

Beyond the Gates: Creating a Campus-Wide Program for Cross-Cultural Learning and Assessing Mission Integration

Community Engagement Track IUPUI Pre-Conference Webinar
February 19, 2019 - 1:30PM EST

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Our Mercyhurst University Mission



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Consistent with its Catholic identity and Mercy heritage, Mercyhurst University educates women and men in a culture where faith and reason flourish together, where the beauty and power of the liberal arts combine with an appreciation for the dignity of work and a commitment to serving others. Confident in the strength of its student-faculty bonds, the university community is inspired by the image of students whose choices, in life and work, will enable them to realize the human and spiritual values embedded in everyday realities and to exercise leadership in service toward a just world.

Look at the language of “mission”



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- It often feels like we’re wrestling with “intangibles”
 - *Development of the whole person*
 - *Excellence in lifelong learning*
 - *Make the world even better*
 - *Preserve and transmit knowledge wisdom and values*
 - *Advocate justice*
- *How Exactly Do Measure These?!*

How to write measurable objectives



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- Suskie lists important qualities of outcomes/objectives (2009)
 - Action oriented
 - Observable
 - Measurable
 - Learner-centered
 - Specific
 - Cognitively appropriate
 - Understandable
 - Achievable
 - Realistic

Our Mercyhurst University Mission



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*Consistent with its Catholic identity and Mercy heritage, Mercyhurst University educates women and men in a culture where faith and reason flourish together, where the beauty and power of the liberal arts combine with an **appreciation for the dignity of work** and a **commitment to serving others**. Confident in the strength of its student-faculty bonds, the university community is inspired by the image of students whose choices, in life and work, will enable them to **realize the human and spiritual values** embedded in everyday realities and to **exercise leadership** in service **toward a just world**.*

Let's revisit that list of qualities



- Suskie lists important qualities of outcomes/objectives (2009)
 - ✓ Action oriented
 - ✓ *Observable*
 - ✓ *Measurable*
 - ✓ Learner-centered
 - ✓ *Specific*
 - ✓ *Cognitively appropriate*
 - ✓ Understandable
 - ✓ Achievable
 - ✓ Realistic

Maybe this is doable ... but it requires considering all aspects of the mission and how it was integrated.

An integrated approach to Mission

Okay. We have to do it. *But how?!*



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We developed the *outREACH* experience

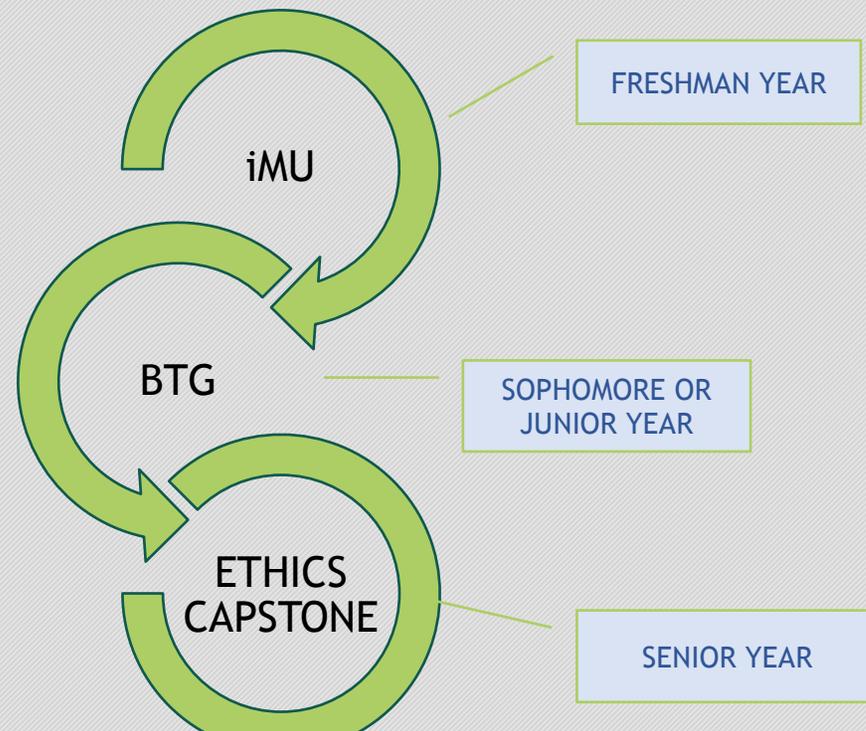


- outREACH is a component of our Liberal Arts (REACH) Curriculum
- Designed to expose students to **other** through a set of honest, intense, and sometimes (appropriately) uncomfortable experiences
- Purposeful and recursive experience that spans their 4-year education and provides multiple exposures

outREACH - mission across the curriculum



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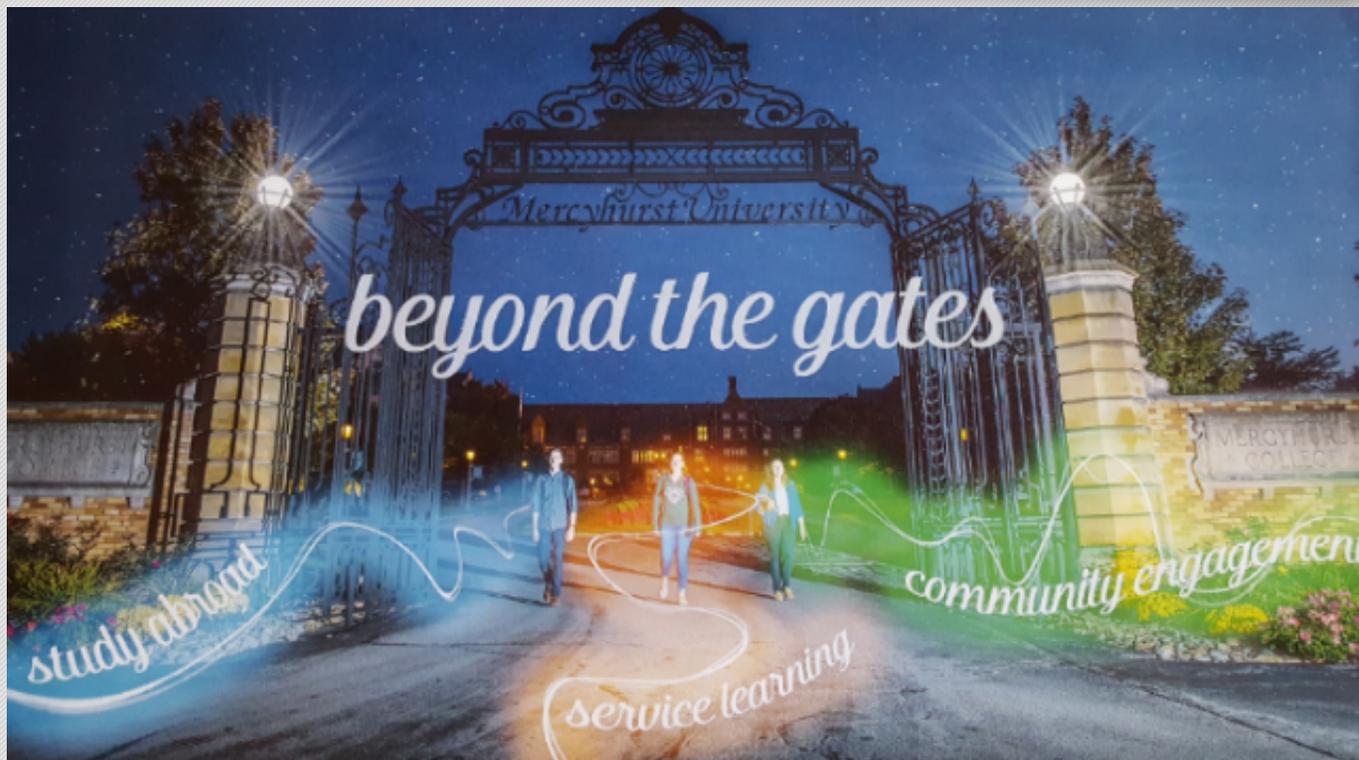


IMU: 2-CREDIT FRESHMAN FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE
BTG: 1-CREDIT SERVICE LEARNING OR CULTURAL LEARNING EXPERIENTIAL COURSE
CAPSTONE: 3-CREDIT SENIOR ETHICS/MISSION CAPSTONE COURSE

Beyond the Gates (BTG)



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Measuring the “immeasurable”

Okay. We have to do it. *But how?!*



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How do *others* measure mission?



- Usually by finding something to “count.”
 - Reduce (Slim down the mission to something we can measure)
 - Reuse (Get a bunch of research data and find a way to tie it to mission)
 - Recycle (Retrench existing data to speak to the whole of mission)

WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING MORE.

Our tenets of mission assessment



- **Real** (it has to measure Mission effectiveness and not something else)
- **Reflective** (it has to come from data based on the evaluation of actual student learning)
- **Relevant** (it has to be something accreditors will recognize and accept)
- **Sustainable** (it has to be something we can undertake, afford, and manage over the long term)

But now what are we going to measure?



We needed a set of Student Learning Outcomes based on the mission.
So, we set parameters:

- Use action verbs.
 - Eliminate fuzzy ideas like *understand, grasp, appreciate, empathize, ...*
- The outcomes should be independent of the specific experience, but encompass the overall features of all experiences
- Achievement of the outcomes should be reportable, or at least identifiable within self-reporting
- Achievement should be recognizable to any (trained) observer

Making it *Real, Reflective, and Relevant*



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- It had to be **grounded in the actual mission, targeted to skills that can be assessed, and devised for quantified data that could be compared and evaluated over time.**
 - Demonstrate increased confidence in their ability to contribute to the common good;
 - Express an informed understanding of and respect for the diverse experiences and points of view that differentiate self from other;
 - Articulate the importance of and practice listening and dialogue as essential to meaningful human interaction;
 - Reflect critically on their BTG experiences and the interconnections between the Mercy heritage, the University Mission, and meaningful contribution to the world that lies beyond the gates.

Our learning outcomes



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- Apply academic knowledge and critical thinking skills in an unfamiliar context.
- Demonstrate increased confidence in their ability to contribute to the common good.
- Develop an empathetic understanding for people and other life situations.
- Practice listening and dialog as essential to meaningful human interaction.
- Reflect critically on their BTG experiences and the interconnections between learning in and outside of the classroom.

Assessment Mechanisms

Now we have the “what” ... so what about “how” we are going to assess?



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How are we going to measure it?



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- Students will need to *do* something related to outREACH, and then have to tell us about it.
- We created a set of prompts that could be used in each part of the experience to solicit student responses.
 - Focused but not guided
 - Direct in asking for their experiences
 - Explicit in how they would be assessed

An example prompt



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Your BTG experience most likely provided opportunities to work with others to accomplish tasks, meet goals, and/or get some real work done. For this reflection, we want you to draw upon your BTG experience and write a response—a minimum of 10 sentences—in which you reflect on what your BTG experience has contributed to your comfort with and ability to work effectively with others. Identify an actual example from your BTG experience (or draw from something you discovered about yourself and/or others during your BTG experience) to demonstrate what you have learned about the challenges involved with interacting and collaborating with others (i.e. the staff at your placement site, other student service learners, and/or community members these sites serve). What specific and concrete actions or behaviors are critical in embracing diversity, bridging differences, and working effectively with others? In what ways are you better prepared for these kinds of collaborations?

	Does Not Address	Emerging	Developing	Adept	Exemplary
Critical Thinking					
Unfamiliar Settings & Contexts					
Diverse Experiences					
Service to Others					
Dialogue and Listening					
Connections: experience, mission, and heritage					



We're ready

- We have
 - clearly stated learning outcomes
 - defined access points
 - articulated prompts to gather data
 - Rubrics to assess student learning



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Data Snapshot

Here's what it looks like when we use the tool.



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outREACH



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The Method

- Longitudinal study over the students' academic careers
- Students reflect on a set of prompts

The Measure

- An outREACH rubric that covers the measurable objectives

Data collection timeline



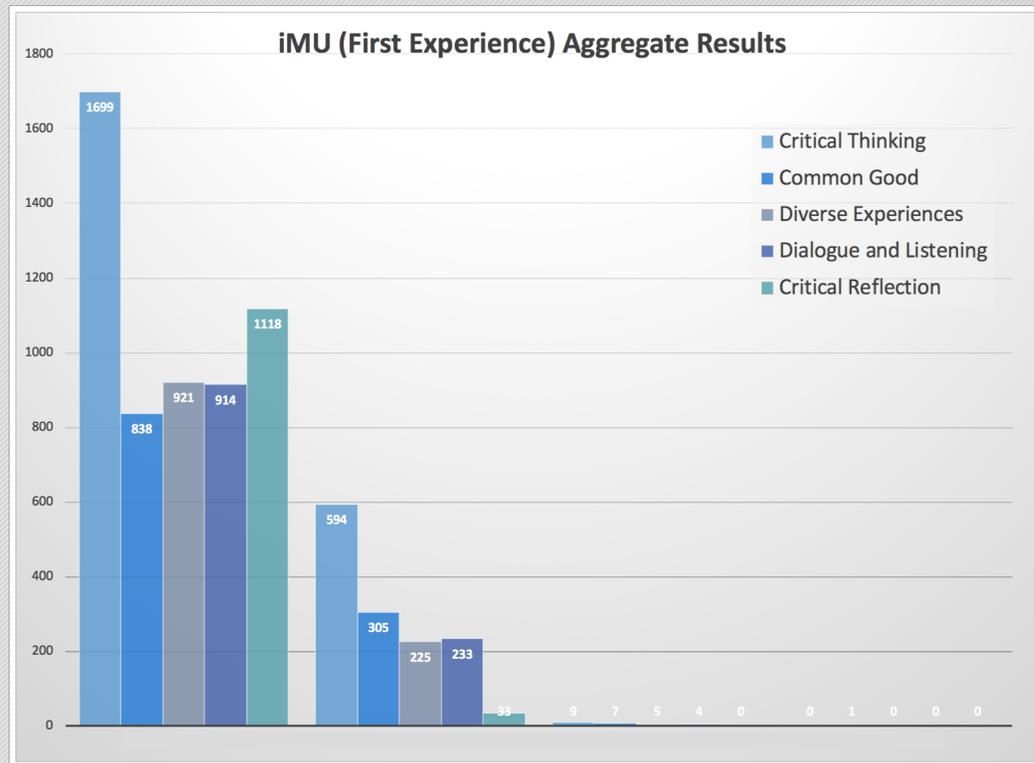
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- The first cohort of freshmen to participate in outREACH was Spring 2017
- Most of those students have now completed their BTG experience in Fall 2017 or Spring 2018.
 - They'll enroll in the Ethics Capstone in Fall 2019 or Spring 2020.
- The second cohort of freshmen to participate in iMU was this Spring 2018.
 - They'll move through the outREACH process over the next three years

Our Data - iMU (Freshman) experience



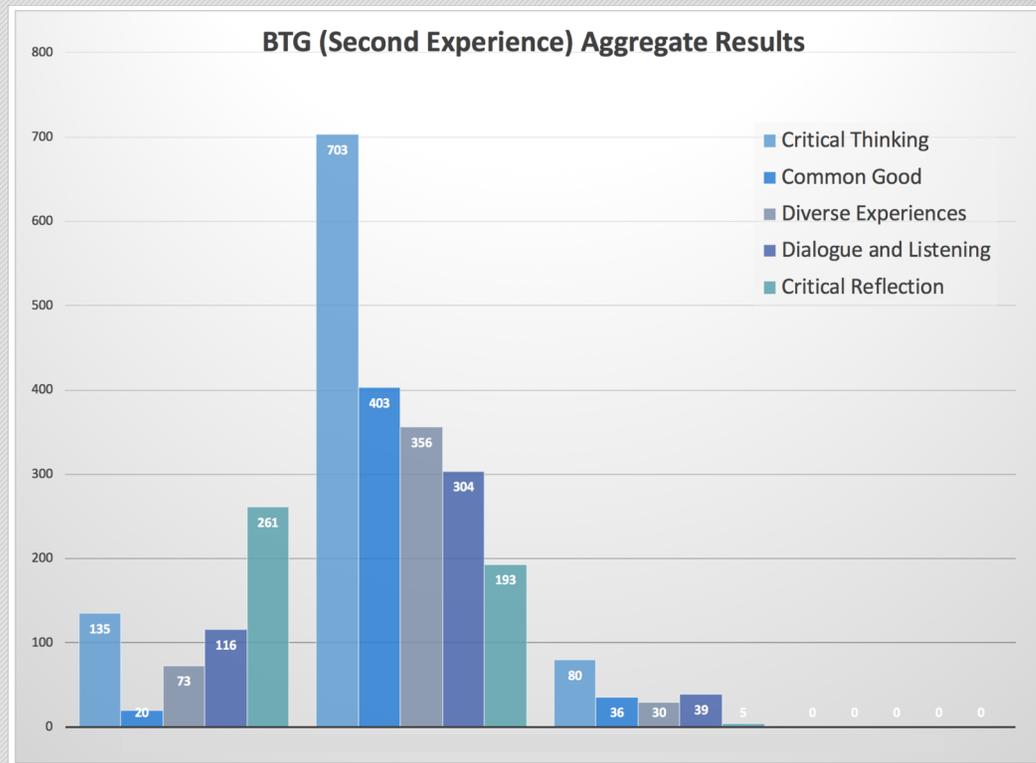
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Our Data - BTG (Sophomore) experience



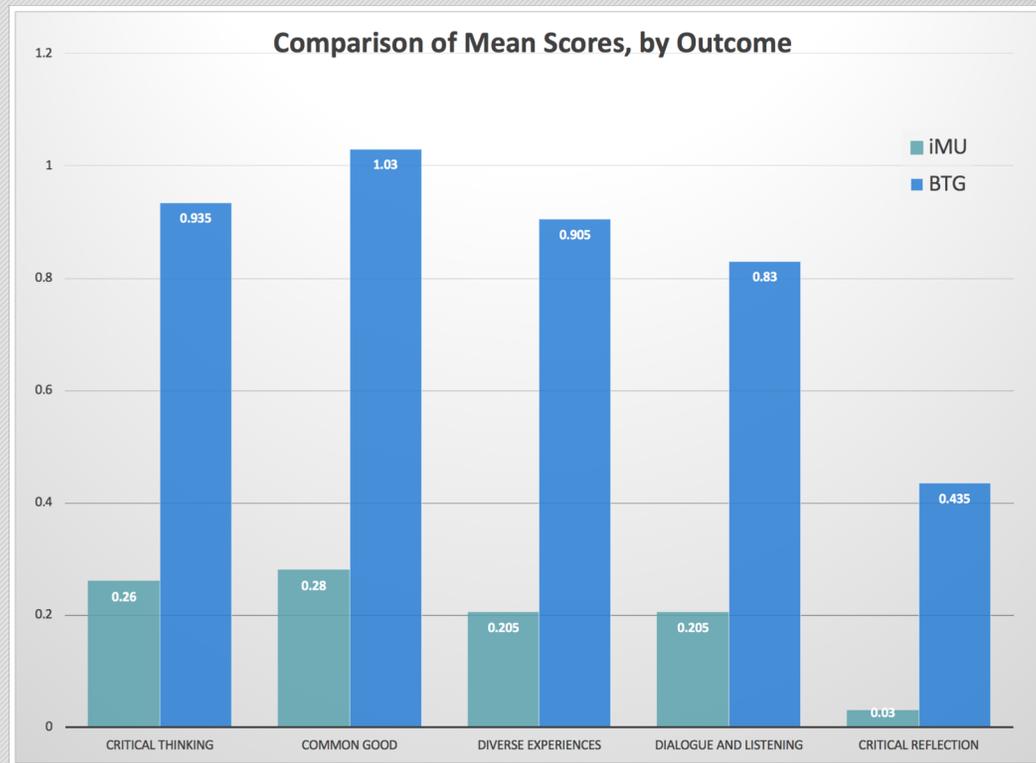
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Our Data - iMU to BTG Comparison



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Data summary



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- In the first two experiences, we can see clear positive shifts in student learning and engagement with the mission.
- The siffts are not equal for all learning outcomes
 - Highest gains in *Contributing to the Common Good* and *Appreciation of Diverse Experiences*.
 - Both of these are incredibly resonant with our Mission in particular
- After the BTG (second) experience, the students seem to be at the appropriate developmental level.
 - There is room to grow for our students as they continue in the outREACH experience

Ongoing Challenges



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Sustainability



- We are a relatively small institution, but the numbers get big quickly!

650 students per graduating class
x 3 experiences over their college career
2,000 (nearly) submissions each year

- We simply HAD to have an efficient system to collect, assess, and analyze our data. We knew we couldn't pull this off without technological support.

Approach: ePortfolio system



- Our ePortfolio System is big and complex and wonderful and full of features
 - We had to learn to focus in on what we wanted, and then pick the right tool
- Because these things are entangled yet separate from classes/programs, they need a different kind of support.
- Our students tend to respond best when all of the assignments are consistent, controlled, and predictable. If we're going to use the ePortfolio, we need to *really use it*.

Applying the Rubrics



- There are unique challenges with using a maturational rubric.
 - People have different senses of what achievement is.
- outREACH crosses the university enterprise (curricular and co-curricular student experiences)
 - We have different approaches, understandings of “learning” and expectations for our students
 - This posts interesting challenges to using a rubric
- How do we institutionalize the outREACH assessment?

Approach: trained assessor pools



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- We have a small group of assessors from both curricular and co-curricular areas who are committed to ongoing development, rating/normalizing sessions, and communication.
- In the future, we plan to embark on a wider development and educational process across the university.

In Summary



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What we've learned about us



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- Assessing mission is, in fact, doable.
 - It's hard. It is time- and resource-intensive. *It is worth it.*

My placement includes some kids with some hard home lives. One of the children was painting in the painting class, and told me something that would change my life in Beyond the Gates. The big blue eyes tearing up turned to me and said, "I just want to stay here forever because I don't want to go home." I felt horrible and thought to myself that no one trained me for how to respond to a statement like this. I told the child, "I am so sorry you feel that way, but we love having you come here. You are so special and have such a unique creative talent." This makes me feel awful because of the home life I had compared to this child. I felt selfish and was determined to give this child as much attention as I could while I was in her class. I felt that I was an outsider while helping a child make a pillow because they did not have one to sleep on. I felt like I was selfish for going back to my huge apartment with my nine pillows and hot shower. I just wished that I could somehow help the children out so that they could have a better home life.

What we've learned about us



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- We are seeing gains in student outcomes over the first two outREACH experiences
 - As expected, the gains are not consistent across all learning outcomes and/or criteria.
- We look forward to obtaining data from the third component over the next two years. In the meantime, we sustain the experience and the assessment.

*Thank you for your time, attention,
and participation!*

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