

The First-Year Experience: A Program is Not a Plan

A Workshop for the Faculty and Staff of
Philadelphia University
Facilitated by Andrew K. Koch, Ph.D.
August 30, 2012



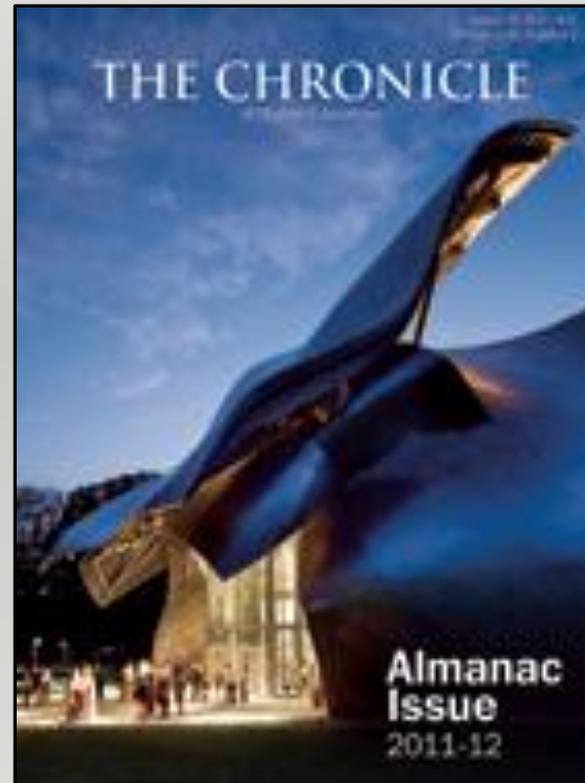
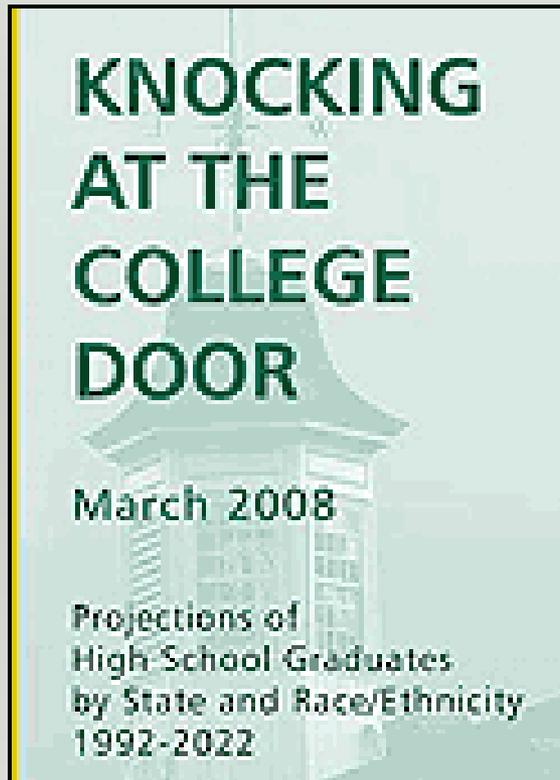
Overview & Purposes of the Workshop

- To put your institution's approach to new student success in a broader national context of relevant theory, research, and promising practice
 - Who are today's first-year students?
 - What do these students need?
 - How are institutions responding?
- Preliminary identification of some of PhilaU's strengths and challenges
- Preliminary identification of what you can do to improve the first year at PhilaU

Thinking back, thinking ahead

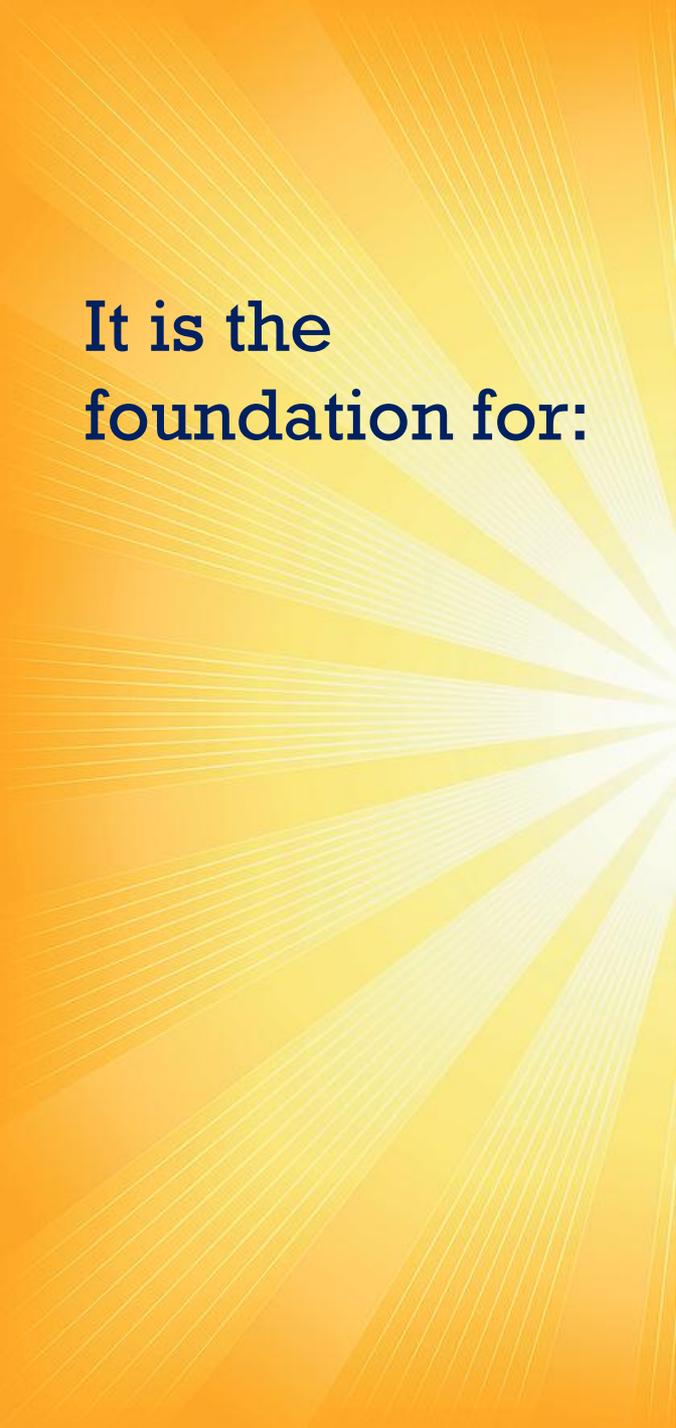
- What was the nature of your first-year experience?
- How your first-year experience similar to or different from the experience students have at PhilaU now?

Today's First-Year Students (A Brief Overview)



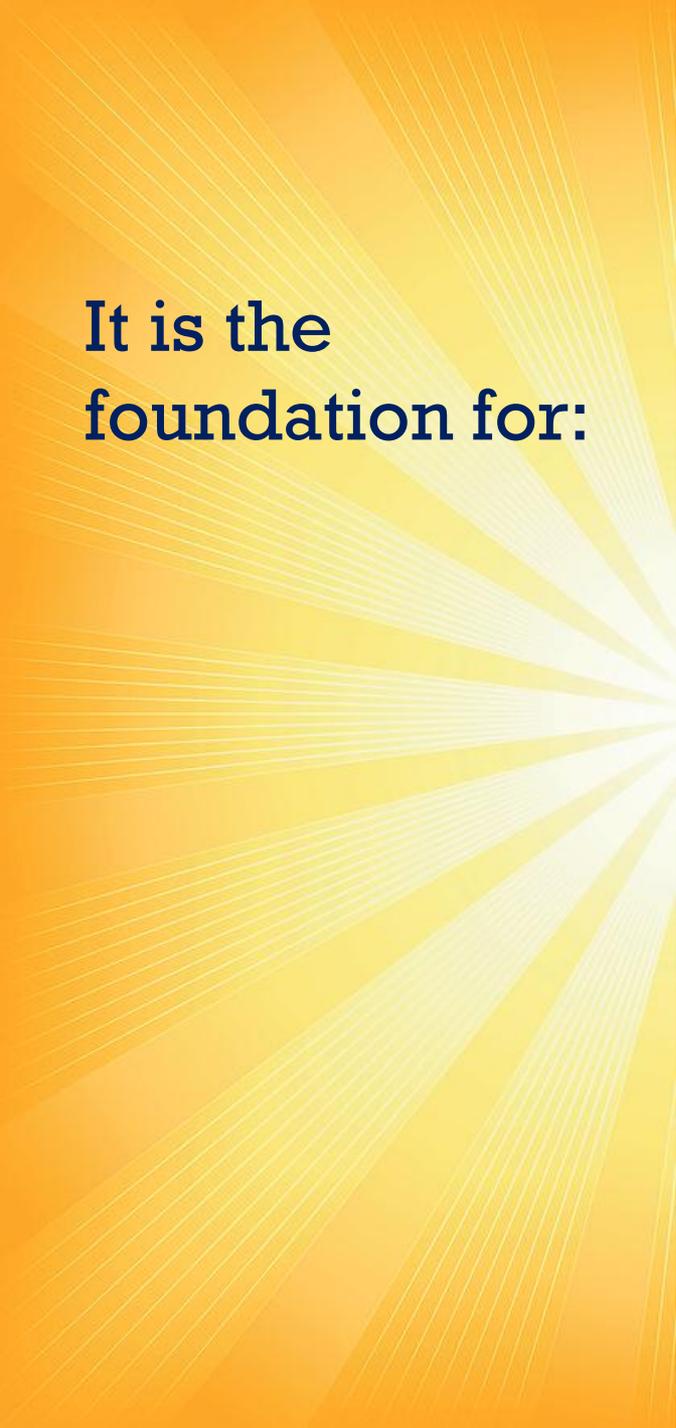
Why the First Year Matters





**It is the
foundation for:**

- Choosing a major
- Establishing a good GPA
- Learning good study habits
- Developing positive attitudes toward faculty and a willingness to interact with them outside of class
- Developing satisfied attitudes toward the institution which hopefully will last



**It is the
foundation for:**

- Retention, therefore revenue
- Impact on graduation rates
- The development of long term relationships that last through and beyond college
- Decisions to stay or transfer
- Important decisions like group affiliation, e.g. fraternities, sororities, team sports, intramurals

**It is the
foundation for:**

- Acquiring certain behaviors that may or may not carry over into later adulthood – from reading a daily national newspaper to alcohol abuse
- The redefinition of family member roles
- Developing economies of time
- Assessment. Important baseline period for conducting initial assessments

Historic Purposes of the First Year

- Making money that can be reallocated to “higher status” endeavors
- Weeding out students who don’t belong
- Allowing senior faculty to avoid teaching new students

What’s your purpose?

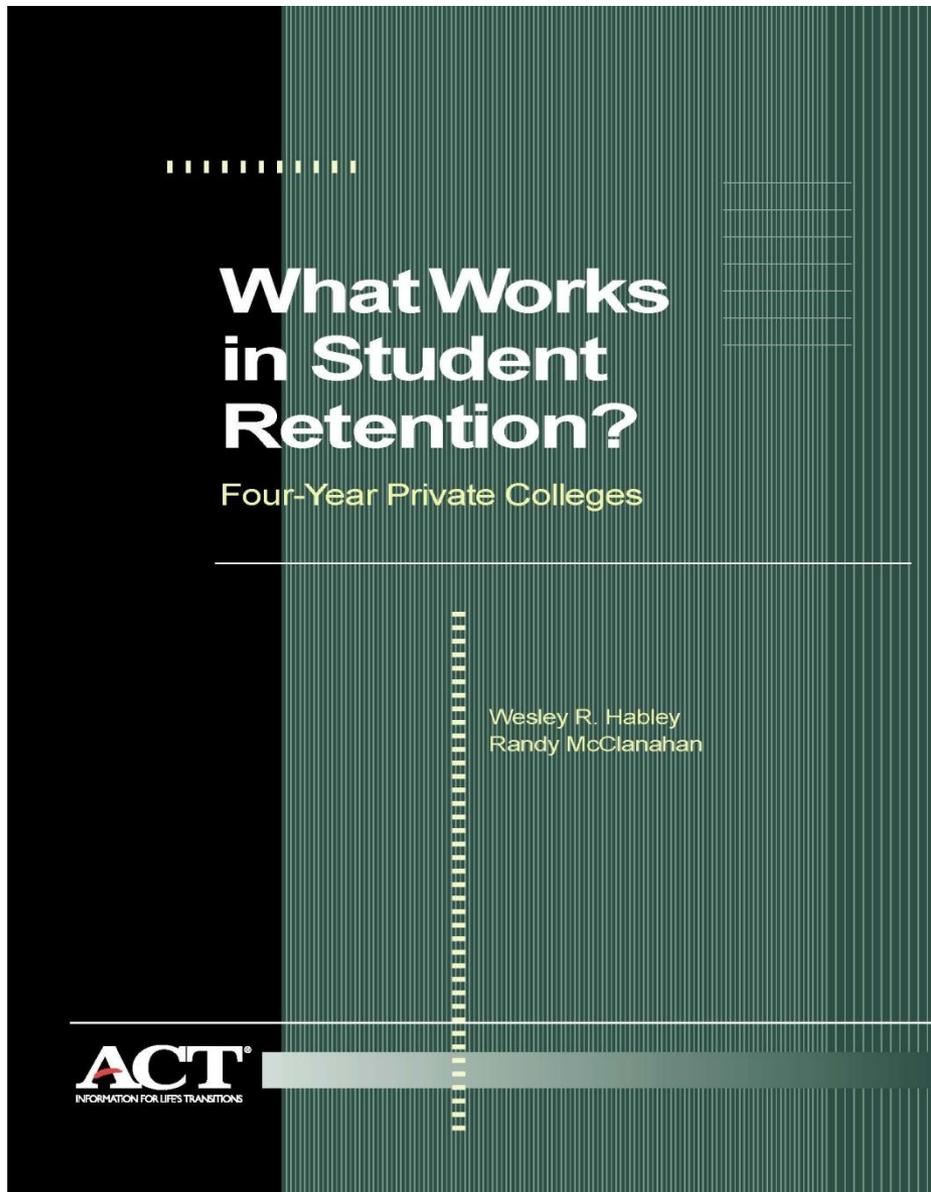
Promising Practices for Strategic Student Success Efforts



Overview:

- Context
- The Current Situation – From National Studies
- What We Know (and Don't Know) About New Student Programs
- Moving from Tactical to Strategic

Context:



What Works
in Student
Retention?

Four-Year Private Colleges

Wesley R. Habley
Randy McClanahan

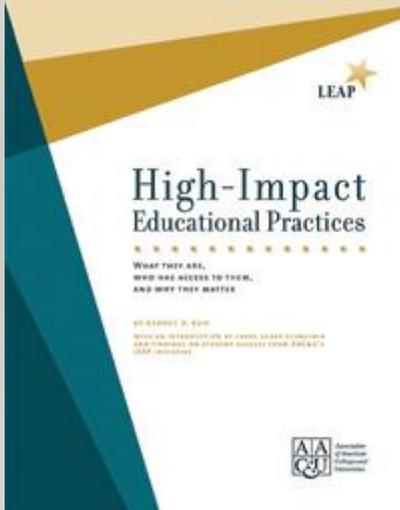
ACT[®]
INFORMATION FOR LIVES TRANSITIONS

Context:

No Magic Pill

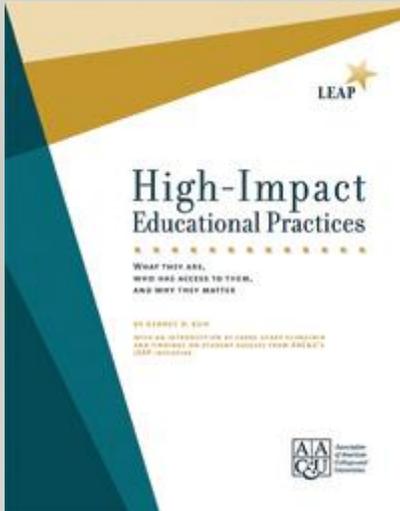


High Impact Strategies



- First-Year Seminars
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects

High Impact Strategies



- Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects



Other Practices / Programs

What We Know (and Don't Know) About New Student Programs

The Big Goals:

- Increasing students' sense of institutional fit
- Assuring “academic and social integration” – learning the culture*
- Promoting student involvement*
- Enhancing student engagement*
- Building commitment and motivation

* Lisa Wolf-Wendel, Kelly Ward, & Jillian Kinzie . A Tangled Web of Terms: The Overlap and Unique Contribution of Involvement, Engagement, and Integration to Understanding College Student Success. 2009., *Journal of College Student Development*, v50 n4.

First-Year Seminars

- Do credit hours matter?
- Is there a perceived difference between required and elective courses?
- Should courses be pass/fail or letter graded?
- Do peer leaders have an impact?
- Is it a good idea to link seminars into a block or “learning community”?

First-Year Seminars

- Does section size influence effectiveness?
- Does the “type” of instructor make a difference?
- Does impact relate to a particular textbook?
- What’s the bottom line on first-year seminar impact on learning, academic achievement, and retention?

Summary: First-Year Seminars that...

- Are elective
- Are graded
- Use peer leaders
- Carry sufficient credit hours to achieve objectives
- Are linked into a learning community

...produce better student outcomes!

Learning Communities

institution-specific findings:

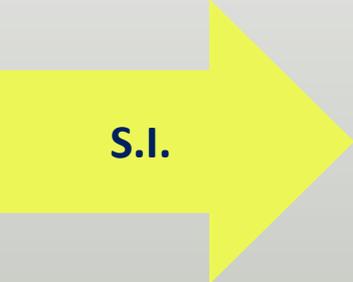
- Impact on retention
- Impact on academic achievement
- Impact on student satisfaction
- Insufficient evidence about impact on student learning
- Insufficient evidence about impact on faculty and student leaders

...need clarity about desired learning outcomes

Academic Advising

- Strong anecdotal evidence about the influence of advising, especially intensive/intrusive advising
- Weak statistical evidence
- Lack of clarity about goals for advising –
Retention? Speed of declaring major?
Satisfaction? Time to graduation?
- The inherent research difficulties
- Issues of student expectations of advisors and experiences

Supplemental Instruction (S.I.) & Orientation



S.I.

- Strong evidence to support link with retention
- Strong evidence to support link with academic achievement



Orientation

- Strong (but dated) evidence linking two-day pre-term orientation with retention
- Research lacking that compares different modes of pre-term orientation

Early Warning Systems



- Many models
- Some Local Examples
- Labor Intensive
- Grades – Not Retention
- Analytics

Early Warning (Analytics)



Learner Analytics (A Form of Early Warning)

- Big Market – Some Promising Data
- Retention correlation is spotty at best
- Grades

Financial Aid and Employment



- Combining Support with Aid
- Lead Them to Water and Pay Them to Drink
- MDRC – Performance-Based Scholarships



- On-Campus Employment
- 10-20 Hours a Week

Service Learning and Developmental Education

Service Learning

- Strong impact on expected involvement in civic affairs and improved life skills
- Limited-to-no direct impact on retention

A necessary, but challenging, service on a number of levels:

- Impact is mixed on student outcomes
- Do developmental courses prepare students for success in regular courses?
- How is developmental work best delivered? The ongoing debate.

Developmental Education

Summing Up

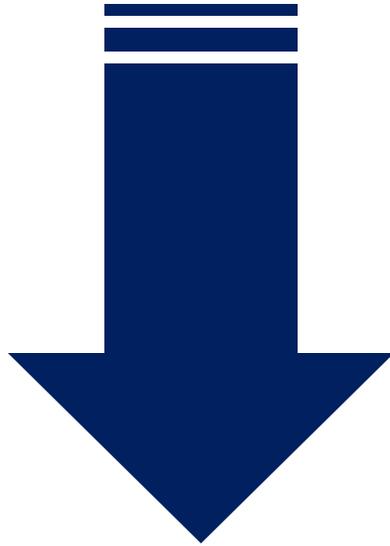
- Basic theoretical models are sound but developed primarily for white, male students

How well do these models apply to all of today's students?

- Research today focuses on program outcomes that can be easily counted (e.g., retention, grade point average)

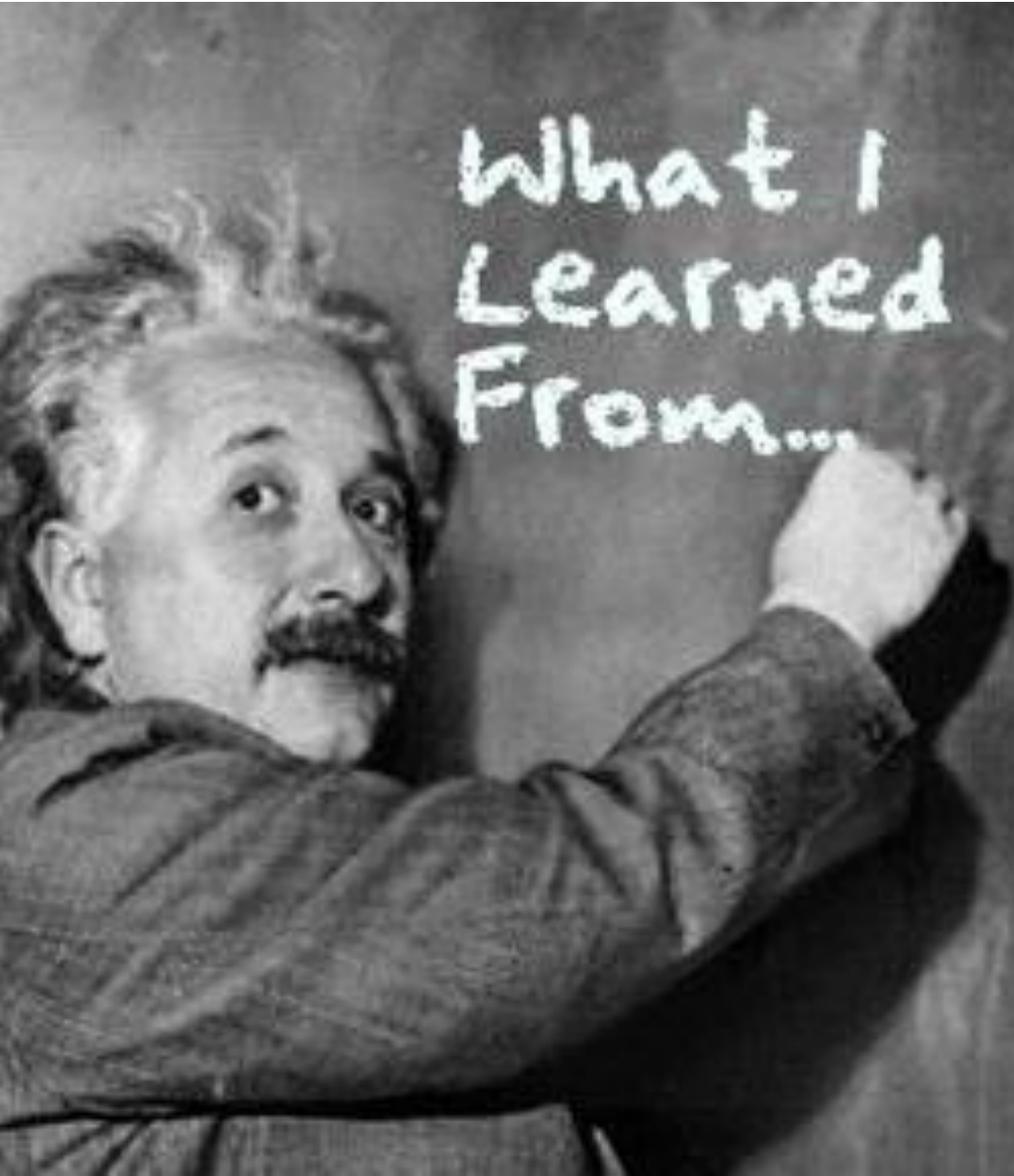
How can we better understand the short-term and long-term learning that does or does not result from common first-year programs ?

Moving from Tactical to Strategic



Considerations for Participants

Four “Take-Aways”



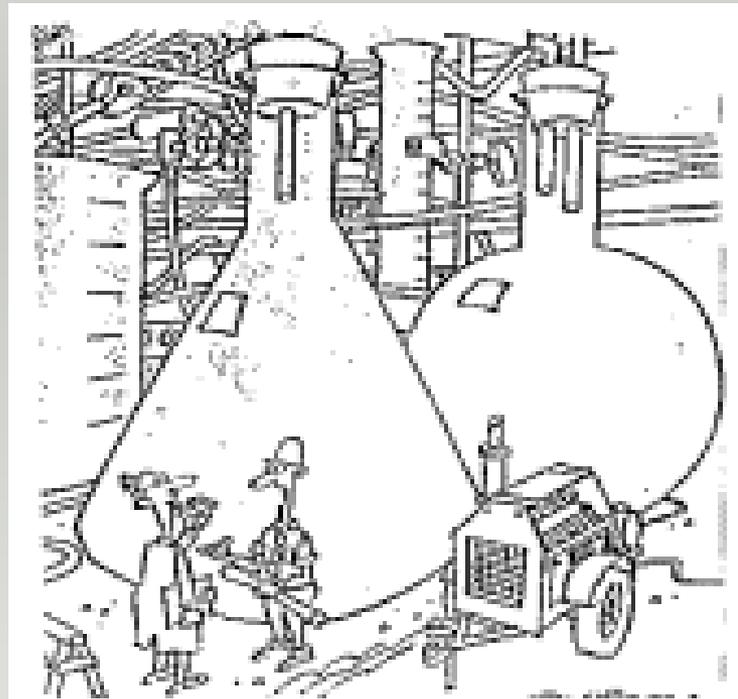
1. Context
2. Scale
3. Coordination
4. A Plan

1. Context



2. Scale

- Many Single Pockets of Excellence?
- All, Most, or Some?
- Critical Mass



“Got a few problems going from lab scale to full-scale commercial.”

3. Coordination

- The Benefits of Coordination
 - Exponential Combinations
- Downsides to Coordination?



4. A (The) Plan!

- “Coordinated Coordination”
- Application of Evidence to Action





Creating Your Own Piece of a Plan

Re-engineering your approach to the beginning college experience should include an acknowledgement of what is working well and only needs to be maintained and/or expanded; what initiatives need to be improved and/or eliminated; and what your role will be in this work.

Three areas of focus



- > policies
- > programs
- > practices
- > pedagogies
- > assessment

- 1. What current first-year initiatives have achieved a high level of excellence at PhilaU and do not need to be changed?**
- 2. What changes do you suggest in PhilaU's approach to supporting first-year students?**
- 3. What role do PhilaU's faculty need to play in the changes you suggest?**



Reporting Out, Questions, and Discussion

Contact Information

Dr. Andrew (Drew) K. Koch

Executive Vice President

John N. Gardner Institute for
Excellence in Undergraduate
Education

koch@jngi.org

828-877-3549

