advising through a combination of web resources (to allow independence) and a staff or peer mentor to act as a “go-to” resource.
Conclusions

How are existing services meeting those needs?

Evaluation participants that identify as target organization members are satisfied by several aspects that support their academic, social, financial, leadership development needs, and support their postgraduate planning.

Evaluation participants that identify as target organization members are more likely to report being familiar with or utilizing campus-wide services.
CAS EMC: Future considerations

Maintenance of membership records

Communicate effectively with members and prospective members

Assess membership effectively – students enjoyed focus group method

Survey respondents and focus group participants are active with other campus activities and organizations.

These results are not generalizable to students that did not participate in evaluation.
Implications for Assessment

The Use of Qualitative Methods

Kuh and Andreas (1991) encouraged student affairs administrators to use qualitative methods often.

Kuh, Whitt, and Shedd (1987) wrote that administrators should, “learn about student life by becoming engaged with students in their living environments, the library, their playing fields” (p. 397).

The survey gave us good information, but hearing the students’ experiences in their own voices brought new depth.
Implications for Assessment

Amplifying Voices

Blimling (2013), highlights a primary challenge of assessment of higher education is the time necessary to identify useful solutions in response to assessment findings.

Evaluators and student affairs administration must work together to share information to uncover these disengaged students.
Implications for Assessment

Engaging URM students at PWIs

Must create environments where all voices are valued and allow students to use their voices to tell their experiences.

As Kuh (2009) illustrates, “Not enough is known about the all-but-invisible majority with whom most student affairs staff have little or no contact” (p.697).

Blimling (2013), highlights a primary challenge of assessment of higher education is the time necessary to identify useful solutions in response to assessment findings.

Students will see if what they say makes a difference! Soliciting feedback and not making change discourages future participation.
Implications for Partnerships

Limited Resources

Many offices struggle to find the resources for large assessment efforts.

Partnering with other offices on campus, graduate students, or established research teams can help.

Numerous academic affairs and student affairs assessment and research endeavors are underway – many using teams of graduate students, faculty, and staff who are interested in student/institution issues.
Implications for Partnerships

Limited Resources

Partnerships can pose challenges – be sure to clearly define roles for each office/person involved.

Open and frequent communication is crucial to success.

The most important element is a clear vision for what the team wants to accomplish.
Discussion

• Questions?
• Effective practices to engage underrepresented students on your campus?
Contact Information

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