Feeding Networks: Institutional Research and Uncertainty

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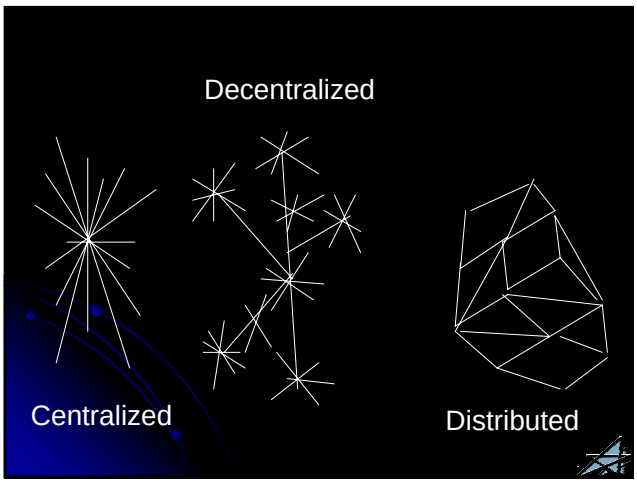
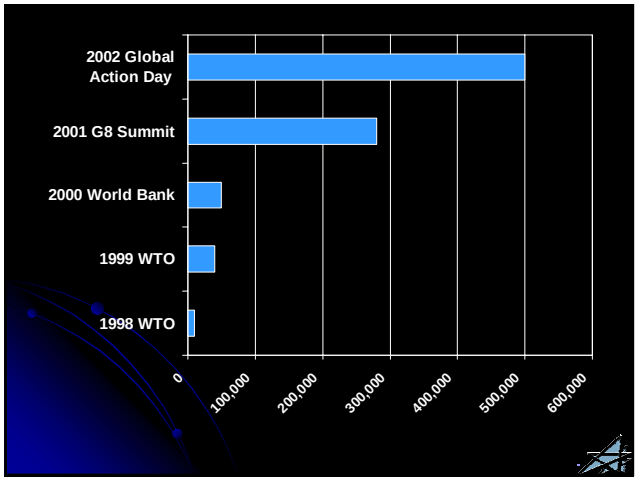
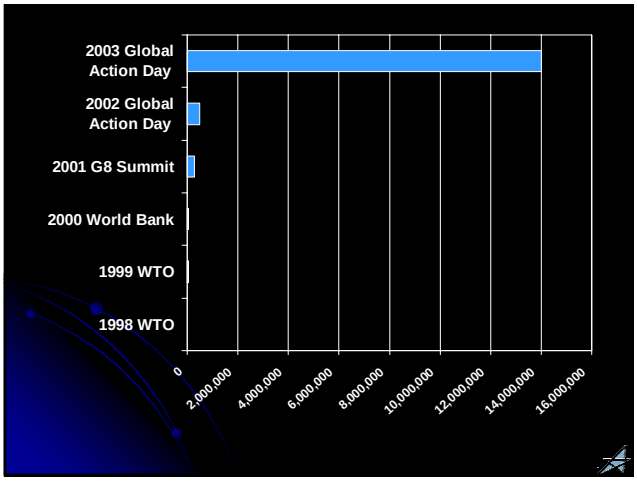
The Voorhees Group







What are the obstacles?

- Money
- Small staff/operation
- Researching the wrong issues…routine reports
- Fear of getting involved
- Spread too thin
- Lack of exposure…the Forum will fix this!

Issues in Networks

- K-16 Linkages
- Adult Learning & Workforce Linkages
- Institutional and System Capacity
- Student Mobility
- Student Financing
- Leading through Technology
- Networks and Research

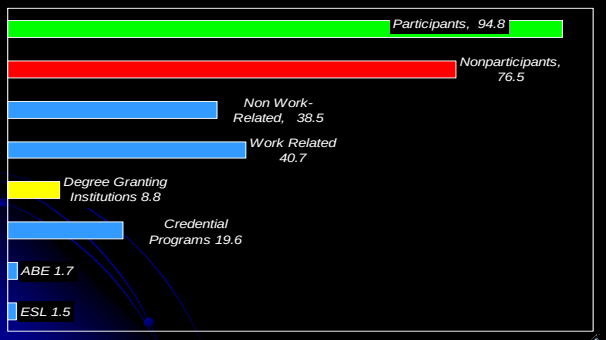
K-16 Networks

- K to 12 --600 pound gorilla
- Not your father's or mother's classmates
- Senior year--holding tank
- 26 percent more graduates by 2008
- 5th and 6th grade is the runway
- $202 Billion in debt
- Foibles of the classical research design

Adult Learning & Workforce Linkages

- More adults than ever before are participating in formal learning
- 1.6 million certifications outside of higher education
- 40 million adults function at the lowest level of literacy…2nd lowest in an OECD survey
- Global e-Learning market $35 billion by 2005

Adult Learning and Workforce Linkages



Institutional and System Capacity

- Legislators' perceptions
- Total supply and demand
- Lack of precision…best guesses are averages
- Regional networks
- Does everyone need to do **everything**?

Student Mobility

- Understand some things about those who do come
- Understand almost nothing about those who don't
- 69% of the nation's full-time enrollment can be tracked in existing state-level databases already…is that enough?

Student Financing

- Tuition increases and reduced state support--can't have it both ways
- HEA proposal to penalize colleges that raise their prices beyond a certain point (McKeon)
- Most prosperous 20 years in American history…fueled by speculation
- Democratization v. stratification
- Drops in philanthropy
- State cutbacks impact low-income students most

Networks and Technology

- Open source software
- Furtive networks
- New partners for existing networks
- Distinguished networks
- Training networks

What Matters….
Is What Students Learn

Networks and Research

- Wrong research designs
- Learning doesn't happen in isolation from the social network in which she or he resides
- Intervention **A** produced result **B**
- Stop seeking and believing generalizations
- No magic bullet

Networks and Research

- Reconsider the criteria for success
- Adopt models appropriate to network phenomena
- Question the assumption that external intervention can produce results at a micro level
- Consider that you'll be swamped by a variety of external variables

What Can Institutional Researchers Do?

- Stay in dissonance with your institution
- Find opportunities to work with your institution's external networks
- Participate in ways to feed and expand the institutional research network
- Use accountability initiatives to your advantage
- Resist all efforts to prematurely close networks. Even if you don't think it matters much to you, the cumulative effect can be devastating

What Can Institutional Researchers Do?

- Read all you can
- Re-invent the touchstones
- Think not higher education; think education, think K-16
- Walk with courage
- Knock their socks off