

Alliance for Equity  
in Higher Education



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## A letter from the Director

Dear BEAMS Colleagues:

As summer officially ends, let us take one fond look at the joys and accomplishments of the 2006 Summer Academy. We were invigorated by the number—over 300—and quality of participants. Our third cohort was joined by eight returning teams from the 2003 and 2004 cohorts; three independent teams; and a dynamic and enterprising group from the National Articulation and Transfer Network (NATN), made up by representatives from mostly two-year institutions. The newcomers came from Texas, Michigan, California, Arizona, Maryland, Washington, New York, Massachusetts, Puerto Rico, and Connecticut, in hope of connecting with BEAMS institutions to expand our ongoing conversation on access and success in higher education.

Among our many distinguished speakers, we were lucky to have representatives from two of the major accrediting agencies—SACS and North Central—that work with BEAMS schools. Linking our BEAMS work to accreditation gives it meaning and impact throughout the institution, and bolsters its chances for permanence. We intend to pursue our interaction with accrediting agencies through BEAMS and beyond. We were also quite lucky in the great crop of students that took part in this year's Summer Academy. Their comments and suggestions were astute and exceptionally relevant. Among their suggestions were the Institute for Higher Education Policy's tapping BEAMS students to discuss initiatives beyond the Summer Academy meetings, disseminating information on BEAMS, and planning future student-focused events; and highlighting issues of particular interest to students, such as mental health resources, working more closely with faculty on change initiatives, and broadening the number of their fellow students engaged in campus change work. Another great group was made up by the presidents who took part in the Summer Academy: their presence and perspectives were both inspiring and very informative.

We are also excited by the 2003 cohort's plan implementation progress reported by the Urban Institute (UI) which is the external BEAMS. UI found that "over half of the [2003] projects are on track in terms of timely completion of the implementation phase." We are very encouraged by this information, and share it with you proudly.

What lies ahead? A lot of work for everybody, certainly. As the three BEAMS cohorts continue their work in the various stages of implementation of campus change plans, we are putting together the itinerary for campus site visits this fall and next spring, coordinating efforts with the NSSE folks, planning the mid-year meeting for February 2007 as well as the 2007 Summer Academy, determining how best to report your good work as we approach the final year of BEAMS, and beginning to plan for our continued work together after BEAMS ends. We will be sure to keep you well updated as we move forward on all fronts.

Margarita Benitez,  
BEAMS Project Director

## 2005 Cohort Attends Summer Academy

Thirty-three campuses in the 2005 cohort participated in the Institute for Higher Education Policy's 2006 Summer Academy, held from July 17-21. This year's academy, focusing on cultivating the access and success of minority students, emphasized three themes throughout the week: minority student engagement, data informed decision making, and sustainability and long-term change. These themes allowed teams to learn from and contribute to national conversations on

access and success while working on tailoring initiatives for their particular institutional context.



The Westin Rio Mar



Dr. Wheelan gives the 2006 Summer Academy keynote address

Over sixty-three institutions were represented at this year's Summer Academy. The 2005 cohort schools were joined by eight returning BEAMS institutions and three autonomous institutions working on various change plans on their campuses. For the first time, the National Articulation and Transfer Network (NATN) also joined the academy. NATN participants utilized their time in Puerto Rico to set a platform for continued work under the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, which assumed leadership of the project in February 2006. The academy also provided networking opportunities for all institutions.

This year's keynote address was delivered by Belle Wheelan, president of the Commission on Colleges for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. She opened the Summer Academy with a focus on challenges institutions face in the accreditation process and how they most effectively meet those challenges. Herman Brann, associate vice president of institutional research at Florida A&M University; Deborah Santiago, vice president for policy and research at *Excelencia* in Education; and Karen Swisher, president of Haskell Indian Nations University participated in a plenary panel on best practices for student engagement at MSI and how such practices can inform majority institutions. A plenary with George Kuh, director of the Center for Postsecondary Research, and Lana Low, a higher education consultant formerly with Noel Levitz, focused on how to make sense of data institutions are collecting and using it more effectively. And, a panel of MSI presidents, Hilda Colón of

UPR Humacao, Melvin Johnson of Tennessee State, and Karen Swisher spoke to participants on how to identify ways of gaining presidential support for project work. A range of workshops hosted by higher education experts and structured team time provided continued assistance to teams as they completed assignments and planned for their continued work on campus.

BEAMS teams worked throughout the week using the results of their National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data to craft implementation plans that will outline the steps for their BEAMS initiative. As in past years, teams' projects varied. A majority of schools worked on first-year programs and co-curricular changes, while other teams focused on returning student engagement, technology-supported learning, centralized and enhanced support services, writing and critical thinking, and assessment. This year's teams were aided in their efforts by very dedicated consultants whose expertise reflected the broad range of institutional focus. The consultants were:

- **William Aguilar**, *vice president of university advancement, California State University, San Bernardino*
- **Brian Bridges**, *associate director, Center for Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equity, American Council on Education, Washington, DC*
- **John Burkhardt**, *professor of higher and postsecondary education, University of Michigan and director, National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good, Ann Arbor, MI*
- **Jaime Chahin**, *dean, College of Applied Arts and professor, Texas State University – San Marcos*
- **Art Chickering**, *special assistant to the president, Goddard College, Plainfield, VT*
- **Scott Evenbeck**, *dean, University College, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis*
- **Camille Hazeur**, *assistant to the president, and director, University Equity and Diversity Services, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA*
- **Emily Lardner**, *co-director, The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA*



- **Gillies Malnarich**, *co-director, The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA*
- **Betty Overton-Adkins**, *vice president for academic affairs, Spring Arbor University and incoming chair, The Higher Education Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Spring Arbor, MI*
- **Hazel Symonette**, *senior policy and program development specialist, University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Wisconsin System Administration*

Many of the BEAMS participants enjoyed their experience at the Academy, and the opportunity it presented them to work with colleagues at their institutions and nationally continues to be seen as one of the most valuable parts of the academy. Some comments of note include:

*"The Summer Academy is an excellent way to develop strong projects for implementation on campus. It created a strong sense of community involvement and melding of the minds. The team time was invaluable and reinvigorated my commitment to creating successful students."*

– 2005 Cohort Participant

*"The academy met my expectations. The sessions were informative. The opportunity to network with fellow colleagues was great."*

– Returning BEAMS Participant

As the Institute for Higher Education Policy continues planning for the 2007 Summer Academy we hope that all BEAMS teams consider attending next year. We will be providing information on location, dates, and cost in upcoming months.



BEAMS teams working hard



A full computer lab with equipment supplied by the University of Puerto Rico-Humacao

## Returning BEAMS Campus Representatives Discuss Lessons Learned with New Cohort



Myra Burnett from Spelman College and Gilbert Toro-Ventura from Pontifical Catholic University, 2003 cohort representatives, and Sara Shumate from St. Thomas University and John Mason from Morehouse College, 2004 cohort representatives, shared their BEAMS experiences with this year's newest cohort. The panel, moderated by consultant Brian Bridges, highlighted the specific initiatives begun by each represented campus, with a focus on pitfalls and possibilities when implementing Summer Academy action plans. In particular, panelists identified supportive campus leadership, a detailed action plan with an articulated timeline and list of responsibilities, regular team meetings, and campus resources devoted to BEAMS work as critical components of successful plan implementations.

## Students Share Perspectives on Their Role in Campus Change with Summer Academy Participants

We would like to thank the following BEAMS students for their participation in this year's student panel: Isis Capre, University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez; Diego Espinoza, Eastern New Mexico University; Jamel Trott, Delaware State University; Brent Wright, Tennessee State University (graduate student); and Vanessa Maria, Institute of American Indian Arts. The students shared their thoughts on BEAMS, the Summer Academy, their role as student leaders, how other students could be brought into campus change conversations, and what faculty and administrators can do to welcome and support the student voice.



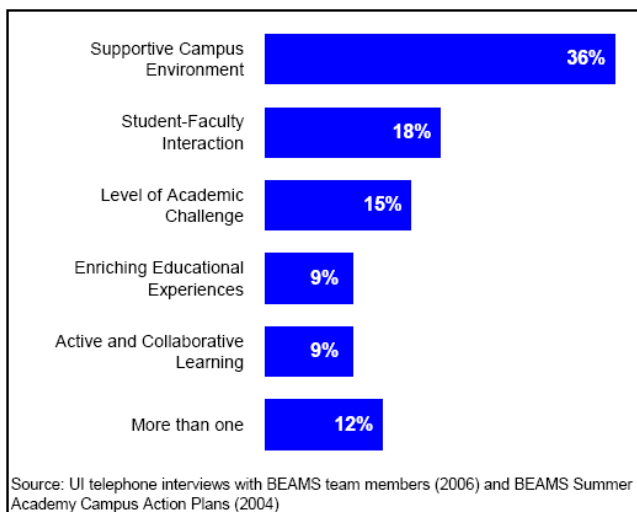
## The BEAMS Project: One-and-a-half Years Later

The Urban Institute (UI), the external evaluator for the BEAMS project, in June submitted their report on the short-term outcomes of BEAMS to the Lumina Foundation. UI sought to determine whether MSIs were able to acquire the insight of institutional problems from analyzing their NSSE data, if they were able to develop appropriate action plan based on the analyzed data, and if those plans were implemented effectively. To answer these questions researchers at UI conducted phone interviews with representatives from 33 institutions in the 2003 cohort—one-and-a-half years after attending the 2004 Summer Academy. Results indicate that in general BEAMS institutions used data in helping to identify institutional problem areas, developed feasible and appropriate campus action plans (CAPS), and implemented CAPs effectively.



**Development of a campus action plan (CAP):** Prior to developing a CAP, institutions identified one of the five NSSE benchmarks as their area of focus. The chart describes the breakdown of the benchmarks chosen by the 2003 cohort. Institutions chose their benchmark based on the following reasons: the benchmark was identified as low solely based on the NSSE scores (27% of institutions); the benchmark addressed an area of weakness indicated by both low NSSE scores and other institutional data (27%); the benchmark, in addition to the low NSSE scores, fit with a larger ongoing plan for institutional reform (36%); the benchmark was identified as an area of concern by other, non-NSSE, data (9%). While NSSE data was very important in influencing the choice of benchmark, in the majority of cases it was a combination of NSSE data and other factors that was the main determinant.

Figure 1. Benchmarks selected by Cohort I institutions (N=33)



### Institutions' progress and levels of CAP implementation:

Over half of the institutions have made considerable progress in terms of implementing their CAPs. Seventeen institutions identified themselves as having their plan developed and their project as fully established and more than half completed. Six institutions have their plan developed and some parts of the plan are being implemented, or the full plan is halfway implemented. According to UI, one indication of the appropriateness of action plans is the extent to which the vast majority (84%) of CAPs have been integrated into ongoing campus reform efforts. UI noted that findings that over half of the team projects are on track in terms of timely completion of the implementation phase is an "encouraging" outcome given the extreme difficulty of institutional reform.

Throughout the interviews four consistent barriers to implementation were raised by campus representatives, despite

their level of implementation. These barriers were: changes in their school's administration or in their BEAMS team, lack of funds, lack of campus buy-in, and time constraints. Five factors identified by institutions that appeared to strengthen CAPs and facilitate implementation were: support from top administration and others, BEAMS supports (Summer Academy, consultants, the Institute, and cross-team collaboration), alignment or incorporation of the CAP with other campus efforts, project/institutional resources, and a well-composed team. Institutions where development began with the BEAMS team, moved to discussion and input with the campus constituency, and finalized with the approval of a high ranking campus administrator were found to also be more on track with their implementation than other institutions.

### Factors Important for Successful Plan Implementation

- Support from top administration
- BEAMS supports like the Summer Academy, consultants, the Institute and cross-team collaboration
- Alignment or incorporation of the CAP with other campus efforts
- Project/institutional resources and
- A well-composed team

**Recommendations:** To facilitate the attainment of program goals, the following recommendations were made by UI. UI points to the below points as a strong foundation for successful effective plans:

- BEAMS institutions should ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the plan. The CAP should be feasible within the current funding and institutional support structure. One strategy for assuring that adequate resources are available is integrating the BEAMS activity with ongoing campus reform efforts
- BEAMS projects should be encouraged to communicate among themselves to share ideas and experiences. This should be accomplished through structured sessions at the mid-year meeting, campus visits, or telephone calls
- The Institute should continue to monitor progress and ensure motivation through progress reports and WebCenter postings, as well as through the provision of technical assistance and mid-year meetings. Projects have reported that they consider these activities important for maintaining momentum

Note: UI will be contacting 2003 cohort schools this fall for the final follow-up phone interview. This interview will focus on how schools may have been influenced by BEAMS in using data for decision-making. We encourage you to share the insights and results that have emerged from the fruitful efforts of your project work.

## Campus Spotlights: Highlighting the Work of the BEAMS teams

Now that all cohorts have participated in their respective Summer Academy and are implementing their crafted action plan the BEAMS staff is initiating a new section for the *BEAMS Beat* that highlights the work of the teams. Each *BEAMS Beat* will focus on three institutions, one from each cohort, that are willing to share the progress they have made and the lessons they learned in the process. Project staff intend that these snapshots will foster cross-campus and cross-cohort collaboration. These snapshots are written by the teams and reflect their progress to date.

Please be on the lookout for a team that is doing similar work or may face similar challenges. If you identify a school that you can learn from or that can help you continue your work the project has travel grants to offset costs to visit that institution. If you are interested in sharing your team's progress please send a short summary to Melissa Del Rios, BEAMS program associate at [mdelrios@ihep.org](mailto:mdelrios@ihep.org).

### Spelman College – 2003 Cohort

The Spelman College BEAMS project centers around improving critical thinking skills of our students. Our strategy for addressing this issue is to increase the number of mid-length papers (five-seven pages) that students write. We have linked our BEAMS project to a reinvigorated Writing Across the Curriculum program in the College, as well as to development of an electronic portfolio that students will begin in their first year. Perhaps most importantly, our BEAMS goals are aligned with the College's general education objectives, making it easier to explain what we are doing and gain support for our work.

Immediately after returning from the 2006 Summer Academy, we met with the provost and secured her endorsement of our activities. With the provost's support, we were able to identify funding from the provost's office to support the work ahead.

We maintain momentum for our BEAMS project by including faculty and administrators on the BEAMS workgroup—the vice president for enrollment management, the vice provost, the assistant dean of undergraduate Studies, and the director of the Comprehensive Writing Center are all members of the team. Faculty committed to the BEAMS goals also keep the workgroup momentum going, and they serve as critical liaisons to the academic departments. Our next task is to convene a meeting of faculty who teach courses in the general education curriculum to ensure that assignments in those courses support BEAMS goals. By involving faculty, administrators, and students in our BEAMS activities, we hope to increase commitment to BEAMS goals, thereby increasing our probability of success.

### St. Thomas University – 2004 Cohort

St. Thomas University embarked upon a comprehensive project to make improvements in three campus initiatives currently in place: mentoring program, summer bridge program, and residential learning communities. Through an Academic Affairs and Student Affairs departments' collaboration including officers at the senior level in both divisions, St. Thomas University heightened a dialogue between these two divisions to improve student engagement and student success.

While not much progress has been made on developing a transfer mentoring program this past year, improvements in the CHAMP Peer Mentor Program have occurred and its linkage with the First Year Experience course. This has increased student interest and senior staff recognition of the contribution these students provide. Student Affairs worked closely with the Academic Enhancement Center to create a three-week Pilot Summer Enrichment Academy to focus on enhance mathematics skills and reading skills. Ten students participated in this pilot initiative that sought to assist students in the development of skills to improve their chances for success during the academic school year. Four learning communities have been designed for the residence halls including: STU-Renew, Rhythm and Resistance, Women Empowered through Poetics, and Comparative Cultures. One collaborates with Campus Ministry, another with International Student Services, while two others grow out of the expanding activities of the Leadership and Student Engagement department.

The BEAMS project team has reduced our focus to early intervention activities and the development of an institutional mentoring program. This fall's work will be to develop individual retention plans for each student.

### New Jersey City University (NJCU) – 2005 Cohort

NJCU is integrating our BEAMS work with the implementation of Vision 2010: A Strategic Plan. The key organizational elements of our progress to date consist of the integration of five transformative components:

**University Commitment** – The president and key administrative leaders must make a commitment, in word, time, resources and engagement for the duration of the BEAMS project. NJCU has taken the "pyramid approach" utilizing the support from influential University leaders as the base, and building upwards to the implementation of a successful action plan.

**BEAMS Organization Structure** – The development of an organizational structure, which ensures accountability is paramount. The structure benefits from being as inclusive as possible. Our structure consists of five teams: Policy Implementation; Faculty Engagement, Student Engagement, Research & Assessment, and Marketing and Operations.

**Streamlined Communications** – Our President announced his decision for NJCU's involvement in BEAMS to the entire university through mailings, Web postings, and All-University Senate presentations. Our five team leaders made presentations to various constituencies. The development of a Web site ensured total transparency of NSSE results, team minutes and other BEAMS related material.

**Introspection and Analysis** – Candid conversations took place regarding NJCU's NSSE results. The reflection of the institution was made visible to all constituencies through an impartial mirror. The outcome was honest analysis which has led to the creation of a data driven culture in regards to decision making.

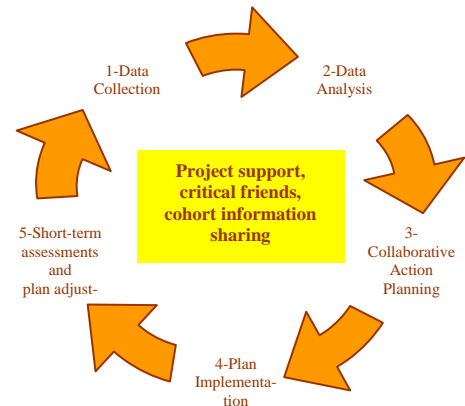
**Group Synergy & Diligence** –The importance of synergy among divisions, teams, and group members is imperative to successful planning and implementation.

The NJCU BEAMS team has recently returned from the Summer Academy with the *Urban Learner Centered Model*. This model is designed to increase first and second year retention and focuses on the needs and strengths of students from urban locales. This model calls for, amongst other things, the implementation of a Web-based academic resource center; introduction of academic enrichment experiences through the newly established Center for Teaching and Learning; formalization of the College Access and Persistence Program for Students (CAPPS); and assignment of all incoming freshmen to a thematically-based learning community.

For more information regarding our process, contact us at our BEAMS Web site, [www.njcu.edu/programs/beams/](http://www.njcu.edu/programs/beams/).

## Telling the Story: BEAMS Showcased at NASPA Meeting

In June, BEAMS hosted a session at the NASPA Assessment and Retention Conference in Phoenix, Ariz. entitled "Increasing Student Access and Success at Minority-Serving Institutions through Data-Informed Change Initiatives: Learning from the BEAMS Project." Lacey Leegwater, senior program manager for BEAMS, was joined by Rita Lamb, director of the Center for Student Success, at North Carolina A&T University, and by Sterling Hudson, dean of the office of admissions and records, and Zaid Ansari, director of institutional research, at Morehouse College. The purpose of the session was to share BEAMS work through the lens of project participants. Lacey gave an overview of the history and activities of BEAMS in the context of data-informed, collaborative change process driving the BEAMS model (see diagram).



Rita Lamb, representing a 2003 cohort campus, focused on how the use of NSSE in BEAMS at North Carolina A&T had helped identify the need to better involve first year students to increase their retention rate. Rita's presentation also brought to light the problems that teams may face on campus. She highlighted how North Carolina A&T had to redefine their project as they saw the need of their first-year students change.

As team members of a 2004 BEAMS campus, Zaid Ansari and Sterling Hudson discussed how their team sought to increase student engagement through service learning projects. The Morehouse team was able to connect their project with the vore vurriculum changes taking place on their campus.

Workshop attendees were excited about the work that the BEAMS teams were able to accomplish on their campus. By having the teams discuss both their successes and also some of their challenges in implementation, those in attendance were able to see the reality of initiating change work on their campus.

## Upcoming Conferences and Meetings

There are a good number of conferences and meetings taking place at the end of this year and in early 2007 that we believe would be a perfect venue for teams to showcase their work. Don't forget that the BEAMS project supports dissemination efforts by providing a one time \$500 travel grant to institutions to support session presentations on BEAMS. If you are interested in receiving travel grants and presenting your BEAMS work at a national or regional conference, please contact Melissa Del Rios, program associate for BEAMS ([mdelrios@ihcp.org](mailto:mdelrios@ihcp.org)).

BEAMS sessions are scheduled for two upcoming conferences. If you will be in attendance you may want to stop by to support the BEAMS panelists.

**HACU's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference** : Learning from BEAMS: Increasing Student Success, Oct. 29, 9:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m. Session panelists: Lacey Leegwater, BEAMS; Mildred de Santiago, Inter American San Germán; and Donna Aronson and Denise Doyle, University of the Incarnate Word. For more information on HACU's conference, visit their Web site at [www.hacu.net](http://www.hacu.net).

**AAC&U's Diversity and Learning Conference**: Strategies for Increasing Student Access and Success at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs): Learning from the BEAMS Project, Saturday, Oct. 21, 1 p.m.-2 p.m. Session panelists: Lacey Leegwater, BEAMS; Alexei Matveev, Norfolk State; and Judith Munter and Josie Tinajero, UTEP. For more information on AAC&U's Diversity conference, visit [www.aacu.org/meetings/diversityandlearning/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/meetings/diversityandlearning/index.cfm)

Below is another meeting your team may be interested in attending. The deadline for submitting session proposals is soon so act quickly if you are interested!

The **NCA Higher Learning Commission** will be hosting its annual meeting, *Leading for the Common Good*, in Chicago, Ill.. If you are interested in attending this conference, being held on April 20-24, 2007. Visit their Web site for details on how to submit a proposal, [www.ncahlc.org/download/annualmeeting/07CallforProposals.pdf](http://www.ncahlc.org/download/annualmeeting/07CallforProposals.pdf). Their submission deadline is Oct. 16, 2006.

# The BEAMS Beat

September 2006

## About BEAMS

BEAMS is a five-year initiative fostering ways in which Historically Black, Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities using National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) can develop data-based decision making and increase student engagement and learning.

BEAMS serves over 100 four-year colleges and universities from the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education. Each institution commits to analyzing the scope and character of their students' engagement in learning and implementing well-designed action plans for improvement of engagement, learning, persistence, and success. The project offers five primary ways for campuses to move toward these institutional goals.

- Data on the student experience from NSSE
- Design of action plans at the Summer Academy for initiatives to enhance student engagement and learning
- Collegial support for implementing action plans
- Web-based support throughout project participation
- Opportunities to report nationally on campus initiatives and successes

Campuses administer NSSE at least twice during the project. Consortia of BEAMS campuses generate action plans based on NSSE data at the 2004, 2005, and 2006 Summer Academy meetings. They interact and disseminate their learning throughout the project.

# BEAMS

## Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students

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For more information about BEAMS, visit the Alliance Web site at [www.msi-alliance.org/beams.asp](http://www.msi-alliance.org/beams.asp)  
or the WebCenter at [webcenter.msi-alliance.org](http://webcenter.msi-alliance.org).