

*The Wabash National Study:  
The Impact of Teaching Practices and  
Institutional Conditions on Student Growth*

Charles Blaich & Kathleen Wise  
Wabash College

AERA, New Orleans

April 2011

# Overview

- Wabash National Study has two components
  - Research
  - Using Wabash Study data to improve student learning
- In this session we will
  - Describe our findings on outcome growth
  - Describe how we have worked with campuses to use the data
  - Discuss the challenging relationship between national research and campus efforts to improve student learning

# Wabash Study

- Longitudinal
- 49 institutions
  - Cohort 1 (2006): 19 institutions
  - Cohort 2 (2007): 8 institutions
  - Cohort 3 (2008): 26 institutions
- 17,000 students
  - Cohort I (2006)
    - $n(T1) = 4501; n(T2) = 3081; n(T3) = 2212$
  - Cohort 2 (2007)
    - $n(T1) = 3374; n(T2) = 1305; n(T3) = ?$
  - Cohort 3 (2008)
    - $n(T1) = 9628; n(T2) = 4228; n(T3) = ?$

## *Wabash Study Outcome Measures*

Academic Motivation Scale

ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency Critical Thinking Test

Contribution to the Arts and Humanities Scale

Contribution to the Sciences Scale

Defining Issues Test of Moral Reasoning (Version 2)

Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (Short Form)

Need for Cognition Scale

Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale

Political and Social Involvement Scale

Positive Attitude toward Literacy Scale

Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being

Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (Revision 2)

## *Wabash Study Student Experience Scales*

Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty (23 items)

Academic Challenge and High Expectations (31 items)

Diversity Experiences (9 items)

NSSE Deep Learning (12 items)

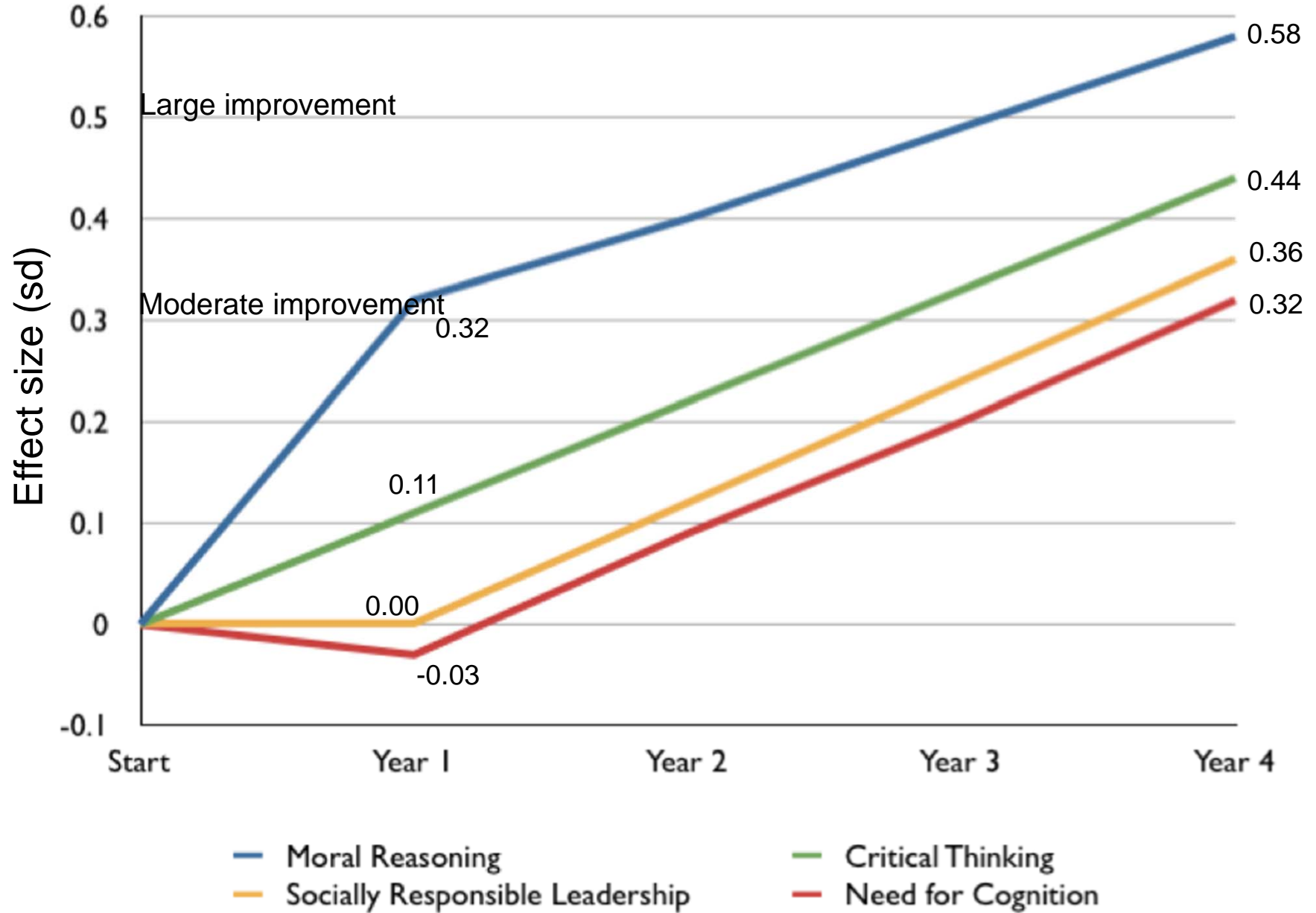
Frequency of Interactions with Faculty and Staff (9 items)

Interactions with Peers (9 items)

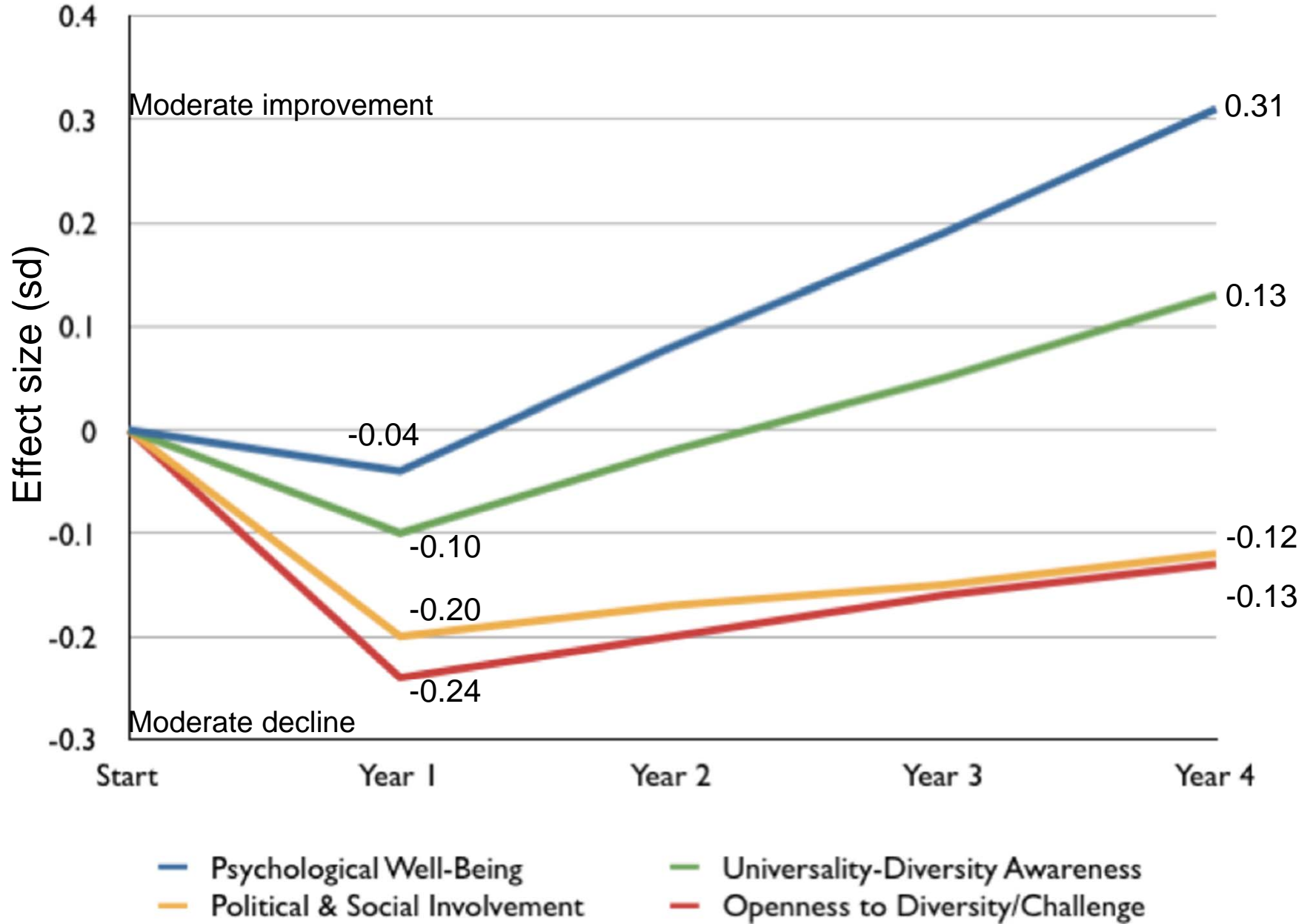
Cooperative Learning (4 items)

*Goal - Student-level information  
for both outcomes and  
experiences*

## Four-Year Change

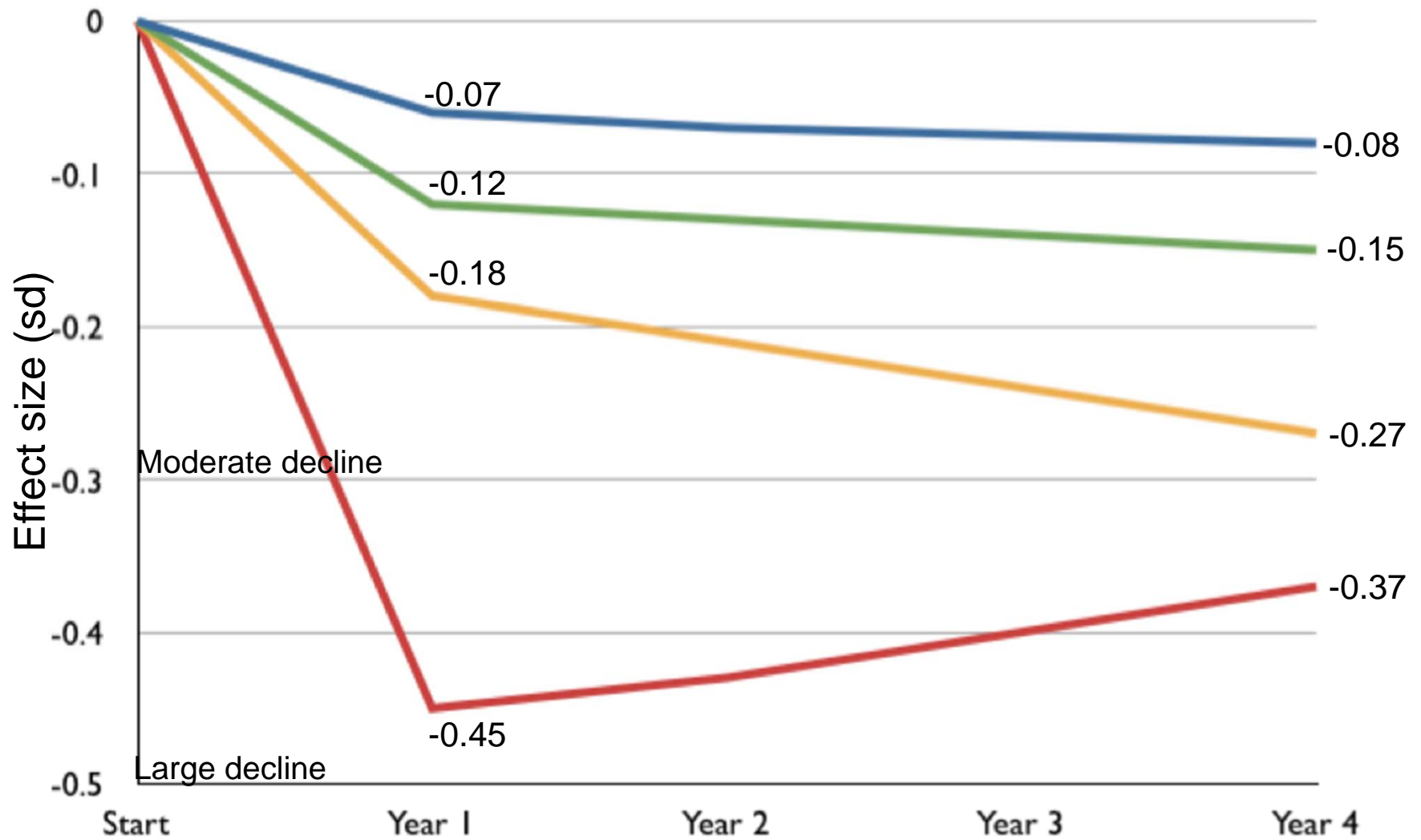


## Four-Year Change

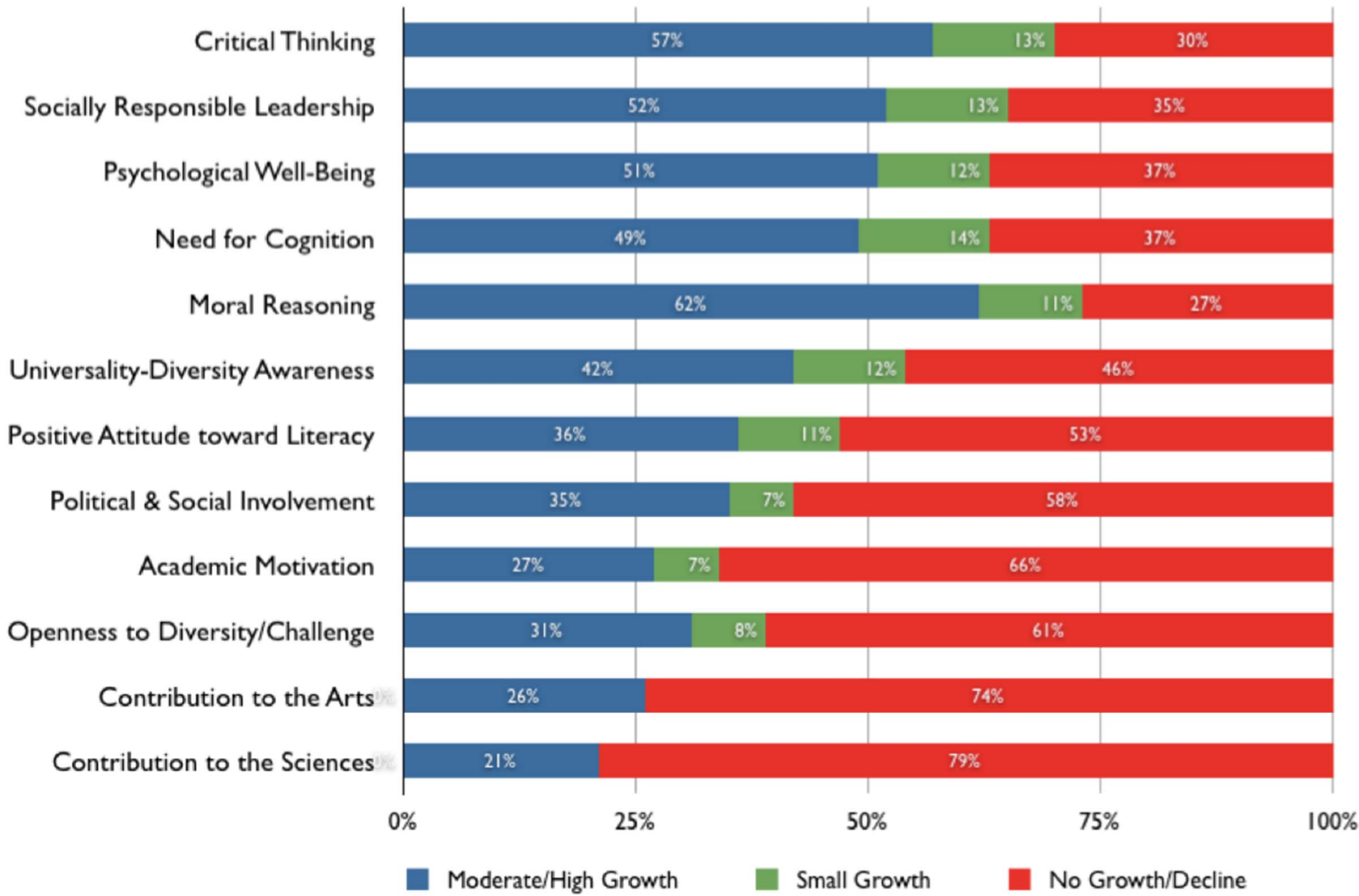




## Four-Year Change



- Positive Attitude toward Literacy
- Contribution to the Arts
- Contribution to the Sciences
- Academic Motivation



# *Working with campuses*

- How we frame our work with campuses
  - Include all institutional assessment data, not just Wabash Study data
  - Do not treat Wabash Study data as dispositive
    - *Dashboard light*
    - *“Not the window to your institution’s soul”*
  - Engage in process of collaborative inquiry with faculty, staff, and students
  - Build a long-term relationship with interactions in multiple settings

# *Working with campuses (cont.)*

- Prior to our visits we
  - Conduct separate analyses on campus data to review the relationship between outcomes and students' experiences
    - *Include measures from campus surveys, grades, and anything else we can merge with Wabash Study data*
    - *Focus our analyses on certain outcomes given the campus mission and/or our conversations with campus representatives*
  - Review other survey or campus assessment data
- When we visit campuses we
  - Meet with groups of students and faculty prior to any broader campus conversations
  - Redo analyses based on these interviews

# *What do we learn from this approach?*

- Our conversations with students can help explain the “whys” behind survey data
  - Example 1 - Lack of syllabi for first-year courses
  - Example 2 - Students being intimidated by faculty credentials
- Our conversations with students can reveal how survey questions about their experiences are interpreted differently on different campuses
  - Example 3 - View of student-faculty interactions
  - Example 4 - Institutional emphasis on academic work
- Our analyses and conversations can identify the “good practices” that matter on campus that do not matter in our overall analyses
  - Example 5 - Strong peer effects
  - Example 6 - Frequency of student-faculty interactions

# *Challenges for using data for improvement*

- Few campuses have or use student-level, longitudinal data on outcomes and experiences
  - Runs contrary to VSA methodology
    - *Institution-level outcome measures are very challenging to work with*
  - We have concerns about how to interpret self-report data on outcome change
- Methodological purity can block the ability to gather and use assessment data for change
- Many campuses do not talk with or listen to their students
- *Without the combination of timely, longitudinal, student-level data on both outcomes and the learning environment, as well as qualitative information, responses to assessment data may be ineffective*

## *More information*

- About the Wabash Study
  - <http://www.centerofinquiry.org>
- About the Good Practices
  - <http://www.centerofinquiry.org/study-research/>
- About the Teagle Assessment Scholar Program
  - <http://www.centerofinquiry.org/assessment-scholars/>
- About the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium
  - [www.hedsconsortium.org](http://www.hedsconsortium.org)