Transformative Experiences: More Than Meets the Eye!

Lauren M. Conoscenti, Ph.D.
Emma Morgan, Ed.M.

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Four key questions

- What are transformational experiences?

- How do we know if students have them? How do we measure this concept?

- If students endorse having been transformed, is it attributable to specific institutional action or to other forces?

- How does an institution respond to such information?

What are transformational experiences?

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What is your mission???

- Explicitly or implicitly, higher ed institutions want to *transform* their students:

  - "…promotes the…the human flourishing of each member of the campus community." –Providence College

  - "…strives to develop students' skills of critical thinking, verbal communication, and quantitative reasoning and their capacity for creative endeavor." –Lafayette College

  - "…to create a transformative educational experience for students focused on deep disciplinary knowledge; problem solving; leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills; and personal health and well-being." –Carnegie Mellon University

What is your mission???

- Some institutions have created specific programs or initiatives to foster these experiences (often during sophomore year)
  - Washburn Transformational Experience (WTE) program
  - Ohio State's Second-Year Transformational Experience Program (STEP)
  - Duke University's Second Year Experience (SYE) program
  - University of North Florida's Transformational Learning Opportunities (TLO) initiative
  - North Carolina State University's SophoMORE Experience program

What is your mission???

- Other institutions expect students will transform through elements already embedded in undergraduate life:
  - Residential life
    - Residential colleges
    - Pre-Orientation or Orientation programming
  - Academics
    - Capstone or thesis projects
    - Research with faculty
  - Extracurricular activities
    - Community service requirements
    - Exploring new hobbies or interests
  - Personal growth opportunities
    - Study abroad
    - Visiting speakers
    - Interfaith or intercultural gatherings

Tufts' T10 Strategic Theme on Transformational Experiences

"Transformational experiences can be defined as experiences that fundamentally challenge a person's assumptions and preconceptions, as well as their beliefs and values, affecting how they understand themselves, others, and the world.

These experiences are likely to occur when people venture beyond their comfort zones – physically, intellectually, socially, culturally, geographically, or otherwise.

The novel thinking that often accompanies unfamiliarity can lead individuals to appreciate unexamined parts of their environments, discover new parts of themselves or others, and achieve in ways previously thought impossible."

Tufts' T10 Strategic Theme on Transformational Experiences

Theme 2: Enabling and integrating transformational experiences

1. Provide faculty with the resources necessary to create a greater number and range of transformational classroom experiences.
2. Identify and promote best practices for enabling and integrating transformational experiences.
3. Renew and expand our commitment to active citizenship, including a new 1 + 4 Undergraduate Program.
4. Enhance and expand engagement opportunities for our substantial alumni community.

- T10 Strategic Plan Executive Summary

Tufts' T10 Strategic Theme on Transformational Experiences

- What the heck does that mean?

- Tufts wants to make sure students change during their time at Tufts.

   …BUT HOW??

Tufts' T10 Strategic Theme on Transformational Experiences

- What kinds of experiences are transformational?

  Learning new things is transformational…

  Meeting new people is transformational…

  Living independently for the first time is transformational…

  Going to new places is transformational…

  Preparing for a career is transformational…

Tufts' T10 Strategic Theme on Transformational Experiences

- How much does something need to change in order to be considered a transformation?

  A semester-long class?

  All four years?

  A brief moment in time, a "Eureka!" moment?

  An afternoon participating in an activity?

  An hour-long discussion?

Tufts' T10 Strategic Theme on Transformational Experiences

- The creation of this strategic goal is noble and ambitious.

- But, it is difficult to define what we mean by "transformational experience."

- …and, it's even harder to measure!

How do we know if students have transformational experiences?

Measuring Transformation

- OIRE tasked with measuring transformational experiences

- How do you measure whether or not a student has had such an experience?
  - Fundamentally subjective
  - Influenced by memory biases

- But these issues are inherent in all survey research…

Measuring Transformation

Semester	Survey	Action Taken
Spring 2014	Senior Survey	Collect data with open-ended text box.
Fall 2014		• Categorize text responses into positive/negative and type of experience (e.g. academic, community service, diversity-related). • Use information to craft closed-ended question
Spring 2015	Senior Survey Grad Student Exit Surveys: Fletcher, Cummings	Collect data using closed-ended question, with open-ended item for elaboration.
Fall 2015		Review and amend categories
Spring 2016+	Senior Survey Grad Student Exit Surveys: Fletcher, Cummings, Public Health, GSAS	Collect data using revised closed-ended question, with open-ended item for elaboration.

Measuring Transformation: 2014

During your time at Tufts, did you have any experiences that altered your perspective on the world? If yes, please describe:

75% positive experiences

12% negative experiences
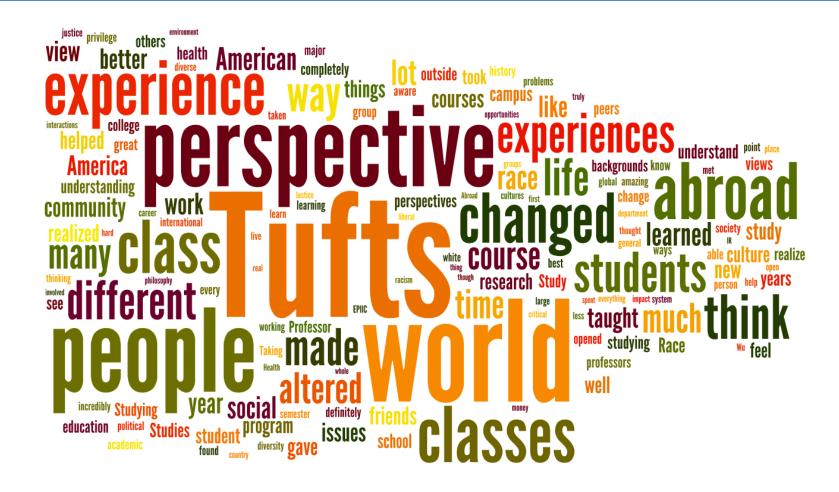
11% mixed experiences

44% academic experiences

24% study abroad/travel-related experiences

24% diversity-related experiences

Measuring Transformation: 2014

Measuring Transformation: 2015+

During your time at Tufts, have you had any such experiences?

No

Yes → **Was that experience…a positive one?**
…a negative one?

How would you categorize that experience? Select all that apply.

Academic

Extracurricular/social activities

Diversity-related

Internship/work/career-related

Volunteer/Civic Engagement

Other

Personal

Friends and family

Study abroad/travel abroad

Campus culture

Religious/Spiritual

Please tell us more about your transformational experience.

Measuring Transformation: Senior Survey

Survey Year	During your time at Tufts, have you had any such experiences? (% Yes)	Was that experience a positive one? (% Yes)
2015	85%	94%
2016	78%	90%
2017	86%	92%
2018	70%	86%

Measuring Transformation: Senior Survey

Survey Year	How would you categorize your experience?				
	% Academic	% Personal	% Social/ Extracurricular	% Friends/ Family	% Study or Travel Abroad
2015	58%	53%	45%	35%	32%
2016	49%	60%	31%	35%	29%
2017	51%	62%	42%	41%	30%
2018	37%	57%	31%	38%	27%

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Measuring Transformation: Graduate Student Exit Surveys

Survey Year	During your time at Tufts, have you had any such experiences? (% Yes)	Was that experience a positive one? (% Yes)
2015[1]	63%	93%
2016[2]	64%	93%
2017[2]	64%	93%

[1] Schools surveyed include: Cummings Veterinary, Fletcher

[2] Schools surveyed include: Cummings Veterinary; Fletcher, Graduate School of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering; Public Health and Professional Degree Programs

Measuring Transformation: Graduate Student Exit Surveys

Survey Year	How would you categorize your experience?				
	% Academic	% Personal	% Internship/ Work/Career	% Friends/ Family	% Diversity-related
2015[1]	59%	44%	32%	26%	25%
2016[2]	74%	48%	39%	24%	25%
2017[2]	71%	45%	35%	25%	25%

[1] Schools surveyed include: Cummings Veterinary, Fletcher

[2] Schools surveyed include: Cummings Veterinary; Fletcher, Graduate School of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering; Public Health and Professional Degree Programs

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Measuring Transformation: Yes!

Working in a lab helped foster my interest in medicine, and I now want to be a doctor.

The Tufts in Paris program was amazing! It's where I grew as an individual and learned so much about France.

My sociology major changed how I see the world and how I relate to other people.

I interacted with so many different types of people while at Tufts! I feel like I better understand, appreciate, and celebrate the differences between people.

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Measuring Transformation: Yes?

The most transformative thing was when I took time off from Tufts to start my own company.

I worked abroad in Ghana. It was a totally new experience that really opened my eyes to a part of the world I'd never thought much about before.

I stopped using drugs. It was the best decision of my life. I am now a healthier person in both mind and body.

I started attending church again and ultimately became a more religious person.

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Measuring Transformation: Yes…

Although the experience was negative, it had some positive outcomes. It gave me a better view and a better appreciation for life.

It has been negative but I have gained positively from it. I thought I knew myself very well but I am learning a new me.

Initially, I would have categorized my experience as a negative one. However, upon reflection, my experience forced me to be more outspoken and advocate for myself and my work which has helped me to become a better doctor. I would not be who I am without that experience and in the end I believe it changed me for the better.

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Measuring Transformation: Yes, but…

I was at the Boston Marathon when the bombs went off, I saw a lot of horrible things that day that I can never unsee.

I was sexually assaulted in my first year and I have not been the same since.

I became very self-conscious of my ethnic background, something that had never happened before when I lived in a big diverse city.

I was very depressed and considered suicide. I ended up at the hospital. That saved my life.

I didn't realize how much I'd hate being so far from my family.

Measuring Transformation: Maybe?

- Lots of experiences.

- Not one specific experience, just a general gradual change.

- Of course, who goes to college and doesn't transform?

- Life is transformational.

- Everything changed me.

- Drugs.

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Did <u>our institution</u> transform these students?

Was it us?

- To what extent are students changed by things our institutions do?

- How can you tell exactly what your institution did to change the student?
  - It's not always clear…

Was it us?

- To what extent are students changed by things our institutions do?
  - Specific programs, faculty members, or campus organizations tell us YES!
    - Prof. X's class was incredible and opened my eyes…
    - Being president of the student body was a challenging but rewarding experience…

  - But other transformations do not have such a clear "origin story."

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Was it us?

- Would this student have transformed similarly at another institution?
  - I met my best friends/significant other.
  - I learned new skills/new ideas/new techniques.
  - I now have a deeper understanding of the problems in the world/this country/my community.
  - I learned my strengths and weaknesses competing in the NCAA.
  - Through majoring in political science, I realized I wanted to pursue a law career.

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Was it us?

- Would this student have transformed anyway?
  - I tried new things.
  - I became more religious.
  - I traveled to a new place.
  - Global or national events impacting students (e.g. Election Day, Boston Marathon bombings)

- Human development plays a role
  - Students are naturally changing and growing during this time.
  - Traditional undergraduate years coincide with emergence into adulthood

Note: Examples listed are not actual student quotes; they are representations of the kinds of transformational experiences listed by students on our surveys.

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Was it us?

- Human development plays a role
  - Cognitive and emotional changes
    - More stable interpersonal relationships, better able to forecast outcomes of behavior
  - Exploration and evaluation of identity, trying on new identities
    - Tries new hobbies, attends different religious services, experimentation with food or substances
  - Greater openness to ideas, less black-and-white thinking
    - Able to listen to new points of view, accept things as part of a continuum, appreciate diversity of ideas

What do you do with such information?

Now what? T10 Goals

Circle back – why did we want this information?

By 2023…
- Every Tufts undergraduate and graduate student has meaningful and supported transformational experiences.
- Faculty have the resources required to enable and to participate in transformational experiences.
- New programs have been developed that assist our students with their intellectual and social growth.
- Traditional educational methods have been augmented with real-world internship opportunities from our local and global alumni and partners that provide students with new experiences and perspectives.

Now what?

- Already begun:
  - Tufts 1+4 Bridge Program (undergraduates)
  - Teaching and Learning Engagements at Tufts (TALEs), directed toward faculty – focused on using technology to foster learning

- Proposed:
  - Expansion of internship funding
  - Career Center improvements
  - Residential communities implementation

1+4 Bridge Year Program Update

- First cohort of fellows AY 2015-16

- First fellows on campus AY 2016-17
  - 19 fellows responded to the 2017 & 2018 First Year Experience Survey
  - 100% responded "Yes" when asked if they had transformational experiences.
  - 95% (18 of 19) characterized their experience(s) as "positive"
  - Of six respondents who provided additional (text) information, four explicitly mentioned the 1+4 program (all positive).

Now what?

- The path forward for graduate programs is less clear
- The notion that an institution transforms students is "undergraduate-centric"

(…But is the only purpose of graduate school to earn a degree? Don't we want students to change how they think about the world during their degree program?)

Now what?

- How should an institution respond to the collected data?
  - Specific decision-making is outside of the IR domain
  - But we love actionable data…

  - "Every Tufts undergraduate and graduate student has meaningful and **supported** transformational experiences."

    Meaningful is easy… supported is harder!

Now what?

- Not everyone transformed – what do you do?

- Not everyone had positive transformations – what do you do?

- Some had positive transformations – what do you do?

- We only ask about one transformational experience – our picture is incomplete

Now what?

- Is there actually a drive for change?
  - Were these just lofty goals or is there real momentum?

- Limited time, money, expertise – we cannot do everything

- Is this information consistent with other sources of information about students?
  - Does it dovetail with surveys, academic data, student information, etc.?

Now what?

- Where should an institution focus its efforts?

- Should we try to change negative experiences?
  - Funding more mental health services to combat depression
  - Training faculty to be more sensitive to cultural issues
  - Renovating a dorm or social space
  - Hiring new faculty or creating new learning opportunities

Now what?

- Where should an institution focus its efforts?

- Should we nurture the positive experiences already reported? (Do more of what works)
  - Funding more study abroad programs
  - Adding more student life options (clubs, athletics, concerts, etc.)
  - Recognize more faculty for their contributions to student happiness
  - Fund special programs that previously required additional fees (e.g. pre-orientation programming)

Now what?

- Additional/future efforts: IR
  - Measuring transformational experiences for graduate and professional students
  - Correlating data with other student information

- Future efforts: University-wide
  - Obtaining greater buy-in from faculty and staff toward this goal
  - Aligning other university efforts around this goal

Contact information

Questions?

Lauren.Conoscenti@tufts.edu

Emma.Morgan@tufts.edu

http://go.tufts.edu/OIRE