
WABASH NATIONAL STUDY OF Liberal Arts Education

Purpose of the Wabash National Study

- To learn what teaching practices, programs, and institutional structures support liberal arts education
- To develop methods of assessing liberal arts education

Study Details

- The study began in fall 2006 with nineteen institutions participating; additional institutions have joined each year since. The study currently includes 49 institutions and more than 17,000 students.
- Longitudinal
 - Follows one class for at least four years, perhaps longer
 - Look at where students start and gauge how much they change
 - What do they experience that promotes or inhibits change?
 - Takes into account what students bring with them
 - SAT/ACT performance
 - Institutional selectivity
 - College attended first choice?
 - Age, sex, ethnicity, parental education and income
 - High school grades and activities
 - Considers the individual as the unit of analysis, not the institution

Outcomes

- Our study focuses on understanding the conditions and practices that promote the development of seven liberal arts outcomes:
 - Effective reasoning and problem solving
 - Inclination to inquire and lifelong learning
 - Integration of learning
 - Intercultural effectiveness
 - Leadership
 - Moral reasoning
 - Well-being

Findings to Date

- We have been surprised by students' lack of growth over their first year of college. In general, students did not change or they declined on most of our outcome measures, specifically as follows:
 - Moral reasoning increased and critical thinking grew marginally
 - Need for cognition, socially responsible leadership, psychological well-being, positive attitude toward literacy, and universality-diversity awareness did not change
 - Interest in making a contribution to the arts and sciences, political and social involvement, academic motivation, and openness to diversity and challenge decreased
- At the same time, we found that four broad categories of teaching practices and institutional conditions predict growth on many of the outcomes in our study. These high-impact experiences include the following:
 - Good teaching and high-quality interactions with faculty
 - Faculty interest in teaching and student development
 - Organization, clarity, prompt feedback
 - Academic challenge and high expectations
 - Hard work, challenging assignments and interactions
 - Diversity experiences
 - Meaningful interactions with people who are different
 - Deep learning
 - Higher-order, integrative, and reflective learning

Participating Institutions (2006)

- Small Colleges
 - Alma College
 - Bard College
 - Coe College
 - Columbia College (SC)
 - Connecticut College
 - Gustavus Adolphus College
 - Hamilton College
 - Hampshire College
 - Hope College
 - Wabash College
 - Whittier College
- Community Colleges
 - Ivy Tech Community College, Lafayette
 - Kirkwood Community College
- Universities
 - Butler University
 - San José State University
 - University of Kentucky
 - University of Michigan
 - University of North Carolina Wilmington
 - University of Notre Dame

Participating Institutions (2007)

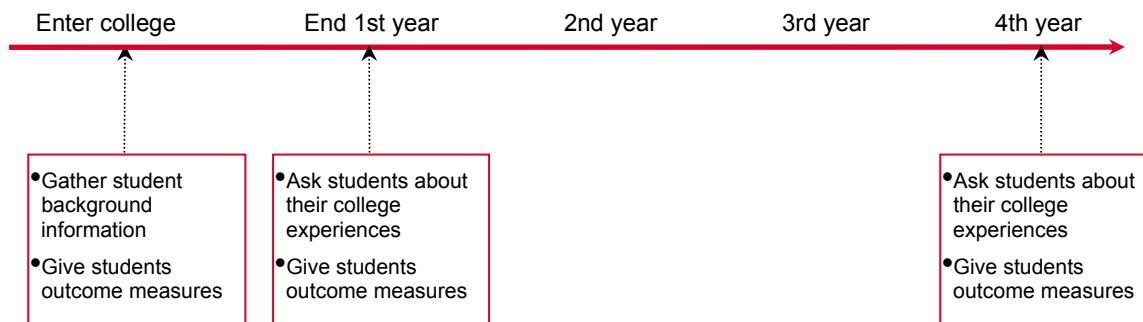
- Small Colleges
 - Allegheny College
 - Franklin College
 - Vassar College
 - Wabash College
- Universities
 - Delaware State University
 - Fairfield University
 - North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University
 - University of Rhode Island

Participating Institutions (2008)

- Small Colleges
 - Alverno College
 - Augustana College
 - Bard College at Simon's Rock
 - Bennington College
 - Blackburn College
 - Carleton College
 - College of the Holy Cross
 - Drew University
 - Hampshire College
 - Hobart and William Smith Colleges
 - Lasell College
- Community Colleges
 - Marlboro College
 - New College of Florida
 - Oxford College of Emory University
 - Prescott College
 - Ripon College
 - Wabash College
 - Warren Wilson College
 - Wheelock College
- Universities
 - Brandeis University
 - Millersville University
 - Salem State College
 - University of Rhode Island
 - Worcester Polytechnic Institute
 - Worcester State College

Data Collection

- We collect demographic information, reports of precollege and collegiate experiences, and measurements of liberal arts outcomes from students. Students are tested a total of three times—in the fall and spring of their first year and again in the spring of their fourth year.



- Student Surveys
 - High school experiences and background information (given at beginning of entering year)
 - College experiences (given at end of first year and end of fourth year)
 - Wabash National Study Student Experiences Survey
 - National Survey of Student Engagement
 - Research question
 - Do students' responses on these surveys predict changes on the outcome measures?
- Outcome Measures

All participants complete the following:

 - Need for Cognition Scale
 - Measures how much people enjoy engaging in effortful cognitive activities
 - Socially Responsible Leadership Scale-Revised Version 2
 - Measures eight aspects of leadership development
 - Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being
 - Measure six dimensions of positive psychological functioning
 - Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (Short form)
 - Measures awareness and acceptance of similarities and differences among people

Each of the following is completed by half of the participants:

 - CAAP Critical Thinking Test
 - Measures skills in clarifying, analyzing, evaluating, and extending arguments
 - Defining Issues Test 2
 - Measures the development of moral reasoning
- Other Scales
 - Literacy, diversity, academic motivation, political and social involvement

These Instruments and Surveys Are Imperfect

- Multiple-choice tests and surveys do not fully capture our most ambitious institutional goals
- But they are useful in conjunction with course, program, and institutional evidence
 - They provide us with comparative information
 - They can be readily connected with information about individual students
 - They can provoke further inquiry on campus

Using Study Data

- The goal of the Wabash National Study is to:
 - Provide clear, high-quality assessment information
 - Determine which pieces of information matter to particular campuses
 - Collaborate with faculty and staff at institutions to develop ideas for using study data to improve student learning

The Wabash National Study is funded through grants from the Lilly Endowment Inc., the Davis Educational Foundation, and the Teagle Foundation. The Wabash National Study is led by the Center of Inquiry, under the direction of Dr. Charles F. Blaich, in collaboration with a research team from the University of Iowa, led by Dr. Ernest T. Pascarella. ACT, Inc., under the direction of Dr. Michael J. Valiga, is assisting with the data collection and reporting. Research teams from the University of Michigan, led by Dr. Patricia M. King, and from Miami University (Ohio), led by Dr. Marcia Baxter Magolda, are also conducting annual interviews with a subset of students from six institutions in the 2006 round of the study.