

# Evaluating NRCs Using Student and Alumni Surveys: Goals, Challenges, and Plan

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# National Resource Centers

- Funded by Title VI
- Promote knowledge about and engagement with particular regions of the world outside the United States
- Sponsor a range of courses in the languages, history, culture, and politics of their respective regions, provide interdisciplinary degree and certificate programs
- Support study abroad and other international experiences for undergraduates
- Fund graduate and undergraduate students through fellowship competitions
- Help sustain inter-disciplinary campus research and learning communities focused on their regions through conferences, lecture series, and cultural events
- Expand the contribution of the university to the larger community through a range of outreach programs focused on their regions

# NRC Evaluation Objectives

- Assess the extent to which NRC programming achieves its objectives
  - *Student-oriented objectives (undergraduate and graduate)*
  - Faculty-oriented objectives
  - Other stakeholder objectives: USED, federal government, university administrators, NRC staff members
- Identify programmatic areas that are particularly successful and also those needing improvement

# Students: Learning Outcomes

- Language skills
- “Area studies” expertise
  - Harder to measure
- Inter-disciplinary, comparative, global perspectives and critical thinking on contemporary problems
  - Still harder to measure
- NRC evaluation: Programmatic vs. substantive emphasis
  - Limited capacity to micro-manage courses
  - Assess student demand for and satisfaction with particular programmatic elements that advance these goals

# Students: Career Outcomes

- Assess student career outcomes
  - Maintain and further develop language and area skills after graduation
    - basis for lifelong learning
  - Practical application of language and area skills in concrete professional activity after graduation
    - government service, business, military, academia
  - Cultural competence and confidence to:
    - work in a variety of environments
    - take on new challenges in diverse settings
    - engage a globalizing world as inter-culturally informed citizens

# Evaluation Challenges

- What is “success”?
- Necessity and difficulty of comparing across institutions
- What is realistic?

# What is “success”?

- Lack of defined standards and benchmarks
- Moving beyond participation levels
  - Bean counting does not measure impact
- Different time horizons
  - Careers and learning outcomes manifest over long periods of time
- Counterfactual problem
  - Who is the “control group”?
  - Endogenous selection
- Treatment group problem: who is an NRC “participant”?
  - Minimalist vs. maximalist definitions
  - Intensity of treatment
  - Funded vs. unfunded participation

# Necessity and difficulty of comparing across institutions

- Institutions with different endowments and comparative advantages compete for scarce resources
- Funders and students choose institutions based on limited information
- Standardized, comparable information across institutions yields efficiencies on both supply and demand side
- Obstacles to standardization:
  - Institutional diversity (size, sector, region, resources)
  - Resistance to quantification
  - Political challenges
    - Institutional risks and reluctance
    - Lack of a change agent/collective action problem
    - Reluctance of external stakeholders to intervene

# What is realistic?

- Mismatch between typical NRC leadership background (humanities) and skills necessary for quantitative evaluation (social science)
- Demands on faculty time
- Expense and frustration of relying on external evaluation firms
- Challenges of good survey design and implementation
- Data analysis , programmatic application, and dissemination of results

# Plan: Standardized Wisconsin Evaluation Program for Title VI (SWEPT)

- Collaboration of all of UW's National Resource Centers
- Regular student (bi-annual) and alumni (every 4 years) surveys focusing on both learning and career outcomes
  - Standard and NRC-specific questions
  - Alumni up to twenty years out
- Preliminary qualitative phase
- Social scientist faculty evaluation director
- Other campus partners:
  - University of Wisconsin Survey Center
  - Wisconsin Alumni Association
- Funding from both NRC budgets and internal UW sources

# Population of interest

- For each NRC, participants are defined as:
  - Any student who receives funding from a competition implemented by the NRC
  - Any degree or certificate program enrollee
  - Any student formally enrolled in a program sponsored by the NRC (e.g. summer language instruction, study abroad)
  - Students with 15 credits of coursework in NRC-related subjects who self-identify as regular participants in NRC extracurricular programs (lecture series, career workshops, language tables, cultural events, musical groups)
- Control group: 15 credit students in NRC-related subjects who do not meet any of the above criteria.

# Questions for Students

- How aware are current program participants of the range, quality, and accessibility of program offerings?
- How satisfied are they with them?
- Which specific learning opportunities, formats, and technologies would they like to see more of, and which do not hold much interest?
- Do they feel like their experiences at UW are preparing them for careers that involve the application of global knowledge, foreign language skills, and awareness of diverse cultures and practices?
- How successful are NRC-sponsored programs at cultivating cross-disciplinary perspectives, practical hands-on experience, and critical thinking on the regions they cover, according to participants in these programs?

# More Questions for Alumni

- To what extent do they use their language skills and area-based expertise in their current and previous jobs and other significant activities (civic engagement, service work, further education)?
- What aspects of their internationally-related UW education do they find especially helpful in their subsequent work lives, and what do they wish they had had more of during their studies?

# Analysis plan

- Analyze response distributions
- Compare program participants and non-participants
- Cohort analysis of alumni
- Prepare reports for each NRC
- Work with NRC leadership to develop specific actions to address findings
- Disseminate the data internally and post selective results on NRC and International Institute websites
- Use initial rounds of data as benchmarks to measure progress with future surveys

# Anticipated Limitations

- Consensus about composition of standardized questions may be hard to reach
- Standardized questions and design costs may limit capacity for NRCs to incorporate their own specific questions
- Response rates may be low
- Non-response may be non-random with respect to key outcomes being assessed
- Possible reluctance to disseminate results that might be perceived as adverse
- Not all outcomes of interest to NRCs' missions can be measured

# Reasons for optimism

- Strong collaborative spirit among UW NRCs
- Other efforts of this nature underway elsewhere
- Close involvement of NRC leadership vital to success
- Other complementary evaluation initiatives to be implemented independently by NRCs
- Learn as we go!
- Learn from each other: workshops and trainings to identify and disseminate best practices?