

In Memoriam: Alexander W. Astin

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NILOA and IUPUI Assessment Forum colleagues, as well as higher education generally, lost a prolific scholar, influential thought leader and innovator on May 18, 2022, with the passing of Alexander W. (“Sandy”) Astin.

In 1966, when director of research at the American Council on Education, Sandy created the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which he took to UCLA in 1973 when he joined the faculty and founding director of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). CIRP is a pioneering national study of some fifteen million students, 300,000 faculty and staff, and more than 1800 colleges and universities. Sandy authored 23 books and more than 300 scholarly articles on college student learning and development and received more than a dozen awards for his research from national associations and professional societies. With his book *Four Critical Years* in 1977, he pioneered the concept of “value added” (which he later called “talent development”) resulting in the widely used Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) framework for guiding research on college student learning and development which continues to be cited by researchers to this day. Sandy was one of seven scholars who contributed to Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) distillation of principles of good practice in undergraduate education that undergirds the concept of student engagement. Prominent among these is the power of peers to influence learning and identity development, the value of student-faculty interaction, and the role of co-curricular involvement on student learning. In addition, Sandy’s (1991) work on assessment in higher education documented the relationship between educational practices and processes and outcomes, adding much needed impetus to the fledgling assessment movement in the U.S.

Peter first met Sandy in 1981 when Sandy served as a member of the Advisory Committee for a Kellogg funded project that Peter directed at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) on Using Information on Student Outcomes to Improve College Student Learning and Development. He also pointed out that Sandy was an unfailingly good colleague, according all of those with whom he interacted with respect and good cheer. Since that first encounter, Sandy became, to put it succinctly, the single most significant influence on Peter’s research, thinking, and subsequent career about how and what students learn in college. Sandy’s later service on the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, which NCHEMS staffed, built on this initial contribution by cementing student assessment as one of three core principles, together with high expectations and active involvement, to guide research on academic improvement. These principles have provided valid and practical guidance to assessment work ever since.

Sandy influenced George’s thinking, teaching, and research long before meeting him, having read many of Sandy’s early publications in graduate school and later incorporating them as required readings in his higher education and

Viewpoint

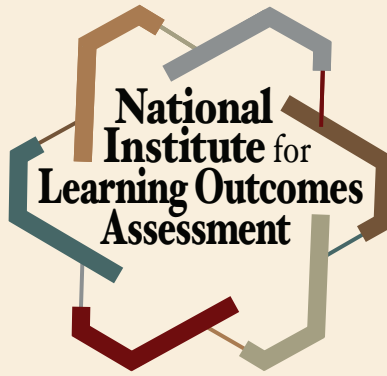
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student affairs courses at Indiana University. As with other higher education scholars, George often cited Sandy in his own work. Sandy was a key member of the writing team (for which George was the scribe) that produced the Student Learning Imperative (1996) issued by the American College Personnel Association, a clarion call for the student affairs profession to intentionally create the conditions that foster high levels of learning and personal development. George had the good fortune of getting to know Sandy better in 1998 after nominating and hosting him for several days when Sandy presented two distinguished IU Patton Lectures.

Sandy's longitudinal studies via CIRP about the impact of college on students and his involvement theory were foundational for understanding and designing research on college student development and were particularly important to the development of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which George directed. Sandy rendered invaluable service as a member of the NSSE Design Team led by Peter, a group of assessment experts that designed the NSSE questionnaire and oversaw its field testing. In an early NSSE Design Team meeting, Sandy emphatically and persuasively made the point that to shift the national conversation about what matters to collegiate quality and help energize and contribute to institutional improvement, NSSE had to be more than just another student survey. It needed to stimulate, help lead, and support a movement focused on learning, teaching, and holistic personal development. This became NSSE's mantra and continues to guide its work to this day.

Tall in stature, with a wide-ranging intellect, infectious laugh, generative spirit, and prodigious output, Alexander W. (Sandy) Astin made a profound, unmatched impact on higher education and countless students and scholars.

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