

Abstract

Title: WHAT ARE WE MEASURING?

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Each year Bermuda College collects data and measures its performance on retention and student persistence. We have known that not all of our students “enter to graduate.” As a result we refocused our measurement effort. Despite this refocus we find that our retention percentages are lower than some of our counterparts’ percentages in other jurisdictions (Riley, 2016). By changing our management paradigm from retention to a value-added assessment of the Bermuda College experience, we can capture what we *are* doing well. By viewing each student as an eventual newcomer to another host culture (whether an institution or a place of employment) and applying the cultural intelligence framework to evaluate their persistence, we can use that data to invoke a new measurement paradigm. The new paradigm might answer the question, “How well have we equipped our former students to matriculate successfully in new environments?” A longitudinal study design will allow us to capture the data. The use of the SYM-Q™ Survey (Student Version) elicits the responses of former students about the value-added contribution they gained as a result of their educational experience at Bermuda College.

The following persons peer-reviewed this article and made salient observations that improved its clarity: Cordell Riley, MSc., Institutional Research and Planning Coordinator, Ru-Zelda Severin, M.M., Senior Lecturer in Music and Education, and Trescot Wilson, DBA, Dean of Business, Hospitality, and Applied Sciences.

What Are We Measuring?

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Bermuda College is the only tertiary institution in Bermuda. It operates with the mission of “setting Bermuda’s students on the paths to success” (BC Mission Statement, 2016). Each year the college collects data and measures its performance on retention and student persistence. This is accomplished by analysing Fall Semester to Spring Semester data and Spring Semester to new Fall Term data. We have known that not all of our students “enter to graduate.” Many students matriculate in the college’s academic divisions (Business, Arts and Science, and Applied Science) to learn a skill, specialization, or trade through the various certificate and diploma programmes offered by the divisions. While these programmes do allow students to simultaneously earn credits toward a related associate’s degree, many are able to take their certificates and diplomas to the workplace in culinary arts and the construction trades. For these students, persistence to the associate’s degree level is not deemed necessary. Other students see Bermuda College as an avenue to take general education courses that will transfer to institutions abroad. For them, Bermuda College is a stepping stone, which allows them to conveniently earn degree credit at on-island, at a fraction of the cost that would be incurred as an international student, elsewhere. Thirdly, cohorts of working professionals enter the college to gain certificates, certifications, and designations that facilitate their advancement in the workplace. These career development courses, offered through our Centre for Professional and Career Education, are not offered for degree credit. As a result of these matriculation scenarios, we refocused our measurement effort; we abandoned persistence in favour of measuring retention. Despite this refocus of our measurement effort, our retention percentages are lower than those of some of our counterparts in other jurisdictions (Riley, 2016). By changing our management paradigm from retention to a value-added assessment of the Bermuda College experience, we can capture what we *are* doing well. There may be merit in measuring our performance by our strengths, which seem to be: “preparing students to leave” and “equipping students to be successful in the new environments they select.”

Our students have grown up on the island of Bermuda which is 24-miles long, 21 miles square, and 1 mile at its widest point. While small island life provides a highly developed network and safety net for our students, it can be considered a somewhat insular experience. Most of our students are not trying to stay---they are trying to “go” somewhere else. Whether it is to complete their 4-year degrees at a University abroad, to obtain their 2-year degrees or trade designations at other institutions abroad, or to work at one of the international businesses domiciled on the island, one thing our students have in common is that they enter with the goal of “leaving,” not staying.

We have the opportunity to change our measurement paradigm, from retention to a value-added assessment of the college experience at Bermuda College. By viewing each student as an eventual newcomer to another host culture (whether an institution or a place of employment) and applying the cultural intelligence framework (Earley, Ang, & Tan (2006); Bucher (2008); Livermore (2011) to evaluate their persistence in the new institution, we can use that data to invoke a new measurement paradigm. The new paradigm might answer the question, “How well have we equipped our former students to

matriculate successfully in new environments?” A longitudinal study design will allow us to capture the data and answer these questions:

1. In what ways has Bermuda College prepared students to function in the larger, global, more plural worlds which exist beyond Bermuda and Bermuda College? (introduction of new courses, seminars, workshops, or strands within existing curricula)
2. What have we done to aid the development of metacognitive skills that will not only give students the confidence to achieve in new settings, but will make them self-aware and able to self-adjust as they experience new cultures?
3. How have the Bermuda College educational experiences facilitated cognitive development and helped our former students to gain knowledge about the new culture?
4. How well are our former students able to execute appropriate behaviors in the plural worlds in which they decide to matriculate?
5. To what extent have the Bermuda College educational experiences developed independent learners and problem-solvers who are capable of critical thinking?
6. What percentage of our former students persist to completion in these new environments?

The theoretical framework for this proposed methodology is cultural intelligence (CQ). Two dissertation studies (Ridley-Smith, 2014, 2015) which utilized cultural intelligence as a theoretical framework undergird the methodology. While the studies were conducted independently of each other, both studies examined the newcomer and host culture member experiences of participants and revealed similar themes surrounding what is known as the CQ exchange. A further consideration of the literature points to the phenomenon that all of the students who leave Bermuda College enter into receiving institutions (host cultures) as newcomers. Therefore, the constructs of the newcomer/host culture experience in CQ research (Early, Ang, & Tan, 2006) can be useful in refashioning the measurement paradigm of our student experience at Bermuda College.

The SYM-Q™ Survey (Student Version) is the data collection tool being pilot-tested for use. Thirty-five questions elicit responses that will help the investigator to determine whether the sending institution (in this case, Bermuda College) has provided for the student an educational experience that is compatible with the receiving institution in terms of academic rigor, academic support, grading scale, expectation for access to teachers/advisors, use of technology, social support, and the student’s ability to adjust, matriculate, and persist in the new host culture environment. Though inconclusive, the data collected so far affirms the value-added assertion.

The SYM-Q™ will be administered one year after the former student’s experience at the new, receiving institution. The SYM-Q™ survey instantly highlights what the sending institution has done successfully – equipping its former students to make good transitions into their new institutions of choice and, ultimately, persisting through graduation or maintaining successful employment in new environments and host cultures. For us, that’s worth measuring.

The SYM-Q™ methodology can be employed by any institution who faces a measurement dilemma that is similar to the one at Bermuda College. As such, we invite collaboration and participating in parallel research with sister institutions.

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