Evaluating Acceleration Strategies: Exploring Possibilities for a Demonstration Project

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Outline of Session

- Significance of evaluation—how the field and your college benefit
- Evaluation designs and what might be expected of colleges
- Discussion of expected student benefits of acceleration strategies
- Quick survey of acceleration strategies
Benefits of Evaluation

- Improve policy and practice in the field as a whole
- Improve practice at individual colleges
- Bring recognition to colleges
“What’s in it for me (or my college?)

- Receive technical assistance
- Learn from other sites implementing similar programs
- Learn if your program is making a difference
- Be part of a national study that will provide important new information to the field.
Different Levels of Evaluation

- Pilot project and preliminary evaluation
- Rigorous evaluation at one or two sites
- Larger scale demonstration project at several sites
Measuring Impacts

- Did the program make a difference in outcomes compared to “business as usual”?
- For whom (which subgroups) did the program make the most difference?
Impact Evaluation Designs

- Pre-Post Designs

- Comparison Group Designs
  - Quasi-experimental
  - Experimental (random assignment)
Random Assignment Results from a Performance-Based Scholarship Program

Key Impacts on Registration: First Two Cohorts
Delgado Community College and Louisiana Technical College Report

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from Delgado Community College and Louisiana Technical College transcript data.

NOTE: Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, * = 10 percent.
Why are random assignment studies considered the most rigorous?

- Random assignment assures that students who receive the program and students in the control group have similar characteristics at “baseline”.

- Characteristics must be similar so that any differences in the outcomes between the two groups can be attributed to the program rather than to any pre-program differences.
How Does Random Assignment Work?

Targeted students invited to participate in study

Students give consent

Baseline data collected

Random assignment

Program group
Enrolled in acceleration program

Control group
Receives regular courses and services
Critical Design Questions

1. Are there enough students?

2. Is the program robust and well-implemented?

2. Is there a strong contrast between the program and control group?
Examining Implementation

- Important at all levels of evaluation
- Describes the “treatment”
- Provides formative lessons about what’s going well, what needs attention
- Helps explain why programs are – or aren’t – effective
Examples of Implementation Questions

- What was involved in getting the accelerated program in place at the college?
- What conditions facilitated and impeded implementation?
- How were staff members and students “recruited” to participate?
- How do staff and students feel about the program?
Implementation Data

- Qualitative (from interviews, focus groups, observations)
- Quantitative (from surveys, administrative records)
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