Nurturing an Exchange of Views for Identifying and Achieving Shared, Quality Learning Outcomes

Panel Discussion
Western Academic Leadership Forum
19 April 2012
What is All the Fuss About? A Coming Storm?

- Spellings: from deference to skepticism: research, teaching, and mass higher education.

- The issues of cost/access, completion, quality.

- Reauthorizations as occasions for scrutiny: the once and future vise on accreditation.

- Lamar Alexander (2008): “If colleges and universities don’t do something about assessment and accountability, the federal government will do it for them.”
Why Haven’t/How Can We Respond?  
Who’s “We”?  

• A lot of pluribus, not much unum: a diffuse, decentralized industry.  

• Structurally: autonomy/diversity within/without, loosely-joined organizations.  

• Culturally: the Gandhi problem—who is interested/has an interest in learning?
What is to be Done? Changing Things Before Change Happens To Us.

- The centrality of quality and student learning (this panel).

- A shift in professional (self)-understandings and all that goes with it (this panel).

- Organizing and becoming part of a collective endeavor, higher education “as a vocation” (did I mention this panel?).

- Professional norms and standards, the New Leadership Alliance and *Committing to Quality*. 

David Paris
New Leadership Alliance
Cognitive Courseware Design

APLU/AACC/OLI planning grant funded by B&M Gates Foundation

- Creating adaptive learning technology environments for students in intro/gateway courses taught at universities and community colleges
- Collective development effort of APLU universities and community college faculties in five areas (psychology, English composition, pre-calculus, biology, economics)
- Agree on the “core” 80%, allow faculty variation
• Define subject content down to specific learning outcomes and myriad performances of knowledge

• Personalized, adaptive support for each student
  ▫ – learning what the student knows
  ▫ – providing what the student needs

• Feedback
  ▫ Immediate feedback to the student
  ▫ Student mastery and mysteries conveyed to the instructor
  ▫ Coursewares and system improvements guided by learning what works and what doesn’t

R. Michael Tanner
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)
• Benefits foreseen
  ▫ Faster, more enjoyable learning with better retention for diverse heterogeneous backgrounds
  ▫ Faculty time devoted more to meaningful interaction
  ▫ Transfer success resulting from common learning expectations
  ▫ Low-cost per student through large scale and information technology

• Challenges and horizons
  ▫ Agreement on learning outcomes
  ▫ Gaining faculty enthusiasm => wide adoption
  ▫ Needed: HE Consortium to be an aggregator of demand, screener for quality, and steward of materials

R. Michael Tanner
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)
What topics are being discussed?

Norma Ming
Nexus Research & Policy Center

Are participants interacting meaningfully?

- Student posts & instructor posts almost entirely separate
- Lack of similarity in language
- *Did the students understand the instructor?*

Norma Ming
Nexus Research & Policy Center

- Some student-instructor overlap:
  - “Good job!” “Can you say more?”
- Student-only region:
  - Off-topic posts, misconceptions

(What) Are students learning in discussions?

- ROYGBIV progression of discussion threads over time
  - More dispersed (wk 1, 2)
  - More tightly clustered (wk 5, 6)
  - Converge across wks and across classes
- Train classifier to track:
  - Desirable (normative) concepts
  - Undesirable (non-normative) concepts
- Help instructors recognize (and intervene on) misconceptions, then support correct concepts

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From ongoing work in collaboration with Vivienne Ming, Socos LLC.
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