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A Match or Mismatch: Comparing College Stated Learning Goals to Student Learning Goals & Perception of Educational Quality

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Abstract

An institution's ability to meet students' learning expectations influences student perceptions of educational quality and usefulness. Currently, colleges and universities are trying to provide evidence of these attributes through various summative assessment instruments. However, the content and structure of most assessment instruments measures what students have retained, not actual cognitive change or instances of goal achievement. This study surveyed a random sample of students at a four-year liberal arts college asking them to describe their personal learning goals and quantify the quality and usefulness of the education they received. The students' goals were then compared to the stated goals of the institution. Findings revealed valuable information about how achievement of personal goals is tied to student perception of quality, and the implications of matching or mismatching students with institutions that can meet their predetermined expectations.

Objectives

Compare the learning goals of students to the stated institutional learning goals



Compare the learning goals of students to the stated departmental learning goals for their major



Determine if the learning goals of students and the institution/major department stated goals began to match or deviate as students advanced in their educational career

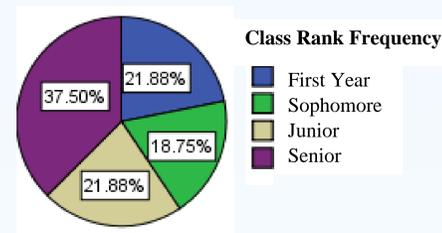


Find if students perceived that the institution helped them achieve their personal learning goals and what this meant for perception of quality and institutional match



Methods

An eleven question electronic survey was distributed to an anonymous sample (n=430) of students at Kenyon College during the 5th and 6th week of classes, spring semester, 2015. The survey format was similar in style to the NSSE, YFCY, CIRP, CSS, and HERI National Surveys.



One qualitative and ten quantitative questions were then analyzed for:

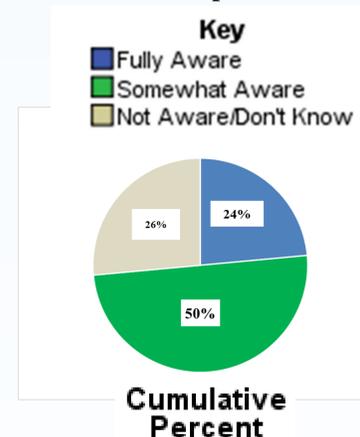
- Student awareness of institutional and departmental mission statements
- Level of perception that personal learning goals matched institutional and departmental learning goals
- Perception of quality of a Kenyon education based on a Likert scale of 1 to 5
 - Belief of personal match or fit with Kenyon College

Results

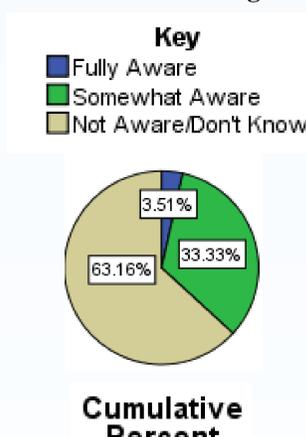
The vast majority of students reported that they were unaware of the institutional mission of Kenyon College, but at least half perceived awareness of their selected major department's goals.

The majority were satisfied that their overall Kenyon education was of very good to excellent quality, and that the college itself was a good match for them personally.

Awareness of Departmental Goals



Awareness of College Goals

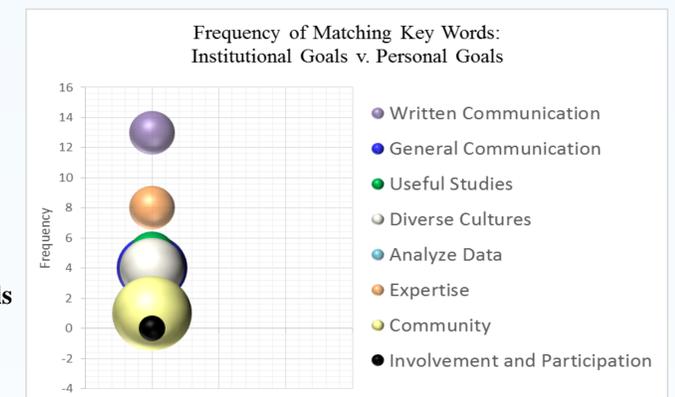


Perception of Match vs. Perception of Quality

Level of Belief that Personal Learning Goals Match	Rank of Quality				Total
	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Very Good	5 Excellent	
Fully Match	0	0	2	3	5
Somewhat Match	0	1	5	4	10
Do Not Match	0	1	1	0	2
N/A, Don't Know the Goals	2	0	9	4	15
Total	2	2	17	11	32

Conclusions

Despite the majority of students not perceiving awareness of Kenyon's institutional goals, when comparing qualitative data, more students' personal goals aligned with the institution as a whole, rather than with their chosen major department. This begs the question, could students be gaining an understanding of an institution's goals from other environmental factors outside the formal mission statement?



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