Data-based Decisions:

Making Informed Choices for Student Success

David Parkinson, Dewey Litwiller – University of Saskatchewan

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University of Saskatchewan:

- mid-sized medical-doctoral university

- 21,000 students

- Over 2,400 international students from 100 countries

Strong in:

▶Agriculture and bioresources

▶Food and water security

▶Life sciences

Program Profile

- 4 terms per year of 10 weeks per term

- Average class size is 14 (maximum 17)

- 6 levels (from basic to university entry)

- Enrolments average 200 to 250 per term

- Top 2 levels are intense university English

- Also offer top 2 levels as a bridging option

Our mandate

To prepare our students **linguistically** and **academically** and **culturally** to be successful.
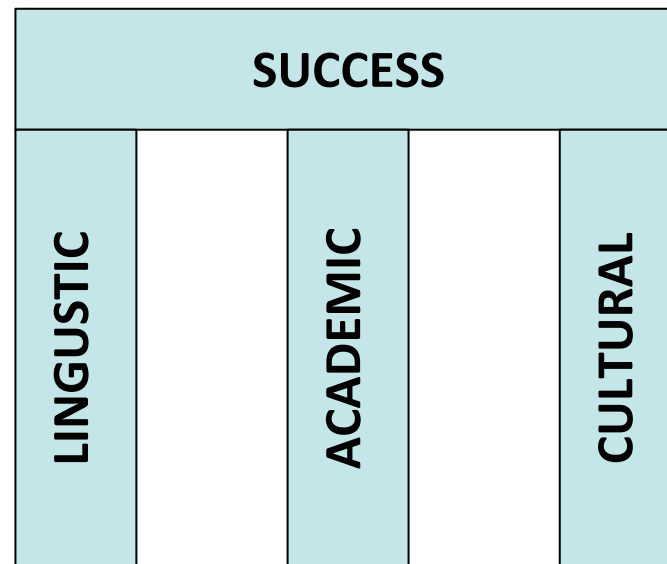
The factors affecting student success

Characteristics of students:

- Young, immature, lack of independence

- Not familiar with Western style of education

- May hit their "cognitive ceiling"

- May struggle with the "mastery model" of learning

- Unproductive expectations and attitude of students

The issue: Increasing failure rate

Passes vs. Repeats vs. Incompletes vs. Conditional Passes
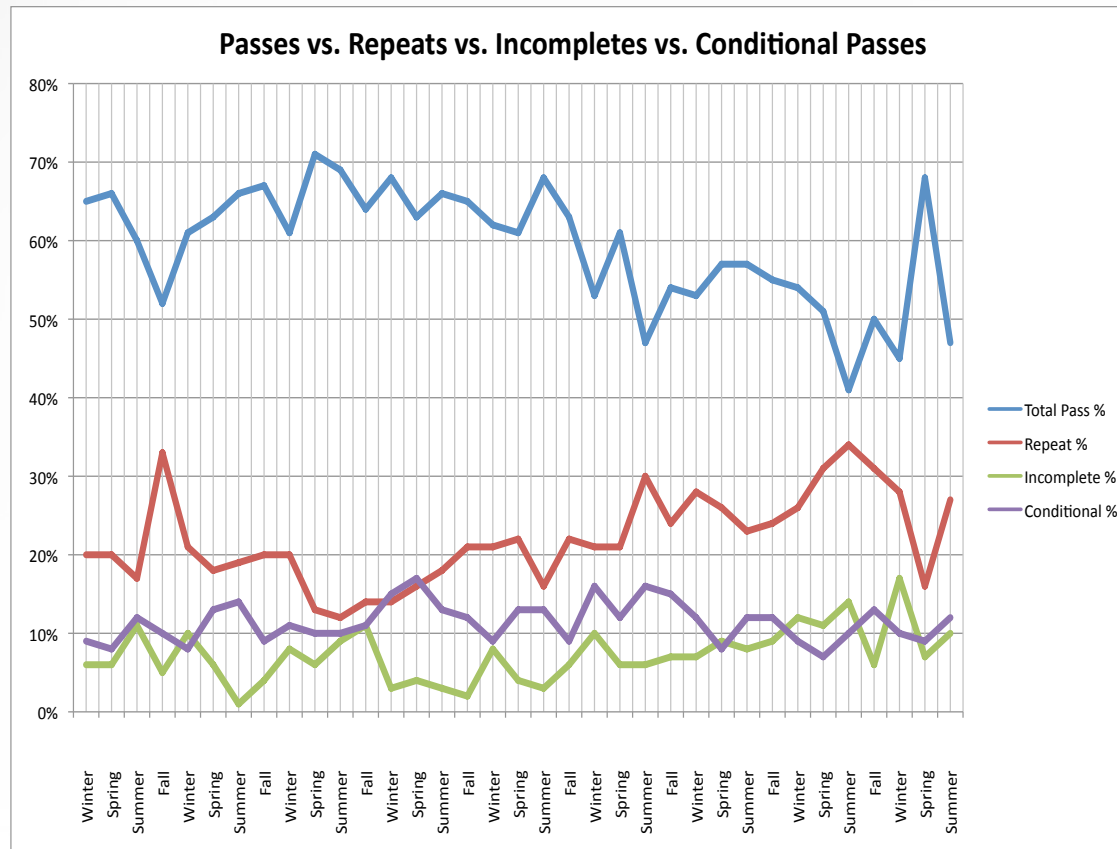
The 3 "faces" of student success

Prevention: Orientation, Cultural Adaptation Program, Homestay, structured activities, tutorials

The 3 "faces" of student success

Intervention: Classroom teacher, Student Advisor, Student Success Coach, Administration, Student Health

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The 3 "faces" of student success

Redemption:　Learning contract, Part Time classes, tutoring

Various ideas for interventions

- Tighten up attendance requirements

- Impose a learning contract

- Inform parents and sponsors about problems

- Require extra classes and/or tutorials

- Provide self-assessment and self-reflection exercises

- Mandatory meetings with Student Advisor or Homestay staff

- Require an assessment for a possible learning disability

- Impose a limit on number of terms to completion

- Suspension or expulsion or direct to another program

Various attempts at student supports

- Enhanced classes such as for KASP students

- Study group

- Book club

- Student support group

- Cultural Adaptation Program

- Orientation program

- Activities program

- Special "U-Prep +" section for repeaters

- Library and CALL Lab

The conclusion: "We needed a database."

Development of Database

- Needed to determine baseline

- Extracted two years of data from marks spreadsheets

- Created Excel database

    a) Student personal data

    b) Placement information

    c) All marks in critical areas

    d) Final results and comments

- Used tutorials from Lynda.com

Drawing of Initial Conclusions

- Most problematic skills: #1 Reading and #2 Listening

- Weak vocabulary a major issue

  a) Interviews with repeating students

  b) Most repeating students one level behind

Drawing of Initial Conclusions

- Two anomalous levels:
    a) Beginner level:
        - Comparatively low pass rate
        - Very multi-level class
    b) Intermediate level:
        - Comparatively high pass rate
        - Negative effect on next level

Drawing of Initial Conclusions

- Surprising results for students in homestay/residence

  a) 16% greater pass rate overall

    - 20% greater for men in homestay

  b) 8% lower dropout rate overall

    - 10% lower for men in homestay

Application and Lessons Learned

- Focused practice for beginner level (2 hrs/wk)

- Extra practice classes for other levels (13 hrs/wk)

  a) Reading with strong focus on vocabulary

  b) Listening with strong focus on phonics and note-taking

  c) Novel club for advanced levels

Application and Lessons Learned

- Individual/group appointments for other issues (18 hrs/wk)
- Time reserved for planning, collaborating, and data analysis (7 hrs/wk)

Application and Lessons Learned

- School-wide testing of vocabulary
  a) Administer test for New General Service List
     - http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org
  b) Provide comparative feedback
  c) Encourage use of Quizlet.com
  d) Have noticed increasing vocabulary averages term to term
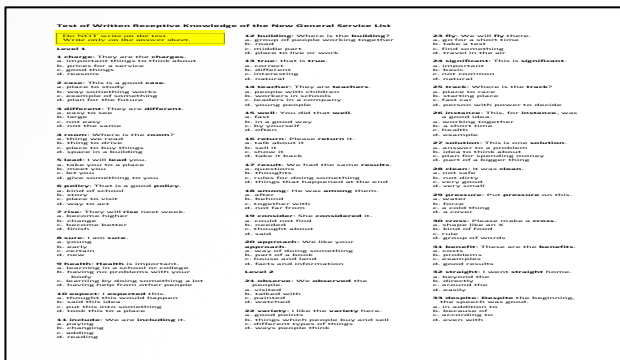
Application and Lessons Learned

- Strategic marketing to students is essential
  a) Ineffective: "Remedial help for weak students"
  b) Effective: "Extra practice opportunities for all students"
  c) All classes visited in first week

- Make success statistics known
  a) Marketing Department and overseas agents
  b) Orientation sessions

- Foster teacher buy-in
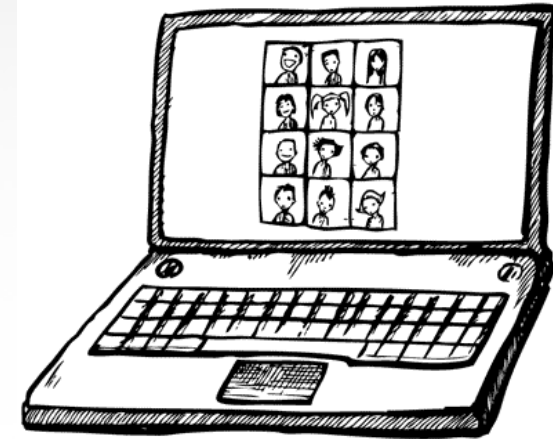
- Develop close collaborations with other frontline staff

Application and Lessons Learned

2015	Non-SSC Participants	SSC Participants
Pass Rate	66.9%	79.2%
Dropout Rate	15.4%	0.9%

- Increasing participation rate from 30% to 40%
- More repeating students seeking help
- Increasing pass rate for repeating students
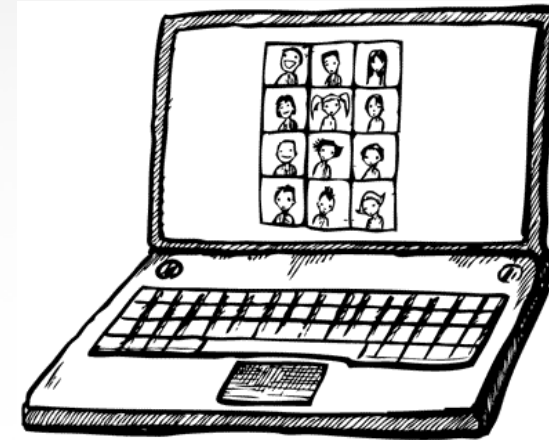
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The data base

Positives….

+ grounds discussions productively in facts

+ avoids purely anecdotal evidence and "emotional" decisions

+ provides an organizing principle and a common vocabulary

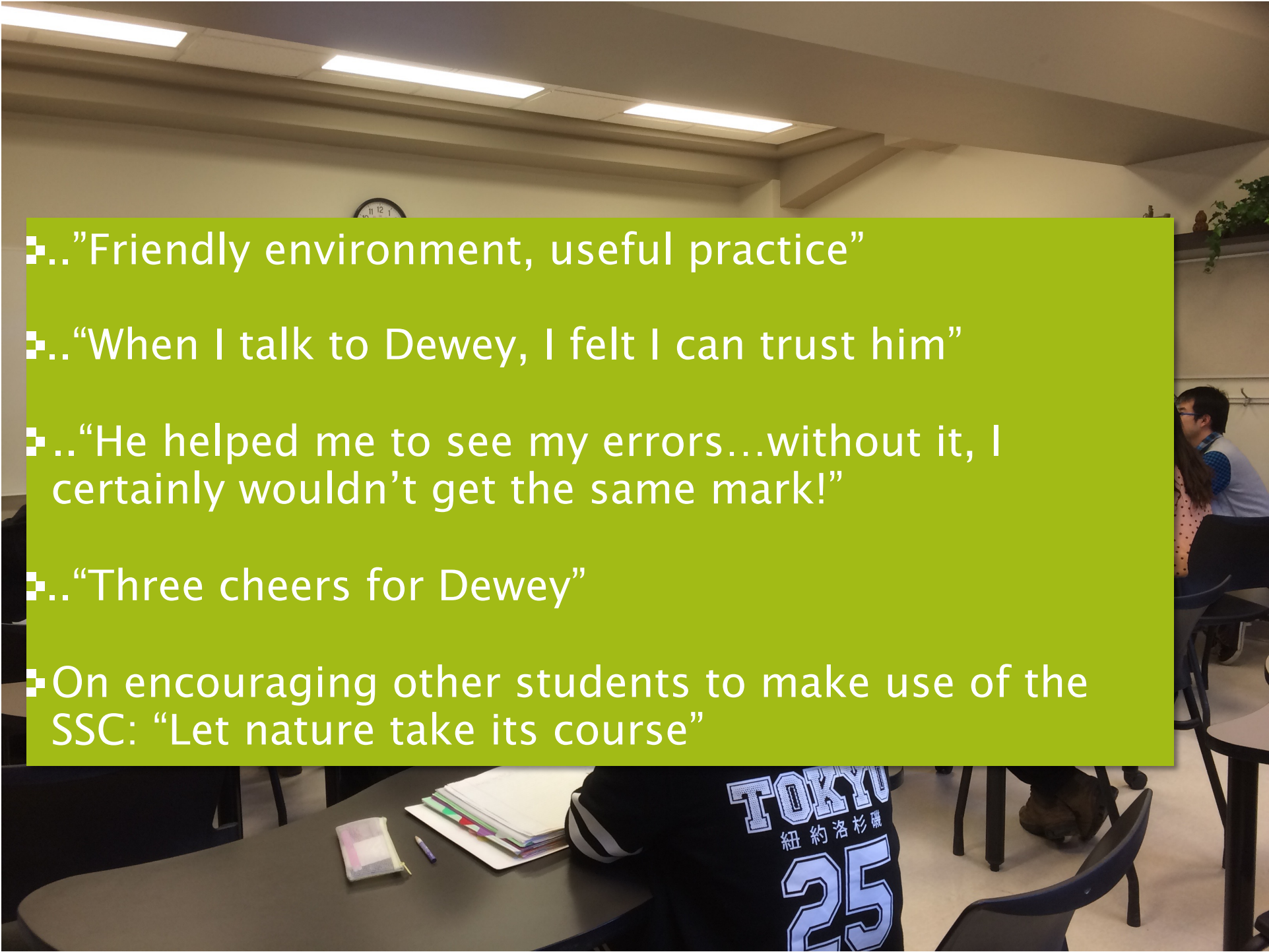+ encourages a longitudinal view of an issue

The data base

Questions....

- You can be "correct" but not "right" ➔ don't ignore your gut

- How far do you pursue an initiative ➔ sunk cost vs. payback?

- "Figures don't lie, but liars sure do figure" ➔ slanted statistics?

- Data bases don't always talk to each other

- Is the past a reliable predictor of the future?

- You must have someone willing, able and capable to undertake this.

The Student Success Centre

- ..”Friendly environment, useful practice”

- ..“When I talk to Dewey, I felt I can trust him”

- ..“He helped me to see my errors…without it, I certainly wouldn't get the same mark!”

- ..“Three cheers for Dewey”

- On encouraging other students to make use of the SSC: “Let nature take its course”

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The Student Success Centre

- Allows us to focus our efforts according to specific data evidence

- Physical manifestation of a commitment to our students' success

- Resource and support for our teachers

- A "safe space" for learning (different dynamic than the classroom)

- Demonstrated buy-in by our students

- "Democratic support" promoting individual responsibility

- Marketing asset both as a selling point and increased pass rate