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NEW PARADIGMS FOR EVALUATING  
DIPLOMACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
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Methods Track

PowerPoint presentation from workshop on  
A Retrospective on Evaluation in the US Federal Public  
Sector

Session transcript:

<http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/rm/2010/148059.htm>

# **Increasing the Effectiveness of Development Assistance & Diplomacy Through Rigorous Evidence About “What Works”**

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Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

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# Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

- ◆ A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.
- ◆ Mission: To increase government effectiveness through rigorous evidence about “what works.”
- ◆ Coalition has no affiliation with any programs or program models – thus serves as an objective, independent resource on evidence-based programs.
- ◆ Funded independently, by national philanthropic foundations (e.g., MacArthur).

## Recent independent assessment found:

*“Over the past five years, the Coalition has successfully influenced legislative language, increased funding for evidence-based evaluations and programs, helped shape OMB’s Program Assessment Rating Tool, and raised the level of debate in the policy process regarding standards of evidence. The Coalition has established a generally positive reputation as a rigorous, responsive, honest, and impartial advocate for evidence-based approaches, primarily at the federal level.”*

# Coalition's Board of Advisors

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Westat

# 1. Rationale for Evidence-Based Policy

Problem: Tens of billions are spent annually on development, yet little is known about “what works”

- ◆ That was central finding of the recent Evaluation Gap report , based on its comprehensive assessment of the evaluation literature for projects funded by UN agencies, multilateral development banks, and developing country governments.
- ◆ Earlier World Bank reviews reached similar conclusions.

## Rigorous evaluations have identified interventions that are ineffective/harmful:

- ◆ Vouchers for disadvantaged workers, to subsidize their employment

Well-conducted randomized trial found large negative effects on employment.

- ◆ Increasing grassroots participation in monitoring road projects in Indonesia

Well-conducted randomized trial found no effect on corruption/waste in project implementation.

## Rigorous evaluations have identified a few effective interventions:

### ◆ Small incentives to families for child vaccination in India

Well-conducted randomized trial found that simple, low-cost strategy doubled the vaccination rate (18% vs 39%).

### ◆ Increasing gov't audits of road projects in Indonesia (from 4% of projects to 100%)

Well-conducted randomized trial found 30% reduction in corruption/waste, vs control group. Audit benefit > cost.

Evidence-based policy seeks to incorporate two main reforms into government programs:

1. Increased funding for rigorous evaluations, to grow the number of research-proven interventions.
2. Strong incentives & assistance for program grantees to adopt the research-proven interventions.

# New federal evidence-based initiatives we've helped inform and/or shape:

- ◆ OMB-led government-wide evaluation initiative:
  - \$100 million in new funds for rigorous evaluations in FY11 (many likely to be randomized trials)
- ◆ Newly-enacted initiatives to expand implementation of evidence-based interventions:
  - Evidence-Based Home Visitation - HHS (\$1.5B/5yrs)
  - Teen Pregnancy Prevention - HHS (\$110M)
  - Social Innovation Fund - CNCS (\$50 million)
  - Investing in Innovation Fund - Dept of Ed (\$650M)

## **2. What Kinds of Evidence Are Needed To Increase Gov't Effectiveness?**

# We believe many types research/evaluation are needed:

- ◆ Implementation studies.
- ◆ Well-conducted comparison-group studies, and small randomized trials (RCTs), to identify promising programs that merit more rigorous evaluation.
- ◆ We generally advocate large RCTs of programs at-scale only when program has been shown (i) well-implemented, and (ii) highly promising.

## But a Central Theme of Our Work, Consistent With A Recent National Academies Recommendation

... is that evidence of effectiveness generally  
“cannot be considered definitive” unless  
ultimately confirmed in well-conducted RCTs,  
“even if based on the next strongest designs.”

# Second-Best When Random Assignment Is Not Possible:

## ◆ *Observably-equivalent* comparison-group study.

The groups should be:

1. Highly similar in key characteristics;
2. Not formed through self-selection (or other methods likely to create differences in motivation etc)
3. Preferably, chosen prospectively (i.e., before the intervention is administered).

# Less Rigorous Study Designs Include:

- ◆ Comparison-group studies in which the groups are *not equivalent* in key characteristics;
- ◆ Pre-post studies; and
- ◆ Outcome metrics (without reference to a control or comparison group).

*Such designs can be valuable for identifying promising interventions that merit more rigorous evaluation, BUT:*

# Too Often, Promising Findings in Non-Randomized Studies Are Not Confirmed in Subsequent, More Definitive RCTs

- ◆ **In medicine:** 50-80% of interventions found promising in phase II (nonrandomized studies or small efficacy trials) are found ineffective in phase III (sizable RCTs).
- ◆ **In K-12 education:** 9 of the 10 large RCTs of education strategies funded by Institute of Education Sciences 2003-2010 found weak or no positive effects.
- ◆ **Similar pattern occurs in other areas** (e.g., welfare/employment, crime prevention, etc.)

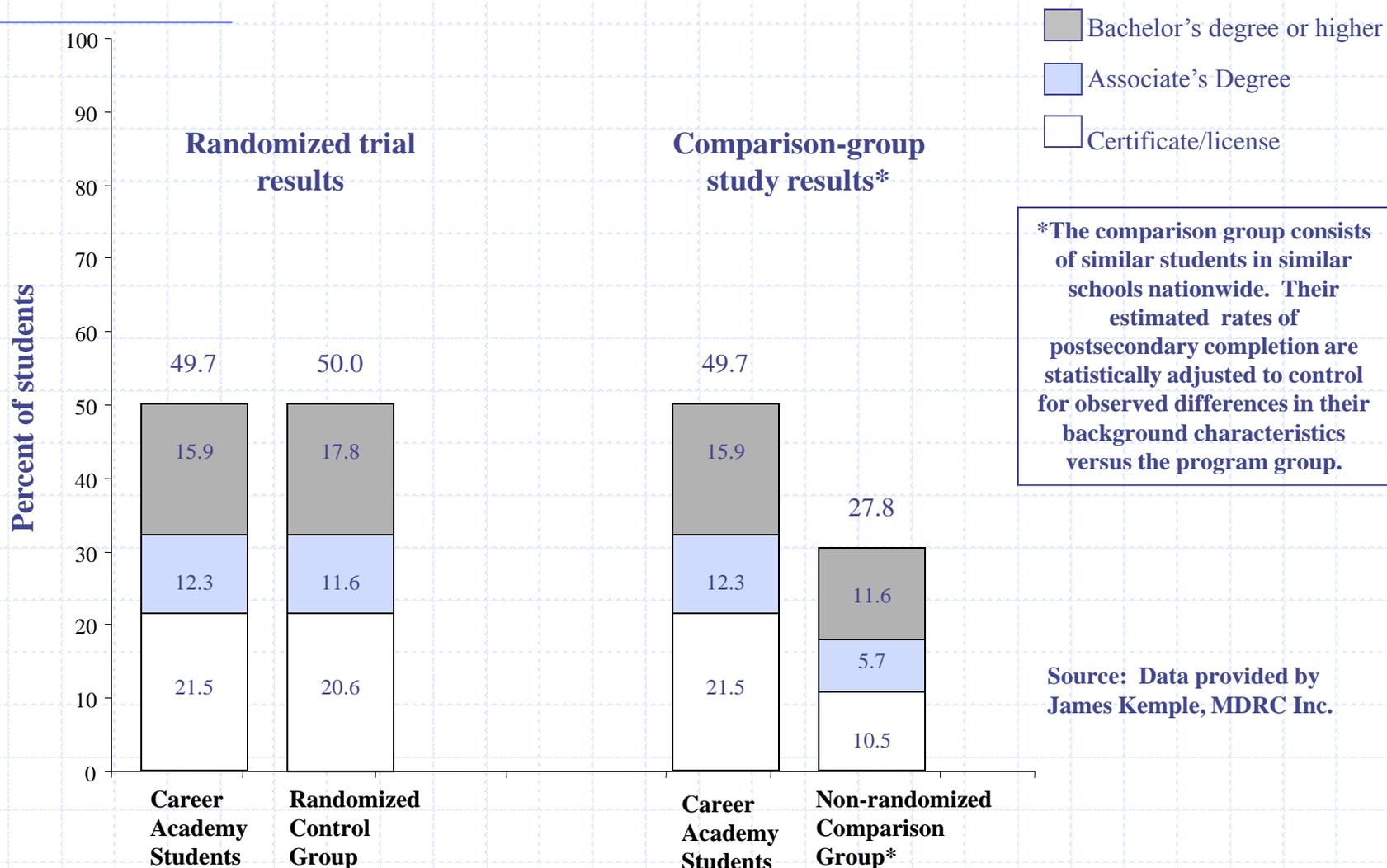
# Example – AIDS Vaccine Failure in Africa

◆ Head of AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition, commenting on the vaccine failure:

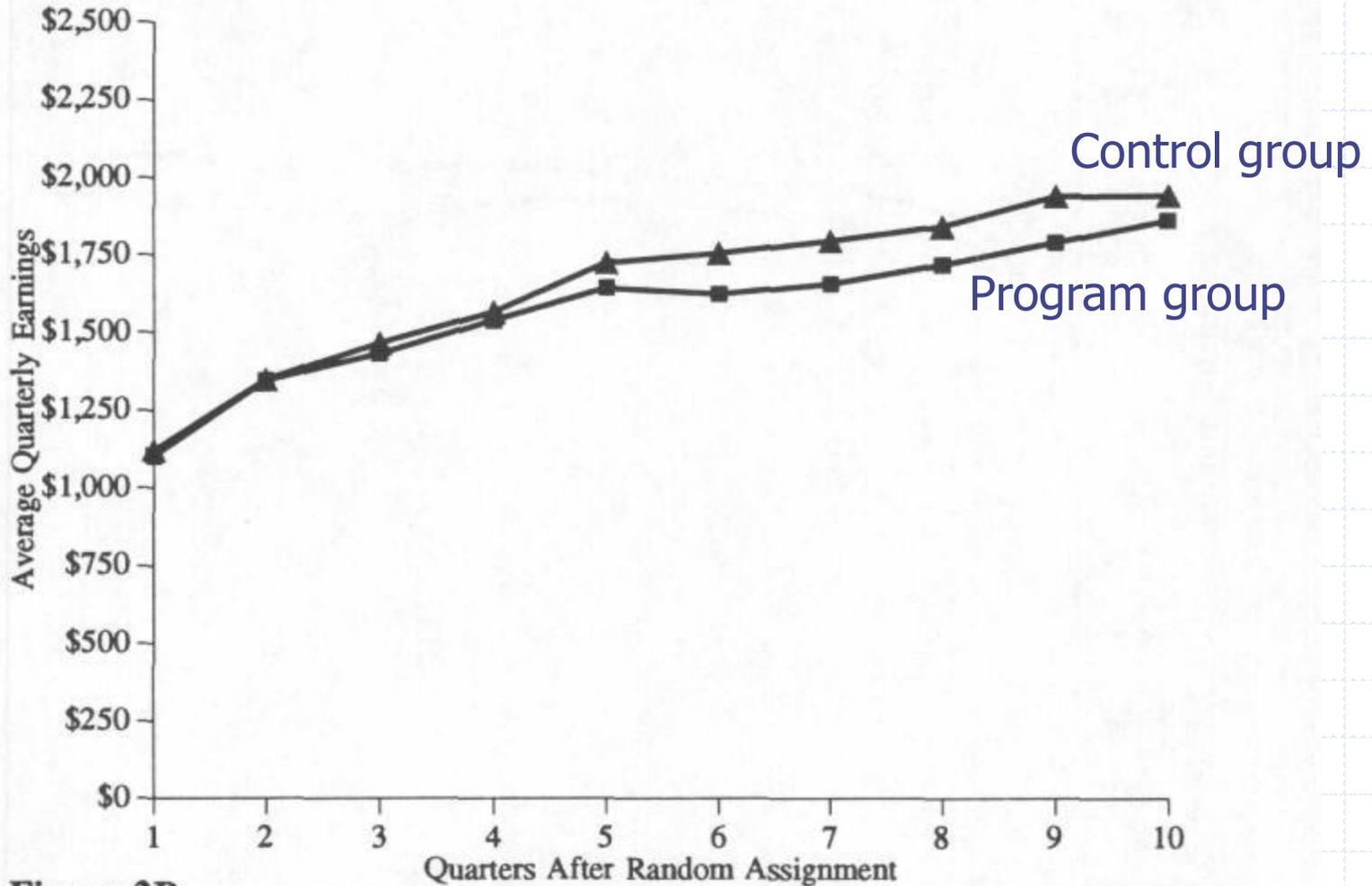
*"This is ... an important milestone in many respects. This is the way products get developed. Lots of things don't work, and we're on the road to finding something that does."*

-- Mitchell Warren, July 2008

# Impact of Career Academies on Completion of a Postsecondary Credential



# Job Training Partnership Act: Impact on Earnings of Male Youth (Non-arrestees)



**Figure 2B**  
*Mean Earnings, by Quarter: Male Youth Non-arrestees*

# How might one rigorously evaluate a public diplomacy strategy? Example:

- ◆ To be evaluated: A strategy to undermine public support for terrorist ideology in a country where such ideology is widespread (e.g., fund schools run by moderates, conduct media campaign on harm terrorism causes innocent civilians).
- ◆ First: Identify ~60 communities where support for violence against Americans exists.
- ◆ Second: Randomly assign half to receive the strategy, and half to a control group.
- ◆ Third: Measure attitudes towards terrorism vs. U.S. in treatment & control communities over time.

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