The Role of Assessment in Assuring Academic Quality

Western Academic Leadership Forum

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Peter Ewell
National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)
Logic of this Session

- Prominent Goals in Place for Considerable Expansion in Degree Production (Obama, Lumina, Gates)
- Easy Way to Attain these Goals is Simply to Print Degrees
- Right Way to Attain these Goals is to Assure Academic Quality through Learning Outcomes Assessment
- Doing So Will Require a New “Academic Currency”
- Doing So Will Also Require an Aligned Learning Outcomes Framework Like the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile
Learning as Academic Currency

- Virtues of the Credit System
- Breakdowns of the Credit System
- Imagining an Alternative
- Some “Existence Proofs”
- Some Lessons from Bologna
Virtues of the Credit System

- Ready Transferability
- Supports Calculation of Teaching Loads
- Helps in Counting Costs
- Helps in Setting Prices (e.g. Tuition)
- Same Currency Applies to Students and Courses
Breakdowns of the Credit System

- Asynchronous Instructional Approaches
- Only a Proxy for Learning
- Lack of Real Equivalency or Acceptability Across Settings
- Inhibits Innovation by “Locking In” a Particular Mode of Instructional Provision
What’s Wrong with Grades?

- Inability to Communicate or Encompass the Results of *Multiple* Learning Events
- Lack of Agreed-Upon Achievement Criteria (Validity)
- Faculty Judgments are Inconsistent (Reliability)
Imagining an Alternative

- Mastery is What Counts
- Time is Irrelevant
- Place is Irrelevant
- Outcomes Mapped to Learning Experiences
- Assessment Embedded in Learning Experiences
Some “Existence Proofs”

- Asynchronous Degree Programs (e.g. Fielding University)

- Curricula Anchored on Abilities Frameworks (e.g. University of Charleston)

- Mastery-Based Degree Programs (e.g. Western Governors University)
Some Lessons from Bologna

- The **Student**, Not Course or Content, is the Primary Unit of Analysis

- All Students are Assessed, Not Just a Sample or an Average

- Tuning

- Diploma Supplement

- Qualifications Frameworks
Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)

- Three Degree Levels: Associate, Bachelor's, and Master's
- Five Learning Areas: Specialized Knowledge, Broad/Integrative Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, Applied Learning, and Civic Learning
- Framed as Successively Inclusive Hierarchies of “Action Verbs” to Describe Outcomes at Each Degree Level
- Intended as a “Beta” Version, for Testing, Experimentation, and Further Development
An Example: Communication Skills

**Associate Level**: The student presents substantially error-free prose in both argumentative and narrative forms to general and specialized audiences.

**Bachelor’s Level**: The student constructs sustained, coherent arguments and/or narratives and/or explications of technical issues and processes, in two media, to general and specialized audiences.

**Master’s Level**: The student creates sustained, coherent arguments or explanations and reflections on his or her work or that of collaborators (if applicable) in two or more media or languages, to both general and specialized audiences.
The DQP and Assessment

The DQP Asserts that *Every* Student Should Graduate with the Designated Competencies. This Means that:

- The Typical Approach of Setting Outcomes as “Aspirations” and Conducting Assessments of “Average” Student Performance is not Adequate
- Assessment as an “Add-On” to the Curriculum (e.g. via Standardized Test) is Not Appropriate
- Assessment Must Be Embedded in Regular Student Assignments and Examination Questions and Certified at Multiple Levels on the Way to Degree Completion
Some Implications

- Curricular Mapping
- Rubrics and Assignment Templates
- Navigating the Curriculum
- Documenting Learning
- Benchmarking and Comparison
**Curricular Mapping**

- Two-Dimensional Matrix with Courses on One Dimension and Competencies on the Other

- Entries Note Whether the Competency is Taught, Required, or Mastered at a Given Level in the Course

- Usually Done for the Highest Enrollment Courses in Both General Education and the Major

- Used to Plan Where “Signature Assignments” Should be Located
### Example of a Course Level Curriculum Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Analytical Use of Inquiry</th>
<th>Engaging Information Diverse Fluency Resources Perspectives</th>
<th>Quantitative Fluency</th>
<th>Communications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course #1</td>
<td>Addressed?</td>
<td>Tested or Assessed?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Course #4</td>
<td>Addressed?</td>
<td>Tested or Assessed?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[etc]
Rubrics and Assignment Templates

- Rubrics Array Multiple Criteria for Judging Student Constructed Responses (to an Assignment, Test Question, etc.) at Various Levels

- Assignment Templates Support the Development of Assignments that Unavoidably Elicit Demonstration of a Particular Competency

- Assignment Templates “Mirror” Rubrics by Noting the Central Task to be Undertaken, How the Answer Should be Communicated, and How Extensive or Evidential the Response Should Be
**Points About Assignment Templates**

- **Basic Format:** “Compare the Substance of [Argument X] with [Argument Y] by Means of a Written Essay [of Z Length] that Contains at Least Three Examples of Important Ways in Which these Arguments Differ”

- Should Address No More than Two or Three Competencies

- Should Combine DQP Competencies (which are broad and generic) with Subject Specific Competencies Tied to Course Content
Navigating the Curriculum

- The DQP Demands that Curricular Sequences be Intentional and Cumulative (A “Vector of Learning”)

- Curricular Maps Can be Used to Plan or Revise Curricula by Displaying a Sequence of Competencies to be Mastered and the Assignments to Do This

- Allows Development of “Ability Transcripts” that Show Where Each Student Is in Mastering Competencies

- Answers the Most Commonly Posed Student Question: “Why Do I Have to Take this Course?”
Documenting Learning

- Adopting DQP Requires a Competency-Positioned Student Unit Record System

- The System Should Record for Each Student Which Competency is Mastered, at What Level, at What Point in Time and Occasion, and Demonstrated through What Kind of Assessment

- Allows Mastery Data to be Linked to Registration Data

- Many Commercial Systems Work Well for This (TracDat, eLumen, WEAVE Online, etc.)
Benchmarking and Comparison

- The DQP Can Act as a “Universal Translator” for Conversations About Mastery Across Institutions

- Works Best in Consortia of Similar Institutions

- Some Benchmarking Approaches:
  - Multiple Third-Party Raters
  - Cross Rating
  - Multi-Institutional Rating (Single Raters)
What Does Assuring Quality Require?

- Requires Faculty to be Much More Systematic and Intentional than is Currently the Case in Most Places
  - Requires Careful Planning of Course Sequences and Embedded Assignments
  - Assignments and Rubrics Should be Carefully Scripted to Elicit and Judge Student Responses
  - Done in Collaboration Across Instructional Staff

- This Will Demand Considerable Attention to Faculty Development