

# KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND EXAMPLES FOR FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT INSTRUCTOR EFFECTS

Instructors play a critical role in ensuring students are learning and are essential to any efforts to close equity gaps in students' outcomes. As a result, what happens in the classroom is critical to student learning. The term *instructor effects* broadly defines the effect the instructor has on students' outcomes - specifically in the classroom but also beyond. Student success initiatives across the nation have focused primarily on institution-level approaches for building success such as student advising, with insufficient attention to instructional approaches in the classroom.<sup>1</sup>

In this resource, we broadly define *instructor effects* as the effect of the classroom learning environment that is driven by the instructor who is teaching the class and the learning environment that instructor creates based on their pedagogical and support approaches to teaching and learning. While research has reported on a myriad of factors that affect student outcomes, the effect of the instructor has been found to be one of the biggest contributors to student success.<sup>2</sup> Studies examining factors affecting student outcomes have found that instructor effects can explain nearly 30% of the variance found in those outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

The following are key considerations for Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness professionals as they facilitate conversations with their faculty and administrative colleagues about instructor effects. Each consideration is accompanied by a few samples of key research and practices that can help promote supportive dialogue and discussions that keep the focus on the central role faculty play in student success.

## 1

### Communicate the “Why”

Leading with the “why” communicates to others what we believe and what we think is important. Starting with the purpose can help inspire others to action. The term *instructor effects* may conjure adverse reactions for many faculty and can be misconstrued by other stakeholders as the reason for any observed negative outcomes. Moreover, these concerns center around accountability and how single metrics (e.g., course success rates by instructor) could be used for evaluative purposes. Recognizing these sensitivities, it is important that the framing for examining student outcomes focuses on improving outcomes for our students and not evaluating faculty.

#### Sample Why Statements

- African American students at our college have experienced disproportionate outcomes for too long. We must identify practices that facilitate their success in the classroom to advance the long-term and overarching equity and success agenda of the institution.
- We want to make sure our students have equitable opportunities for success in our courses, regardless of which instructor they have.
- We want to empower faculty to use data to inform their teaching and students' learning experiences.
- Disaggregating student outcomes by classroom/instructor provides the opportunity to identify effective instructional approaches.

# 2

## Establish community norms

Recognize that there will be resistance; these conversations can be challenging and create discomfort because these topics are sensitive and personal. Creating a set of norms upfront increases trust and promotes productive dialog.<sup>4</sup>

### Sample Norms

- Acknowledge one another as equals.
- Actively listen and stay curious about each other and our individual journeys.
- Take collective ownership for the success of its students.
- Practice self-awareness and be mindful of your impact on others.
- Share authentically and be radically honest.
- Assume positive intent on the part of others.
- Review and interrogate the data to promote meaningful dialogue about the progress and success of our students.
- Use the data to assess and inform classroom teaching and grading practices.
- Examine the data without judgment and with an eye towards equitable student outcomes.
- What is said here, stays in here.

# 3

## Frame the data

To create a compelling reason to act, the data need to be framed in a relatable way. By examining traditional academic outcomes disaggregated at the instructor level, instructors can gain a deeper understanding of their students' learning and their outcomes, and identify potentially promising pedagogical approaches and resources to aid in continuous improvement efforts for supporting equitable student outcomes.

### Sample Frames

- Complement traditional course rates (e.g., success and retention rates) with DFW rates to highlight the percent and number of students who do not pass
- Disaggregate all outcomes using key student characteristics such as ethnicity and gender to identify any disproportionate student experiences
- Link student outcomes data with student learning outcomes data (e.g., compare success rates and SLO achievement rates)
- Use pseudonyms when presenting data at the instructor level to focus the conversations on the data and findings and not on the individual instructor
- Create thresholds for reporting data (e.g., a minimum of two sections for classes taught by two different instructors)

# 4

## Leverage existing culture of data-informed planning

Conversations about student success are already happening across campuses in a variety of existing meetings. Embed into these conversations student-centered discussions around data at department/program and course level.

### Sample Contexts

- Connect and contextualize instructor-level data with institutional priorities such as institution-set standards
- Connect and contextualize instructor-level data with program-level data (e.g., program review)
- Connect instructor-level data to local implementation efforts such as guided pathways and student equity

# 5

## Build faculty ownership around the data

Building relationships and trust with key faculty allies who are open and willing to examine their own data at this level are critical for this work.

This work is not a power dynamic and not about stripping away instructor autonomy over pedagogy and grades; rather, it is about faculty ownership around the data and helping empower them to use data to inform and improve their teaching.

### Sample Approaches

- Include faculty in the planning, either in leadership or participant roles, to foster their engagement in the process
- Build upon existing relationships to help develop support around an initiative
- Provide examples and models for how to use instructor-level data
- Ask faculty who have used or are planning to use these data to share their knowledge and experiences with other faculty.

# 6

## Reframe from deficit-minded to student-asset based and affirm institutional responsibility

Often, students are perceived as not motivated or not “ready” for college. This framing places the responsibility primarily on students and ignores institutions’ responsibility to foster an environment that supports and promotes student success.

### Sample Frames

- Explore and assess grading practices to determine their impact on students’ actual and reported experiences in the classroom (e.g., assignment due dates, policies on submitting late assignments, weighting of assignments/tests, participation requirements)
- Determine whether students have access to resources and services to support their learning (e.g., tutoring service hours and content areas)
- Assess class climate to determine how the learning environment in the classroom is facilitating or hindering students’ engagement and learning
- Review and assess pedagogical practices to promote equitable learning in the classroom

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> EAB Global, Inc. (2018). The course completion playbook: Analyses and tools to improve student outcomes in critical gateway courses. Retrieved from <https://umaine.edu/provost/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/12/Course-Completion-Playbook.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Opper, I. M. (2019). Teachers matter: Understanding teachers’ impact on student achievement. RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4312.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4312.html).
- <sup>3</sup> Hattie, J. A.C. (2003, October). Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence? Paper presented at the Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us? ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from [http://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference\\_2003/4/](http://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2003/4/).
- <sup>4</sup> Anderson, A. D. (2011). *Engaging resistance: How ordinary people successfully champion change*. Stanford University Press.

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