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# AER mail

THE ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH  
KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER.

*The following is a letter from the chairs of the Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community. You can find contact information for Nathan and Darby on page 7. Enjoy!*

## Dear NASPA Colleagues,

Welcome to a new school year! With a lot happening in higher education and student affairs, there is no shortage of assessment opportunities and conversations. The federal government is interested in the campus climate for sexual assault, developing rating scales for institutions, and enrolling and graduating more students in higher education. If you are a state institution, you may be faced with different funding models, requests for information about effectiveness and efficiency, and reports on student success. At your own institution, you might be having discussions about your division or department's contribution to student learning, the campus climate for various groups, and strategic planning.

As you get settled into a fall routine, we hope that you have taken time to

plan for your year in assessment based on these larger questions. If not, it's never too late to start. Here are a few reflective questions for you to consider.

- ◆ What do you NEED (vs. want) to know to improve your programs and services?
- ◆ What do others want to know about how you contribute to the institution's mission and priorities?
- ◆ What data already exist on your campus that you can use?
- ◆ How have you shared recent assessment results with stakeholders?
- ◆ How have you used results to make changes and documented those changes?
- ◆ What are the current and future issues that you need to be aware of to plan your assessment strategies?

If you have not talked to your colleagues about these issues, this would be a great time to bring together a group of people who are interested in these issues. Assessment is not done in a vacuum, and it works better when staff work together. Think, too, about how you can include people from outside your division—other support units, institutional research office, faculty, graduate students, etc. As more attention is being paid to higher education, it is important that assessment in student affairs is incorporated into the day-to-day operations of what we do to support students.

We hope that you have a good fall and engage with your colleagues on assessment issues.

Enjoy your fall

*Darby and Nathan*



ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION,  
AND RESEARCH



# Action Research: Looking Towards the Future

By *Jermaine F. Williams* and *Erica Eckert*

The past three AER Newsletter articles about action research introduced it as an approach focusing on understanding a phenomenon in order to produce positive outcomes and create social change and equity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lewin, 1946; Slavin, 2007). The first piece in the series focused on the steps involved with the action research process (Slavin, 2007); the second piece explained why action research is an appropriate form of assessment for student affairs practitioners. The third piece, by Brian Dietz of Kalamazoo College, described the process and results of a real-world action research project focused on understanding and attempting to solve lower-than-anticipated attendance at an on-campus programming event.

The last piece in the series will further identify examples of action research and provide a basic analysis and synthesis. The goal is to concretely illustrate ways in which action research can support the work of student affairs administrators, regardless of position, and enhance programs and services that embrace the holistic development of students. It is hoped that this article encourages practitioners to consider engaging in the action research process (and to submit those examples for future NASPA AER newsletters).

As noted by Hirsch (2010), “action research has particular resonance for practitioners seeking to bring about change and to solidify commitment to change” (p. 102). Deeply engaged in an action research approach, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE), “has developed programs to help higher education administrators become more thoughtful about their practice and to conduct research that is rooted in practice” for more than two decades (Hirsch, 2000, p. 99).

NERCHE has developed and continues to offer a number of think tanks designed to support professional connections in higher education (e.g., partnerships between faculty and administrators) and address key current and foreseeable future concerns that shape the landscape of higher education. Each with the same underpinnings and grounded in action research, NERCHE focuses on the following groups: chief student affairs officers, chief academic officers, academic deans, multicultural affairs, department chairs, and faculty.

As described by NERCHE (2014), think tanks “are designed to help members credit what they know as real knowledge and to push them through structured inquiry to generate and test new knowledge for action. In short, think tanks operate squarely in the area where theory and practice overlap”. While we encourage you to explore NERCHE’s work, action research is not limited to think tanks and organizations; it can be highly useful at both a macro and micro level.

When scanning research databases, it becomes clear very quickly that action research is used far more often for

exploration of teaching and learning of students in college and university settings than for their experiences. It is worth noting, before the examples below, that only a handful of studies can be cited here for length reasons; this is intended to give the reader an idea of avenues for this type of research. Action research is used internationally, from mentoring studies in Botswana (Geber and Nyanjom, 2009) to the importance of focusing on students’ academic skills in Israel (Raviv, 2009).

Action research is very popular in the field of teacher education, with studies focused on using action research in the classroom (Dahl, 2014; Hulse & Hulse, 2012; Megowan-Romanowicz, 2010), for mentoring (Davey & Ham, 2010; Halai, 2006; Hobson, Harris, Buckner-Manley, & Smith, 2012; Mullen, 2000), and the integration of technology (Jeffs & Banister, 2006; Keeler, 2008; Papadakis, Dovros, Paschalis, & Rossiou, 2012) among many other educator-preparation related topics.

Culp and Dungy (2012) reference an excellent example of action research focusing on service learning in student affairs. They described a study of student affairs graduate students who worked with urban middle school students to raise their awareness of and readiness for higher education. The service learning program began with planning and implementing strategies for raising awareness of college. Directly after the program’s strategies were executed, students gathered structured feedback via surveys and focus groups. These data were analyzed by the students, with the lens of identifying if the original goal was accomplished. It was evident that the strategies presented to the urban middle school students did not have the intended impact. Based on this information, the

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**DO YOU HAVE  
KNOWLEDGE  
TO SHARE?**



**If you would like to  
share assessment  
knowledge with the  
rest of the AER KC  
send your  
submissions to the  
AER Newsletter.**

Please send an email to :  
Melissa Kisubika  
([kisubika@illinois.edu](mailto:kisubika@illinois.edu))



(Continued from page 2)

graduate students reflected on their work and established new approaches.

Action research studies are very useful for studying specific populations; example studies include how to best support deaf students making the transition to higher education (Saunders, 2012) and the experiences of migrant students in Australian universities (Cuthill & Scull, 2011). Innovative postsecondary teaching practices are also explored, such as using games as an instructional aid in the teaching of computer programming (Muganda, Joubert, Toit, & Johnson, 2012) as well as using Wikis with college and university staff members (Benson, Brack, & Samarwickrema, 2012). Although not a piece of action research specifically, Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, and Troxel (2010) have written a cogent article imploring academic advisors to use action research to improve practice and advocate for the profession, and we hope you will consider engaging in this process to improve the work of student affairs.

At its core, action research is executed by first observing or participating in a program, phenomenon, or environment, and then by collecting and analyzing data. In an ideal situation, the researcher is able to modify the environment to observe if data-informed changes alter outcomes, but that is not always the case. Action research can be used for assessment in higher education, with the goal of enhancing practice (Maxwell, 2012). We hope that this fourth piece helps to bring together the previous three and generates ideas for future research at your institution. The examples listed above are in no way comprehensive, but it should be noted that the boundaries of action research have not been fully explored. We welcome you, as we close the planned pieces in this series, to consider engaging in action research and submitting experiences to the AER KC Newsletter—sharing your successes (as well as how one might do it differently the next time) are an important part in professional collaboration and can inspire innovation and advancement.

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## **NASPA Annual Conference**

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2015 NASPA ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
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## **Important Links**

### **NASPA Homepage**

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### **NASPA Annual Conference Homepage**

<http://conference2015.naspa.org/>

### **Assessment and Persistence Conference**

<http://www.naspa.org/events/2014APC>

### **AER KC Homepage**

<http://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/kcs/assessment-evaluation-and-research>

### **AER Resources Page**

<http://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/kcs/assessment-evaluation-and-research/resources>

*\*If you have resources you think would make good additions to this page please send them to [Kisubika@illinois.edu](mailto:Kisubika@illinois.edu).*





# NASPA Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community Mission Statement

The NASPA Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Knowledge Community encourages and supports student affairs professionals, faculty and graduate students at institutions across the country and throughout the world as they systematically assess learning, evaluate programs, and research theory and practice as it relates to our profession. By providing quality education and networking opportunities for those that engage in assessment, evaluation and research in student affairs, the Knowledge Community strives to serve as a driving force in the movement towards improved student learning.

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## Regional Updates: Region IV-East

The NASPA IV-E Regional Conference for 2014 will be held in Columbus, OH from **November 2, 2014 - November 14, 2014.**

On Sunday there will be featured activities that consist of roundtable discussions on selected topics. There will be a roundtable facilitated by members of the Assessment, Evaluation & Research Knowledge Community.

Registration Information—<http://www.naspa.org/events/14R4EConf>

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## Join our the AER Blog!!

There are two great ways to be a part of the conversation on the AER KC Blog.

### 1. Sign-up to contribute and be published on the blog!

Read a great journal article? You can summarize it for the blog. Been working on some research or a great new process of assessment—give us the low down and share it with the whole AER Community. Contact Melissa Kisubika ([Kisubika@illinois.edu](mailto:Kisubika@illinois.edu)) for information or sign up [HERE](#)

### 2. Comment on a blog post and keep conversations going!

*Be sure to adjust your settings in your member profile to make sure you receive the blog digest for all KC's.*

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# AER Knowledge Community Leadership Team and Committee Leadership

*Below you will find the names, institutions and e-mail contacts for members of the Leadership Team and Committee Leadership.*

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