



CPRN's Project on Achieving Access and Excellence in Canada's Post-Secondary Institutions

*Presentation by
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Outline

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- Motivation for the CPRN project on “excellence”
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- Highlights from work in progress on “measuring quality”
- Next steps
- Project sponsors



About CPRN

- An independent, non-profit, policy research think tank
- Mission: “to create knowledge and lead public debate on social and economic issues important to Canadians”
- Four Networks: Family, Health, Work, Public Involvement



Motivation for the CPRN project on “excellence”

- Much attention paid to access issues
- CPRN preparing synthesis of recent work on factors affecting access by students from low-income families
- Insufficient attention being paid to quality
- Risk of funding demand but not supply
- Challenge funding provided by Wilson Foundation



Outline of the project

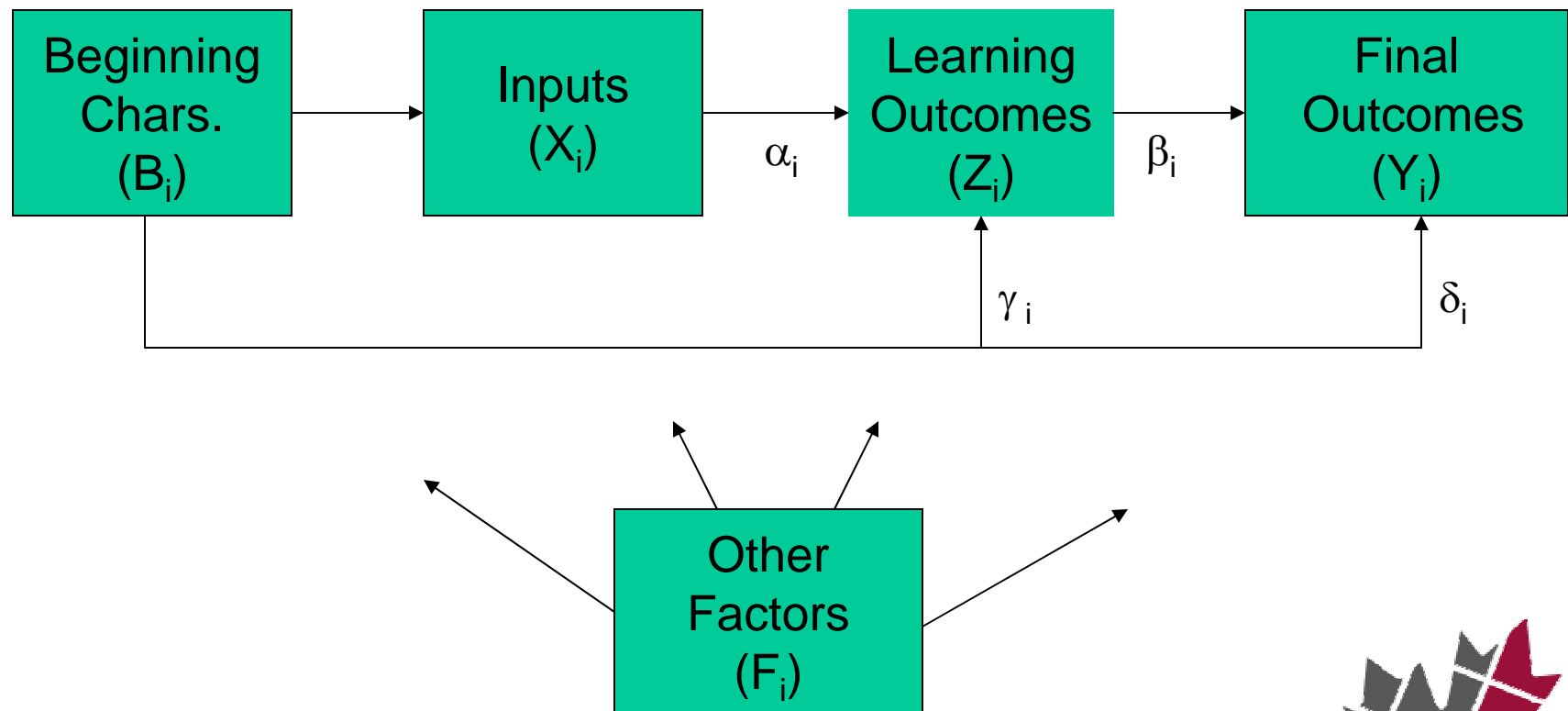
- 4 studies planned over 18-24 months
 - Measuring quality (authors: Ross Finnie and Alex Usher; Roundtable held Dec. 7)
 - Incentive structure facing Canada's PSE institutions
 - Capacity for innovation and differentiation within current incentive structure
 - Synthesis of policy implications



Highlights from work in progress
on
“measuring quality”



The Finnie/Usher conceptual framework



Beginning Characteristics: characteristics and abilities of students as they start PSE programs

Include: skills and knowledge acquired in high school, aspirations, attitude towards learning, gender, family background



Learning Inputs: factors that determine students' educational experiences and are controllable by the educational system.

Include:

financial resources (\$ spent);

material inputs (e.g., library books, IT services);

pedagogies (how resources are organised into educational experiences, such as amount of contact time with professors, methods of evaluating students, etc.)



Learning Outcomes: “skill sets” or other attributes of graduates which culminate from their educational experiences (as well as their beginning characteristics)

Include skills (critical thinking, analytic reasoning, communication skills, being able to work with others) and technical knowledge (how to build a bridge, market a product, conduct a literature review)



Final outcomes: “final ends” to which the educational system may contribute

Can be any outcome deemed to be important to individuals and society, such as

- employment rates and incomes
- job satisfaction
- civic engagement
- continued participation in learning

Want to know what inputs (\$ spent, pedagogies adopted, etc.) affect learning outcomes, and how these affect a final outcome. Can examine at department, institution, or system levels.



Current Approaches to Quality Measurement

- Minimum Standards
- Rankings/Indicators
- Learning Outcomes
- Continuous Improvement



Minimum Standards

- Largely Qualitative
- Usually begins with institutional/departmental self-audit
- External confirmation of self-audit findings
- Good management tool, but not very transparent



Rankings/Indicators

- Mostly quantitative
- “Rankings” tend to focus on inputs and beginning characteristics, with little attention to outcomes
- “Indicators” focus on outputs with little attention to inputs/beginning characteristics
- Useful, easy to understand data but no clear sense of institutional value-added



Learning Outcomes

- National Survey of Student Engagement looks at input/pedagogical variables found to be correlated with learning (e.g., demanding assignments, contact with faculty, co-curricular activities)
 - Useful as guide to institutions
 - Indirect measure of learning outcomes
 - Institutional results not public
- Collegiate Learning Assessment being piloted as more direct measure of institutional value-added (using entry and exit tests).



Continuous Improvement

- Quality as process
- Institutions choose measures, self-assess, and develop improvement plan
- Government oversees to see that processes are followed

Important to keep conceptual framework in mind as one assesses any particular initiative.



Next steps

- Paper on measuring quality being revised in light of input from Roundtable. Final paper will include advice on steps to take in short-run and long-run to improve measurement of quality. Expect to publish in March 2005.
- Outline being developed for project on documenting the incentive structure facing PSE institutions. Expect launch within a few months.



Project sponsors

- The Wilson Foundation
- Ontario Review of Postsecondary Education (Rae Panel)
- Power Corporation of Canada
- 1st Plaza Incorporated
- Milton Wong
- The William and Nancy Turner Foundation





For additional information:

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