

TRANSCRIPT

The Relevance of Research in Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation

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[Slide: *The Relevance of Research in Program Development, Implementation and Evaluation*]

MARY RAUNER

So I would now like to welcome Michal Kurlaender, who'll help us think through the importance of research in developing, implementing and evaluating our programs. And Dr. Kurlaender is an Associate Professor of Education and a Chancellor's Fellow at the University of California, Davis. She investigates students' educational pathways, both traditional and alternative, and in particular K-12 and postsecondary alignment, and access to and success in postsecondary schooling, including both community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. Dr. Kurlaender works closely with administrative data from all three of the...California's public higher ed sector, the UC system, the CSU system, and the community college system. And she also studies the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on student outcomes. So we're really lucky to have her today joining us, and thank you for coming.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

I'm going to try to not use the mike, is that going to work for folks? Okay.

It's great to be here at Sierra College and so thank you for having me, and thank you for inviting me. I'm going to try and talk a little bit about broad work that I've done on the role of the importance of research and making and evaluating programs and policies at colleges. And I will pull from a variety of different papers and research projects that I have done. A lot of this is collaborative work with my graduate students and colleagues. In fact, I wasn't able to come to the Southern California event yesterday so I sent my graduate student who I trust did a pretty good job—Betsy Friedmann—which makes me, of course, very proud.

[Slide: *Presentation Outline*]

So, I just want to give some motivation on our presentation, and also just to invite you to interrupt me throughout the talk if I either speak too fast or you want some further clarification. That will make this much more of a conversation, and Mary has promised she'll keep time for me so we'll also make sure to leave time for Q&A at the end. I don't actually expect to get through all of this, but provide the slides nonetheless. So I'll give some

motivation and some prior literature, and then I really want to use part of our time together to talk about what I think the Federal Government in the last 10 years and others in the social sciences have really tried to establish around not just the importance of research but when we think about research, when we think about evaluating programs and policies, that we develop what is often called a counterfactual thinking. And by that...it's difficult to implement randomized controlled trials—randomly assign your treatments to get a really scientific estimate of a treatment, right? That's pretty...very difficult in many cases, though it has been done more and more in education in the last 10 years I would say, even 15.

But many times we can't do that and we don't want to do that, either for ethical reasons or for other reasons. And so it's still helpful, though, to develop what we would call counterfactual thinking. So we'll try to explore that a little bit, which is more conceptual but fun to do and in the business of sort of taking care of yourself and having the time to think through these conceptual ideas. And then I'm going to talk specifically about work I did that is very concretely about evaluating. I work with the CSU Chancellor's Office, and they're very...care a lot about college completion, which as you may know at CSU, remains...hovers at just about 50%, even among students who are native to CSU. It's quite lower than we all want it to be, and even lower for underrepresented minority groups. And so we've spent a lot of time thinking about how they could leverage the data they have to try to understand what's going on, and so I'll talk about what we did when we looked at three specific programs. And then I may not have time...I wanted to talk a little bit about a colleague of mine's work on Summer Melt. And I probably won't have time, but I'll at least give a shout out to her new book on it in case folks are interested.

[Slide: *Motivation: High remediation and low graduation rates at CSUs*]

Okay. So here's some motivation. This is at CSU, and I should say I do a lot of work with the community college system as well, but I have for the last six years worked really closely with the CSU system largely to evaluate the Early Assessment Program. Do people know about the Early Assessment Program? Right. So we've been tracking...in particular, we have been tracking need for remediation, developmental ed in English and/or math, and you will see that's over two thirds of students at the CSU system enter the system in need of either developmental English or math—quite high because as many of you know, CSU students enter CSU not only A-G eligible but actually with a B+ average. So I at least find that pretty striking evidence of misalignment between our systems if so many students enter as B+ students and are told that they require some remediation once they start there. And then you can see that six-year graduation rate.

There is a decline in the remediation need and we're exploring that. Some of that is because CSU has changed some of the way it's doing remediation; in particular it started this Early Start. Many of you may even know what Early Start is because some of the way students remediate before they enter CSU is actually at community colleges, and so again, I am happy to clarify any of that. Sure, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So you mentioned that the EAP assessment is what's making them, or putting them in the category of remediation...

MICHAL KURLAENDER

No. So EAP is just one way that they are notified that they need remediation. So EAP was...is a signal that they get relatively early...and relatively...by relatively I mean it's 11th grade. Some of us think they should know even sooner, right? But that's early, by national standards, and then they're told whether or not they're exempt from needing to take the replacement exam once they get into CSU. They can demonstrate their readiness in other ways—Honor AP classes, now it's 500 on the SAT, it used to be 550—but there are other ways that they can demonstrate that. But otherwise they show up as freshmen and it's really in the end of spring or early summer and they take a placement test. And those placement tests...many of the ones who make it to the placement tests are still deemed not ready, and then they are told they have to take some remedial courses. And the change is that (we are hypothesizing here) the decline in 2011 is because...I think they're regents at CSU; is it a board or a regents? I forget; anyway, it's board, right? So they decided that all students should do this before they enter the fall term, and so they're doing it in the summer. And so the count there might be a little bit different. That's what we are hypothesizing is the difference. Okay, thank you.

[Slide: *Motivation: High rates of basic skills coursetaking at community colleges*]

So here is what it looks like for community colleges and, you know, it's different, right? So we have a lot of access to the state datasets, and so it depends on sort of what exactly are using basic skills. There's different kind of labels attached to the course types and many of you guys know this at the community college. And so this is just one of the...this is developmental math course taking but tracking back as far as 1992—I like to do this because people like to sort of say, “Oh, so many more kids today aren't ready for college,” and it's not necessarily empirically true. I don't think we've had so many, so many changes, but here you will see it tracked and what we did here was we also tracked the community colleges that adopted the EAP to see if these more reform-oriented campuses might have had other changes to developmental math course taking.

[Slide: *Plausible explanations for low persistence and completion rates in college*]

So the real picture that I want to draw is sort of two big things: one, that over the last half century...I'm just going to sort of suggest to you, that over the last half century we have lots and lots of evidence that suggests more kids are going to college than ever before. And that's across the board, across all different subgroups that you can imagine. But what we also have is proportionally no better completion rates. In fact, we would argue that they're actually declining for some subgroups. So more people are going to college than ever before, but proportionally no more are finishing, and actually the rates of completion are a little bit declining for minority groups, okay? And so this is quite troubling to me, and not just to me, to many others in the research community, who have really I would say in the last decade or so shifted from not just focusing on access but on focusing on completion as well, right? And

that's what you guys are in the business in. So there are lots of plausible explanations for this phenomenon that we see, right?

So one of them might be what we call are compositional changes, and by that I just don't mean demographics like racial ethnic demographics, I mean truly compositional changes. And you guys probably see this more than anyone, which is, today's college student looks a lot different than the college student of 50 years ago. They're more likely to be working, they're more likely to balance kids, to attend multiple institutions, to try out different things. So the student—the typical college student today—does not necessarily look like the typical college student of a half a century ago. So that's just sort of one plausible explanation, right? But there are others, right? So one is, we believe in this “college for all” ethos. We tell all kids to go to college and we should because there are important returns to going to college. I work in a middle school in Sacramento that I have been tracking these kids for quite a few years, and you'll see kids, even if they're not doing well in middle school and not doing well in high school, they'll tell you they're going to college, right?

So upwards of 90% of kids, no matter how they fare in school, will tell you they're going to college. Which is good. We feel like they've heard this message loud and clear, and they'll tell you they want to go, not just because their parents tell them that they should go, but they want to go. So what happens when they go? So many—even students who are not ready or who are not even sure what college is about—will enter college. And then they may learn—in that experience, in their first year experience—they may get a whole bunch of information about whether college is for them or not. And you'll see these things aren't discrete, they're all related, right? They may decide they actually just don't like it, and all of a sudden they realize, “I don't have to be here,” and so they decide they don't want to stay, right? But they also might feel unready, right? They might feel like they get a lot of signals from their coursework, from their peers, from their teachers, that they're not doing college-level work and so college may not be for them. They also might suddenly be concerned about their financial situation, right? So even though we've make huge headway in supporting students who aren't going to college for financial constraints, we still know that even holding achievement constant, all these things...that if you are from a low-income family you are less likely to go to college and to finish college. So we haven't quite solved the financial constraint problem completely, right?

So lack of preparation, financial concerns, and the...are all a part...also, this sort of loss of interest in going to college, compositional changes—and then I would argue an area that's been the least explored, is sort of institutional practices; and most of the work on college access and completion is really focused on the individual student, right? What are the demographic differences? Why are underrepresented minority students less likely to finish? Why are low-income students...? And we haven't focused so much on trying to understand institutional practices, right? So we give institutions a hard time. Bob and others are like sort of focused on performance funding, college completion, all this great stuff, but we actually don't know a whole lot about what happens at institutions that might better support students to finish it. And so that is, I think, a really important area of research.

[Slide: *The challenge of drawing causality*]

So the problem is, of course, of drawing a sort of causal idea; what is this practice is good; we should support all students to do it, or all colleges. So bear with me as I kind of do a few slides that are more conceptual in nature, right? So first just...let's think about educational destinations—and you can think about it as just even types of colleges, I'll have a picture of that in a minute—so educational destinations and even program participation—ending up in a program, even ending up participating in a program that exists even at the college level—does not typically happen randomly, right? We don't end up in those destinations randomly, right? So...but the problem is, our desire is to determine how the outcomes of individuals who participate in a particular program or get a particular kind of experience, or we might think of it in a sort of experimental sense—a treatment, right? How does it differ? What would the outcomes have been if they didn't get that experience, right? That's what we often want to know.

And so the absence of that condition is what we might think of as the counterfactual. That is, the condition to which individuals would have been exposed to. What would they have done if a career ladders program wasn't there, or some other program? What would their experience have been in the absence of a particular program or policy? It's often hard to do, but the thinking around it is really important because we often live also in a situation with really constrained resources. And so it's really important to think about the counterfactual because we want to make decisions about which programs to expand, which programs to bring on, and they often cost or have different sort of constraints. And so thinking about the “Well, if we didn't do this, what would it look like?” is often really useful.

[Slide: *Example: Ubiquitous selection problem that plagues education research*]

So, let me see...okay. So let's first start with...and I think this is sort of a ubiquitous problem that we have that plagues education research, so we have all seen these studies—I'm guilty of even writing a couple of them—like, “Community college students, you know, are less likely to get a BA,” right? And so community college...you know this sort of beating up on community colleges and the transfer function, right? But the reality is, we know that the students, right?...So if the outcome is we care about getting that degree—and let's add earnings on there—we know that students who enter a community college are probably quite different than the students who enter selective four-year for sure, but probably also the non-selective four-year, right? So what are some obvious ways in which they are different?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Economics, working.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Economics, so being able to afford...many are working.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Academic preparation.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Academic preparation.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

First generation.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

First generation, right. And so those are like the obvious ones, but as you guys are—more than any group I would ever talk to—as counselors, you would know there’s also underneath all of that a whole host of what researchers don’t observe; what we would call “unobserved reasons” that make these kids probably really different. Everything from, you know, hesitation, to family support, to motivation, to all of these things. Those are, I would argue, not only as important, sometimes even more important because we can’t actually control for them in a lot of these studies, right? So these are pretty different kids. So that’s the easy part. What about...let’s make it a little bit harder, which is to say, “Okay, let’s rule out these non-selective four-years, much less selective ones, but now let’s look at two types of, kids—students, excuse me—in community colleges, ones that are part of a learning community and ones that are not.” People know what learning communities are? Should I do any...? Okay, right. So does that seem like a reasonable...should we be able to compare the outcomes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Yes. Anyone want to disagree? No, okay. All right, so then I’ll disagree with you all. So tell me, so what might...tell me, how do you end up in a learning community at your college or another college?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think that they’re very different students, that students who are in developmental, or who we can identify...there’s some identifying factor that would historically suggest that their completion rate would be lower; we’re going to steer those students towards the learning communities, where a student coming in very prepared to our campus might not be steered towards a learning community.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

So you said you might actually select on the sort of potential—don’t love this word but I’m going to use it—like risk factors.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yes.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

It's a little bit deficit thinking, but you guys will understand, so okay. So, any others? That's one really good...any others, anybody's learning community look a little different? Maybe they draw kids, maybe not with as...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

By ethnic group.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

By ethnic group, right? And we have lots of theory that suggests that being around students—especially if you are from a minority group—being with other students who share similar experiences might help you, right? So there's lots of good theory behind why we would do that. Any other? Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Academic focus.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Academic focus, right, so to be able to cluster these classes around a particular at least trajectory, right, if not a specific major. Anything else? So what about how do you end up...like literally the logistics of how do you end up in a learning community? Are these students who enroll like the last, like the first day of classes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Probably not.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Probably not.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

In fact, at our college we have Super Saturdays where students can get a pre-exposure to them and can sign up to get on kind of a mailing list to be recruited [Inaudible].

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Okay. So these are kind of students who have their act together, right? More likely? Sometimes? I got...yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

It depends, though, because some learning communities have active and assertive kind of outreach efforts, so going out into the community, going out into the schools, going out into the churches...so it really depends on which programs you're talking about.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Learning communities typically have restrictive registrations, so the student has to be...there has to be a process in place that gets the student in the class, whereas the non-learning communities are open registration and you could—depending on enrollments which we know are all tight right now, but—students can just register themselves. So there's a mechanism in place that supports students who made registrations.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Right. And then what about the fact that they have to be available at those block times, right? I mean, there is some logistical, right...you need to actually be available to take those classes. Okay. So we've pointed out that yes, we...so a lot of those things like, you know, let's say we were doing this quantitatively or even qualitatively. We can...let's effect...sort of control for those, account for them in some way—a lot of those things that you said, but many you can't, right, in the same way that we described around the sort of unobserved factors.

[Slide: *Establishing a Counterfactual*]

And so I'm not going to belabor this sort of concept of the counterfactual too much longer, but I just want to sort of set it up in this sort of very obvious way which is, let's just think of those kids—students—who are in the learning community at a community college, right? And we want to know their outcomes if...when they are participating, right? So we know those. If you were in a community college...if you were in a learning community, and we wanted to look at your outcomes a year later, we see that. What we don't see is what your outcomes would have been if you didn't get that learning community. In exactly the same way that we don't see what your outcomes for students who didn't get the learning community would be, right? We only know that they...we know their outcomes and we know that they were not in a learning community. And that is basically this problem we have, is that all of these students that we are comparing ultimately are a whole mix of students, some of whom may look like the learning community students we let in, and many of whom probably don't, right?

If, for example, we just took students who had, you know, sort of a high risk factors and so we said, "Okay, well, these students, are...we identified through the college are going to have the hardest time making—persisting—at the college and we're going to put them in a learning community," right? Well, and we...like literally imagine drawing the students that you might guess, you know, based on new enrollment are going to struggle the most, and you put them in a learning community. Well, your outcomes—if someone gave you a lot of money to study this—you may find that, "Well, they didn't persist as much as the control group." But, of course, those students started out with a whole host of other factors, right? So you're going to look like your treatment, the learning community, was not so successful. But what the real counterfactual thinking is, "Well, what would have happened to these students if you didn't have a learning community to begin with?" So the right comparison group isn't those students relative to everyone else, it's—in your mind at least—it's what would have happened to these

“high risk” students, right, if you didn’t offer them this special treatment. And that’s really the thinking that you want to do when you start thinking about sort of the impact of a policy or a program. What’s the right group to compare them to?

[Slide: *Counterfactual Thinking*]

All right, so I’m actually going to, in the interest of time, not going to belabor that more, but again, all of my slides I’m going to make available and you’ll have them. So, we’re just going to move ahead.

[Slide: *Creating and Evaluating Promising Practices and Policies*]

So I wanted to talk about very specific way we looked with CSU data. So even though at UC Davis, all my work is really on broader access institutions and trying to understand persistence and completion at...and so this particular slide I’m going to show you is at a very broad access CSU. So, CSUs are all...look quite different from each other but some of the CSUs are—assuming A-G eligibility—are quite...are pretty open access. And so this is...we’re going to start thinking about, “How do you look at promising practices and policies?” And so in looking at the existing ones you have you might consider cost if you’re trying to expand; you might survey students to see what mattered to them for those who transferred, or if you just want to know, do they take advantage of, you know, open counseling sessions, peer sessions, things like that; and then, of course, you’re going to explore the literature.

[Slide: *Three sample policies at a CSU campus*]

So let me talk about...let me talk about three programs that we looked at for one CSU. So we looked at freshmen orientation; that is, some people come, and some people don’t. We looked at whether or not students declared a major when they entered the college; some people do and some people don’t. And then we looked at the impact of Summer Bridge. So Summer Bridge—since we have this whole thinking about learning communities—in many ways it targets very specific types of students, right? Students that CSU might also target as being potentially at risk of not persisting: first-generation college students, students who are Pell eligible, some from underrepresented minority groups, definitely low-income students. And so we also looked at...so here is the percent who participate in these programs. This was over a few years, so you will see only 60% of students participate in freshmen orientation at this campus. Only 75% declare a major, and they have a 4% participation rate in Summer Bridge; again, keeping in mind that they would only expect—I don’t know how many they invite even in to participate, but we expect that to be small because it’s very...it serves a select group of students.

[Slide: *Some programs show great promise, others do not*]

So they said, “Okay, well, let’s look at what we, what the graduation outcomes are by these groups to see, by these—sorry, by these programs and policies—to see if we can leverage some of that.” So here’s people who participate in freshmen orientation and people who don’t, and here’s the graduation rates. So you’ll see if you participate in freshmen orientation, it looks like 17 percentage point higher graduation rate, right? Here’s major declaration. So if you declare a major, and if you don’t, there’s a difference in the graduation rates of 4 percentage

points. And then what about this? If you participate in Summer Bridge, you're less likely to graduate by 7 percentage points. Any thoughts about why this is? Why is that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

They're the hardest students.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

That's right. It's exactly what we just said about the learning communities. So we are comparing Summer Bridge students to all those who don't, and we should not be surprised that it's read as lower. These are students who are there for...because they need that extra boost, right? And so that's why we're expecting students who are entering this program to have a whole host of potential risks for not persisting in college, right? Does that make sense? Well, what about this—any thoughts on this? Who's...let's think of this as a treatment—who's coming and who's not coming to freshmen orientation?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The more prepared student; the one that has social capital.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

They want to know what the requirements are so they can finish.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

So more maybe have...they are gung ho, more social capital, more...maybe someone who said you better go to...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Some orientations are done in the middle of the summer while students are working; they can't attend and so it's not financially feasible for them...[inaudible].

AUDIENCE MEMBER

They don't really understand the value of orientation.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Any others? You guys have kind of covered them all. So all of that stuff you just said, some of it is...very little of what you said a institutional researcher or, you know, someone who does quantitative policy work like me can control for, right? I mean what can we control for? We can control for race, we can control for Pell eligibility, first generation, right? Some of that would pick up a lot, but a lot of what you just said is very hard to control for, right? We don't capture it in all our...but it's probably very much operating here. So a little bit may be operating, what do you think? On the major declaration, do you think some of the same stuff applies?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Absolutely.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Maybe, but not...but maybe not as dramatic as the freshmen orientation.

[Slide: *Freshman orientation program participants differ from non-participants*]

Okay. So let's just look at, here are sort of the participants, and so I just wanted to show you participants versus non-participants. So this is in the freshmen orientation. So 11%, just as exactly as you described, are less...much more likely to be first generation if you didn't participate, to be low income; we didn't...you know, we see to not be ready for math or English; male or, sort of, fewer men participate in freshmen orientation, and much fewer underrepresented minority groups. So much of what you guys described overall.

[Slide: *Summer Bridge participants differ from non-participants*]

This is what...Summer Bridge is exactly as we would expect is...is specifically targeting underrepresented minority groups and first-generation college students. And so you will see much, much higher rates of those two groups that help explain why we saw actually lower rates of graduation than those who didn't participate.

[Slide: *Regression-adjusted differences differ from raw differences*]

Okay. So we can adjust as I suggested. So I left you thinking, "Okay, it's completely impossible." Well, it's not; people like me and others try and do it, right. The Accountability Office at the Chancellor's Office also tries to adjust for as many things as they can, and we do a much better job so I'll show you; but there I had a question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Sorry, I just want a little bit more details; for the freshmen orientation, I'm assuming it's face-to-face orientation or is it online...[inaudible]

MICHAL KURLAENDER

No, that's great. So in the years that we're looking and at the campus, we're looking, it's face-to-face. So a lot of these factors have come in... matters. I think there are other ways to do it, but keep that question in mind, as you'll see what happens when the campus decided to make it mandatory. Because that's what I'm going to show you. So the campus said, "Ooh, there's this big push, why don't we just make everyone take it?" and then I'll show you. You guys are on the edge of your seats; I'm going to keep you there and then you'll see, so, yeah.

Okay. So we can adjust for a lot of these things, right? And then look: yes, we still see differences but they're smaller, right? And now—I don't know if you can follow, I'm going kind of fast through the slides—but now when we adjust for those differences, that we see Summer Bridge actually makes a difference, right, because now we're accounting for similar kids; similar again on the things that researchers can control for, right? But turns out they're pretty

important. When we control for those, we see that similar kids who did not get exposed to Summer Bridge fared worse, okay? And we still see, you know, that there's a benefit to declaring a major, but it's smaller now, right? There's a benefit to going to freshmen orientation, but it's smaller.

[Slide: Simulation using our results and student characteristics helps determine expected gains from policy changes]

Okay. So then we decided to do a simulation for this campus, and we said, "Okay, well what would happen if we made freshmen orientation mandatory?" So what did we do? We used these models, these regression-adjusted models from 2002 and 2003. Then we used the characteristics of 2004 students. Why did we do that? Well, because year by year you might have shifts in who is enrolling in your college, and we can adjust for that in these models, right? It's relatively easy to do, to sort of say, "Okay, we know these things matter, but suddenly you're going to have a big influx of a certain characteristic of a student," right? Maybe first-generation student. So we look at how these change, and then we predict what would happen in 2004 if all students participated in freshmen orientation.

So we project a gain of 4.5 percentage points. We said, "Okay, if you have all of your students"—and again, all is not like 100%, but all of your students—"we would expect a 4.5 percentage point gain," right? Because freshmen orientation isn't the only thing on, you know, predicting college completion. There's...all those other things that are still in the model, right? And so that means for this campus, graduation rates would go from 49.4%—yes, that's how low they are—four-year graduation—I mean six years but at a four-year institution—they would get to 53.9%, okay? And what actually happened...here's what it looks like.

[Slide: What actually happened?]

So here's the predicted graduation rate and then here's sort of what we hoped would be, right, orientation participation—let's get everybody up there—and here's the actual graduation rate. So it got no better. Any thoughts about why?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Bad researcher (laughing).

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Thank you, Paul. And he didn't prep me that he was going to do that. Could happen, sure, that's why we have peer review.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Could be the quality of the orientation.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Quality of the orientation, not unrelated to what someone said over here, right? So let's think about that. What if you expanded something? What happens if suddenly you have—think of how

many, what were the original numbers, how many—you had almost an increase of 30%-40% people showing up at orientation? So maybe it's not the quality per se, or how we think about quality, but what happens when you suddenly have that many more people coming, right? We say it's mandatory; we say we welcome everyone, but not everyone has come; now we make it mandatory, we actually have to assume we have to have something to give all of these folks when they come. So quality might mean that it became shorter, maybe the format changed, you had to deliver it differently—and I can't actually tell you all the qualitative ways in which it changed for this campus—but maybe you had to have more staff come that were less prepared to do it, maybe staff were just tired, maybe it was too big of a room; you know, too big of enrollment so you couldn't do some of the smaller, kind of smaller sessions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

For me it could be kind of like going to Southwest instead of United; where in Southwest it's a cattle call kind of thing and all, and then United you have a specific seat that you sit on, so it's the experience of the student.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Yeah, that personally offends me as a person of Southwest...no, but, yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Yeah, right, I mean the experience...depending on how the student experiences a connection with someone at the school as opposed to mass.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Good. Any other thing, though, other than quality? So quality may definitely be a factor but anything other than...I think that's a nice analogy, but there may be other things.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

This is kind of an analogy also; not necessarily a different point but it reminds me of when we started saying, "We're going to do ed plans for everybody," you know, like, "Okay, so my half-hour appointments are going to go to 30 seconds per student to whip out that quality ed plan."

MICHAL KURLAENDER

That's excellent. Let's stay with ed plans because that is real for you guys. That's a really great concrete example. So one is, you actually feel like as a professional the quality of those plans were reduced. There's no way you could do the kind of counseling that you needed to do when you were told to do it en mass like that, right? Something like that. So quality is definitely...what's another aspect of that, though? Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

If it becomes the mass...if the intent's to go to some kind of online format where there's maybe not interaction, you're just watching videos, answering some questions so that you can prove

that you watched it, it becomes...and then like an artist you get to the multiple colleges so it's not specific all the time to the college you're at, so it's more general and it's less...[inaudible]

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Right. Diffused maybe? The information you can give them if you you've got—let's not say 30 seconds; 3 minutes—how is that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

If you teach hybrid you know that we're kind of going towards a thing where it has to be more interactive now, right? But I don't think the orientations are interactive either, so how do you want them to be motivated to listen and actually retain the information when you're not really sitting at the...[inaudible]?

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Yeah, go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I think the motivation, too, it's kind of like when you're counseling someone who wants to change versus someone who the court said they have to see a counselor; you have different group interactions when it's people who self-select versus people who are forced.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Great. So that is a nice way to capture the non-quality thing so we will come back to it, but, yeah, let's get another thing on the table.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So orientation is the beginning stage, and graduation is the end stage, and a lot happens between then, which to me is retention efforts. So I think that the whole push is lacking in retention efforts and I think that's why we're asking...[inaudible]

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Great. So let's take these two comments and really unpack them a little bit further because, well, yes, I think we can all agree the quality must have changed when you have to sort of increase to that kind of capacity. But there are a whole host of other things, which suggests there is no easy fix, right? It's just not that simple. So one part is, "Hey, maybe the reason we get such a, you know, bang for our buck on a lot of treatments is because kids— you know, students—want to be there, they want to participate," and that sort of motivation that, again, researchers can't control for, is a big reason of why they work; they want it. They're at your door—whatever door that is, whether it's a learning community or something else—and so that's part of why it's working. These are serving motivated students who likely—this is going to sound more negative than I mean—but may have made it anyway, right? Right? So those are...we need to support those students; that's not at all my goal to suggest we don't—but part of why those programs work is because they're speaking to students who are going to soak up

whatever it is that you give to them, right? But other students, right, who may not get to freshmen orientation for any number of reasons, or may not, you know, show up because they're told to do the ed plan but have no better...there is no way three minutes could ever, much less 30 minutes could...to get them on a track when they need more supports. And, who may need it in different dosages—again, for lack of another word—but they need a different kind of treatment altogether, or more of it, or a different format or something else.

And so, that is very much...as much of the explanation, if not more, because we don't want to beat up completely on quality. You always have to be careful not to beat up on yourselves, too, because there is only so much you can do. You think, "Okay, I am serving...why aren't 40% of people coming to freshmen orientation? Let's push out. Let's get the letters out. Let's tell them they have to come, right? Because what we're telling them is so important." Yes, quality is a part of it, but it's probably not as big a part as all of these other components as well. And those are just as important.

MARY RAUNER

You have just about 5 to 7 minutes.

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Okay, so I'll...yeah. Let me get one more and I'll actually stop. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I just want you to notice that the years of how when we track the 2002 to 2004, a lot of students don't finish in that particular time...

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Oh, yeah, no, these are the cohorts, sorry. Yeah. They're the cohorts. They start. We track them actually for upwards of, you know, six years till we get them to finish.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So we look at our graduation rates and there it takes students a lot longer...

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Oh, yeah. No, no, we don't ever report CSU graduation rates that...if we don't have at least six years to track them, we don't even report it because it's unfair to, sort of...good, but thank you for asking that.

[Slide: Principles of Evaluating Policies and Programs]

Alright, so I'm going to quickly say some of this and then we'll just open it up to other questions. And so I think...I wanted to leave you with some principles of, "Okay, I gave you this nice kind of research talk..." or maybe it wasn't nice, but you listened anyway, politely, and participated, and now what can you take away, how can you use it? And so I wanted to leave you with some principles; and so one is to think about, "Who is effective?" Because that really

is about sort of the counterfactual thinking, right? So who currently participates in a program that you might be thinking about, or activity?

If creating a new program, will it be voluntary? And then, who's likely to participate? What are the differences between participants and non-participants; is there any enforcement regarding who participates? Because that's likely to make a difference. And then one thing we didn't nearly have enough time to talk about but which is hugely important—and it was kind of implicit in a lot of the comments you guys made—is, what's the mechanism at work? Like, we're just assuming freshmen orientation is a good thing, like the delivery, but what are they getting at that freshmen orientation? What's the point of having a mandatory ed plan? Like, what do we think we're giving students? What's the mechanism by which we think that's going to change outcomes? And is this mandatory ed plan the best way to get there, right? Maybe, and maybe for some students, and maybe not for others, right? So thinking, it's not just about who participates and who's actively, you know, getting it, but it's really...like, you know, what evaluators would call the theory of action, or I call as a researcher the “mechanism”—like, if we think this is going to happen, by what mechanism? Are we going to get students more motivated? Are we going to give them more information, more supports, and in what format? So that's thinking about the mechanism.

And then lastly, this is my...I will end with this plea—is how to track change and think about it. And really what I would argue, what's been the most beneficial for my career as a researcher, is to partner with practitioners; so to talk a lot to people who are on the ground working with students to think about if I'm even investigating the right thing. And so this is my plea to say, “Hey, you have IR offices, you have other, you know, researchers in your community, whether it's UC Davis or the Chancellor's Office or whatever, who would be very open to collaborating with you on how to track change.” And so I think that's really super important. So I will end there to...I have like three minutes for more Q&A, is that...yeah?

Now you're all quiet. I could have shown you more slides. No, no, okay. I'm definitely not going to show you...I think I just wanted to...I think my email is there so, yeah, if people need to reach me. And I'll make the slides available.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

So I like the question she posed to us; did you...have you done any research on community colleges...[inaudible]?

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Yeah, I have done lots. I think I just wanted to talk about sort of looking at specific programs. Yeah, so I have been working with the Chancellor's Office for quite a while. My latest work is actually more tracking... So I have done quite a few papers on EAP and its impact on community colleges, and also on differences in developmental course taking for racial ethnic minorities. So I find...I'm able to sort of match my data to K-12 data, which is really hard for you guys to do, but to sort of control for the input students bring into the community colleges in terms... So I have a paper that actually looks at how students of similar academic abilities, that underrepresented minority groups are more likely to be placed in developmental ed than are

similarly achieving non-minority...White students and Asian students, and so I have done some work on that. And then my...some of my newest work is on CTE pathways and I'm looking at working with the Chancellor's Office. We just got a grant together to look at how to think about people who aren't necessarily degree bound but who are taking...how do we...how do we account for students who are at community colleges trying to build skills—skill builders or non, sort of non-degree attending students—and how to track them. But in general, I have a very...lots of broad interest on supporting community college students, not just for transfer, but for career...other career pathways and for CTE degree obtainment. So, yeah. I'm always happy...I'm not as good about putting up my papers on my website, but I'm always happy to email them to you, so if you're interested send me an email. Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I had a question: So right now because of the career pathways trust a lot of the work is about connecting between high school and community college at the pathway level. And many of the consortias that are working are trying to build introductory kind of activities—matriculation process brought into the high school, looking at the assessment challenge that we have with AccuPlacer Learn and others that don't place the students oftentimes in the right courses, but using the multiple measures or the Long Beach path—promise path—and so forth...are you doing any research...?

MICHAL KURLAENDER

Yeah, no, absolutely. I love that Long Beach kind of got...I mean, you know, there's so much...there's a lot in the academic literature alone, I would say; there's so much on remediation, and I would say the evidence on it is mixed at best on whether it "works," and by that I mean sort of having a lot of it helps. And so I think I really...when...I think when the research is not clear on what the best practice is, I think it's ripe for kind of innovation and trying different things. Not everybody has the capacity to do that or the even courage I would say to do it, but people are, and so I think there are ways. To your first point that you made, I do think the K-12 system...and I'm in conversation with them as well about how now with SBAC, the Smarter Balanced Assessments—how we can have better tracking on students who are exposed in their K-12 experiences to these career pathways, many of which are partnered through the community college system. So I think it's amazing the number of students in this state who touch community colleges before they ever, you know, are formally in their 13th year. And so I think they are really trying to understand how we can leverage that as a way to sort of improve not just actual employment but also, you know, other CTE pathways. So, yeah, I think there is great conversation about that. I know, you need me to stop. I could talk all day, I'm a...it's what I do for a profession. So thank you.