INCREASING STUDENT SUCCESS AT MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS:
FINDINGS FROM THE BEAMS PROJECT
BY MELISSA DEL RIOS AND LACEY LEEGWATER

IHEP

BEAMS
Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the growing understanding that higher education is not only beneficial to individuals but also to society as a whole, policymakers, accrediting agencies, and the general public have placed an emphasis on ensuring that institutions of higher education are held accountable for the learning experiences of students. The collection and use of data are crucial factors in helping institutions make changes that can improve student learning and success, while also providing them with evidence to publicize their achievements, a critical element of navigating successfully in an emerging culture of accountability.

However, not all institutions in the United States are at a stage where the move to data-focused assessment comes easy. Some institutions, for example, have limited capacity to collect and analyze the data that could help them make informed decisions, and they have limited financial resources with which to change their situation. Specifically, many of the nation's Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)—including Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)—often do not have the institutional capacity to collect data on their

students' experiences, and even fewer have effective mechanisms for linking their collected information to campus change efforts. The role of MSIs in ensuring the educational success of students of color places an imperative on these institutions to hold themselves accountable and find ways to do so with limited resources.

The Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) initiative was established to support the important role MSIs play in facilitating minority students' participation in and completion of higher education. BEAMS was structured as a five-year project intended to foster data-based campus change initiatives at HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs. The BEAMS project helps participating MSIs enhance their capacity to collect and use data for institutional decision making and accountability, and helps them create a "culture of evidence," in which research and data are key forces behind campus change. The process BEAMS campuses went through to build their data capacity, along with the best practices that emerged from their work, can be replicated at institutions nationwide that are serious about using data to create change and improve their students' collegiate experience.

The 102 institutions involved in BEAMS went through a five-step process that included the following:

1. Data collection through the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
2. Data analysis by NSSE staff and data review with the assistance of campus assessment offices and national higher education experts.
3. Collaborative action planning involving various campus constituencies, and the creation of a realistic plan for change.
4. Plan implementation that consisted of garnering support from campus administrators, staff, faculty, and students.
5. Short-term assessments to benchmark their progress and making mid-course changes to their plans as needed.

Key Lessons and Practices

Five years into this process, the BEAMS institutions have taken part in practices of information collection and plan implementation that have strengthened their student engagement initiatives and can be used to inform efforts to institute data-informed campus change at other institutions nationwide.

The following are some of the lessons that have emerged for successful data collection and use:

- **Align data collection methods with institutional capacity.** When planning for data collection, institutions need to ensure that the methods they use are consistent with their capacity to administer a survey and make follow-up requests for survey completion.

- **Draw on available internal and external resources.** Using available support structures to assist with data collection and interpretation can help institutions and groups of stakeholders who are new to assessment make the most of their efforts.

- **Develop a framework to interpret data results.** It is helpful for institutions to translate the results into a format that is accessible for a broad audience, highlighting the major findings in relation to what was being measured and how the findings can be used. When they are provided with a clear framework for interpreting the data, stakeholders can focus less on the technical details of data interpretation and more on how the findings can inform their practice.

Certain practices have emerged during the BEAMS project that have led to short-term successes in identifying campus concerns and implementing action plans:

- **Establishing a strong team.** Institutions that are serious about using data to craft change need to ensure that the persons involved in the project are dedicated to and can influence change. Institutions with broad team membership are often able to overcome problems with turnover and time limitations, because responsibilities are distributed among everyone on the team.

- **Linking BEAMS work with a larger campus initiative.** Teams need to consider how their project fits in with other campus or system-wide initiatives to more easily secure buy-in from various constituencies, increase the resources that are available for projects, and build long-term sustainability through a process of institutionalization.

- **Building support from senior administration, faculty, and staff.** High-profile commitment from top leadership strengthens action plan implementation. Buy-in at the faculty and staff level is equally important to ensure implementation success—it is crucial that those who will be implementing the project are supporters of it.

Using these practices, BEAMS institutions are moving ahead with their efforts to improve student success and are demonstrating what their dedication to their students can achieve. While the plans discussed in this report have been in place for three years at most—too short a time to measure their affect on graduation rates—some institutions are reporting promising short-term results, including:

- Increases in short-term student retention and NSSE scores;
- Changes in institutional decision making, either through the use of more data or through collaboration across campus;
- Receipt of additional external funding, in part because BEAMS action plans help address pressing and pertinent needs; and
- Regional and national recognition for the work undertaken through the project.

Recommendations

The lessons learned from the BEAMS project can help MSIs and non-MSIs alike as they consider how to build institutional capacity for using data to increase student retention and degree attainment. The recommendations in this publication focus on building institutional capacity to collect and use data for campus decision making, and on crafting and implementing more effective student success initiatives.

- **Institutions must make greater technology and staff investments in their institutional research and assessment offices.** Institutional research and assessment offices are becoming increasingly more important to institutions that are committed to data-informed change. These offices need the technology and staff resources to gather and analyze institutional data and to work with other campus stakeholders to translate these data into information that informs campus practices and policies.

- **State systems must continue to support and encourage data capacity building at their institutions.** On the whole in BEAMS, the public institutions had more robust institutional research and assessment offices and more fully developed data collection and analysis tools than the private institutions did. State systems should continue to take seriously the important role they play in helping to build data capacity at their institutions by providing resources and setting clear expectations for their institutions' collection and use of data.

- **A report is needed to document the data capacity status of MSIs.** While the BEAMS project highlights some specific data capacity gaps at participating institutions, a more thorough study of this issue is needed to make claims about the status of data capacity at MSIs in general. A report on the current capacity for MSIs to gather and use data for institutional decision making and accountability would provide incentives for addressing data capacity resource gaps at the federal and state levels.

- **Investments are needed to build the capacity of MSIs to collect, analyze, and use data for institutional decision making and accountability efforts.** While limited in scope, the BEAMS project highlights some common issues MSIs face in gathering and using data. This information can be a point of departure for strengthening the data capacity of MSIs. Common issues raised by the BEAMS project were a lack of financial resources to establish internal data collection processes, outdated technology infrastructures that make data collection difficult, limited resources for participation in national surveys, and, when resources are available, inability or hesitancy to use national comparison data because of concerns about peer group reliability. As new information is gathered on the status of the data infrastructure at MSIs, additional interventions can be identified.

INTRODUCTION

As the country becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, it is imperative that institutions of higher education continually work to strengthen the academic success of students of color. By the year 2020, 39 percent of the total U.S. population is projected to be people of color; the proportion will increase to 50 percent by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). In 1995, Whites made up 71 percent of the college undergraduate population. By 2015, their numbers will drop to 63 percent, while African Americans will slightly increase their representation in the undergraduate population to just over 13 percent, and the number of Hispanic students will increase from 5 to 15 percent of this population (Carnevale and Fry 2000). African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students will constitute a large part of America's workforce in the coming years, and what happens to these students during the years they spend in the higher education system is of great importance to the nation.

According to figures from the U.S. Department of Education, 58 percent of White students who enrolled in four-year institutions in 1995–96 earned a bachelor's degree in five years, while only 36 percent of African Americans and 42 percent of Hispanics did. Among White students who enrolled in four-year institutions that year, only 19 percent never attained their degree and were no longer enrolled five years later (Cook and Córdova 2006). The number of African Americans and Hispanics who left school without completing a degree is higher, 30 percent and 29 percent, respectively (Cook and Córdova 2006). These figures suggest that, despite increases in the number of undergraduates who are people of color, some of these students are finding it difficult to complete a college degree. Higher education institutions must take on the challenge of ensuring that students of color, whose numbers will continue to grow, are adequately prepared to join the workforce in an environment where higher education is increasingly necessary. Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) are at the forefront of this work, with missions directly focused on increasing minority student access to and success in higher education. MSIs are colleges and universities that enroll a high proportion of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students. The designated MSIs are as follows:

- **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):** Federally designated institutions that began operating in the 19th century to serve African Americans, who were prohibited from attending predominantly White institutions.

- **Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs):** Defined by federal statute as accredited and degree-granting institutions that have at least a 25 percent Hispanic undergraduate full-time-equivalent enrollment.

- **Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs):** Institutions chartered by one or more federally recognized American Indian tribes. They are located on reservations or in communities with a large American Indian population.

Poster session during the
2005 Summer Academy.

MSIs help provide access to college and prepare students for success in a variety of ways. While African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students attend all types of postsecondary institutions, MSIs provide access and a cultural and supportive environment to many students who may be less prepared for the challenges of obtaining a college degree. MSIs are often relatively small institutions, so opportunities that help students garner satisfaction from their educational efforts, such as taking on a leadership role in a campus organization, may be more available to a range of students. For example, research indicates that many HSIs (although they were not originally founded with a mission of educating Hispanics) "offer a variety of academic and student support programs and holistic approaches that are specifically designed to raise Latino student aspirations and enhance their retention and completion rates" (Laden 2004). MSIs also help the communities that surround them by addressing local issues and educating members of the future workforce in the area.

However, while making significant contributions to the success of the emerging majority, MSIs face significant challenges. Minority-Serving Institutions, when compared with predominantly White institutions, are more likely to have students who have a low income, are the first in their family to attend college, or need developmental courses. For example, in the academic year 2003–04, 44 percent of undergraduate students enrolled at an HBCU or an HSI were first-generation college students, compared with 35 percent of students enrolled in all institutions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2004). Serving this population creates its own hardships for MSIs, especially financial ones, but this does not prevent them from developing innovative practices and improving educational attainment for students of color across the country.

In 2002, to recognize and support the important role MSIs play in facilitating minority students' participation in and completion of higher education, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE),[1] in conjunction with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and with funding from Lumina Foundation for Education, established the Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) initiative. BEAMS built on the findings that emerged from Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice), an earlier partnership between AAHE and NSSE, which documented best practices in twenty institutions that lead to student success.[2] BEAMS grew from that original partnership and findings, into a five-year project intended to foster data-based campus change initiatives at Historically Black, Hispanic-Serving, and Tribal colleges and universities. The BEAMS project helps participating MSIs enhance their capacity to collect and use data for institutional decision making and accountability. It also works with them to improve campus practices, policies, and structures for supporting student engagement, learning, and degree completion. More than 100 four-year MSIs from the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, a collaboration of the three MSI membership organizations (**BOX 1**), have joined BEAMS and have crafted institutional change initiatives to improve student persistence, learning, and attainment at their campuses.

1 AAHE was an individual membership organization that promoted changes higher education should make to ensure its effectiveness in a complex, interconnected world. AAHE submitted the original proposal for the BEAMS project in 2002, but management of the project was transferred to Institution for Higher Education Policy in 2005 when AAHE ceased operations.

2 Project DEEP documents conditions that lead to educationally effective institutions. The conditions include: having a "living" mission and a "lived" educational philosophy; an unshakeable focus on student learning; clear pathways to student success; environments adapted for educational enrichment; improvement-oriented campus culture; and shared responsibility for educational quality and student success (NSSE Web site).

ALLIANCE FOR EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, established in 1999, is a coalition of the three major associations for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), coordinated by the Institute for Higher Education Policy. The following are the three higher education founding organizations:

THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM (AIHEC) was founded in 1972 by the presidents of the first six TCUs. AIHEC has grown to represent 34 colleges in the United States and one Canadian institution. AIHEC's mission identifies four objectives: maintain commonly held standards of quality in American Indian education; support the development of new tribally controlled colleges; promote and assist in the development of legislation to support American Indian higher education; and encourage greater participation by American Indians in the development of higher education policy (AIHEC Web site).

THE HISPANIC ASSOCIATION FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HACU) was established in 1986 with a membership of 18 institutions; currently, it represents 212 HSIs in 14 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. HACU's mission states three objectives: to promote the develop-ment of member colleges and universities; to improve access to and the quality of postsecondary educational opportunities for Hispanic students; and to meet the needs of business, industry, and government through the development and sharing of resources, information, and expertise (HACU Web site).

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION (NAFEO) was founded in 1969 to be the professional asso-ciation of the presidents and chancellors of the nation's Historically and Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities; currently, it represents 119 institutions. Its mission is to champion the interests of HBCUs and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) with the executive, legislative, regulatory, and judicial branches of federal and state government and with corporations, foundations, associations, and nongovernment or-ganizations; provide services to NAFEO members; build the capacity of HBCUs and their executives, administrators, faculty, staff, and students; and serve as an international voice and advocate for the preservation and enhancement of Historically and Predominantly Black colleges and universities and for Blacks in higher education (NAFEO Web site).

The Alliance promotes collaboration and cooperation among the member MSIs and advocates for the shared policy concerns of all TCUs, HSIs, and HBCUs, and the students they serve.

Since beginning their work with BEAMS, participating institutions have reported a wide range of short-term outcomes, such as realigned institutional structures to support learning, dedication of institutional resources to support BEAMS efforts, increased participation in BEAMS-prompted programs, and, at some institutions, very promising short-term increases in retention. However, until campuses have enough time to document the long-term outcomes of their BEAMS interventions, the most promising short-term outcomes of their work are the lessons and practices that have emerged from their participation in the process of implementing data-informed campus change initiatives.

This report focuses on the practices that aided implementation at the BEAMS institutions, while also highlighting the short-term successes that have been realized thus far. By focusing on the practices that are leading to positive internal change at MSIs, this report aims to share a replicable process with institutions nationwide that are serious about using data to create change and improve their students' collegiate experience. The information gathered and cited in this publication comes from various sources. The background information on institutional practices and progress references material campuses submitted during their involvement in the BEAMS project, including action plans, progress reports, and correspondence, unless otherwise noted. Programmatic and descriptive information included in the institutional case studies came from detailed interviews with administration, staff, faculty, and students from select MSIs in the BEAMS project. In addition, the Urban Institute's Program for Evaluation and Equity Research conducted a four-year external evaluation of the BEAMS project. References to the collective practices and outcomes of the institutions in BEAMS are based on the findings summarized by the Urban Institute in various reports submitted to Lumina Foundation for Education.

The first chapter of this report describes how changes in higher education and accountability have led to an increasing need for data collection and assessment, and how these changes affect MSIs in particular. The second chapter explains how the BEAMS project enabled participating institutions to address issues of data capacity and use institutional data to establish initiatives designed to increase student success. The success BEAMS institutions experienced during the implementation process and the challenges they encountered are outlined in chapter 3; they help frame some best practices that all institutions can follow when undertaking campus change work. The report concludes with recommendations for how various stakeholders can support institutions as they follow this model. Throughout the report, case studies describe how various institutions used the highlighted best practices to achieve plan and implementation success.

''PARTICIPATION IN THE BEAMS PROJECT HAS HELPED US TO FOCUS MORE ON HOW OUR HABITS AS AN INSTITUTION INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS OF OUR STUDENTS. WE HAVE INTENTIONALLY INSTITUTED A NUMBER OF MEASURES TO PROVIDE A MORE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO HELP OUR STUDENTS SUCCEED IN THEIR ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC LIVES.''

— MARY EVANS SIAS, PRESIDENT, KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY

DATA COLLECTION AND USE AT MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

The benefits of higher education are well known and documented. They include both public and private economic benefits as well as public and private social benefits. People who have a college education are more likely to receive a higher salary and better fringe benefits, such as employer-subsidized health insurance and retirement savings accounts. They also have higher life expectancies and improved quality of life for their children. Beyond benefits to the individual, increased access to higher education leads to increases in tax revenue from workers with higher incomes, greater workforce productivity, and higher levels of voting, charitable giving, and participation in community service (Institute for Higher Education Policy [IHEP] 1998). With the growing understanding that higher education benefits not only individuals, but society as a whole, policymakers, accrediting agencies, and the general public have focused on ensuring that institutions of higher education are held accountable for the learning experiences of students.

Over the past three decades, demand has increased for institutions of higher education to demonstrate student success. The focus on greater accountability is based on declining public resources, increasing tuition costs, and the sense that colleges and universities are not well prepared to meet the needs of the 21st century (Education Commission of the States 1997). Early on, the push for measurable outcomes came from the states and typically focused on student learning (Chun 2002; Shavelson 2007). Accrediting agencies, as the organizations that ensure academic quality in higher education, have developed standards in their review process that make institutions responsible for achieving acceptable measures of student success. Recently, with the increased emphasis on accountability in the K–12 educational sector as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, the federal government has begun to play a more active role in making higher education institutions accountable for student outcomes. The federal government's involvement was made most apparent in the creation of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education and its declaration that institutional information should be made available publicly so that consumers and policymakers can measure the effectiveness of various colleges and universities (U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education 2006).

The increasing importance of accountability in higher education has consequences for postsecondary institutions. These institutions are now becoming responsible for demonstrating their successes in student learning through quantifiable evidence. If they are not able to do so, they face a number of possible institutional setbacks, including reduced funding from state and federal entities and questions about reaccreditation.

The collection and use of data are crucial factors in helping institutions successfully navigate in this emerging culture of accountability. The assessment of collected data allows institutions to determine whether or not they are achieving both their mission-defined outcomes and the outcomes desired by accrediting agencies, funding sources, and current and potential students and parents. Data provide institutions with the necessary information to make informed decisions about campus changes that can improve student learning and success, while also providing them with evidence to publicize their achievements.

MSIs and Data Collection

In the current policy environment, accountability and assessment are important at all institutions. However, not all institutions in the United States are at a stage where the move to data-focused assessment comes easily. Some institutions have limited capacity to collect and analyze the data that could help them make informed decisions and limited financial resources with which to change their situation. Often, the institutions with the most obstacles to overcome in making the shift to a data-based culture are those that would benefit most.

MSIs have found it particularly difficult to keep up with the increasing demands for data-based assessment. MSIs play a unique role in the higher education community because they educate more than one-third of the nation's students of color (Cook and Córdova 2006). The goal of an MSI—whether derived from the institution's historical mission or developed in response to population changes—is to provide postsecondary educational opportunities to groups that still face significant access barriers.

BEAMS teams working with their consultant during the 2006 Summer Academy.

The commitment of HBCUs, HSIs, and TCUs to the underrepresented populations they educate puts them at the forefront in ensuring that the United States will have a skilled workforce and will be able to maintain its global competitiveness. Remarkably, MSIs achieve these important missions while frequently facing problems that can jeopardize the success of their students. African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians are often at risk of not completing a postsecondary program. Some key risk factors shared by many of these students are lack of financial support from parents, part-time college attendance, full-time work commitments while going to school, and delayed enrollment after high school (O'Brien and Zudak 1998). Because of these risk factors and others, MSIs often have to contend with low retention and graduation rates.

MSIs themselves face problems that can limit their ability to focus on the needs of students as individual learners. Given the limited financial capacity of the populations they serve, MSIs must continue to keep tuition and fees relatively low. At HBCUs and HSIs, the average total for full-time undergraduate tuition and fees in 2003–04 was $3,986, compared with $6,814 at all postsecondary institutions. At TCUs, the average full-time undergraduate tuition was $1,951 (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education 2007). Low tuition and fees, along with other limited resources, constrain the revenue an institution has available for faculty salaries, infrastructure expenses, and technology updates. These are problems that most MSIs have experienced.

The limitations that MSIs deal with daily inhibit their ability to join the movement toward data-informed campus change. Many MSIs do not have the institutional capacity to collect data on their students'

experiences, and even fewer have effective mechanisms for linking their collected information to campus change efforts. Issues that affect institutional data capacity at MSIs include a lack of financial resources to establish internal data collection processes, staffing constraints, and outdated technology infrastructures that make data collection difficult. The lack of financial resources also hinders MSIs' participation in the national surveys used for self-assessment. As a result, MSIs that do participate in these surveys may find few comparable peers against which to judge their own results. Some MSI leaders feel that their circumstances are either unknown or misunderstood by large sectors of the higher education community. Without experience in data-based campus change, MSIs may encounter problems with regional accreditation agencies. They also have difficulty instituting practices grounded in evidence of need and impact that aid the support and retention of their students.

MSIs that are able to overcome their limitations and begin creating a culture of data-based campus change still need to address other issues that can affect assessment at any type of institution. To effectively assess students' experiences and use that information to improve campus programs and policies, institutions need to determine the following:

• How to interpret new data in the context of existing data about the quality of teaching and learning,
• How to motivate faculty members across academic departments and help them take action on the basis of the data, and
• How to disseminate assessment results to stakeholders and design strategies for improvement (AAHE and NSSE 2002).

"BEING IN BEAMS ALLOWS US TO HAVE A MEANS AND A METHOD TO PROVIDE ENRICHING EXPERIENCES TO OUR STUDENTS."

– NAPOLEON MOSES, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY

Students from BEAMS institutions sharing their experiences during the 2006 Summer Academy.

For many MSIs that have no experience addressing these issues, the practice of instituting data-based campus change can be a daunting one, requiring a significant financial and human commitment. Not doing so, however, will limit the ability of these institutions to increase student persistence and success.

It is imperative that MSIs attend to these issues as they continue to lead students of color through their higher education experience. While all students enrolled in colleges and universities face impediments to persistence and completion of a degree, MSIs in particular need to seek opportunities to engage the students they serve in "educationally appropriate behaviors and tasks" (Laird et al. 2007). This includes providing the opportunity for academic and co-curricular programs that help students garner satisfaction from their educational efforts. To create effective strategies for their students' persistence, MSIs must have concrete information that accurately defines the needs on their campuses. Oftentimes administrative decisions regarding the quality of life on campus are made on the basis of anecdotes or the experience of a few students. By including quantitative data along with qualitative data, MSIs demonstrate their ability to provide for the needs of their students.

An increase in the use of quantitative data makes a stronger case when MSIs demonstrate their students' successful outcomes to accrediting organizations, government, and current and prospective students.

Having reliable and current institutional data will allow these institutions to more accurately tailor support services, learning opportunities, and engagement opportunities to fit their populations' expressed needs. Data will help them accurately define institutional problems and find solutions to increase persistence and graduation. By holding themselves accountable, MSIs will continue to play a leading role in ensuring the educational success of students of color and enable a wider understanding of how these students learn and are engaged in postsecondary education.

Since 2002, when the BEAMS project began, there has been marked progress at many institutions, including MSIs, toward the creation of a campus culture that uses data to direct change. Institutions have answered the call from their states, the federal government, policymakers, and students to provide evidence of learning by initiating data collection efforts; using that data to implement campus change; and, in some cases, making that information public. For some MSIs, involvement in the BEAMS project was a catalyst that helped them build a foundation for data-based change and, in the process, improve student engagement and learning. For others, the lessons learned from the BEAMS process as described in the following chapters, showed the way to move in this direction, both for the benefit of students and to respond to calls for greater levels of accountability in higher education.

"THE BEAMS PROGRAM ASSISTS THE UNIVERSITY IN CULTIVATING A LASTING FOUNDATION FOR OUR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AND BEYOND. THE GOAL OF RETENTION AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IS GREATLY SUPPORTED THROUGH THIS INITIATIVE."
– EARL S. RICHARDSON, PRESIDENT, MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONALIZING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER A "COMMUNIVERSITY"

Location: Alcorn State, Miss.
Established: 1871
Type: Public HBCU
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 2,815
BEAMS Focus: Co-curricular student
engagement activities
BEAMS Cohort: 2004

"THE BEAMS ACTIVITIES
HAVE ENLIGHTENED THE
STUDENTS TO THE CARING
ATMOSPHERE AT ALCORN.
GETTING THE STUDENTS
INVOLVED HELPS THEM FEEL
THAT THEY ARE PART OF
A TEAM THAT WANTS TO
SEE THEM SUCCEED."
– LAPLOSE JACKSON, VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Alcorn State University's (ASU) late president, Clinton Bristow, initiated the institution's involvement in the BEAMS project because he believed that engaging students in community service and other co-curricular activities would contribute to their collegiate success.[3] Leveraging co-curricular activities has helped ASU foster what it calls a "communiversity"—an institutional effort to build engagement with the university, the nation, and the world. The out-of-the-classroom opportunities created through BEAMS offer the dual benefits of prompting ASU students to try to make a positive impact on those around them and providing opportunities for the surrounding community to contribute to the education of the students. This effort is especially important to a rural school like ASU, where students tended to return home when they were not in class, because there were few opportunities to engage with each other and with the surrounding community.

Building student engagement through co-curricular activities at ASU began as a formal program in 2002, but the efforts initiated at that point, while successful, were not integrated into the campus community. In 2005, the ASU BEAMS team attended the Summer Academy and used the BEAMS project to design a comprehensive student engagement program that would integrate student experience through co-curricular activities. Using the framework from the initial discussion on student engagement begun in 2002, the team set five program outcomes intended to broaden the student experience: multiculturalism, wellness, personal growth, civic involvement and responsibility, and student leadership. The team determined that the key means for achieving those goals would be through:

- Weekend and special activities,
- Faculty-student interaction activities,
- Service-learning activities, and
- Learning communities.

3 President Clinton Bristow died
prematurely on Aug. 19, 2006.
He was a visionary president
and an enthusiastic BEAMS
supporter. We honor his
memory and legacy.

Alcorn State BEAMS
Team at the 2007
Summer Academy.

Because the initiative was instigated by the president of the university, the BEAMS team had the support it needed to begin implementing these activities as soon as the members returned from the Summer Academy. However, throughout the initial stages of implementation, the team also made a conscious effort to include faculty, staff, and students in discussions about implementing new activities and improving existing ones. The ongoing effort to achieve buy-in from various campus constituencies creates support for the activities on the ASU campus, builds sustainability, and strengthens the role the entire community plays in increasing student engagement. The university also made the director of student engagement (who currently serves as the BEAMS team leader) a member of the academic council, providing a direct contact for sharing suggestions, successes, and obstacles with the senior administration.

In the two years since implementation began, ASU has initiated very successful seminars and workshops covering life skill topics ranging from health and wellness to creditworthiness and career opportunities. The Multicultural Festival, held annually on the ASU campus, has proved very successful and has helped increase engagement among students, faculty, and staff by providing an outlet for them to share aspects of their culture with each other. This sort of deliberate connection among students, faculty, and staff has helped students become more involved because they see the value placed on these activities by the entire community. As a result, student groups across the campus have initiated community service projects on their own, demonstrating how co-curricular activities are permeating the university's culture. These activities have helped strengthen the sense of community and created a vibrant environment where, rather than returning home on the weekends, students are working together in community service activities in the towns surrounding ASU.

Although a formal service-learning program does not yet exist at ASU, the BEAMS team has been encouraging course-based options as a precursor to a broader service-learning requirement. Faculty are including service-learning components in their courses. For example, one administrator who teaches in the business school included a service-learning component in which the students conducted a feasibility study for a business that suffered from the aftereffects of Hurricane Katrina. There is a clear expectation by the administration that other faculty should provide similar options for integrating engagement activities in the classroom, and the BEAMS team is working with the academic affairs office to identify campus-wide service-learning options that could provide additional learning opportunities for students.

As the ASU BEAMS team continues to fine-tune its original plan, it is implementing new programs to meet its goal of engaging students in educationally enriching activities. Recently, the team developed a plan to help students better adjust to college through the creation of the Center for Student Services and Outcomes. Through this new center and the establishment of student living and learning service centers in the residence halls, the university will strengthen its capacity to develop student leadership skills in the areas of ethics, integrity, and humanism, and will promote engagement outside the classroom with the aim of requiring community service as a condition for graduation.

Student engagement at ASU has permeated the culture of the university, with an emphasis on the belief that participation in enriching activities helps promote student learning and success. The university is developing its quality enhancement plan (QEP) for accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (also known as SACS), and senior administrators are seriously considering making student engagement the focus of their QEP. If this occurs, there will be an additional commitment of resources to the BEAMS project and involvement from the entire university.

With the implementation of activities developed through the BEAMS project, ASU is helping its students succeed at the university by providing experiences that would not be available to them if they returned home each weekend. The incorporation of co-curricular engagement activities throughout the entire university provides learning experiences and builds on the idea of a "communiversity," allowing students to realize that they can make a positive impact on the world around them.

2

ENGAGING MSIs IN DATA-BASED CHANGE

The call in higher education for institutions to develop educational practices based on needs identified through quantifiable evidence, along with the reality that some institutions face barriers to the collection and use of institutional data, were the catalysts for the BEAMS project. As the need for accountability in higher education grew stronger, the BEAMS project was established to help MSIs address the issue of assessment and data capacity. By targeting MSIs, the project also intended to help move students of color toward graduation from a college or university by working with institutions to increase student learning, engagement in learning, and collegiate success.

Since 2002, 102 four-year MSIs have taken part in BEAMS: 55 HBCUs, 44 HSIs, and three TCUs (see Appendix A for a list of BEAMS institutions).[4] While the majority of these institutions are public institutions, 40 are private institutions. The institutions involved in the BEAMS project have freshman classes whose high school grade point averages (GPAs) range from 1.66 to 3.65, with an average GPA of 2.9 for entering freshmen (National Articulation and Transfer Network Web site).[5] The 102 institutions also vary greatly in their enrollment. The median total enrollment at BEAMS institutions during fall 2005 was 3,748 students. However, the smallest total enrollment in that semester was 113 students, while the largest total enrollment was 36,904 (NCES 2005). While the institutions involved in BEAMS vary greatly, they were able to come together and engage in a similar process to promote institutional change based on data collection.

Student Engagement in the BEAMS Project

In recent years, many individuals and institutions in the higher education community have recognized the importance of data-based decision making and the creation of a "culture of evidence" on campuses. In their work on community colleges, Bailey and Alfonso (2005) emphasize that the creation of a culture of evidence—in which research and data are key forces behind campus change—is a step institutions should take because of the important role institutional research can have on student success.

A primary goal of the BEAMS project was to support the creation of a culture of evidence at MSIs. To establish common baseline data at participating institutions, the BEAMS project called for institutions to collect student engagement data through NSSE (**BOX 2**). While experts disagree as to what data provides "evidence" of student learning, student engagement data are considered an indicator of student success. Using the premise that student learning is a corollary of student engagement, and with the guidance of NSSE staff and BEAMS consultants, BEAMS campuses leveraged their NSSE results to develop strategic plans to make systemic changes that would improve student learning and success. Using data regularly to plan and measure campus change implied building a culture of evidence.

Student engagement has emerged in the past few decades as a strong predictor of student success. Research has found that the more engaged students are on campus, the stronger the likelihood that they will succeed in college and graduate. NCES found that "consistent with Tinto's (1993) theory of academic integration, students who were less able to engage with their academic program were more likely to leave early, even when controlling for such other factors as low GPAs" (1998). Other researchers have found that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is a strong predictor of their cognitive and personal development (Astin 1993; Pace 1980; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

4 BEAMS focused solely on four-year institutions because the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement,* NSSE's two-year counterpart, was in its early stages of development at the time the program began.

5 Average GPA is based on 77 institutions; data not available for the other 25 institutions.

Cheyney University of Pennsylvania BEAMS Team at the 2006 Summer Academy.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) outlined the following seven institutional practices that can lead to high levels of student engagement:

1. Student-faculty interaction, in which contacts between faculty members and students are frequent and occur within or outside the classroom.
2. Reciprocity and cooperation among students, such as having students work with each other and share ideas collaboratively.
3. Active learning—making learning relate to the students' daily lives.
4. Prompt feedback, in which students receive frequent suggestions for improvement.
5. Teaching students how to use their time effectively.
6. High expectations—communicating to students that they are expected to perform well.
7. Respect for diverse talents and ways of learning, including embracing the various talents and styles students bring to college.

Since these practices were identified, they have been a key foundation to improvement in institutions of higher education. Implementing these practices tends to help students make gains in critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship (Kuh 2003).

These seven principles underlie the conceptual framework for NSSE. The survey is an institutional assessment tool used nationally to identify student perceptions of how they engage in the learning process at their institution and how they take advantage of the engagement opportunities available to them (**BOX 2**). When the survey began in 1999, it was seen as a promising tool for improving institutional effectiveness and student success. NSSE has grown into a generally accepted and widely used tool for institutional self-assessment, with more than 1,458,000 students at nearly 1,200 four-year colleges and universities participating since its inception (NSSE 2007).

BOX 2 **ABOUT THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is designed to obtain information from scores of colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. Survey items on NSSE represent empirically confirmed "good practices" in undergraduate education. That is, they reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college.

NSSE frames its questions around the following five benchmarks, which capture some of the most important aspects of the student experience that contribute to learning and personal development:

• **Level of Academic Challenge:** Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance.
• **Student Interactions with Faculty Members:** Students see firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom.
• **Supportive Campus Environment:** Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and that cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.
• **Active and Collaborative Learning:** Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in various settings.
• **Enriching Educational Experiences:** Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program. Such experiences make learning more meaningful and more useful, because what students know becomes part of who they are.
SOURCE: NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WEB SITE

When BEAMS was conceived, however, only a limited number of HBCUs and HSIs—and no TCUs—were taking part in NSSE. Many MSIs were concerned that the demographics of most participating institutions were quite different from their own and, therefore, comparative data would not accurately reflect the MSI reality. For others, the cost of participation was too high or the survey instrument too new to justify the expense. Some MSIs also feared that data collected would be made public without explanation, and thus misrepresent the efforts and accomplishments of the institutions and the populations they served.[6] The decision not to participate in NSSE meant not having national data on student engagement that other higher education institutions were finding valuable to identify gaps in meeting student needs. The lack of MSI participation in the first years of NSSE also had broader implications—the inability to assess engagement at MSIs and to provide comparison data within this group. The BEAMS project helped introduce a critical mass of MSIs to NSSE, which in turn provided new information on how MSIs were engaging and supporting their students for institutional assessment and cross-institutional comparisons.

The BEAMS Process

Institutions joined BEAMS through one of three cohorts in 2003, 2004, or 2005. They prepared to engage in a systematic process of data-informed institutional change that was supported and guided by project staff, consultants, and other participants (**FIGURE 1**). From the onset, institutions were encouraged to form a BEAMS working group composed of senior administrators, faculty, students, institutional researchers, and staff from various college offices to organize the project and ensure its implementation.

In the first stage of BEAMS, institutions collected student engagement data through the National Survey of Student Engagement. NSSE was administered to a random sample of first-year and senior students via a Web-based survey, mailed hard copies of the survey, or a combination of these options, depending on institutional capacity and preference. The institutions were supported by NSSE experts during this process to help them choose the best method of data collection and to increase the response rate. Some institutions chose to supplement NSSE collection with internal assessments and participation in other national surveys, such as the Student Satisfaction Inventory (also known as SSI) by Noel Levitz, the Higher Education Research Institute's Freshman Survey (also known as HERI), or the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (also known as FSSE).

6 NSSE describes how they addressed these concerns in *Connecting the Dots*. For a copy of the report visit: http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/Connecting_the_Dots_Report.pdf.
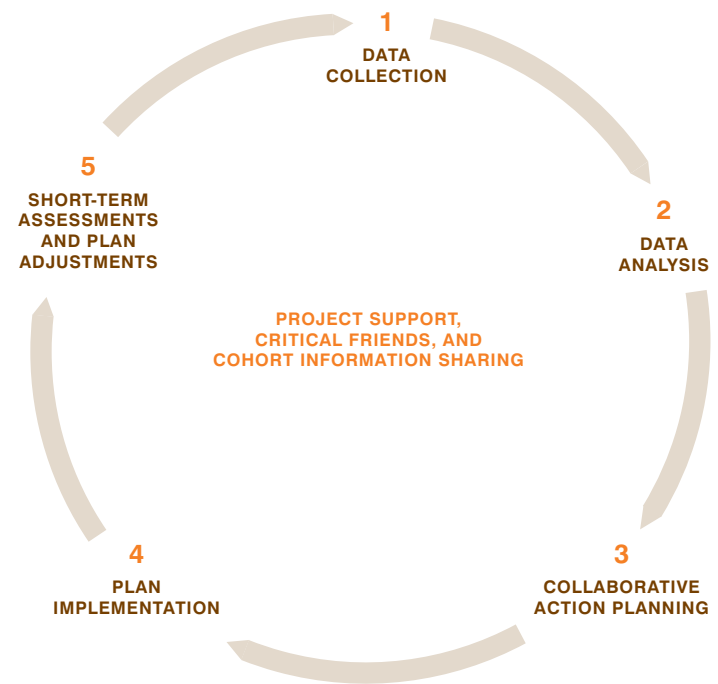

Brian Bridges, BEAMS consultant, at the 2006 Summer Academy.

The campuses followed up by having their data analyzed to determine areas that needed improvement and attention. Institutions were provided with NSSE institutional and benchmark reports and could request special analysis reports to obtain more detailed comparisons between the responses from their students and those from students at other institutions that participated in NSSE. While teams reviewed the information received by the NSSE reports, they were also asked to consider what potential interventions might help them strengthen their students' level of engagement on the various NSSE benchmarks or individual survey items.

To help BEAMS institutions move from data collection and analysis review to data-based decision making and campus change, the BEAMS project funded a five-person team from each institution to attend a Summer Academy (**BOX 3**). The event provided teams with the time and focus to use their results as a basis for an intervention that would lead to improved student engagement and learning. Throughout the five-day Academy, teams had the support of consultants who commented on their daily assignments and guided them as they generated an action plan to implement changes. Participants also benefited from the guidance of NSSE and BEAMS project staff, and from the opportunity to interact with other Academy participants who were undertaking similar projects. By the end of the Academy, each team had designed a campus action plan for change that outlined strategies to implement a new or restructured initiative to increase student engagement and learning, set a timeline for the implementation, established realistic goals, and defined appropriate assessment measures.

FIGURE 1
BEAMS PROCESS

1 DATA COLLECTION

2 DATA ANALYSIS

3 COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLANNING

4 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

5 SHORT-TERM ASSESSMENTS AND PLAN ADJUSTMENTS

PROJECT SUPPORT, CRITICAL FRIENDS, AND COHORT INFORMATION SHARING

BOX 3 **SUMMER ACADEMY**

The Summer Academy is an annual gathering of teams from various colleges and universities that work collaboratively to create action plans aimed at increasing access and success for students of color in higher education. The event allows participating campuses an opportunity to identify institution-focused solutions that, if successful, may influence national higher education policy. Participants include senior academic administrators, faculty, student affairs representatives, students, and other campus stakeholders.

The teams prepare for the Academy by identifying the vision and goals for their campus project. During the five-day event, team members engage in intense work to refine their projects for successful implementation on campus. Project activities include one-on-one consultation with national higher education leaders. Designed as a working conference, the Summer Academy is a retreat where participants can escape the many demands of campus life to focus on strategic conversations and action planning, institutional and cross-institutional teamwork, networking opportunities, tailored workshops and plenary sessions, and access to national leaders in higher education.

The Summer Academy was established in 1995 through the leadership of the American Association for Higher Education; management of the Academy was transferred to the Institute for Higher Education Policy in 2005.
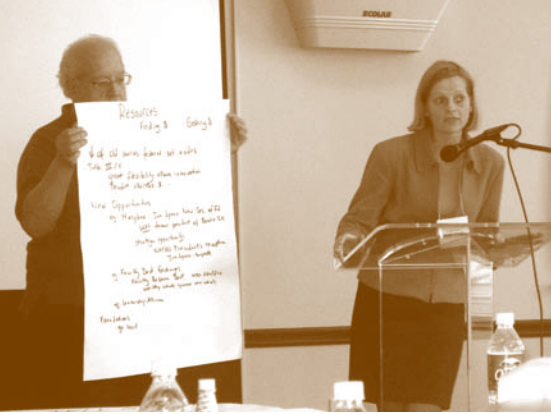
Presenting shared work during the 2007 spring meeting.

On returning from the Summer Academy, BEAMS teams worked with others on their campuses to begin the process of implementation. This often required that teams gain buy-in from campus interest groups, including administration, faculty, and students. The BEAMS project supported teams by arranging consultant site visits, reconvening participants one semester after the initial implementation, and prompting information sharing and progress reporting through the WebCenter, an online communication tool that was available to all participants.

Throughout the process of implementation, teams also used short-term assessment measures that were identified in their original plans to benchmark their progress and make mid-course changes as needed. Ongoing feedback from consultants and BEAMS staff helped teams assess their work and determine next steps.

An emphasis throughout this five-step process was information sharing and collaboration across the BEAMS institutions so that the campuses could learn from each other's work. Participants were brought together on various occasions to promote opportunities for teams and individuals to speak with one another and share their project development and implementation experiences. At their initial Summer Academy, teams were assigned consultants on the basis of project focus; this ensured information sharing from the earliest stages of project planning. Participants were reunited in the spring following the Academy to share implementation experiences, discuss best practices, and offer feedback on obstacles faced during the first months of putting their action plans in place. Both NSSE and BEAMS staff and consultants took active part in these spring meetings. Teams were also encouraged to share information through the WebCenter, by participating in project-supported visits to other BEAMS campuses, and by returning for additional Summer Academy gatherings.

The BEAMS project was strengthened by this constant interaction among teams because participants were able to share their challenges and learn how others in similar situations had overcome similar problems. They also shared their successes and offered guidance to institutions that were just beginning to implement their projects.

''THE HASKELL BEAMS PROJECT IS ADDRESSING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT STARTING WITH THE SOCIAL LIFE AND WILL GO ONTO THE ACADEMIC WITH STRATEGIES TO POSITIVELY IMPACT RETENTION WITH FRESHMAN STUDENTS. THE CONCEPT OF THE 'WHOLE STUDENT' IS A FOCUS THAT IS TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE ENTIRE UNIVERSITY. IT IS BOTH EXCITING AND CHALLENGING AND HASKELL APPRECIATES BEING PART OF THE BEAMS INITIATIVE.''

– KAREN GILLIS, DEAN OF STUDENTS, HASKELL INDIAN NATIONS UNIVERSITY

Projects Developed Through BEAMS

The BEAMS process encouraged teams to focus on areas and strategies that their NSSE results suggested could increase student engagement and retention. Given the many different student responses to NSSE questions, the varied missions and strategic goals of the BEAMS institutions, and the unique perspectives of the individual teams, the projects undertaken through BEAMS have been extremely diverse. Areas such as faculty development, first-year programs, out-of-classroom activities, and student support services were among those most frequently targeted by BEAMS institutions (**FIGURE 2**). Other project foci included the creation of learning communities, the use of technology to enhance programs, and writing across the curriculum.

Once an institution determined its project focus, it had to identify the strategies that would best address this focus. To choose the most effective strategies, institutions had to consider their available resources and current environment. For example, sixteen institutions in the project chose to address faculty development as part of their BEAMS work; however, the way these institutions decided to approach this topic varied. Edward Waters College (EWC), a small private HBCU in Florida, created two faculty learning communities—one for developmental learning and the other for general education—to bring together faculty who taught these courses and help them identify strategies to improve the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills of their students. EWC also planned for a faculty research room where faculty could learn about best practices in teaching and learning. Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico, a large HSI, had its office of institutional revision design a faculty training and support program to help faculty infuse critical thinking competencies into three of the core courses: Spanish, English, and mathematics. **TABLE 1** shows how other institutions across the country addressed the issue of faculty development on their campuses.

FIGURE 2

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF BEAMS INSTITUTIONS BY PROJECT FOCUS

- ■ TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS
- ■ WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
- ■ OTHER PROJECT FOCUS
- ■ FACULTY DEVELOPMENT
- ■ FIRST AND/OR SECOND YEAR PROGRAMS
- ■ LEARNING COMMUNITIES
- ■ OUT-OF-THE-CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
- ■ SUPPORT SERVICES
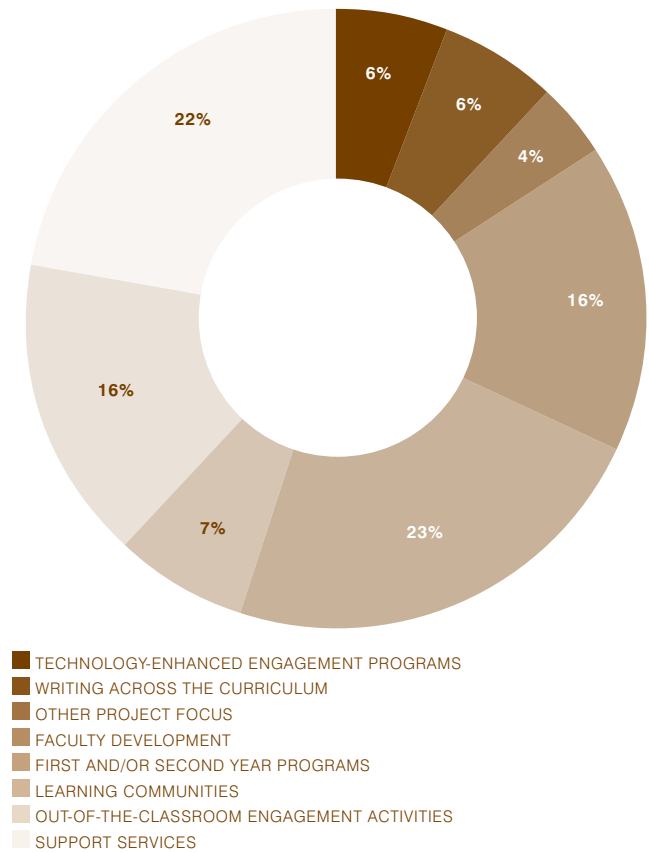
Case studies on the University of the District of Columbia (page 48) and California State University–Dominguez Hills (page 24) delve deeper into how selected institutions are addressing faculty development on their campuses.

Revitalization of an institution's first-year program was another common strategy for the BEAMS institutions. Activities included the creation of student handbooks, mentoring programs, and new student orientations. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, a public HBCU, developed learning communities for students in the first year to provide out-of-classroom activities and experiences that help students build academic and social support networks. California State University–Los Angeles (CSULA) developed a first-year student orientation and an "Introduction to Higher Education" course for students in their first or second term at the university. **TABLE 2** outlines the strategies used at four other institutions as they addressed their first-year program. Detailed information on how Jarvis Christian College and the University of the Incarnate Word address their first-year students' experiences can be found on pages 26 and 50, respectively.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE OF STRATEGIES USED TO ADDRESS FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

INSTITUTION	INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	STRATEGY
Bethune-Cookman College	Type: Private HBCU Location: Florida 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 2,795	1. Develop and distribute assessment tools and guides to the faculty.
		2. Host a series of lectures on student-centered learning and assessments through the Faculty Development Center.
Institute of American Indian Arts	Type: Public TCU Location: New Mexico 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 83	1. Provide resources to faculty teaching the general education course to help them develop and implement the course.
		2. Hold meetings to aid faculty in addressing new learning outcomes.
Jackson State University	Type: Public HBCU Location: Mississippi 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 6,449	1. Establish faculty and staff training programs to enable them to serve as informed resource persons.
Woodbury University	Type: Private HBCU Location: California 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 1,113	1. Create a learning community of adjunct faculty.
		2. Develop a teaching philosophy workshop to help with rank advancement and position applications.

SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SURVEY. ENROLLMENT SURVEY 2004–05.; CAMPUS ACTION PLANS

The strategies mentioned previously, along with many others used by BEAMS institutions to increase student engagement, have generated a wealth of practices and experiences that are helping MSIs target and address the needs of their students. Through participation in a process that provided deliberate steps to aid institutional assessment, planning, and implementation, these colleges and universities have dealt with various issues on their campuses in ways that are leading to increases in student engagement. Not only have the BEAMS schools developed practices that can help other MSIs, the lessons they have learned can be replicated across all types of institutions and continue to build a strong culture of evidence in higher education to achieve greater student success.

BOX 4

THE BEAMS PROJECT PRACTICE BRIEFS

The creative strategies used by the BEAMS institutions to increase their students' engagement and success are far too comprehensive to include in this monograph. Instead, the BEAMS project is disseminating practice briefs detailing the initiatives undertaken by various institutions, the steps they took to achieve implementation, and their accomplishments. The briefs will highlight common practices that can be replicated by other colleges and universities that are interested in carrying out similar projects. All practice briefs are available on the Institute for Higher Education Policy Web site (www.ihep.org).

TABLE 2
SAMPLE OF STRATEGIES USED TO ADDRESS FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	STRATEGY
Barry University	Type: Private HSI Location: Florida 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 6,347	1. Create a mentoring program between first-year students and faculty.
		2. Create a supplemental course focusing on critical thinking strategies.
Bowie State University	Type: Public HBCU Location: Maryland 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 3,570	1. Develop stronger advising and mentoring strategies.
		2. Incorporate strategic interactions between students and faculty.
Miles College	Type: Private HBCU Location: Alabama 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 1,623	1. Restructure the orientation process to provide practical approaches to success.
		2. Strengthen counseling services to help students who are transitioning into college.
University of Texas—Pan American	Type: Public HSI Location: Texas 2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 11,154	1. Develop a learning framework course to help students understand how to apply the psychology of learning into their university experience.

SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SURVEY. ENROLLMENT SURVEY 2004–05.; CAMPUS ACTION PLANS

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY–DOMINGUEZ HILLS

EXPANDING THE CHOIR TO INCREASE
STUDENT SUCCESS

Location: Carson, Calif.
Established: 1960
Type: Public HSI
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 6,711
BEAMS Focus: Comprehensive campus change, including
faculty development and the first-year experience
BEAMS Cohort: 2003

''WE ON THIS CAMPUS
BELIEVE VERY DEEPLY IN
THE VALUE OF WORKING
TOGETHER COLLABORATIVELY
TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN.''
– ALLEN MORI, FORMER PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The BEAMS project at California State University–Dominguez Hills
(CSUDH) served as a catalyst to combine the system-wide initiative,
Facilitation to Graduation, with a self-study for accreditation that
emphasized academic quality, campus change, diversity, and civic
engagement. By establishing such a broad undertaking, CSUDH
captured the interest and passion of students and staff to aid in
creating positive change.

During the 2004 Summer Academy, the CSUDH team—consisting
of representatives from student life, academic affairs, and institutional
research—crafted an action plan with nine major components to
enhance student learning and development to include:

1. The creation of a first-year experience coordinating council.
2. Increasing opportunities for faculty development.
3. Expanding the new-student orientation.
4. Making the introduction to higher education course mandatory.
5. Improving advisement.
6. Creating a peer mentoring program.
7. Having consistent evaluation and feedback on the various initiatives.
8. Ensuring institutional support.
9. Ensuring campus commitment.

The first eight components would not have been feasible without the
ninth one. On its return from the Academy, the team formally presented
the action plan to the president, provost, vice president for student
affairs, and the rest of the president's cabinet, garnering their support
early in the process. The team was also able to engage faculty and
students by involving them in the development of the programs out-
lined in the action plan. By building such broad support from various
campus constituencies—what the BEAMS team called "growing the
choir"—CSUDH has made progress on several components of its
action plan in the three years since the plan was implemented.

Increasing faculty awareness and ability in the area of teaching and
learning was a key focus of the CSUDH action plan. Working with
its Center for Teaching and Learning, the BEAMS team created a
speaker series that invites national higher education experts (includ-
ing Vincent Tinto, Craig Nelson, Jean MacGregor, Tom Angelo, and
James Anderson) to speak on the topic of "Becoming an Engaged

The CSUDH BEAMS team.

Community of Learners." Each speaker is interviewed at CSUDH's television studio, and recordings of these interviews are posted on the school's Web site (http://ctl.csudh.edu/SpeakerSeries/Archive.htm) so all CSUDH faculty have access to them. After each interview, a provost's luncheon seminar is held for senior administrators and invited guests. Finally, a general workshop is offered to the campus community. The information and discussion provided through the speaker series have encouraged the CSUDH community to think broadly about the role of teaching and learning in higher education.

As a direct response to the growing number of freshmen at the university, the BEAMS team decided to focus some of its initiatives on restructuring the freshman experience. As part of this focus, the CSUDH BEAMS action plan proposed to make an existing introductory course on higher education (known as "University 101") mandatory for all first-year students. Resource constraints have prevented the university from making this course mandatory, but the team has managed to expand the number of sections offered by thinking creatively and tapping academic administrators (including the provost and vice provost) to volunteer their time as instructors. In an interview, the provost said University 101 has been successful partly because faculty and administrators were more willing to participate in the program when they saw senior administrators teaching the class. There are now 12 sections of University 101 each year, serving approximately 600 students. The course is designed to ease the transition to college and provide skills for college and beyond. Students are encouraged to integrate into the university by taking part in service learning opportunities, engaging with faculty in their discipline, and being grouped with others who may be experiencing the same fears and doubts during their first year at the university.

Students who took University 101 have seen the benefits of the course as they continue their education. Students who were interviewed said the course helped them balance work, school, and other activities and created networks with fellow students. One student said, "[The class is] like having a big brother on campus who sat you down and talked to you for 20 hours about where to go and who to talk to." Data on student engagement mirror the students' positive views of the course. In 2006, the institution compared NSSE scores of students who took University 101 with the scores of students who did not take the class. The students enrolled in the course scored higher on all five NSSE benchmarks. The course is also affecting retention rates at the university: 78 percent of first-year students who participated in University 101 returned for their second year, compared with 53 percent of first-year students who did not take the class.

One key factor in the successful implementation of the BEAMS action plan is that the changes occurring on CSUDH's campus have been initiated not just by the administration and faculty, but also by students. One of the components of the action plan was to put in place peer mentoring. The peer-mentoring program presently in place, Adopt-a-Freshman, was launched by the student government in the fall 2006 semester. In this program, new students are paired with upper-division volunteers whom they can rely on for advice and assistance during their time at CSUDH.

While the specific initiatives outlined above were key parts of the CSUDH BEAMS action plan, the full impact of this project is apparent in an initiative team members did not even envision at the time they created the plan. The Student Retention Policy Council, created in fall 2006, is composed of members of all divisions on the CSUDH campus and led by the dean of undergraduate studies. The purpose of the council, which meets twice a month, is to have a consistent infrastructure that supports students academically and personally to ensure their academic success. The council makes policy recommendations to the provost. In the year since its creation, nine of the 27 recommendations proposed have been accepted and acted upon by the provost, including the creation of a workshop for new faculty on academic advising and the establishment of an ombudsperson position.

The campus environment when CSUDH joined the BEAMS project allowed the team to undertake extensive changes across the entire university. However, it was the team's commitment to engaging all the diverse campus constituencies that led to the successful implementation of so many initiatives and to a sense that the campus culture has been changed in productive ways. Because of this collaboration across campus and a shared commitment to the success of CSUDH students, the components that formed the BEAMS action plan will likely be sustained for years to come.

JARVIS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

IT TAKES AN ENTIRE CAMPUS TO GRADUATE
A STUDENT

Location: Hawkins, Texas
Established: 1912
Type: Private HBCU
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 559
BEAMS Focus: Comprehensive campus
change, with a focus on the first-year experience
BEAMS Cohort: 2004

''THE WORK DONE
THROUGH BEAMS HAS
HELPED US CHANGE OUR
THINKING ABOUT WHO
IS RESPONSIBLE FOR
RECRUITMENT AND
RETENTION—ALL OF US!''
– LARRY EVERETT, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Jarvis Christian College (JCC) joined BEAMS in 2004 when the president and vice president of academic affairs learned about the project and saw it as an ideal opportunity to supplement the recruitment and retention initiatives in the college's strategic plan. The institution set a goal of having 1,000 students enrolled during the academic year 2012. A specific plan—one that included the entire campus community—was required to meet this goal, and the BEAMS initiative provided appropriate strategies. With leadership from the senior administrators, the entire community at JCC has become involved in implementing strategies to engage students in activities that promote success, specifically in the first year of matriculation.

In 2005, JCC sent a team to the Summer Academy with the goal of developing a master plan to improve student engagement and institutional effectiveness. The JCC BEAMS team crafted an action plan—Recruitment and Retention (R-2)—focused on implementing a comprehensive first-year program that would be the centerpiece of campus efforts to cultivate a supportive environment for students. The following are the key components of the action plan:

• Creating a safe, comfortable, and attractive environment for all students;
• Enhancing the availability of student activities; and
• Restructuring the first-year seminar course.

The action plan was submitted to the senior administration, and the president's executive council voted to adopt the BEAMS plan as JCC's official retention plan. Campus constituencies were made aware of the renewed focus on student recruitment and retention through a series of workshops. This deliberate information sharing helped garner support for the BEAMS work, and a slogan soon emerged—"It takes an entire campus to graduate a student"—signaling that every person at the college is responsible for increasing student success and eventual graduation.

A crucial focus of the BEAMS work at JCC, since 2005, has been improving customer service. Engaging the whole campus community to aid in student success required that all campus services and the manner in which they are provided be consistently helpful

JCC Freshman Year
Experience Team.

to students. Through workshops and trainings, faculty and staff learned how to improve their interactions with students and parents. This process has led to changes in such things as how the telephones are answered in each campus office and how offices communicate with each other about a student's needs. A deliberate effort has been made to have all staff claim responsibility for students' concerns. For example, when staff members are unable to help students themselves, they direct them—and sometimes even walk them—to the appropriate office or division. Overall, the work in this area has helped create a culture among faculty and staff that fosters a spirit of collaboration and positive attitudes, with the shared goal of improving the student experience at JCC.

The most comprehensive product to emerge from JCC's involvement with the BEAMS project has been the development of a multifaceted first-year program. The changes brought about by this initiative can be seen first on registration day in the extra welcome stations—manned by basketball team members, faculty, and staff—located strategically around the campus. At each station, refreshments, maps, and orientation schedules are available, and each freshman and transfer student receives a welcome bag. During registration, freshmen are divided into teams to help them get acquainted with each other. The leaders of these teams also serve as freshmen advisors throughout the year. Separate parent orientation sessions are held at the president's house and provide an opportunity for parents to interact with the vice presidents, the campus pastor, and representatives from the office of recruitment.

For students, the experience of the first year in college is now bookended by a pair of ceremonies designed to mark and celebrate their connection to the JCC community. At the beginning of the year, an induction ceremony welcomes freshmen to the college, and each student is presented a gold key that symbolizes the "key to success." At the end of the year, a commencement ceremony honors the students' successful completion of their first year in college, and each student receives a certificate acknowledging this achievement. A member of the college's executive board expressed the belief that these new activities help students, faculty, and staff build shared experiences. The ritual and ceremonies have become beloved parts of campus culture,

indicating that this change will be sustained for many years to come. JCC also instituted a mandatory two-semester freshman seminar, with credit, designed to help students navigate their first year in college. Each section of the seminar includes 25–30 students and is taught by a team of faculty or staff members who also serve as freshman advisors. The course, held twice a week, introduces students to study and time management skills, the use of electronic portfolios, service learning, and collaborative working styles. It also helps students form bonds with each other and with the JCC community as they work together to complete projects and interact with various campus constituencies.

Like many institutions involved in campus change work, JCC faced challenges in implementing its BEAMS plan. Issues of resources, staff turnover, and lack of available staff time were encountered, but the BEAMS team, with support from the entire JCC community, has been able to surmount these problems and see successes from its work. Implementation of a campus-wide initiative requires more interaction among campus constituencies, and Jarvis has seen these relationships grow in a positive manner. Faculty and staff are more engaged, initiating interactions with each other and volunteering for various campus activities as well as increasing their interaction with students. The college has also seen a transformation in its students over the course of a few years. Students are taking more active leadership roles, claiming responsibility for their academic success, and becoming more attached to the institution. One staff member expressed his view on the benefits of the BEAMS work at JCC this way: "Watching kids grow into responsible adults is a gift unmatched."

The establishment of the community slogan—"It takes an entire campus to graduate a student"—allowed the leadership of Jarvis Christian College to garner commitment to long-term changes from all campus constituencies. From senior administrators to the switchboard operator, each member of the JCC faculty and staff is aware of his or her responsibility in providing support to the students and aiding in their success. Achieving campus buy-in at all levels was not easy, but by making everyone responsible for a student's graduation, the BEAMS team helped embed its work into the heart of the JCC experience.

3

LESSONS FROM
THE BEAMS PROJECT

The BEAMS project has provided a large number of MSIs with the framework to create a culture of evidence and increase student success. While it is still too early to assess the long-term impact of BEAMS on student engagement and, eventually, on graduation rates, important lessons have emerged about how institutions can begin the process of developing a culture of data-based change. The BEAMS institutions have learned lessons about data collection and use, and about the implementation of campus change initiatives, that laid the groundwork for sustainable projects that will lead to increased academic success for students. The BEAMS lessons can benefit any institution that is engaged in similar work. They offer replicable pathways for enhancing student engagement and using data for institutional decision making.

Lessons Learned about Data Collection and Use

The institutions involved in BEAMS began their work by participating in NSSE. Data collection was not always easy, as many of the institutions were unfamiliar with the process of administering a national survey in general and NSSE in particular. What may seem a simple decision about how best to administer a survey to students proved to be quite challenging as institutions had to balance the best method of reaching their target populations against the limits of their resources. The experience of making this and similar decisions served as a foundation on which these institutions could build skills in the process of data collection and a reminder of the commitment data collection entails. The following are some of the lessons that emerged for successful data collection and use:

• Align the collection method with institutional capacity
• Draw on available internal and external resources
• Institute practices to help reach the target audience
• Use a framework to interpret data results
• Use more than one data source

Institutions were able, in many cases, to develop a habit of asking and answering questions that would lead to successful data collection and use, signaling the first stages of a culture of evidence.

Institutions that assume the task of creating a culture of evidence must ensure that the data collection methods they use are consistent with their capacity to administer a survey and conduct follow-up requests for survey completion. During the BEAMS project, each MSI had to decide whether paper, Web, or Web-and-paper survey administration was best for its institution. To make a wise decision, institutions had to be aware of their financial restraints, the capacity of their technological infrastructure, their students' access to technology, and how they would contact first-year and senior students. For example, institutions with a history of contacting students via e-mail or requiring the use of campus e-mail in the classroom could be more confident in choosing a Web-only NSSE administration than those that had not used technology to correspond with their students in the past. The ability to deliver the survey to students

Arthur Chickering,
BEAMS consultant, at the
2006 Summer Academy.

directly correlates with the response rate; therefore, institutions were encouraged to choose the mode of administration that best suited their environment and would provide high response rates and valid data results.[7]

Drawing on available support structures to help with data collection and interpretation can help institutions that are new to assessment, and groups of stakeholders within such institutions, make the most of their efforts. These resources can be both internal (such as drawing on the experience of the institution's research and assessment office) and external (such as tapping support staff of a national survey organization or higher education experts who are familiar with data collection methods). The BEAMS teams found that connections with their internal institutional research staff, when available, were critical in helping them successfully administer NSSE. As the Urban Institute noted in its evaluation of the 2003 NSSE administration, "Interviewees also lauded school staff members, such as those in charge of survey or institutional research, who they believe were instrumental in carrying out the administration" (Tsui et al. 2005a). The use of internal resources allows for ongoing support in the process of collecting and assessing institutional data. During the survey administration, BEAMS teams also relied on NSSE staff for information regarding the survey and its administration, potential ways to publicize the survey on campus, and general guidance for successful data collection.

While national survey staff and on-campus researchers can help with the administration of a survey instrument, institutions should also develop practices that increase awareness of the survey among the broader campus community. Some BEAMS institutions began their data collection with campaigns that informed campus constituencies of the survey's availability and its importance to the institution. These campaigns were effective in garnering buy-in from campus groups, such as faculty, that were then able to publicize the survey to students. Various BEAMS institutions used e-mails, letters, flyers, classroom announcements, and announcements in student clubs to reach first-year and senior students tapped to participate in NSSE (Tsui et al. 2005b). Teams also used incentives and over sampling during survey administration to target more students and to improve survey response rates.

Once data collection is completed, it is helpful for institutions to translate the results into a format that is accessible for a broad audience, highlighting the major findings in relation to what is being measured and how the findings could be used. When stakeholders are provided with a clear framework for interpreting the results, they can focus less on the technical details of data interpretation and more on how the findings can inform their practice. For MSIs that participated in BEAMS, reporting institutional results according to the five NSSE benchmarks provided an accessible framework to interpret the student responses and craft appropriate solutions to some of the problems identified by the data. As the team at one institution noted:

> "The 2003 NSSE data showed the focus on first year students as [an] area in need of immediate enhancement. Although the seniors consistently outperformed the national average, the freshman body showed a great divide in their participation and learning in the enriching educational experiences programs. The office of first-year experience [is] continually strengthening its foundation to build enriching educational experiences for the first-year student. The service learning program developed [an] assessment tool to identify areas of success and areas in need of quality enhancements."[8]

7 For additional information on survey administration protocol and suggestions for successful survey administration visit the NSSE Web site at http://nsse.iub.edu/.

8 The background information on institutional practices and progress references material campuses submitted during their involvement in the BEAMS project, including action plans, progress reports, and correspondence, unless otherwise noted.

BEAMS team at the 2005 Summer Academy.

The use of various data sources help provide a more complete picture of an institution's campus culture and aids in the creation of a framework for change through the use of multiple findings, rather than relying on one data tool. Institutions should use various sources of information to frame an issue from various points of reference. Data can range from institutional measures that are collected yearly to meet federal, state, or institutional reporting requirements, to participation in a national survey that answers more specific questions and targets a specific population within a university. NSSE results were, in fact, not the only source of information used by BEAMS institutions as they sought to frame an institutional challenge. Institutions interpreted their NSSE results in light of a range of existing information sources, ranging from institutional data on student persistence to other national surveys measuring student priorities. For some institutions, NSSE results confirmed an existing understanding of areas of weakness. In these cases, plans for potential solutions may have already been under way when NSSE was administered. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data with institutional knowledge allowed BEAMS campuses to identify areas in need of work and the best ways to address those needs.

The systematic use of data on the BEAMS campuses was, for many, a catalyst for institutional culture shift. Involvement in the BEAMS project helped institutions highlight the value of using data to inform campus decision making and gave them the tools to regularize this process. About half of the institutions in the first and second BEAMS cohorts believed that BEAMS had resulted in a move toward more data-based decision making at their school (Clewell and Deterding 2007; Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006). During the Urban Institute evaluation, one respondent explained:

> "There is a greater reliance on data for decision making because BEAMS, and more specifically NSSE, has helped [us] to realize the usefulness of survey results and that the perceptions of students are not the same as that of the administration or faculty" (Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006).

"OUR POSITIONS ARE NOT REALLY POWER POSITIONS, BUT POSSIBILITY POSITIONS. WE HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF GATHERING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO MEET NEEDS WITH SOLUTIONS."
– GILDA GELY, DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO—HUMACAO

Best Practices for Successful Implementation

Familiarization with the process of data collection is the first step in creating a culture of evidence. However, institutions must also determine how to use the data they have collected. The basis of a culture of evidence is not only having the capacity to conduct institutional research but also being able use the data "to identify problems and choose and assess alternative solutions" (Bailey and Alfonso 2005). In the three years that BEAMS institutions have been developing and implementing their projects, certain practices (in addition to a new emphasis on data-informed decision making) have led to short-term successes in identifying campus concerns and developing potential solutions. These practices include:

- Establishing a strong team;
- Participating in a working conference away from campus;
- Developing an appropriate and feasible action plan;
- Linking BEAMS work with a larger campus initiative;
- Building support from senior administration, faculty, and staff; and
- Gaining access to sufficient resources to make the project a reality.

Many of the BEAMS teams that have begun to see short-term successes attribute their achievements to these practices.

Institutions that are serious about using data to craft change need to ensure that the persons involved in the project are dedicated to and can influence change. It has made a great difference in BEAMS when the teams were made up of persons representing many different campus constituencies, so that change can be effected at every level. At one institution, for example, "all BEAMS team members have been updating their school on various methods to improve student engagement and student assessments. In addition, the team leader is now the director of faculty development." Institutions with broad team membership are often able to overcome problems with turnover and time, because responsibilities are distributed among everyone in the team. As another BEAMS institution put it, "Regular meetings help keep the team's work moving forward. Fresh outlook and energy [have been] infused by incorporating new members as needed."

Sending a strong team with all necessary players to a working conference away from campus has also proved to be an important component of creating effective action plans. For the BEAMS teams, the Summer Academy was the time away from campus they needed to intensively engage with each other and concentrate on building an action plan. During their five days at the Academy, teams were supported by consultants, professionals, and staff who provided feedback on daily assignments and helped generate ideas. The Urban Institute's evaluation indicates that a number of teams in the first and second cohort identified the Summer Academy as a key facilitating factor for project implementation (Clewell and Deterding 2007; Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006). One participant summed it up by saying that "the Summer Academy taught them a lot, boosted enthusiasm, and helped them to envision outcomes" (Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006).

Once away from campus, it is important for a team to create an action plan that is appropriate and feasible based on its identification of an issue to be addressed, consideration of the current campus environment, and assessment of the availability of resources to make implementation possible. While the creation and implementation of the action plans were not without challenges (addressed later in this chapter), the BEAMS institutions have seen their work evolve into appropriate strategies for campus change. The process that the BEAMS institutions undertook—including the collection and analysis of data with the support of staff and consultants—resulted in the development of feasible, appropriate, and effective action plans. The Urban Institute found that a great majority of the institutions in the first two cohorts developed action plans that were appropriate and feasible as defined by the indicators of project implementation, use of NSSE scores, and integration of the plans into other reform efforts on campus (Clewell and Deterding 2007; Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006). The creation of adequate and effective plans at the BEAMS institutions leads the rest of the team's work. By crafting action plans based on data, these institutions laid the foundation to gain support for their projects, use continuous assessment to maintain effectiveness, and lead their students to eventual success.

While undertaking planning efforts, teams considered how their project fit with other campus or system-wide initiatives. Institutions in the BEAMS project tied their work to institutional strategic plans, administration-mandated reforms, or accreditation requirements (Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006). At one institution,

> "Participation in the BEAMS project occurred simultaneously with the [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools] reaffirmation process, allowing [them] to link to the Quality Enhancement Plan. The focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan to enhance under-graduate student writing aligned perfectly with the concern [about] deficiencies in short-writing assignments identified through the NSSE data."

By linking the BEAMS work to initiatives already occurring on campus, teams were able to more easily secure buy-in from various constituencies, increase the resources that were available for their projects, and build long-term sustainability through a process of institutionalization.

Having an institution link its BEAMS work to other campus initiatives is one way of gaining support from senior administrators, faculty, and staff. Some BEAMS institutions made a point of ensuring that presidents, vice presidents, deans, and directors were members of their teams or active participants in their work to guarantee that the action plan would be implemented. With leadership of the project coming from top administrators, teams were better able to gain public commitment and support. Other teams turned to senior administrators after the plan had been crafted, involving them and seeking their endorsement for the work. Either way, a visible commitment by top leadership led to greater implementation success. One institution, when asked what opportunities facilitated implementation, explained:

> "One break for the BEAMS team on our campus was having the vice president for academic affairs chair our Summer Academy team. As chair of the General Education Committee, he is very interested in the activities outlined in our action plan; as a member of the President's Council, he is able to keep our issues before the administration, as necessary."

Senior leaders are not the only constituency whose support teams need. Buy-in on the faculty and staff level is equally important to ensure implementation success. Institutions often addressed the need to gain buy-in from faculty and staff by including members of these constituencies on their BEAMS teams. Also, sharing information at faculty and staff meetings and having venues to present project work and receive suggestions are ways in which BEAMS campuses have included members of various constituencies. As one team noted, "The inclusion of administration, faculty, staff, and students on the team was crucial to [our] success." In undertaking significant change work, it is vital for those who will be implementing the project to be supporters of it.

One of the most difficult tasks to accomplish—and one that, if not accomplished, can fundamentally hinder project implementation—is obtaining sufficient resources. Institutions that have been able to obtain new financial resources, or to think creatively about how to use the resources they already have, often find this to be a large step toward implementation success. Some of the BEAMS institutions set out to gain additional funding through various sources, such as Title V funding from the Department of Education or funding from their state. One institution prepared a retention proposal for state grant funding based on its BEAMS project plan. The proposal for $500,000 was funded, and the institution is implementing its action plan.
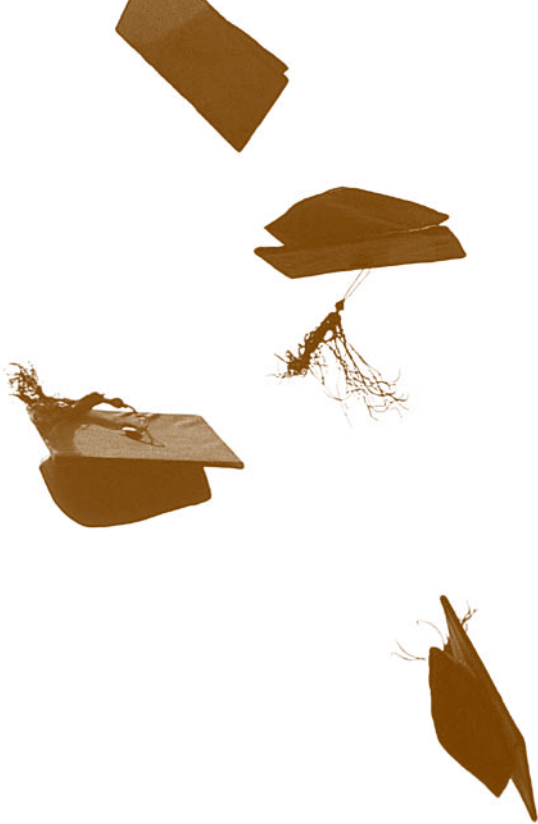
As institutions involved in this work know, having adequate financial resources makes implementing changes much easier. However, MSIs often contend with limited resources that limit options for change. Nonetheless, the institutions in BEAMS that were not so fortunate as to receive substantial outside funding still found ways to implement effective plans, often by persuading administrators to reallocate existing funds. For example, one institution that focused its change work on faculty development tapped into the in-house resources of the university, using faculty members and staff to present workshops on best practices in student learning.

"THE FACT THAT WE HAVE KEPT OUR FOCUS ON THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE, AND THAT BEAMS HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF KEEPING THAT FOCUS, HAS REALLY RAISED THIS IN THE UNIVERSITY TO BEING ONE OF OUR MORE IMPORTANT AND COMMON GOALS. IT HAS RAISED OUR CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE TO DO TO HELP OUR STUDENTS BE SUCCESSFUL."

– DENISE DOYLE, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS, UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

Getting to know each other at the 2005 Summer Academy.

"[BEAMS] WAS A VEHICLE TO ALLOW US TO HAVE INPUT INTO FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AND STUDENT RETENTION. BEAMS ALLOWED US TO BE MORE PROACTIVE."

–ANTHONY FRESQUEZ, BEAMS TEAM LEADER; FACULTY MEMBER, DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES, OGLALA LAKOTA COLLEGE

Not Without Challenges

While the most successful BEAMS institutions were able to use the practices described previously to aid implementation of their action plans, no school succeeded without having to overcome some obstacles that could have hindered its eventual success. And some institutions in all three BEAMS cohorts are still working to overcome such obstacles. The following challenges to implementation were identified by BEAMS institutions:

- Problems with the data collection process
- Team or staff turnover
- Difficulties gaining buy-in from various campus constituencies
- Lack of time to implement the work
- Insufficient resources

Institutions encountered various problems in administering NSSE, including not having up-to-date contact information for students or having a student population that does not respond to school-issued e-mails (Tsui et al. 2005b). These problems often resulted in lower than desirable response rates for the survey, which in turn affected how well the institutions could use their collected data to make plans. At one institution, for example, the state university system mandated electronic administration of NSSE, despite the school's opposition. The team explained, "As we feared, the response rate was a dismal 35 persons —too small to use any of the results. Our future planning is that this would be administered using a captive audience approach, which would give a more desirable response rate."

Institutions also experienced delays in plan development and imple-mentation when they had to contend with turnover among team members or senior leadership. It is difficult to maintain momentum in the face of continuing personnel changes. Institutions that experienced team or staff turnover often had to rework their initial plan and reenergize support for the project. As a team member from one 2003 cohort institution that was still experiencing problems with turnover in fall 2006 noted:

"The biggest challenge has been with staff turnover and maintaining continuity within the team. Funding at the state level to institutions of higher learning has also caused us some difficulties with staffing and workload issues. We have not been able to make progress at the pace we would have liked but are doing the best we can to meet the needs of the project and the program."

Although not all teams had to deal with continuing personnel changes, some were not able to gain the necessary buy-in from essential campus constituencies. Most plans crafted through BEAMS require additional effort from faculty and staff. If the faculty and staff were not willing to take on additional work, the action plans stalled. A team member from an institution in the 2005 cohort explained:

"One of the main obstacles has been to get faculty and administrative buy-in for requiring that conditionally accepted, under-prepared freshmen participate in the summer bridge program. The BEAMS team plan is to make participation in and successful completion of the Summer Bridge program a condition of their acceptance for admission to the university in the fall. The administration and some faculty feel that such a requirement would have an adverse impact on enrollment numbers in the fall. The BEAMS team has had to compromise on this issue with a very strong recommendation that the identified students attend."

Changing faculty thinking and values takes a significant amount of time, time that can delay the work institutions had initially planned. In organizing faculty members for simultaneous seminars, one institution had to work with professors who were reluctant to participate. Also, if teams were unable to gain buy-in from senior administrators, this often delayed plan implementation, resulting in a smaller project or a reframing of the project to better correlate with administration goals.

According to the Urban Institute, almost a third of the institutions in the second BEAMS cohort indicated that time constraints were a barrier to successful implementation (Clewell and Deterding 2007). As is the case in many institutions, the personnel involved in the BEAMS project were often also involved in other campus initiatives. This created a problem when teams tried to meet regularly or find sufficient time to work on the BEAMS project. At one institution, BEAMS team members have tried to set specific times for their meetings. Some teams have been able to replace meetings with online and phone communication. One team member made this astute observation:

"The continuing challenge for the campus team is finding enough time to work effectively to maintain the BEAMS project as an ongoing project. As with many campuses, other institutional initiatives tend to detract from the time available to pursue BEAMS projects on a regular basis. Although we have always anticipated that this would be a continuing issue, the nature of some of the university-level initiatives make it very difficult for many of the members of the team to devote time to BEAMS-related activities. Given that the team, in general, tends to run programs that are one-person operations, finding a solution to this challenge will remain elusive."

A lack of sufficient resources can hinder project implementation by delaying the work that can be done while teams try to access new resources or find new ways to implement their projects. An institution in the 2003 cohort has persisted in its efforts, despite limited resources, by "using already obtained grant monies to fund aspects of the action plan, through volunteers, perseverance on the part of the co-leaders, commitment to the engagement ideals, and a willingness to continue on no matter what the obstacle." Still others are trying to find ways to overcome this challenge.

Outcomes from Data Collection and Plan Implementation

Despite the obstacles described above and many others, BEAMS institutions are moving ahead with their work and demonstrating what dedication to students can achieve. As an outcome of project development and implementation, the BEAMS project focused institutional work on increasing students' graduation rates. While the plans have been in place for only three years at most—too soon to see any changes in graduation rates—some institutions are reporting promising short-term results.

Institutions in BEAMS have begun to see tangible outcomes through the use of short-term assessment measures, indicating that their projects are successfully meeting their near-term goals. For some institutions, this means measurable changes to NSSE results. For example, **TABLE 3** shows positive changes to NSSE results for a BEAMS institution targeting its first-year experience, academic advising, and service learning programs as part of an overall strategy for improving the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark.

For others, short-term success is measured in promising retention gains. Another institution in the 2003 cohort expanded its freshmen success seminar to 12 sections as part of its BEAMS project. Data from the seminar indicate that 78 percent of first-year students who completed the course continued at the university for their second year, while only 53 percent of those who did not take the course persisted to their second year.

Although not all BEAMS teams have been able to document their successes as precisely as those described above, a number of institutions have seen promising changes in the involvement by various campus constituencies in BEAMS-related programs. One university that instituted co-curricular activities as part of its action plan has seen continual increases in participation at various workshops, indicating that faculty, staff, and students are taking advantage of the activities offered to them. Teams that have used technology to provide services to students are also seeing an increase in use. An HSI in the project has measured an increased number of hits to the Web portal that has been the center of its BEAMS work, indicating that efforts to garner faculty use of the portal in classes has succeeded in increasing communication and collaboration.

"BEAMS...A BEACON OF LIGHT IN THE EDUCATIONAL WILDERNESS!!"

– AGNES MOJICA, CHANCELLOR, INTER AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO—SAN GERMÁN

TABLE 3

2003 AND 2006 NSSE RESULTS FOR A 2003 COHORT INSTITUTION

"ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES" NSSE BENCHMARK ITEMS	FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS	
	2003	2006
Participating in Co-Curricular Activities	42%	63%
Practicum, Internship, and/or Field Experience	83%	91%
Community Service or Volunteer Work	70%	87%
Independent Study	35%	54%
Participating in a Learning Community	45%	71%

SOURCE: 2006 FALL PROGRESS REPORTS

Recognition of the BEAMS project and its potential impact on MSIs has resulted in financial benefits for some BEAMS campuses. Some institutions have received additional external funding in part because their BEAMS action plans address pressing and pertinent needs. Much of the funding granted to these institutions has come from state sources that see the work as a valuable resource for other institutions, both within the state and nationally. Institutions have used the action plans crafted at the Summer Academy for grant proposals that have helped them finance their BEAMS projects. One institution received a $500,000 state grant to implement its BEAMS plan, while another received close to $150,000, with the potential for more, by integrating its BEAMS work with a larger retention initiative.

Participation in BEAMS has also resulted in less tangible outcomes, such as greater collaboration within institutions. Rather than having offices work separately on projects, many BEAMS institutions now combine personnel from different offices to achieve one goal. Working through the process of achieving buy-in and information sharing enables teams to build support and sustainability, while also sharing the responsibility for increasing student success with others at the college or university. This experience will help MSIs as they continue to tackle issues—such as increasing student success—that require support and participation from broad constituencies.

Outcomes that demonstrate success for BEAMS extend beyond individual institutions. Various universities have received regional and national recognition for the work they have undertaken through the BEAMS project. BEAMS participants have presented their work at national conferences and in academic journals. As a result of its BEAMS-related service learning work, one HBCU has been tapped to share its service learning expertise with others, and help establish and house the office for its state Campus Compact. This will be the first HBCU in the nation to lead such an effort. Other MSIs are serving as models for institutions that are interested in similar initiatives. For example, an HSI that initiated a virtual student center is currently sharing its knowledge with other institutions, both within and outside BEAMS, to help them create similar resources for their students.

Another measure of success is the increased cooperation and collaboration among participating institutions. BEAMS set out to create a group of institutions that would learn not only from their involvement with the project but also from continued interaction with each other. In addition to the opportunities for interaction at the Summer Academy and an annual mid-year meeting, BEAMS is seeing other signs of success in creating connections among various institutions. In its 2006 evaluation, the Urban Institute found that more than a third of the institutions had

Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico BEAMS team at the 2006 Summer Academy.

Panel of returning BEAMS participants at the 2006 Summer Academy.

been in contact with other campuses in the BEAMS project (Clewell, Tsui, and West 2006). Below are some examples of how the institutions collaborated with each other:

> "[Our] BEAMS team collaborated with [another] university to develop and enhance [our] service-learning program."
> –2003 Cohort Institution

> "Our institution collaborated with another BEAMS institution to develop the survey instrument used to assess the co-curricular activities and programs sponsored through student engagement and other campus initiatives."
> –2004 Cohort Institution

> "We were visited by two other colleges. These colleges were interested in developing a first-year experience program. We shared with them our NSSE data, how it was used to develop our plan, and how the campus bought into the plan."
> –2004 Cohort Institution

This collaboration has allowed institutions to gain feedback on their own projects, share practices that have worked with people at other institutions who are working on similar projects, and build networks of support at the institutional level. Working together helps institutions realize that they are not alone as they undertake substantial change initiatives. Many of the connections occurred without the aid of BEAMS resources, although these resources have been available since the beginning of the project. Where teams previously tended to initiate and fund their own collaborations, they are now beginning to take advantage of the resources provided by BEAMS—resources that were put in place so that teams would be able to look beyond staff and consultants, and toward each other, as supports during implementation.

The project has also added greatly to the research on student engagement at MSIs. BEAMS-sponsored participation in NSSE has provided more than 100 MSIs with the opportunity to compare themselves with similar institutions across the country, and thus attain a better understanding of their student engagement levels in relation to others. Also, it has generated a critical mass of comparative data for other MSIs that are considering participation in NSSE. These new data on student engagement at MSIs may lead to strategies that improve graduation rates for the students BEAMS campuses serve, who often differ from "traditional" students (financially dependent 18- to 24-year-olds, attending school full-time and residing on campus).

The overall and primary purpose of BEAMS is to help participating MSIs better use data for institutional decision making and to situate themselves in the changing higher education environment. On the basis of evaluations by the Urban Institute, BEAMS has achieved its goal. Institutions involved in BEAMS have undergone changes in their decision-making process. According to the Urban Institute (Clewell and Tsui 2007), 94 percent of institutions in the first BEAMS cohort perceived changes in the way decisions are made and 76 percent reported that they observed changes in how the institution identifies and responds to problems. Respondents say that identifying campus problems and determining how to rectify them now elicits greater involvement from various campus constituencies and relies more heavily on data. All but four institutions in the first cohort identified BEAMS as an ingredient in influencing institutional change (Clewell and Tsui 2007). It is apparent that the process and supports of this project have helped establish a culture of evidence at MSIs.

While MSIs continue to serve a large number of students of color, their experiences with assessment and accountability can show other kinds of institutions how to begin, or improve, their data collection processes. The practices that BEAMS institutions have incorporated as they become more data-based show what it takes to create a culture of evidence. The short-term outcomes highlight the benefits that such a commitment can have in changing campus practices and, in the long term, affecting the educational experience of students nationwide.

"EASTERN'S PARTICIPATION IN BEAMS HAS FOCUSED GREATER ATTENTION ON WHAT WE MUST DO TO HELP MAINTAIN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH-OUT THE STUDENT'S ACADEMIC CAREER. THE SUMMER ACADEMIES HAVE PROVEN TO BE GREAT RESOURCES FOR NEW IDEAS AND NETWORKING."

– ROBERT A. VARTABEDIAN, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, EASTERN NEW MEXICO UNIVERSITY

OGLALA LAKOTA COLLEGE

A COMMITTED TEAM EFFECTS CULTURALLY
CONSCIOUS CHANGE

Location: Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, S.D.
Established: 1971
Type: Public TCU
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 715
BEAMS Focus: Providing accessible resources
for students and faculty from a Lakota perspective
BEAMS Cohort: 2005

Oglala Lakota BEAMS
Team at the 2006
Summer Academy.

Through BEAMS, Oglala Lakota College (OLC) developed an action plan to improve student learning and success, with the aim of directly affecting the local community by helping to create individuals who are knowledgeable about Lakota culture and strongly involved in the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The BEAMS team linked its work to the institution's mission of enhancing Lakota life by developing a plan that addresses OLC's unique position in serving the postsecondary needs of the Lakota on the reservation. This includes providing services in a decentralized setting with 10 college centers and nursing facilities; working around ceremonies that often take precedence in a student's life; and providing learning opportunities to students who are nonresidential, frequently lacking transportation, and often have families of their own. After only one year of plan development and implementation, the BEAMS team has already made an impact on some of the challenges affecting OLC students and faculty.

The BEAMS initiative crafted by the OLC team identified strategies to enhance the perspective based on Lakota culture and language in the learning process for both students and faculty. The Lakota perspective is a framework through which the college acknowledges the unique culture of the Lakota and honors it through the use of language and community resources such as elders, and social protocol intertwined in course context. Using this framework, the BEAMS team is creating faculty development opportunities and support services for students—among them a faculty orientation and handbook and a student handbook—that will help provide an environment where culture is one of the strategies used to guide student success.

The changes developed through the BEAMS plan began during the 2006–07 academic year, immediately following the team's participation in the 2006 Summer Academy. Two of the BEAMS team members, in collaboration with staff from student support services, focused their efforts on developing and distributing a student handbook to provide an accessible source of important institutional information, which is essential for an institution with 10 college centers and faculty who travel extensively. Created as a daily calendar for students, the handbook provides information on placement testing, registration, scholarships, and deadlines. It includes space for instructors' contact information, and tips and strategies for studying and test-taking. To highlight the importance of the Lakota culture to the learning experiences, the
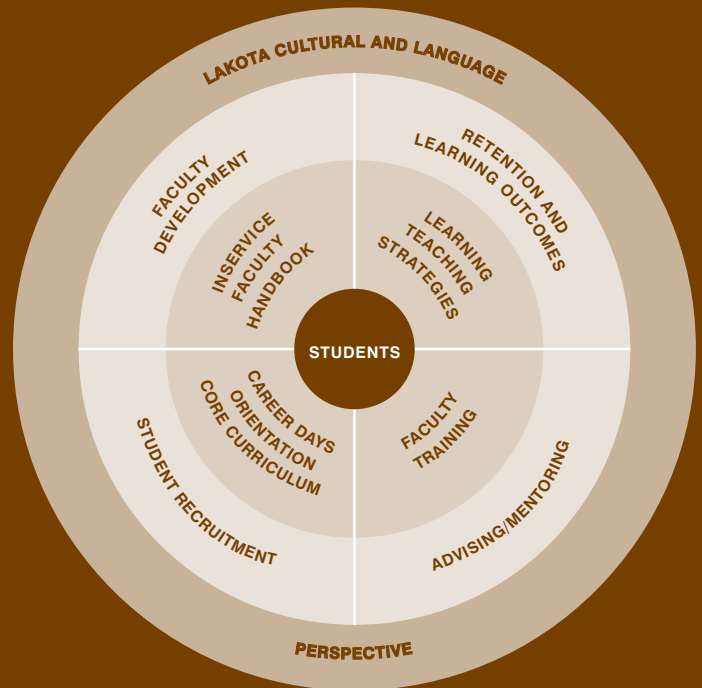
handbook includes motivational quotes from influential Lakota members. The handbook was well received by the OLC community, and the team published a new version for the 2007–08 academic year.

The BEAMS team also helped host a fall faculty retreat that consisted of two days of training and networking. Adjunct and full-time faculty gathered to discuss student retention and best practices for successful college completion. New faculty members were introduced to the history of the Lakota people, the history of the college, and the daily realities that can affect recruitment, retention, and eventual graduation. The retreat aimed to provide faculty with a greater understanding of the students they would be teaching, to enable them to tailor their teaching styles to increase engagement with the students. The retreat also served as a networking opportunity for faculty, who are often unable to connect with one another because they are constantly traveling among the 10 college centers on and off the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Though it has been challenging to maintain constant interaction, the OLC team has made the commitment to meet often to work on implementing BEAMS initiatives. The team has been able to keep the senior administration informed and interested in BEAMS work. The team members' dedication and their role as faculty have helped them gain support from other faculty members. They are taking deliberate steps to ensure that they are presenting the BEAMS plan and the positive aspects of its strategies to all concerned parties, to elicit buy-in throughout the campus community. Each BEAMS team member is also involved in one of four committees—faculty development, student services, institutional development, and instructional affairs—that review, develop, and present policy recommendations to the senior administration.

Since implementation of the action plan has been in place for only a little over a year, the Oglala BEAMS team is working on next steps for increasing student success. The team's participation in the 2007 Summer Academy gave members the opportunity to revise their plan and more thoroughly incorporate the Lakota perspective into their strategies. In the Lakota culture, many areas of life are explained in a circular context, as actions and activities are believed to be connected and continuously affecting each other. In keeping with this

FIGURE 3
WOLAKOLKICIYAPI
LEARNING LAKOTA WAYS OF LIFE IN COMMUNITY

tradition, the OLC BEAMS team placed its action plan into a circular graph (**FIGURE 3**) that highlights how the four main areas—faculty development, retention and learning outcomes, advising and mentoring, and student recruitment—are connected to have a positive impact on students at the college.

As part of the revised plan, the OLC BEAMS team will continue to work on some of the original strategies, while also establishing new ones. To strengthen faculty development, the team created a new faculty handbook in fall 2007. The handbook has components similar to those in the student handbook but also includes a grade book, advisee contacts, technology information, and teaching tips. The team plans to continue hosting faculty retreats and all-staff meetings and to facilitate academic division meetings and intradepartmental communication. In addition, it is going to revamp the institution's faculty orientation. The Lakota perspective will continue to inform these activities by providing lessons consistent with Lakota history, culture, and language strategies that will encourage students to develop their perceptions of the world. Even though the BEAMS work at OLC is still in its infancy, the dedication of the team members and their emphasis on the Lakota cultural perspective are helping them gain support from the college community. The small steps they are taking to provide accessible information and opportunities for collaboration, all framed within the Lakota perspective, are leading toward positive change in the campus culture.

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO–HUMACAO

BUILDING A STUDENT-CENTERED INSTITUTION
WITH PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

Location: Humacao, P.R.
Established: 1962
Type: Public HSI
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 3,519
BEAMS Focus: Integration of student support
services to improve student achievement
BEAMS Cohort: 2003

"THOUGH I HAVE BEEN OUT OF THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT [OF OUR BEAMS WORK], I HAVE BEEN THERE ALMOST EVERY DAY. EVERY TIME THEY ASK FOR MY SUPPORT IN TERMS OF NEEDED CHANGES, WE ALL EXAMINE, WE LOOK AT THE DATA, WE PLAN, AND THAT IS HOW WE HAVE MADE EVERY DECISION."

– HILDA COLÓN-PLUMEY, CHANCELLOR

At the University of Puerto Rico–Humacao (UPRH), the BEAMS project provided a conceptual framework for the institution to integrate all student services, with the objective of creating an environment that promotes social, cultural, and personal development geared toward the achievement of a high level of academic performance. Using NSSE data collected in 2003, the BEAMS team identified a need to create an intervention plan to facilitate the coordination and improvement of the services offered to students. The successes that UPRH has seen in the past few years have been primarily achieved through the institutionalization of the BEAMS work and the strong involvement and support of the campus chancellor.

A team from UPRH attended the 2004 Summer Academy with the goal of developing an action plan that would enhance interaction and promote supportive relationships among students, faculty, and staff, leading to increased academic success for students. When the team members returned to campus, they conducted an inventory of enrichment activities already in place and identified areas that needed work. The team—which included senior administrators, representatives from various campus offices and departments, and the chancellor— met continuously to evaluate and implement the plan.

Early in the process, concerns were raised regarding the lack of cohesion between the activities and the staff and administrators. In response to these concerns, the team revised the action plan and developed a working group that would include the institutional leadership directly responsible for serving the needs of UPRH students. The new group—the Committee for the Integration of Student Services (CISE)—immediately began to restructure the welcoming, orientation, and registration activities for incoming students, with help from all campus departments and offices. CISE folded the original BEAMS project into a larger program called the Student Success Project that focuses on a model in which learning, services, and research are centered on the students. The institution's ability to bring about comprehensive change—from the development of new activities to the complete integration of support services—has been facilitated by the active participation of the chancellor, who has set the visionary

Student volunteers
at the 2007 UPRH
freshman orientation.

goals for the institution. Her support goes beyond providing assistance; it signifies to the university community that the administration is strongly committed to student success.

The Student Success Project focuses on providing a variety of services centered on the students' well-being and integration into the university community. A major overhaul of the registration process has taken place over the past few years. Students can use technology to select courses, pay registration fees, receive health care information, and verify their grades online. The welcome and orientation process is now carried out over a few days, with students attending on the days set aside for their specific majors. An activities fair is held during orientation so students can collect information on the various groups and activities available on campus. For the first time, the university sent a select group of students to a three-day student leadership congress in the United States to promote leadership opportunities and roles on campus. The outcomes from this experience are currently framing and influencing the dialogue among students, faculty, and staff.

The BEAMS team has also focused its efforts beyond students' academic and educational needs. The institution has paid attention to ensuring the well-being of its students by offering various services that help them throughout their college career. For example, UPRH has hired a student wellness coordinator and established a plan for alcohol, drug, and violence prevention campaigns. UPRH also added psychology personnel to the guidance office, including doctoral students in psychology from a neighboring university who are fulfilling their internship requirements. This work has helped the university address student needs beyond strictly academic ones and has shown the students that their welfare is important to the university. Throughout this work, UPRH has relied on the continuous use of assessment data to review and revise the services it implements. The institution designed a data instrument to conduct yearly assessments, and these assessments show that students are finding the services offered to them more useful than in the past. In 2003, 10 percent of students surveyed found their advisors to be very

useful; by 2006, that number had climbed to 30 percent. Students also value their experiences at the institution more than they have in the past. In 2003, 72 percent of students surveyed would enthusiastically recommend their major at UPRH; that number grew in just three years to 82 percent.

UPRH plans additional improvements to the services it delivers to students. The university is establishing academic mentoring for students, including both faculty and peers as mentors, and is brainstorming ways to facilitate student access to technology. The plans are not limited to the services themselves but also address how the delivery of services can be improved. For instance, a campus restructuring will locate most, if not all, student service offices in one building, making them more accessible to students. Throughout all, these plans are the underlying theme of involving and empowering faculty and staff in the student-centered model being fostered by the institution's administrators.

While the success of this work can be attributed to many factors, ranging from strong campus-wide support to the availability of resources for developing new programs, the involvement of the chancellor has been particularly important in creating an environment for campus change. With strong support coming from the senior administration, the UPRH BEAMS team was able to envision comprehensive campus change and then implement that change through the establishment of CISE. The program provided the formal structure necessary to integrate various offices and initiatives into the process of planning, which services to provide to students and how those services could be delivered. CISE was able to align the student success project with the institution's priorities and goals, fostering an environment of collaboration and sustainability. As the university continues to improve its support services, it is building on the foundation laid by the senior administration to create a culture that continuously improves the quality of services and an environment in which students can develop into well-rounded persons working toward academic success.

4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MSIs serve a critical role in meeting the access and success needs of students of color. The BEAMS project has provided support for participating institutions to do this work more effectively by helping them build their capacity to better collect and use data for decision making and to institute or enhance key student success initiatives. The lessons learned from BEAMS can be helpful for MSIs and non-MSIs alike, as they consider how to build their institutional capacity for using data to improve student retention and degree attainment. The following recommendations focus on building institutional capacity to collect and use data for campus decision making, and on crafting and implementing more effective student success initiatives. Institutional leaders have the most direct influence in setting student success agendas that draw on what the institution knows about its students and how well it serves them. For public institutions, the state system office also contributes significantly to the strategic goals and priorities of the campuses and campus leaders. For federal policymakers, foundations, and higher education researchers, the recommendations focus on providing support for increased data capacity at MSIs, so these institutions will have the systems and staff they need to participate effectively in an increasingly data-informed higher education market.

Institutions[9]

Presidents and other senior administrators must provide leadership for data-based institutional change initiatives if they are to be successful. Data-based campus change is very difficult to enact and sustain without the explicit support of campus leadership. Presidents and other senior administrators must champion the use of data to inform student success initiatives on campus and must work with faculty, staff, and students to help integrate these efforts into broader campus goals, strategic plans, and accountability expectations.

Institutions must make greater technology and staff investments in their institutional research and assessment offices. Institutional research and assessment offices are becoming increasingly more important to institutions that are committed to data-informed change. Institutions in BEAMS that lacked the infrastructure for data collection faced more challenges that impacted the number of respondents and the use of the information collected and analyzed. Institutions must have the technology and staff resources to gather and analyze institutional data and to work with other campus stakeholders to translate these data into information that informs campus practices and policies.

At the same time, all members of the institutional community must play a role in data-informed campus change work. Institutional data literacy cannot be the sole responsibility of institutional research and assessment offices. For all members of an institution to participate in data-based change initiatives, institutional leadership must

9 Project DEEP was a precursor to the work done by institutions in the BEAMS project. For more information as to how institutions can leverage resources to promote student success through data-based change, visit the NSSE Web site dedicated to this project: http://nsse.iub.edu/institute/index.cfm?view=deep/overview. Results of the DEEP project can also be found in a book highlighting the DEEP conditions (Kuh et al. 2005) *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter.*

build faculty, staff, and student capacity to use data for change by providing incentives and expectations for incorporating what is being learned through campus data sources into teaching, learning, and support practices. Campus leaders must also provide adequate resources for training personnel to interpret data in the context of their work and broader campus goals, working with the institutional research and assessment offices to develop user-friendly information about what information is available and how it can best inform stakeholder practices.

Student success initiatives must be effectively integrated with each other and must relate directly to the institutional mission and goals. Aligning campus initiatives with institutional goals is critical to ensure broad campus buy-in and long-term sustainability. Institutions should take the necessary steps to integrate new or existing programs with larger objectives. These steps can include linking a campus strategic plan or accreditation process with smaller campus initiatives, framing new projects in the context of the institution's mission, or using a broader retention initiative to support various campus programs that have a goal of achieving student success. If a program spans a major purpose, many of the factors necessary for implementing change initiatives will soon follow.

"OUR IDEA IS THAT OUR BEAMS PLAN WILL HELP BUILD COMMUNITY"

– KIMBERLY BETTLELYOUN-HE CROW, FACULTY MEMBER, DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES, OGLALA LAKOTA COLLEGE

"ONE OF THE STRENGTHS OF THE MYRTILLA MINER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY IS THAT WE ARE USING THE STRENGTHS FROM WITHIN. THAT IS WHERE WE GET ALL THE FACULTY SUPPORT. WE ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OUR OWN EXPERTISE AND SHARING."

– HELENE KRAUTHAMER, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

State System Offices

State systems must continue to support and encourage data capacity building at their institutions. During the course of the BEAMS project, staff observed the important role state systems play in prompting the collection and use of data for institutional decision making and accountability. On the whole, public institutions in BEAMS had more robust institutional research and assessment offices and more fully developed data collection and analysis tools than did the private institutions. Public institutions also were more familiar with national surveys such as NSSE and did not encounter as many data collection problems as private institutions in the project. In fact, MSIs in states like California, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Texas had been participating in NSSE for a number of years before the BEAMS project, and those campuses were much better prepared to use their NSSE results for the institutional change initiatives prompted through BEAMS. State systems must continue to take seriously the important role they play in helping to build data capacity at their institutions by providing resources and setting clear expectations for their institutions' collection and use of data.

State systems should provide funding for disadvantaged schools—such as MSIs—to aid and strengthen their data capacity. It was apparent in BEAMS that many MSIs have the desire to develop a campus culture focused on assessment, but they often lack the financial resources or the infrastructure to make the necessary changes. In state systems that have an established process of assessment, providing additional funding for disadvantaged institutions in the system will help build institutional capacity and strengthen data collection statewide.

State systems should provide opportunities for their institutions to share best practices for increasing student success and leveraging institutional data for campus change. State systems have both the convening authority and the resources to provide collaborative opportunities similar to those provided through BEAMS. Their institutions share common characteristics that help facilitate the sharing of best practices for data-informed decision making and effective student success initiatives. State system offices should provide venues for their institutions to meet regularly to report on student success programs that can be replicated by others in the system and to discuss ways they are effectively using data for change so that others can model these practices.

Federal Policymakers

Expand Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act to support institutional research and assessment offices. Currently, Title III and Title V provide funds to eligible institutions of higher education—including MSIs and institutions that serve low-income students—to improve and strengthen academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability. Expanding the use of these funds to include an institution's data collection and capacity demonstrates the federal government's commitment to higher education assessment. With funds from Title III and Title V directed to institutional research and assessment offices, institutions will have the resources necessary to make changes and strengthen students' experiences through the reliance on data.

Foundations

Foundations should invest in building the capacity for MSIs to collect, analyze, and use data for institutional decision making and accountability efforts. The support of Lumina Foundation for Education to the BEAMS project should be replicated by other foundations that want to improve the success rates of students of color in postsecondary education. With resources available through foundations, projects similar to BEAMS can be funded to increase data capacity at institutions that face financial restraints, overcome some of the common issues MSIs face in gathering and using data, and build cohorts of colleges and universities to institutionalize the process of data-based decision making.

Higher Education Researchers

Document the data capacity status of MSIs. While the BEAMS project has highlighted some specific data capacity gaps at participating institutions, a more thorough study of this issue is needed to make claims about the status of data capacity at MSIs in general. In February 2004, the Institute for Higher Education Policy released a groundbreaking study—*Serving the Nation: Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Information Technology at Minority-Serving Colleges and Universities*—on the state of information technology at MSIs. The report contained important policy recommendations for strengthening the information technology capacity at MSIs through increased funding for technology-related infrastructure, application, and staff development improvements; many of these issues have been addressed since the release of the report. A similar report on the current capacity for MSIs to gather and use data for institutional decision making and accountability would provide incentives to address data capacity resource gaps at the federal and state levels.

For students at MSIs who are seeking ways to continue their education and attain a postsecondary degree, the initiatives at these institutions can help them reach their goals. Investment in and recognition of the work MSIs undertake to improve the academic success of their students is imperative to ensure that students of color have access to a post-secondary education experience that will make them competitive in the workforce and equip them with the necessary skills to achieve their goals. As a postsecondary degree becomes more essential every day, colleges and universities and state, federal, and nongovernmental entities need to reevaluate the role of MSIs and how they can be assisted as they continue to provide educationally enriching opportunities for the growing population of students of color.

"PARTICIPATION IN BEAMS CONFIRMED AND AFFIRMED NUMEROUS ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES THAT NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY HAVE IMPLEMENTED INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM TO ENHANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES AND TO FACILITATE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES. WE ALSO LEARNED AND ADOPTED MANY BEST PRACTICES FROM THE BEAMS SCHOOLS TO FURTHER IMPROVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING AND ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO CONTINUOUS COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF OUR DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATIONS."
–NURIA M. CUEVAS, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND DIRECTOR, INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND ASSESSMENT, NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF INTERNAL STRENGTHS TO IMPROVE
FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Location: Washington, DC
Established: 1976
Type: Public HBCU
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 2,050
BEAMS Focus: Creation of a professional development academy
BEAMS Cohort: 2004

''WHAT MAKES THIS [STAFF DEVELOPMENT] MUCH MORE MEANINGFUL IS THAT YOU HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO CHOOSE. PEOPLE ARE THERE BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE THERE. WHEN PEOPLE WANT TO DO THINGS, IT IS CERTAINLY MORE BENEFICIAL.''
– ARLENE KING-BERRY, PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION

The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) leveraged its involvement in the BEAMS project to develop the Myrtilla Miner Professional Development Academy (MMPDA), an outgrowth of its existing University Scholar Series. The MMPDA "seeks to engage all the members of the university community in continuing education about teaching and student learning, with the ultimate goal of achieving success for students through continuous quality improvement of curriculum and services." The MMPDA is aligned with UDC's mission, goals, and strategic plan, and is linked to the ongoing campus-wide retention initiative.

The UDC BEAMS team designed the MMPDA to provide the university community with knowledge and strategies to enhance student learning and improve student retention. By focusing on teaching and learning, MMPDA helps faculty integrate success strategies into the courses they teach. The MMPDA focuses on the following five tracks to ensure adequate coverage of topics that support student success:

1. Learning about learning.
2. Teaching with technology.
3. Assessing student learning outcomes for continuous improvement.
4. Writing grants and conducting research.
5. Meeting the university's land grant mission by serving community needs.

During their time at the Summer Academy, the UDC BEAMS team members developed a variety of topics and presentations that would fit into these tracks. They decided that MMPDA workshops would be held monthly on campus grounds and would be open to all.

To facilitate the workshops, the team (aware of fiscal constraints) looked to the campus community to identify presenters. Faculty, staff, students, and the BEAMS team members themselves were tapped to lead workshops and share best practices with their colleagues, thus building teaching and learning capacity from within and establishing closer connections among community members. Using in-house resources has resulted in positive outcomes for the MMPDA. Faculty participants are more open to discussing their experiences in the company of colleagues, and the information presented is generally more relatable, since the work discussed is being done in the same environment and with the same challenges. Students have the unique

UDC BEAMS team at the
2007 Summer Academy.

opportunity to work closely with faculty members in preparation for some of the workshops. By looking within the university for MMPDA workshop presenters, the UDC BEAMS team limited its need for additional financial resources, while focusing on providing recognition, development, and growth as incentives for participation.

In the two years since the program began, the MMPDA has been the site for workshops on academic advising, best practices in assessment, teaching students with disabilities, and the scholarship of teaching. One of the key issues raised by the university's NSSE results was that UDC faculty did not often use technology in their teaching. In response to that concern, MMPDA has offered seminars on "Blackboard (Bb) for Organizational Use" and "Effective Teaching Practices Using Technology." During MMPDA workshops, UDC faculty, staff, and students have presented on a range of topics affecting their campus and, in the process, have engaged in broad discussions about how all members of the campus community can improve the learning of UDC students.

The most popular MMPDA workshop has been "Faculty-Student Poster Session: Best Practices in Teaching and Learning." Faculty and students make joint presentations on a variety of topics, such as service learning, learning communities, and effective teaching strategies. Certificates of participation are awarded to all presenters and awards are given for the top three posters, with the winners announced on the school's Web site and in university publications. The most beneficial outcome of this workshop is the opportunity it affords students and faculty to work together to develop high-quality posters presenting their research findings, which in some cases have developed into presentations at national conferences.

The MMPDA is also seeing short-term successes across all the workshops. Staff have documented increases in participation and attendance at the various activities, as well as increased communication and collaboration among faculty across departments. According to UDC's provost, students feel more valued because activities are centered on their learning, and the MMPDA has created "an environment where talents are showcased." The UDC BEAMS team was invited to attend an annual HBCU conference at which members shared their experiences in creating the MMPDA.

An important aspect of the MMPDA has been its emphasis on evaluation and program improvement. The BEAMS team developed an assessment tool for the MMPDA that would inform and improve future programming. Following each workshop, participants complete an online assessment; this information is used to identify the session's strengths and weaknesses and determine whether to offer the topic again in the same format or try a different strategy. The team also takes attendance at the sessions, to determine the best time for scheduling workshops.

While the UDC BEAMS team's efforts in creating the MMPDA have been met with success, the team is continuing to expand and improve its work. Along with planning for a third year of workshops, the team is developing an additional program element intended to broaden the scope of its retention efforts and the MMPDA offerings: learning communities. MMPDA workshops during the academic year 2007–08 will focus on the topic of learning communities in order to prepare faculty and staff for the development of Project Scholars on a Roll (also known as SOAR), which will make learning communities available to students in developmental courses, while also strengthening the existing STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) learning communities. With the development of these learning communities, UDC hopes to build a stronger sense of community at a largely commuter campus.

The BEAMS project at UDC has been successful because of multiple factors on campus, including the completion of a self-study that brought various constituencies together to work on retention efforts and support from a new administration. The team's creativity in identifying internal resources was particularly valuable in the development of a project that has involved the broader campus community. The use of in-house resources located a group of dedicated speakers, helped bring participants to the workshops, and improved relationships among faculty and between faculty and students. While it might have been ideal to have sufficient resources to fund national speakers to lead the MMPDA workshops, UDC's use of faculty and local experts resulted in increased collaboration across all UDC constituencies, creating a foundation for other retention efforts on campus.

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD
INTEGRATING CAMPUS INITIATIVES TO ENHANCE THE
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Location: San Antonio, Texas
Established: 1909
Type: Private HSI
2005 Fall FT Undergraduate Enrollment: 2,478
BEAMS Focus: Accreditation and the first-year experience
BEAMS Cohort: 2004

''THE KEY TO OUR SUCCESS IS THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MERGE ALL OF OUR PROGRAMS TOGETHER. AND I THINK THAT IS THE KEY TO ANY TYPE OF PROGRAMMING YOU WANT TO SEE ON YOUR CAMPUS —TIE YOUR INITIATIVES TOGETHER.''

– SANDY MCMAKIN, DIRECTOR, FIRST-YEAR ENGAGEMENT; AND BEAMS TEAM LEADER

10 Title V of the Higher Education Act sets aside funds to allow the U.S. Department of Education to help institutions of higher education enhance and expand their capacity to serve Hispanic and low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the academic quality, institutional stability, management, and fiscal capabilities of eligible institutions (U.S. Department of Education Web site).

At the time of the initial BEAMS launch, the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) was beginning the process of developing a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to support its reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In 2004, UIW identified NSSE as a useful tool for quantifying student experiences and BEAMS as a critical vehicle for linking NSSE to the QEP work. UIW integrated its QEP planning with participation in the BEAMS project, and with funding from a U.S. Department of Education Title V grant, in an effort to enhance the first-year experience at the institution.[10]

The university sent the BEAMS team to the 2005 Summer Academy, where members explored ways to implement the QEP and considered key changes to the first-year experience. At the event, the UIW BEAMS team established the following six main goals for the first-year experience initiative:

1. Students become familiar with the culture of higher education.
2. Students comprehend and appreciate academic expectations.
3. Students utilize university services.
4. Students know the UIW mission.
5. Students bond with the UIW community.
6. Students engage in co-curricular activities.

To implement programs designed to reach these goals, the BEAMS team initially suggested forming a task force for the enhancement of the first-year experience. As the project progressed, this idea was expanded into three task forces—focusing on curriculum, orientation, and advising. The task forces were composed of faculty members and administrators from the various schools and offices that have the largest impact on the first year. They were charged with analyzing the current programs in place at UIW, developing assessments, and recommending final revisions to the first-year program to the vice president of academic and student affairs.

Since their inception, the three task forces have worked diligently to improve the first-year experience at UIW. The first-year curriculum task force dedicated its efforts to improving eight courses that serve more than 200 first-year students each in an academic year. Through a series of workshops for core faculty teaching these courses, the task force (using funds from the Title V grant on first-year engagement)

Students on the UIW campus.

was able to train instructors to identify and measure student learning outcomes, and teach essential academic skills such as critical thinking, information literacy, and comprehension of core curriculum. Using the eight main first-year courses as target courses, the task force created the "T42" campaign to encourage first-year students to take four target courses in two semesters during their first year. Through these target courses, the task force believes that first-year students will be exposed to key skills that will improve retention and help the institution meet the six goals established as part of the BEAMS project.

Meanwhile, the orientation task force set out to revise the first-year student orientation. Using assessment data from surveys administered to faculty and students, the task force drew on best practices to guide their creation of a mandatory two-phase orientation designed to achieve desired outcomes for first-year students, rather than just using the orientation as time for students to register for their courses. During the summer, UIW holds a two-day orientation that gives incoming students an introduction to the campus and helps them identify important resources. The second phase of the orientation takes place two days before the start of classes and provides an opportunity for students to reacquaint themselves with the information they gathered in the summer. Both phases of UIW's orientation include a mix of social and academic components, and involve faculty, staff, and student organizations. The fact that both orientations are mandatory conveys to incoming students that they are valuable to their learning and success at UIW.

The advising task force was responsible for developing an evaluation tool to measure the impact of advising, identifying intervention strategies for students experiencing academic problems, and clarifying procedures for declaring a major. This task force has encountered more challenges than the other two, because it must deal with many complexities, including determining the methods and responsibilities for providing effective advising in the first year. The group has established a definition for advising at UIW and identified the informal advising (student to student, faculty to student, etc.) that occurs on campus. In the next year, they will move forward with recommendations for a consistent and clear interactive advising process; increasing awareness about advising; and garnering support from deans, program coordinators, and advisors. The task force is seeking additional resources

through a Title V grant to help implement those recommendations. As a result of the work of the task forces, UIW has seen positive changes in the campus culture. Faculty and staff note a change in how first-year students transition into the university and an increase in collective responsibility for ensuring their success. Across all campus offices, there is a new emphasis on working together, and more efficiently, to reach the six goals that now permeate many major initiatives. The focus on engagement has been extended beyond students, as multiple constituencies have become involved in changing the first-year experience. Students at UIW also feel that there have been positive changes on campus, including the fact that the office of first-year engagement provides a central location where they can find information and resources they need during their time at UIW. When interviewed for this case study, the students explained that not only does this office serve as the first line of information for them as first-year students, it has also proved to be a valuable resource beyond their first year, and it provides students the opportunity to make suggestions and offer new ideas for changes on campus.

The team at UIW credits its involvement in BEAMS with triggering a formal conversation about first-year outcomes. The BEAMS project helped maintain the focus on the first year as a means of promoting campus change and provided the opportunity for continuous reflection and collaboration with institutions nationwide. However, the key to success was the integration of the institution's QEP with BEAMS and Title V funds. While BEAMS provided a structure and outlets for thought and conversation, the QEP established the necessity of campus change focused on student learning outcomes and provided a focus for all other initiatives. The Title V grant, in turn, allowed the school to allocate extra resources toward the development of some of the first-year programs. Together, the QEP, Title V, and BEAMS helped create a first-year experience program that is sustainable and institutionalized as part of the campus culture. While determining the causal relationships to outcomes of only one of these projects is not possible, the three together have created a strong environment at UIW that has expanded opportunities for the success of first-year students and laid the groundwork for thinking about student success after that initial year.

A
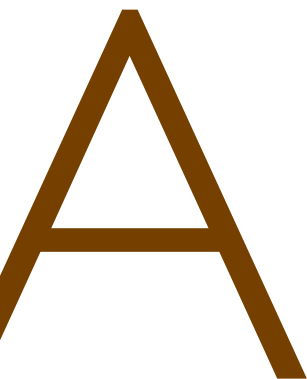
BEAMS PARTICIPATING CAMPUSES*

Adams State University (2003)
Albany State University (2005)
Alcorn State University (2004)
Alliant International University (2004)
Barry University (2005)
Benedict College (2004)
Bennett College (2005)
Bethune-Cookman University (2003)
Bowie State University (2004)
California State University—Dominguez Hills (2003)
California State University—Fresno (2003)
California State University—Los Angeles (2003)
California State University—Monterey Bay (2005)
California State University—Northridge (2004)
California State University—San Bernardino (2003)
California State University—Stanislaus (2003)
Central State University (2003)
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania (2005)
Chicago State University (2004)
Claflin University (2004)
Clark Atlanta University (2003)
Colorado State University Pueblo (2003)
Coppin State University (2005)
Delaware State University (2005)
Dillard University (2005)
Eastern New Mexico University (2005)

Edward Waters College (2005)
Elizabeth City State University (2004)
Fayetteville State University (2003)
Florida A&M University (2005)
Florida International University (2004)
Florida Memorial College (2004)
Fort Valley State University (2003)
Harris-Stowe State College (2005)
Haskell Indian Nations University (2003)
Herbert H. Lehman College, CUNY (2004)
Heritage College (2004)
Huston-Tillotson College (2004)
Institute of American Indian Arts (2005)
Inter American University of Puerto Rico—San Germán (2004)
Inter American University of Puerto Rico—Ponce (2005)
Jackson State University (2003)
Jarvis Christian College (2004)
Johnson C. Smith University (2005)
Kentucky State University (2003)
Lincoln University (2005)
Livingstone College (2005)
Medgar Evers College, CUNY (2003)
Mercy College (2004)
Miles College (2005)
Mississippi Valley State University (2005)
Morehouse College (2004)

* The year in parenthesis indicates the cohort year in which the institution began its participation in the BEAMS project.

Morgan State University (2004)
Morris College (2005)
New Jersey City University (2005)
New York City College of Technology, CUNY (2004)
Norfolk State University (2003)
North Carolina A&T University (2003)
North Carolina Central University (2005)
Oakwood College (2003)
Occidental College (2003)
Oglala Lakota College (2005)
Our Lady of the Lake University (2005)
Philander Smith College (2005)
Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico (2005)
Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (2003)
Prairie View A&M University (2003)
Saint Peter's College (2004)
Savannah State University (2003)
Sojourner-Douglas College (2005)
Southern University and A&M College Baton Rouge (2005)
Spelman College (2003)
St. Mary's University (2004)
St. Thomas University (2004)
Tennessee State University (2005)
Texas A&M International University (2003)
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi (2003)
Universidad del Este (2004)

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (2005)
University of Houston—Downtown (2004)
University of Maryland Eastern Shore (2005)
University of New Mexico North Campus (2004)
University of Puerto Rico at Humacao (2003)
University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (2005)
University of Puerto Rico at Ponce (2004)
University of Puerto Rico at Utuado (2004)
University of St. Thomas (2003)
University of Texas at El Paso (2003)
University of Texas at San Antonio (2003)
University of Texas of the Permian Basin (2003)
University of Texas—Pan American (2003)
University of the District of Columbia (2004)
University of the Incarnate Word (2004)
University of the Virgin Islands (2003)
Virginia Union University (2004)
Voorhees College (2003)
Western New Mexico University (2003)
Wiley College (2004)
Winston-Salem State University (2004)
Woodbury University (2005)
Xavier University of Louisiana (2005)
York College, CUNY (2005)

B

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