

How a Small, Underfunded, Understaffed College Won Back Lost Accreditation

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A Bit About SIPI

- National community college for American Indian/Alaska Natives.
- Part of the Bureau of Indian Education.
- Historically averaged about 550 students per fall trimester.
- High “not-college-ready” student population.
- About 95 full-time employees.
- Just over \$12M in appropriated funds + grants.

What Happened?

- In 2009, found to be out of compliance with 4 of the 5 criteria by the Higher Learning Commission.

Evidence warrants Commission sanction or adverse action.

Recommend Evidence warrants Commission sanction or adverse action.

Criterion is not met **Recommend** Evidence warrants Commission sanction or adverse action.

Criterion is not met **Recommend** Evidence warrants Commission sanction or adverse action.

Criterion is not met **Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is not met, the team recommends Withdrawal.

What Happened?

- Lack of institutional research.
- Lack of institutional effectiveness.
 - No program-level assessment.
 - No institutional-level assessment.
 - No non-academic assessment.
 - No program review/evaluation.
- Lack of strategic planning.
- Lack of sound budget planning.

What Was Next?

The Timeline:

- June, 2010 – Accreditation was withdrawn, placed into candidacy.
- March, 2011 – Continuation of candidacy evaluation completed, approved to reapply for accreditation.
- August, 2013 – Self-study for initial accreditation due.
- October, 2013 – Comprehensive site visit for initial accreditation.

The lines are drawn... let the battle begin!

What Was Next?

- Criteria and components were overwhelming.
 - 5 criteria
 - 21 core components
 - 68 sub-components
- Minimum expectations weren't any easier.
 - 41 expectations
 - 29 sub-expectations
- 164 points to prove, and multitudes of evidence will be needed. **Where do we start? How do we prioritize? AHHHH!!!** Let's calm down, take a deep breath and...

Have a Look at a “Not So Pretty” Analogy

- My old house in Irving, Texas.
 - Small cracks start appearing in the walls – “I can paint over those cracks!”
 - Doors wouldn’t easily open and close – “I can sand down the sides of the doors until they close easier!”
- Expert conclusion on the problems...
 - The house was built on shifting sands. There are cracks in the foundation that painting the walls and sanding down the doors won’t fix!
- The broken processes can’t be tweaked and all will be okay. Underlying, bigger problems must get fixed first. The same is true with a college’s accreditation.

Start with the HLC Guiding Values

1. Focus on student learning.
2. Education as a public purpose.
3. Education for a diverse, technological, globally connected world.
4. A culture of continuous improvement.
5. Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation.
6. Integrity, transparency, and ethical behavior or practice.
7. Governance for the well-being of the institution.
8. Planning and management of resources to ensure institutional sustainability.
9. Mission-centered evaluation.
10. Accreditation through peer review.

Setting Priorities

The most relevant of HLC's guiding values were:

- A culture of continuous improvement.
- Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation.
- Planning and management of resources to ensure institutional sustainability.

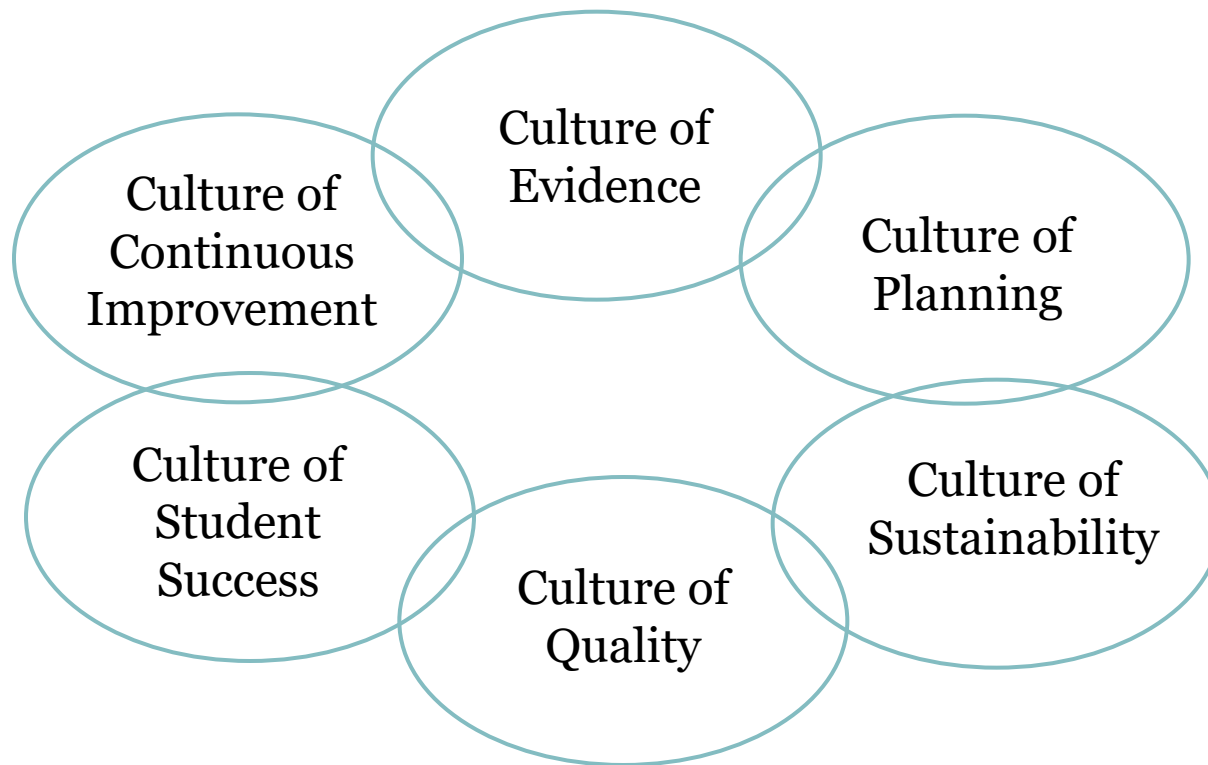
In other words, we need:

- A culture of continuous improvement.
- A culture of evidence.
- A culture of planning.

So... It's a Cultural Thing

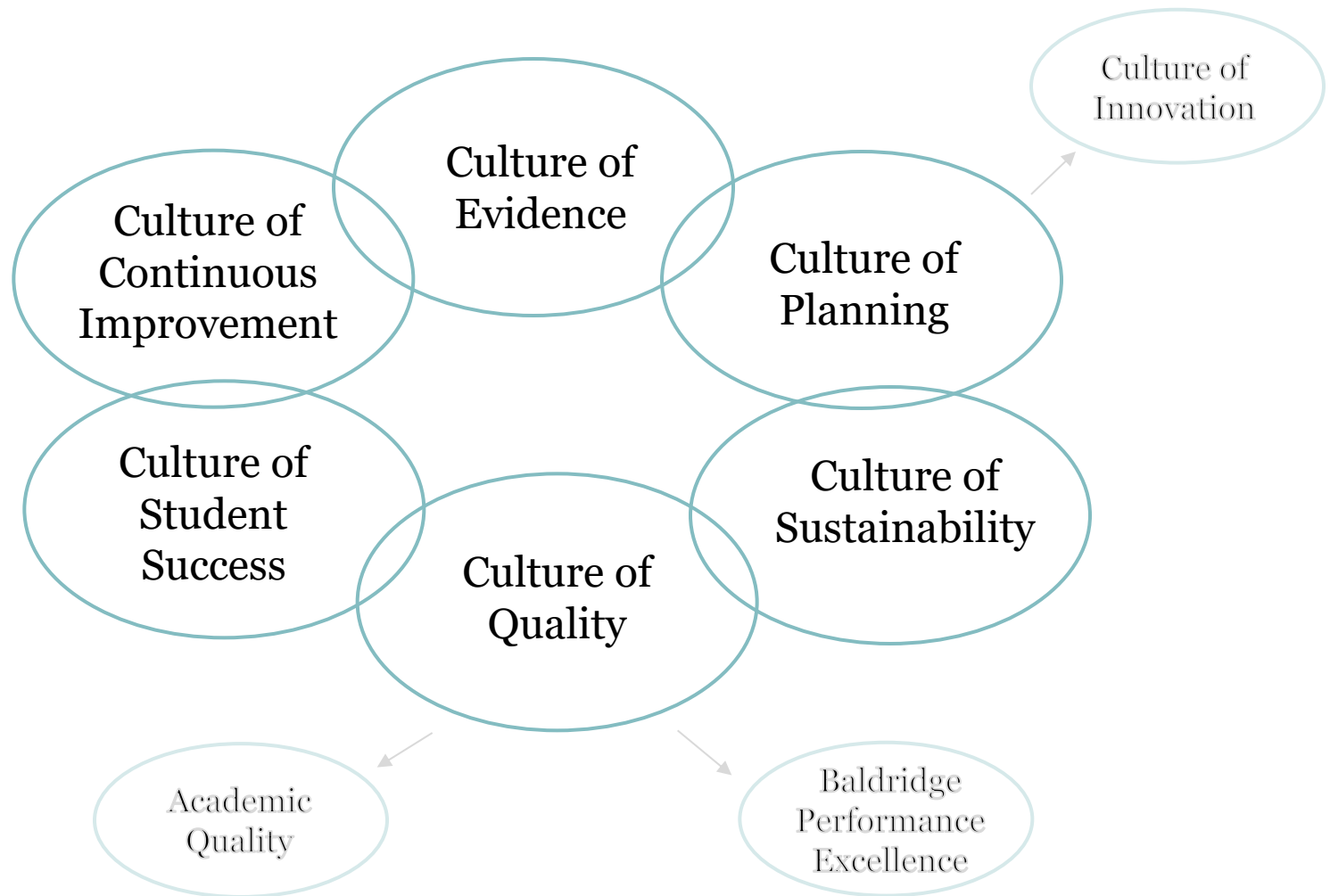
- The focus had to be on the overarching operating philosophy if sustainable change was to happen.
 - Steered by the HLC guiding values.
 - Organizational culture → plans and processes.
 - In other words, **define and build the cultural contexts first**, and then let the processes flow.
 - Create “buy-in” to those cultural values, then develop processes that are the **shortest, straightest, smoothest paths** to achieving those values.
 - Think “macro” first, act “micro” next.
 - Painting over cracks in the wall, sanding doors that won't close, and duct-taping interior plumbing leaks won't hold if the foundation is not repaired. Fix the foundation first!

Great Colleges = Great Cultures



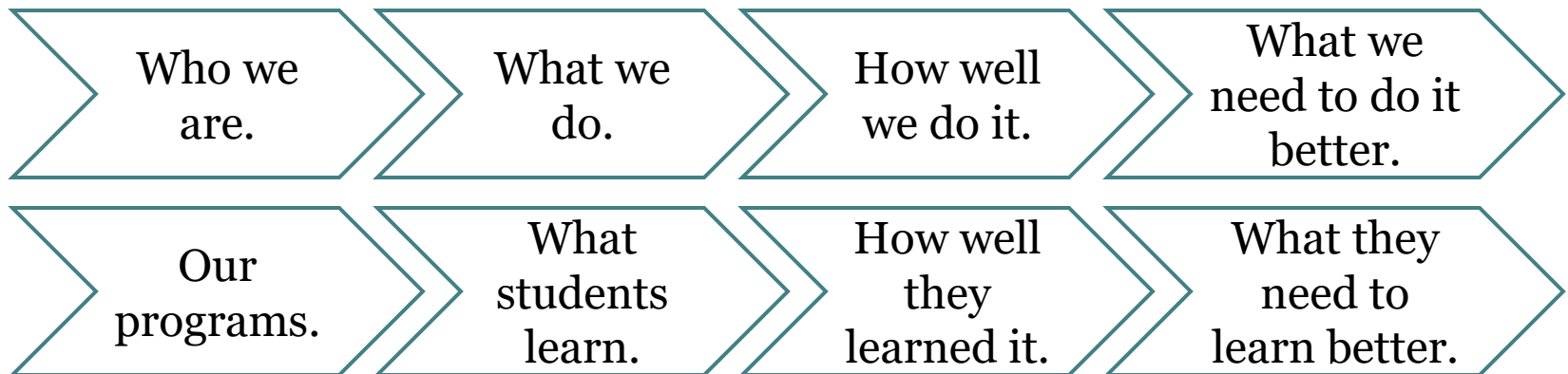
What makes a “culture”? Wide-spread and deeply held belief that we’re all in the business of turning data or evidence into insights, and insights into change.

Great Cultures = Great Subcultures



A Culture of Continuous Improvement

- Continuous improvement is the basic belief that no matter what we do, or how we do it, we can always do it better.
- Assessment is the process to achieve continuous improvement.



- In short, we turn data into insight, and insight into improvement.

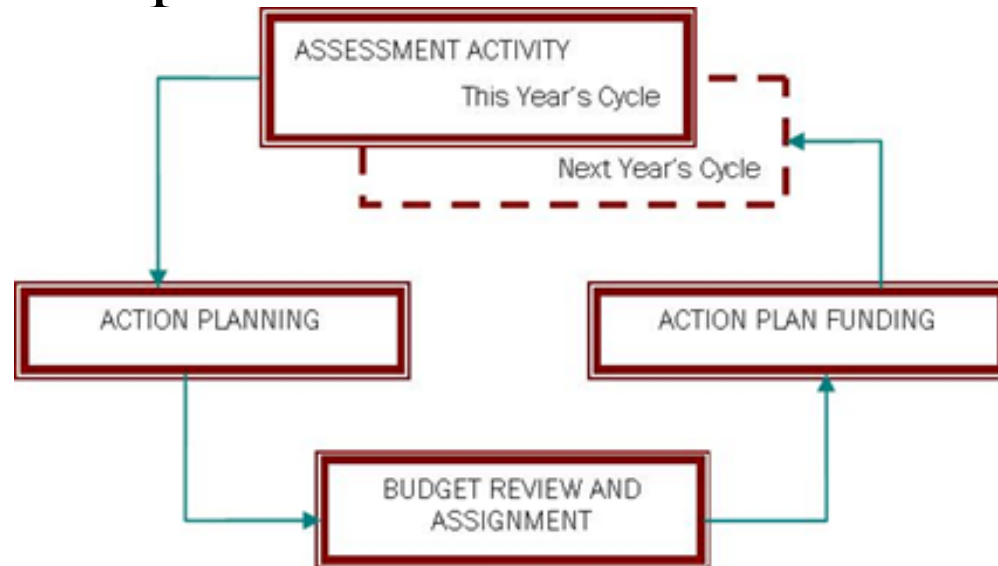
A Culture of Continuous Improvement

- Every academic program and administrative department should show commitment to listening to and acting upon their data's story.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer 2025 beginning of term – DONE 	
Were criteria met?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Criteria met <input type="checkbox"/> Criteria Partially Met <input type="checkbox"/> Criteria Not Met	
Analysis/Discussion of the data. What new insights did you gain from the data's story?	<p>A total of 100% of reporting deadlines were met this cycle. This is a major improvement over the last time this objective was assessed, when only 55% of reports were submitted by the mandated deadline. This is a major improvement over the last time this objective was assessed, when only 55% of reports were submitted by the mandated deadline.</p>	the Post-secondary Data Partnership.
	Recommendations or improvements suggested by the analysis of the data.	<p>The department must meet its reporting requirements in a timely manner. This is central to supporting a culture of evidence, which has been the hallmark of this office since its inception in 2011. Past problems have been rectified. The turn-key system made it possible for Edward Hummingbird to step in during Frank Wiley's Spring absence and meet data requests from the student information system using the stored procedures.</p> <p>At this point, the Office is meeting its expectations and cannot improve on 100% compliance by the mandated deadlines for external reporting.</p>
	Responsible Person(s)	Edward Hummingbird and Frank Wiley, Office of Analytics and Outcomes

A Culture of Continuous Improvement

- Having a mechanical assessment process is not the same as having a robust culture of continuous improvement.
- Closing the loop:

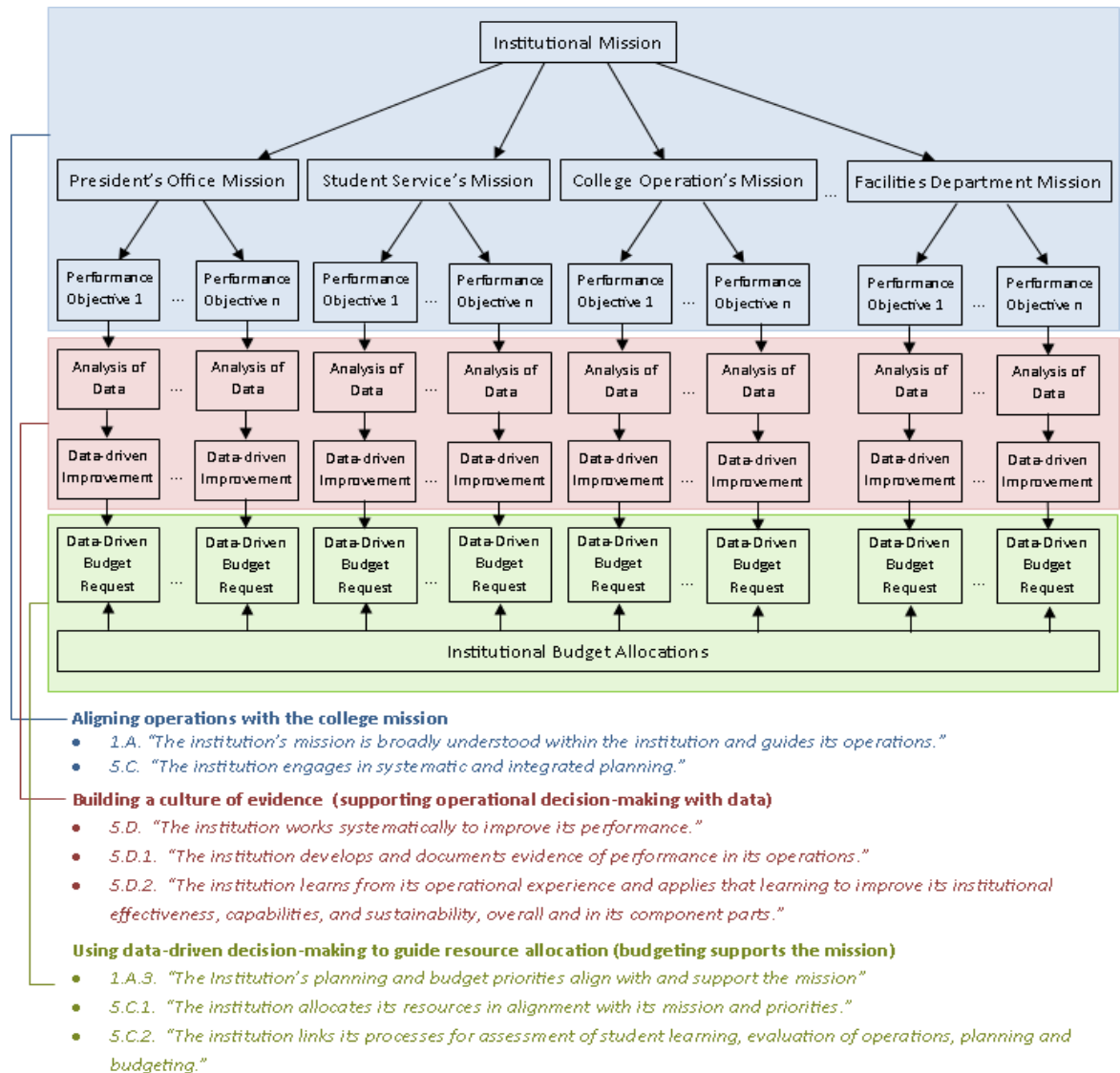


- Assessment reports and action plans should partially drive institutional resource allocations.

Just how does good assessment ensure that we are meeting the expectations of our accreditation agency?

Let's go back to the criteria in 2013, when SIPI went up for accreditation again...

We elegantly linked mission to resource allocation through assessment!



A Culture of Evidence

- Having artifacts of evidence is not the same as living within a culture of evidence.
- Culture of evidence = turning data into insights, and insights into action.
- It's not about having a lot of data.
- Requires the right data and systematically incorporating data into decision-making.
- Data as compelling storytelling.
- How does data show where and to what extent the college is meeting its mission?
 - Institutional Effectiveness Indicators!

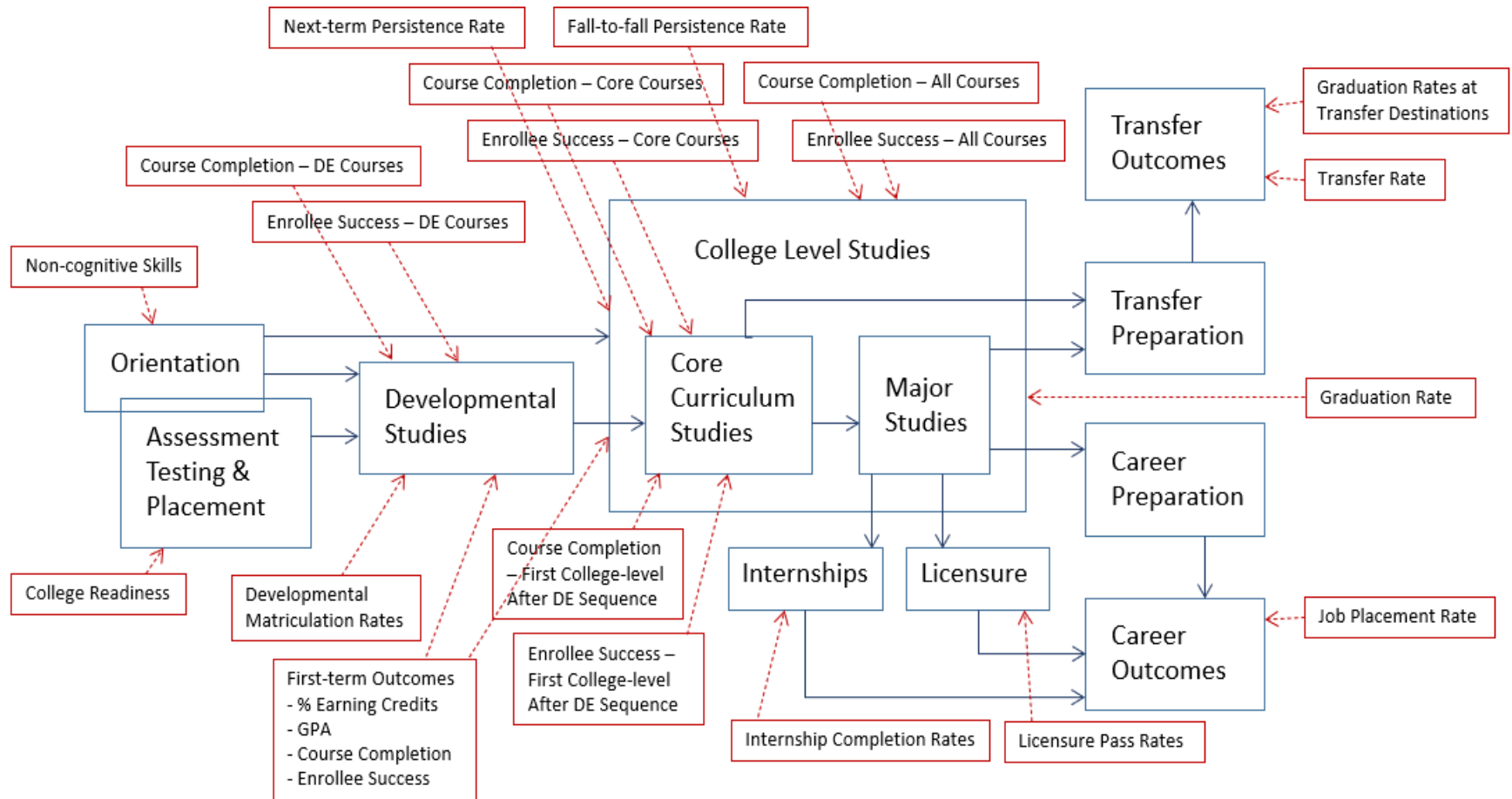
Institutional Effectiveness Indicators

SIPI Mission	Ensuring Quality & Continuous Improvement	General Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment of Critical Thinking - Assessment of Communications - Assessment of Interpersonal Skills/Teamwork - Assessment of Cultural Legacy
		Academic Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes - Graduate Satisfaction - Employer Satisfaction
		Administrative & Student Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effectiveness - Efficiency - Employee/Student Satisfaction
		Formal Program Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic Program Review (5-year) - Non-Academic Program Review (7-year)
	Ensuring Student Success	Key Institutional Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Graduation Rates - Job Placement Rates - Transfer Rates - Retention Rates
	Preparing & Managing Transitions	Transfer Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Articulation Agreements - Transfer Rates to 4-year Institutions - Graduation Rates at Transfer Institutions
		Workforce Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Degrees and Certificates Awarded - Licensure and Certification Pass Rates - Internships - Job Placement Rates - Employer Satisfaction
		Developmental Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful Completion of Developmental Education - Successful Completion of Related College Level Courses - Degree/Certificate Completion and Transfer Rates
	Providing a Supportive Environment	Supportive Educational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student Satisfaction (Ruffalo Noel Levitz) - Student Engagement (CCSSE) - Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) - In-house Surveys & Focus Groups
	Planning for the Future	Strategic Plans	- Strategic Initiative Process Outcomes
		Departmental Plans	- Departmental Initiative Process Outcomes

A Culture of Evidence... Revisited

- It's not about having a lot of data.
- Requires the right data and systematically incorporating data into decision-making.
- Data as compelling storytelling (e.g., “what is student success?”)
 - After all, we're all in the business of student success. All parts of every college contribute directly or indirectly to an environment where students are more likely to success because those parts are there and all moving in sync.

Student Success = Seeing the Elephant with Data



* First step in managing student success is to measure student success throughout the life cycle and search for “pinch points.” Second step is to act on those pinch points. Data → Insights → Interventions

A Culture of Planning

- Having a strategic plan in a binder on the shelf is not the same as living in a culture of planning.
- Must demonstrate how your plans transform.
- Bridging the mission with the vision.



- Planning to achieve our aspirations!

A Bit More on a Culture of Planning

- Operational versus strategic.
- Aligning and augmenting plans.
- HLC 4.C. “The institution engages in **systematic** strategic planning for **quality improvement**. It relies on **data**, integrating its **insights** from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

Build Cultures, Deliverables Follow

“Sound practices for the assessment of student learning were evident at SIPI. A Director of Assessment, who was hired by SIPI in December 2012, and an experienced Director of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning have developed documents to create a structure for learning outcomes assessment, integrated the structure with compliance reporting, and coached and guided the faculty, staff, and administrators to understand and articulate the ways that their departments contribute value to students at SIPI. Further, SIPI has developed a comprehensive handbook of assessment and templates for developing departmental mission statements and goals, measurements, and reports. The campus security officer, housing staff, faculty, and administrators, were knowledgeable of the processes for assessment and used their own language, not jargon, when describing assessment to the team.”

– page 33 of the evaluation report (*emphasis added*)

Build Cultures, Deliverables Follow

“SIPI ... has evolved into an institution with a culture of continuous improvement.” – page 34 of the evaluation report

“Many institutions make claims of being data-driven and have a culture of planning in their self-studies, but the team members agreed that they have yet to encounter an institution that has been able to spread its planning processes to every corner of the school as well as SIPI.” – pages 36-37 of the evaluation report

“Rarely have we seen a culture of assessment so clearly demonstrated across all campus operations and throughout the day-to-day activities of the members of the institution.” – page 37 of the evaluation report

Build Cultures, Deliverables Follow

“From past history, SIPI had a planning problem, but that is very definitely past history. With the hiring of the current President and a new Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Research, SIPI has become one of the most seamless academic planning organizations one could imagine. The melding of academic and non-academic assessment with the program review process and the strategic planning process has created an environment that is extremely data-driven and links virtually all of the planning processes of the institution to assessment.” – page 37 of the evaluation report

“SIPI has become a learning organization that uses performance measures and data driven decision making in every aspect of the institution. From landscapers, to instructors, to human resource specialists, to the senior administrators the organization focuses on measuring their operational effectiveness and analyzing how they can become more efficient and effective. In all facets of program evaluation and planning, SIPI has become a data-driven organization that seeks constant improvement in all aspects of its operations.” – page 37 of the evaluation report

Build Cultures, Deliverables Follow

“The culture of evidence pervades the institution and informs all decisions and processes.” – page 37 of the evaluation report

Final Thoughts...

- Accreditation is all about deliverables.
 - Grade your deliverables.
 - Be sufficiently self-critical. No grade inflation!
- Set the bar as high as you can get it and clear it by as much as you can. Leave no doubt.
 - Seek out trophies – audacious game-changers.
 - Something the peer reviewers never saw coming.
- Think big first and foremost (cultures) – don't get lost in the weeds.
- Cultures = data to insight, insight to action in all parts of the institution.

Questions or Comments?

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Thank you for participating in this session!

