

Leveraging Alumni Research to Evaluate Institutional Effectiveness

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Image from: <https://pixabay.com/en/business-success-curve-hand-draw-1989130/>

- ❑ Understanding alumni, their attitudes and experiences, is critical to an institution's mission and evaluating:
 - Value of degree
 - Curriculum
 - Student services
 - Program reviews
 - Accreditation practices
 - Marketing and outreach
 - Institutional effectiveness
- ❑ By examining common themes, resources, and practices in alumni research—nationwide and internationally—this session will highlight what facilitates impactful alumni research.

Defining Institutional Effectiveness

- “The dynamism and fluidity of current trends and those yet unimagined will continue to influence and shape higher education’s future. The degree to which institutions can *harness their resources* to achieve their *objectives* will depend upon the clarity of these objectives and the institution’s willingness to set *priorities* and solve its problems. This requires *assessing current status*, designing a *change process*, developing and educating senior leaders, and the obligation and nimbleness to make significant widespread *change at all levels*.”

- *American Council on Education*
(from <http://www.acenet.edu/higher-education/topics/Pages/Institutional-Effectiveness.aspx> , with my italics)



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<https://static.pexels.com/photos/373367/pexels-photo-373367.jpeg>

ALUMNI RESEARCH: KEY COMPONENTS AND COMMON PITFALLS

Purposes of Examining Post-Graduation Outcomes

1. Illuminate the value of a degree.
2. Inform policy makers vs. consumers.
3. Understand student vs. institution perspectives.
4. Promote transparency and accountability.
5. Help students achieve success, especially under-served populations.
6. Weed out unsuccessful programs.
7. Support national goals and economic development.
8. Increase state's financial efficiency.



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Why Do Alumni Research?



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- Two perspectives:
 - “Alumni research is one of, if not the, most productive assessment venues for linking higher education accountability and improvement” (Borden, 2005, pg. 62).

 - “Alumni studies are at their best when they are characterized by centralized data collection and decentralized uses of data” (Volkwein, 2010, pg. 126).

Conducting Alumni Research - Advantages

- ❑ Alumni can provide feedback that may have more authority than that from current students (Volkwein, 2010).
- ❑ Findings can help inform (prospective) students and families.
- ❑ Facilitate accreditation, assessment, and program review.
- ❑ Shape alumni outreach and career services.

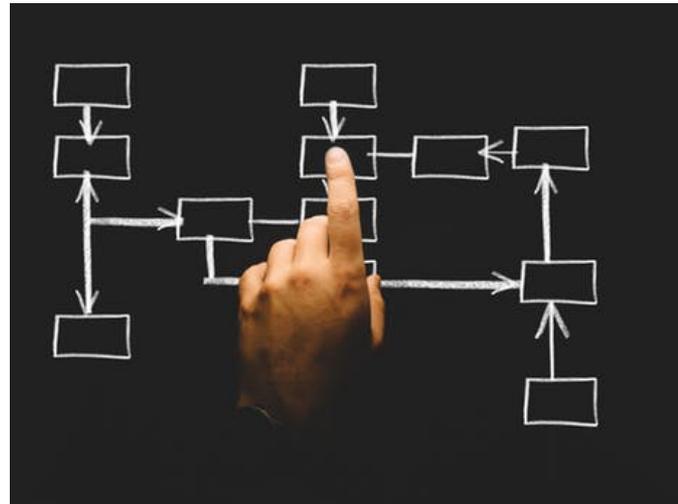


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Conducting Alumni Research - Disadvantages

- ❑ Longer-term outcomes are more difficult to measure.
- ❑ Perceptions of alumni may change over time and be impacted by non-institutional factors.
- ❑ May need to rely more so on external data.
- ❑ Requires lots of intra-departmental coordination.



Image from: <https://pixabay.com/en/graduate-graduation-school-student-150374/>

Useful Components in Alumni Research



Imagine from:

<https://pixabay.com/en/puzzle-planning-strategy-process-1686920/>

- ❑ Characteristics:
 - Believability and utility (Hoey & Gardner, 1999).
 - Sustainability (Ewell, 2005).
- ❑ Supporting:
 - Accreditation, fundraising, and recruitment (Volkwein, 2010).
 - Program review (Hoey & Gardner, 1999).
 - Performance indicators, as part of planning and budgeting (Borden, 2005).
- ❑ Compare departmental-level findings (Hoey & Gardner, 1999).
- ❑ Trends useful to planning and assessment (Hoey & Gardner, 1999).
- ❑ Move beyond reacting to a compliance requirement (Borden, 2005).

Common Pitfalls in Conducting Alumni Research

- ❑ Not having a conceptual framework/model
 - What, when, and how to measure
 - Understand how different components interact
- ❑ Not having a strategic plan that describes measures, goals, and actions.
- ❑ Not engaging the diverse set of stakeholders involved.
- ❑ Not being sustainable.
- ❑ Not validating findings.
- ❑ Not communicating findings.
- ❑ Not evolving.

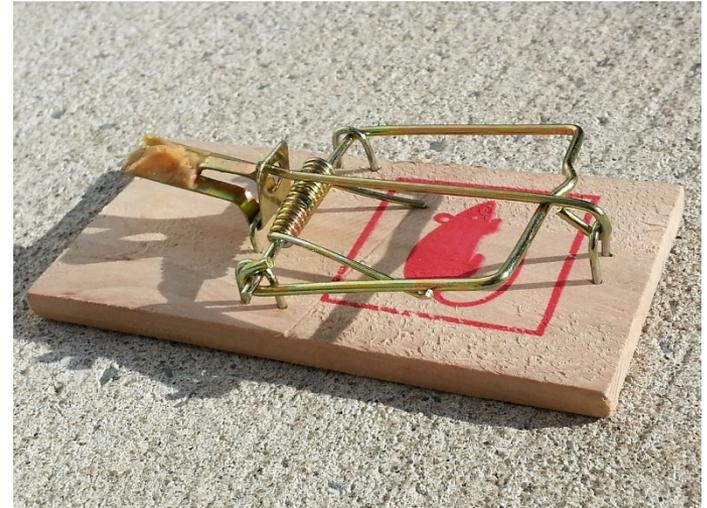


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- “The attention of multiple constituents can be focused by aligning questions about students’ educational experience asked of alumni, entering students, continuing students, faculty, and staff. Although having an institutional research or other centralized office coordinate a variety of surveys can support this type of alignment, the alignment can occur only if the centrally coordinated survey efforts are supported by similarly coordinated assessment and planning processes” (Borden, 2005, pg. 69).

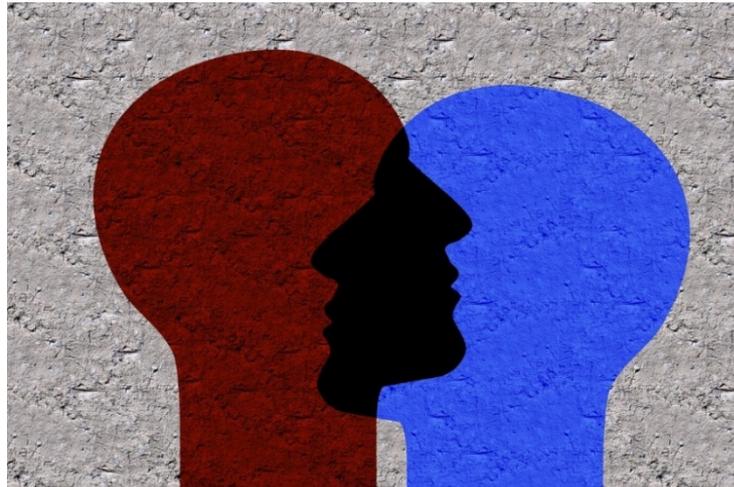
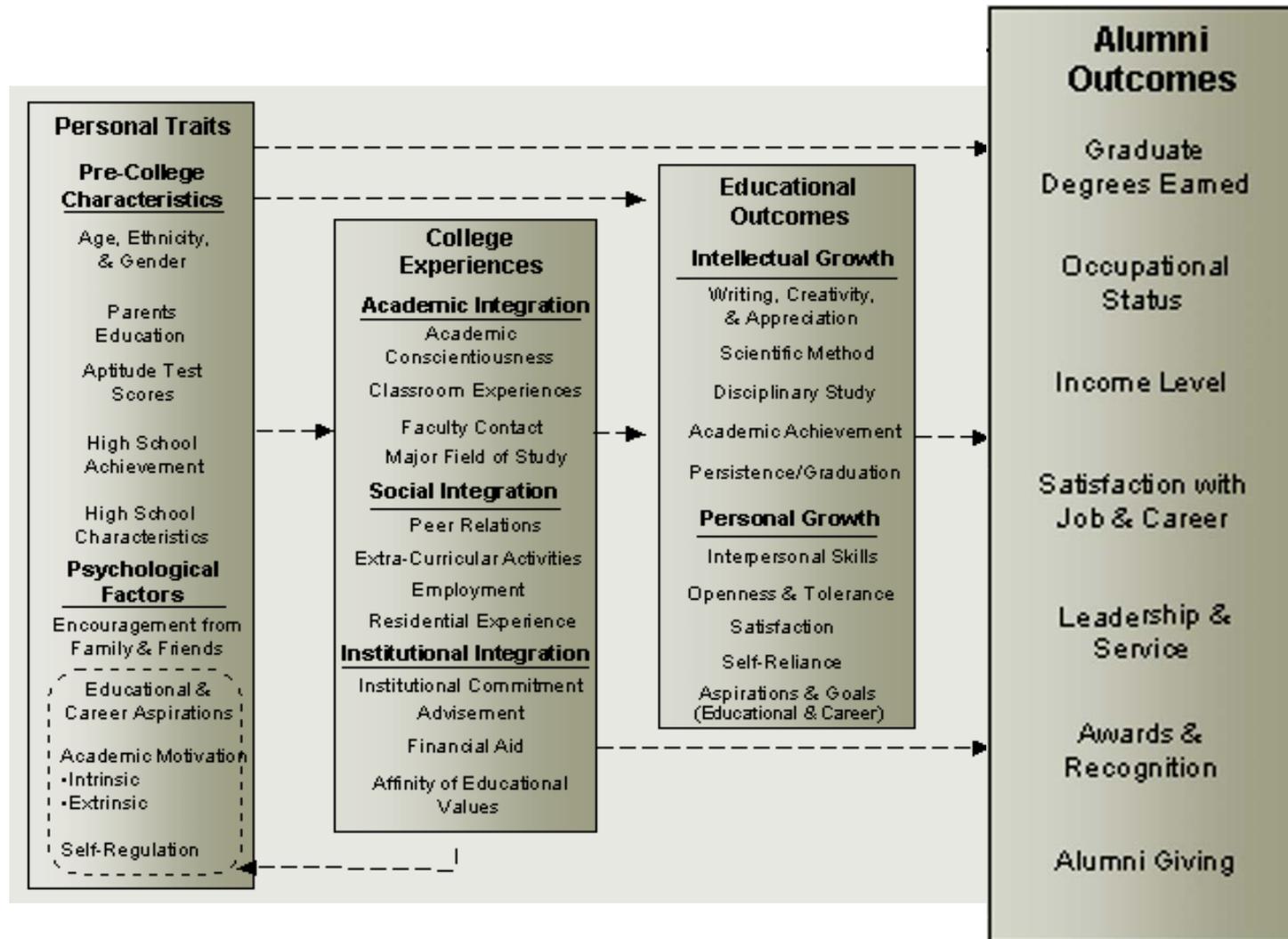


Image from: <https://pixabay.com/en/face-faces-dialogue-talk-psyche-1370958/>

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO ASK ALUMNI

Have a Framework to Assess Outcomes

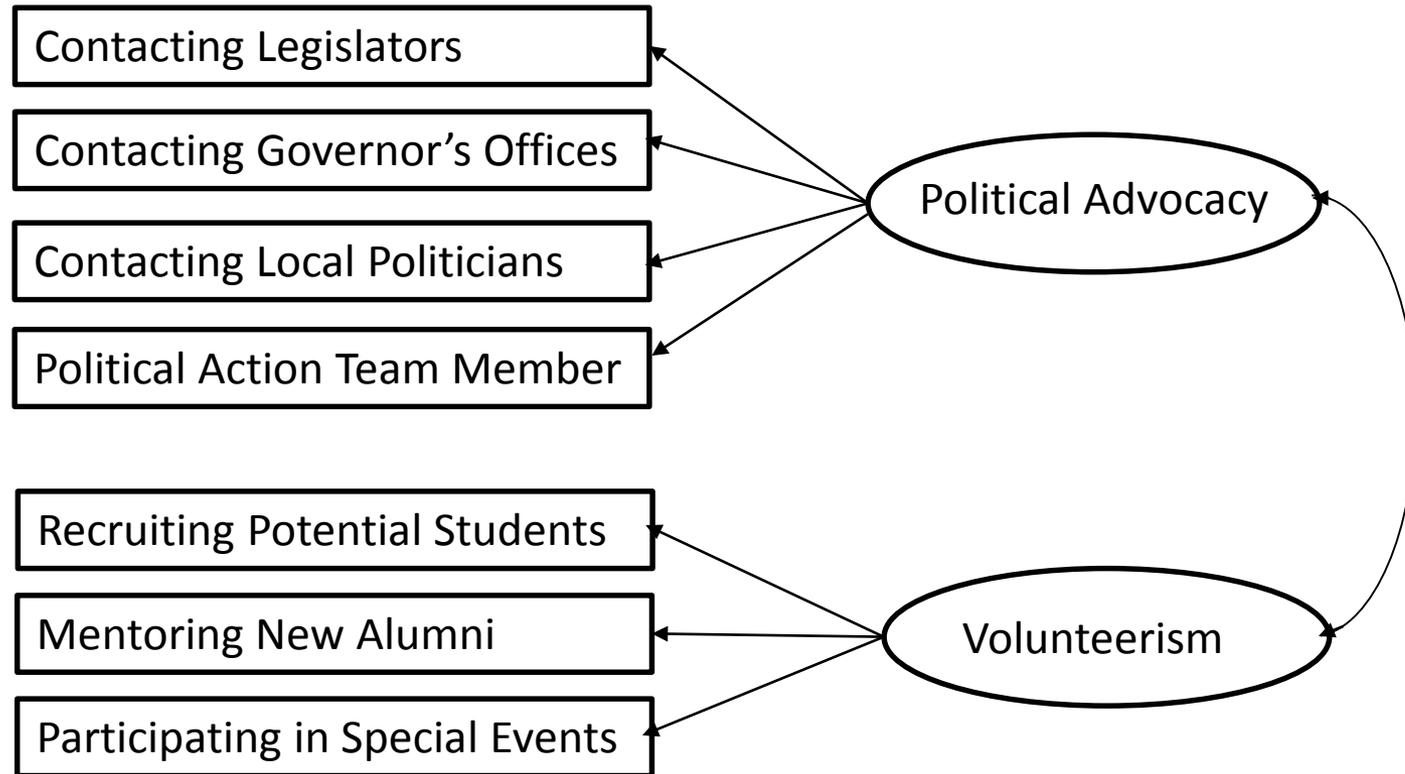
Albany Outcomes Assessment Model



Source: University at Albany (n. d.). Albany Outcomes Assessment Model. Retrieved from: http://www.albany.edu/assessment/ualb_outcomes_model.html.

A Model Focused on Alumni Outcomes

Dimensions of Alumni Support



Source: Weerts, D. J., Cabrera, A. F., & Sanford, T. (2010). Beyond giving: Political advocacy and volunteer behaviors of public university alumni. *Research in Higher Education*, 51, 346-365.

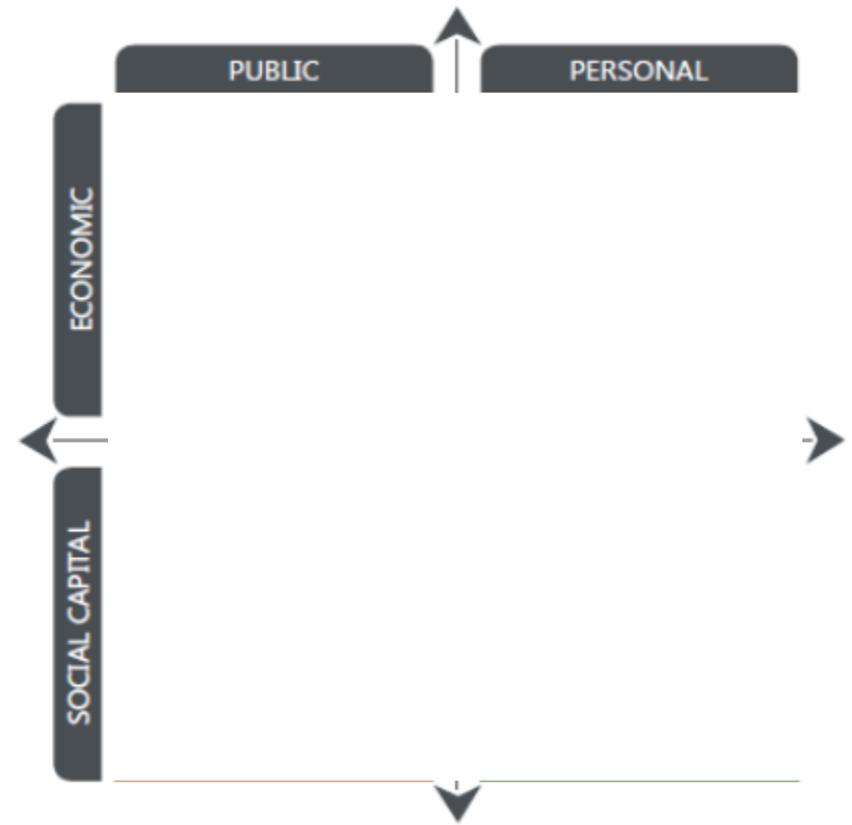
Benefits to Alumni

- ❑ Benefits can be mapped onto at least 2 dimensions:
 - Public vs. Personal
 - Social vs. Economic

- ❑ Is your university capturing these benefits?

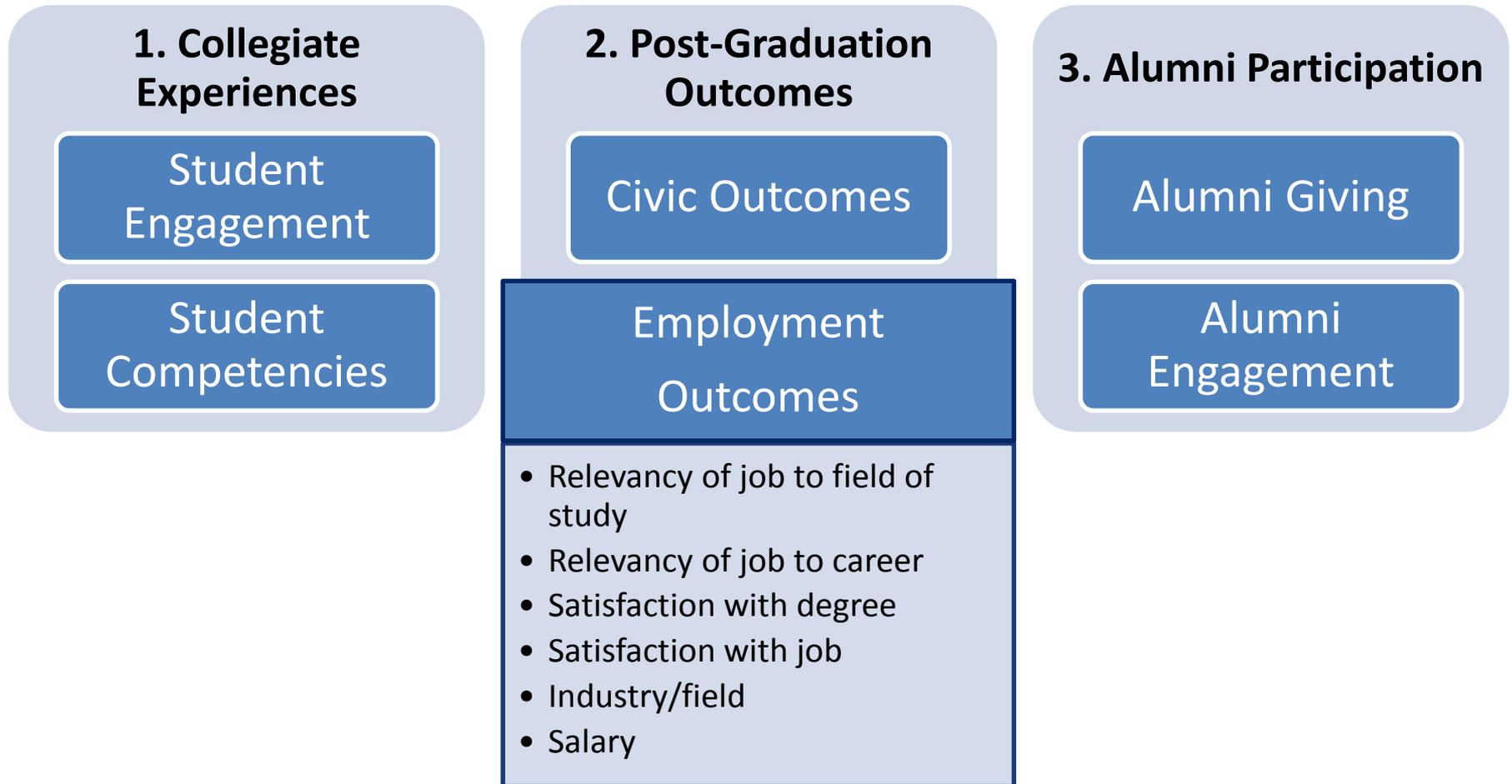
- ❑ What other benefits might we be overlooking and how would we measure these?

Exhibit 2. Post-Collegiate Outcomes (PCO) Initiative Framework



Source: American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), American Association of State Colleges, and Universities (AASCU), & Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU; 2015, March). Advancing a Comprehensive Study of Post-Collegiate Outcomes: Framework and Toolkit. Retrieved from: <http://www.aplu.org/library/advancing-a-comprehensive-study-of-post-collegiate-outcomes-framework-and-toolkit/file>

What to Ask Alumni?



Source: The three major themes are from Volkwein (2010), underlying conceptualizations from Cabrera et al. (2003), and detailed employment outcomes from Durkin and Kircher (2010).

More on Employment Outcomes

- Increase in salary
- Promotion
- New career paths
- Student loan debt, gainful employment
- Skills – employer surveys
- Employer satisfaction and learning outcomes



Image from: <https://static.pexels.com/photos/416322/pexels-photo-416322.jpeg>

Why Is Employment Emphasized?

- ❑ In a 2013 survey, 53% of respondents indicated that the reputation of the college for getting graduated “good jobs” was a top factor in choosing a particular college (Harmon & Ridley, 2014).

- ❑ Among 2006-2011 graduates saying they would do some things differently, the most common thing (37%) was to be more careful in choosing a major (Stone, Van Horn, & Zukin, 2012).
 - Advising can be more career-focused earlier in the student cycle.

- ❑ Student loan debt has affected the lifestyle choices of recent graduates: with 40% putting off a major purchase (like a car or home), 28% delaying additional education, and 27% deciding to live with parents or family members to save money (Stone, Van Horn, & Zukin, 2012).



Imagine from:
<https://static.pexels.com/photos/7075/people-office-group-team.jpg>

☐ **California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's (CCCCO) Salary Surfer**

- <http://salarysurfer.cccco.edu/SalarySurfer.aspx>
- An online tool that displays median earnings of recent graduates from community colleges, 2 years before as well as 2 and 5 years after earning a certificate/degree in specific programs.
- Does not link to specific job titles nor skills.

Curriculum	Award Type	Median Annual Salary		
		2 Years Before	2 Years After	5 Years After
⊕ Behavioral Science	Degree	\$23,241	\$30,912	\$38,080
⊕ Psychology, General	Degree	\$18,276	\$25,163	\$33,740

☐ **CCCCO's Wage Tracker**

- http://datamart.cccco.edu/Outcomes/College_Wage_Tracker.aspx
- Provides median wage 3 years after associate's degree/certificate by institution and degree program.

Other Employment Information Tools (cont'd)

The University of Texas System's seekU

- ❑ Provides UT graduates information on employment, earnings, and student loan debt within Texas by degree program and occupation for nearly 400 degree programs at the 12 UT institutions.
- ❑ Median earnings 1, 5, and 10 years after graduation, percentage who continued education, student loan payments as percentage of monthly salary, and projected job growth in Texas.
- ❑ Only UT graduates who are working full-time, full-year in Texas are included.
- ❑ Will be expanding to national graduate earnings.
- ❑ Outreaching to academic advisors, career services professionals, and high school guidance counselors.



<http://www.utsystem.edu/seekut/>

College Measures

- ❑ “College Measures works with state governments to help identify higher education credentials with high return on investment. Our work focuses on the hot jobs that present the best opportunities for students to launch exciting careers and on the hot skills that students need to get those jobs. Our goal is to help students find programs that lead to success in the labor market and will allow them to lead the lives they want.” – *American Institutes for Research*
- ❑ Seven states have collaborated on College Measures: Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.
 - <http://launchmycareercolorado.org/>

The screenshot shows the 'Launch My Career Colorado' website. At the top, it features the 'CO COLORADO Official State Web Portal' logo and a 'Compare Your Favorites' link with a star icon. Below the header is a navigation bar with 'Jobs', 'Skills', 'Majors', and 'Schools' tabs. A green banner displays 'State of Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper' and 'Number of Businesses: 158064'. A central section titled 'Welcome to Launch My Career Colorado!' includes a paragraph about the service and a 'Provide Feedback' button. Below this is a selection prompt 'Please select an option below.' followed by four buttons: 'What Major I Want', 'What Job I Want', 'What School I Want', and 'What Industry I Prefer'. On the left side, a sidebar lists skills employers are looking for, such as 'Lead and motivate co-workers and colleagues'.

**WHAT OTHER POST-GRADUATION
OUTCOMES TO LOOK AT?**

What to Look At and Other Considerations

- ❑ Not just economic benefits but also life satisfaction, health and well-being.
- ❑ Costs, for attending but also not completing.
- ❑ What is gained by different groups.
- ❑ By degree programs as well as demographics.
- ❑ Skills and not just college completion.
- ❑ Long-term and not just short-term.
- ❑ How to adjust for institutional differences.



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Learning Outcomes

AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative

- ❑ Framework developed in 2005 to facilitate discussing the value of a liberal education, by focusing on four essential learning outcomes:
 1. Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World,
 2. Intellectual and Practical Skills,
 3. Personal and Social Responsibility, and
 4. Integrative and Applied Learning.
- ❑ Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Project (Rhodes, 2009)
 - Provide rubrics that aid in assessing student learning across different institution types in 16 areas necessary for success in “work, citizenship, and life.”

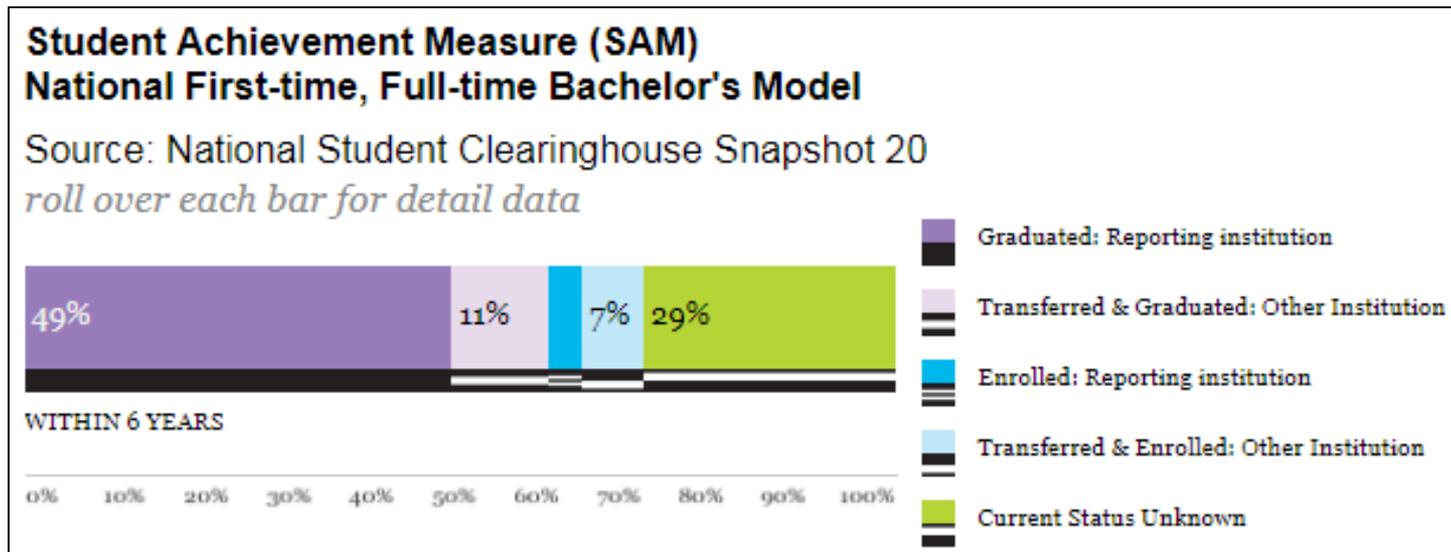


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Student Achievement Measure (SAM)

- “The Student Achievement Measure (SAM) tracks student movement across postsecondary institutions to provide a more complete picture of undergraduate student progress and completion within the higher education system. SAM is an alternative to the federal graduation rate, which is limited to tracking the completion of first-time, full-time students at one institution.”



Civic Engagement, Health, and Social Benefits

- ❑ TERI & IHEP (1997) examined post-graduation outcomes for primarily completers of a four-year program, including employment, further education, civic and social engagement with alma mater and other organizations.
 - In many cases, individuals with higher education attainment have better outcomes.

- ❑ More recently, benefits of a college education included increased earnings, increase in taxes paid, decrease in unemployment rates, decrease in dependence on public assistance programs, improved health outcomes, reduced health care costs, and increase in being engaged socially and civically (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016).



Image from:
<https://static.pexels.com/photos/317157/pexels-photo-317157.jpeg>

Post-Graduation, Are Alumni Engaged?

Gallup-Purdue Index

- ❑ Inaugural administration was in 2015.
- ❑ Focuses on how alumni are engaged in their jobs, how and how they view their undergraduate experiences.
- ❑ Helps answer the question of whether institutions are fulfilling their mission and goals.

Great jobs. Great lives.

Colleges and universities are struggling with increased demands from students, parents, taxpayers and legislators. These stakeholders demand assurances that institutions are providing students with experiences that prepare them to find good jobs and fulfilling lives after graduation.

50%

OF ALL ALUMNI "STRONGLY AGREE" THEIR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION WAS WORTH THE COST.

Source: Gallup-Purdue Index. Retrieved from:
<http://www.gallup.com/services/194264/measuring-college-university-outcomes.aspx>.

**WHAT ARE OTHER COUNTRIES
DOING?**

What Other Countries are Doing – United Kingdom

□ National and Institutional Surveys

- First destinations, within 6 months of graduating.
- Graduating seniors (e.g. National Student Survey).
- Longer term, 3 to 4 years post-graduation.
- Focuses on both employment and learning outcomes.

□ Users and Uses of Survey Data

- Administrators, teachers, prospective students, course designers, and researchers.
- Fundraising initiatives.
- Institutional evaluations.
- ROI of educational degree.

□ Concerns

- Student as consumer.
- Response rates.
- Diversity and equity.



What Other Countries are Doing – Spain



- ❑ National and Institutional Surveys
 - By the late 1990's most Spanish institutions surveyed their alumni.
 - Spurred by growing unemployment and more competition over students.
 - Institutional surveys include those of graduates, employers, and career offices.
- ❑ Users and Uses of Survey Data
 - Used by institutions, regions, and states.
 - Focused on learning, transition to labor market, and employment outcomes.
 - Quality assurance of universities.
- ❑ Concerns
 - No tradition of keeping in contact with alumni.
 - Connect alumni and employer surveys, and curriculum to employment needs.
 - Surveys not specific enough to inform action.
 - Little pressure for institutions to share results, and hard to compare across institutions.
 - Long-term effort involving diverse stakeholders.

Source: Mora, J., & Vidal, J. (2005). The emerging uses of alumni research in Spain. *New Directions in Institutional Research*, 126, 61-72.

Image from: <https://pixabay.com/en/spain-flag-banner-red-gold-crown-1179106/>.

What Other Countries are Doing – Germany



□ National and Institutional Surveys

- Spurred by unstable job market in the 1970's and increasing number of graduates, and concerns of them being “overeducated.”
- Grew to looking at transitions, employers' expectations, job satisfaction, and career paths.

□ Users and Uses of Survey Data

- In the early 1980's, employer's surveyed regarding recruitment processes.
- In the 1990's, both employers and colleges interviewed about competencies.
- International comparisons made possible by surveying 12 countries (CHEERS study).
- Research guides decisions about higher education-work links.

□ Concerns

- Diversity of alumni (even length of job search varies by country).
- Regional differences may override contributions of the college.
- Satisfaction with education may depend upon long-term career outcomes.

Source: Schomburg, H., & Teichler, U. (2005). Increasing potentials of alumni research for curriculum reforms: Some experiences from a German Institute. *New Directions in Institutional Research*, 126, 31-48.

Image from: <https://static.pexels.com/photos/109629/pexels-photo-109629.jpeg>.

A Broader Look of International Alumni Survey Trends



- ❑ In 2015, the Higher Education Authority issued a report on alumni surveys, examining several countries (Frawley & Harvey, 2015).
- ❑ Among the 30 European countries examined, only 13 had national alumni surveys.
 - Among these 13, only 8 countries have conducted them regularly (more than 3x).
- ❑ More data on longer-term outcomes are needed.
 - Most surveys occurred within 1 year of graduation.
 - Longitudinal surveys were most commonly administered 2 and 5 years post-grad.
 - There has been growth in longitudinal alumni research in countries such as the UK, US, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and Australia.
- ❑ While many surveys focus on employment outcomes, more questions on financial debt have been added.
- ❑ Benchmarking over time or against similar institutions can be implemented using alumni surveys.

OTHER RESOURCES TO UNDERSTAND THE ALUMNI EXPERIENCE

Other Resources in Understanding Alumni Experiences

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)



- ❑ [NACE](#) provides information on employment outcomes of college graduates, job market trends, job search experiences, and other employment related trends.
- ❑ NACE offers a variety of survey instruments to be administered at either colleges or completed by employers/recruiters.
 - The *Student Survey* of graduating seniors includes questions about experiences and expectations related to their job search.
 - The *First Destination Survey* aims to track outcomes, both employment and continued education, of students immediately after they graduate.
 - The *Career Services Benchmark Survey* can help provide benchmarks for operating budget and revenue, including salaries and years of experience for different job functions, staff-to-student ratios, fees, and technology.

Other Resources in Understanding Alumni Experiences (cont'd)

Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium & National Center for Education Statistics



❑ Higher Education Data Sharing ([HEDS](#)) Consortium

- Administers two relevant surveys:
 1. [First Destination](#) (co-sponsored by NACE) – graduating seniors and recent graduates.
 2. [Alumni](#) – impact of education on learning outcomes, employment, college satisfaction and experiences, and college debt (5 and 10 years post-graduation).



❑ National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES](#))

- Administers the [Baccalaureate and Beyond \(B & B\) Longitudinal Survey](#) which tracks students' education and work experience post-graduation, examining income, debt repayment, graduate school programs, and career paths.
- B& B tracked three cohorts who graduated in:
 1. 1992-1993*
 2. 1999-2000
 3. 2007-2008*

*The first and third cohorts were or will be interviewed 1, 4, and 10 years post graduation.

Other Resources in Understanding Alumni Experiences (cont'd)

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)



NCHEMS

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

- ❑ [NCHEMS](#)' mission is to improve "strategic decision making in higher education for states and institutions in the United States and abroad."
- ❑ Its Information Center (<http://www.higheredinfo.org/>) provides state-level reports on college attainment, affordability, and economic and workforce conditions.

How is Your State Doing?

- Educational Attainment
- College Access
- College Affordability
- Persistence and Completion
- Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Higher Education Finance
- Workforce Conditions
- Economic Conditions

State Profile Reports

Generate Custom Reports



Welcome to the NCHEMS Information Center

The mission of the National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis is to provide state policymakers and analysts timely and accurate data and information that are useful in making sound higher education policy decisions.

By navigating the links on the left, you'll find comparative data for states and counties, and useful contextual information.

Thanks to Lumina Foundation for Education, the Ford Foundation, and the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative for supporting the development of this website.

Visit the [NCHEMS website](#) for more information about the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

Featured Measures

- Preparation for College: Advanced Placement Exams
- Finance: State and Local Public Higher Education Support Per Full-Time Equivalent Student
- Income and Earnings: Median Family Income

NEXT STEPS

The Future of Alumni Research



Image from: <https://static.pexels.com/photos/6101/hands-woman-art-hand.jpg>.

- ❑ Accountability and transparency continue to rule.
- ❑ More on learning outcomes and actual skills and knowledge gained.
- ❑ More on non-financial benefits and the value of a degree.
- ❑ More emphasis on longer-term outcomes.
- ❑ More on diversity.
- ❑ More international work and collaboration.

What Next For Your Institution?

- ❑ How do you define institutional effectiveness?
- ❑ How do you define success and value?
- ❑ Strategic planning: What matters and how to measure?
- ❑ How does alumni research fit in?
- ❑ Refine goals and conceptual models.
- ❑ Who (else) should be involved?
- ❑ Surveys for graduating seniors, alumni, employers, or career offices?
- ❑ What other sources of information will be useful?
- ❑ (Re-)assess *resources, objectives, priorities, current status, and change process.*



Image from: <https://static.pexels.com/photos/65562/pexels-photo-65562.jpeg>

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