


From “Assessment” to Competency-Based Quality Assurance



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The Changing Shape of Undergraduate Instruction



- ⌘ Increasingly “Modularized” Curriculum
- ⌘ Multi-Institutional Attendance Patterns
- ⌘ Growing Role of “Students as Consumers”
- ⌘ Growing Knowledge About Instructional “Good Practice”
- ⌘ Technology as a “Wild Card”

What's Good About These Changes?



- ⌘ Broader Access to Higher Education
- ⌘ Increased “Portability” of Knowledge and Skills
- ⌘ Higher Learning as a Lifelong Endeavor
- ⌘ Potential for Greater Individualization of Learning

Significant Challenges Posed by These Changes



- ⌘ Loss of Coherence Within and Across Learning Experiences
- ⌘ De-Emphasis of Broad Integrative Abilities in Favor of De-Contextualized “Skills”
- ⌘ Threats to the “Integrity” of Many College Credentials

Some External Multipliers of These Trends




- ⌘ The Competency Movement in Business and Industry
- ⌘ Competition from “New Providers” of Postsecondary Education
- ⌘ Standards-Driven Reform in K-12 [and its Effects on “K-16”]
- ⌘ Public Information About Performance

Some Desired Attributes of College Graduates




- ⌘ Broad Critical-Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills
- ⌘ Commitment to Continuous Learning
- ⌘ Key Interpersonal Skills (e.g., Oral Communications)
- ⌘ Strong Sense of Personal Responsibility
- ⌘ Ability to “Transcend Parochial World View”
- ⌘ Strong Sense of “Professionalism” and Organizational Commitment

Some Implications of this View of “Outcomes”




- ⌘ Focus on Higher-Order “Literacies” as Well as Specific Skills
- ⌘ Frame Outcomes in Terms of Integrated Abilities [not just “Knowledge”]
- ⌘ Foster Attitudes *and* Academics Together

Integrity as a Guiding Metaphor: Three Views



- ⌘ Integrity as *Substance*: Standards and Content
- ⌘ Integrity as *Coherence*: Horizontal and Vertical Integration
- ⌘ Integrity as *Trustworthiness*: Credentials as a Credible Medium of Exchange

Origins of “Assessment” in Higher Education



- ⌘ Internal: Coherence in the Curriculum
- ⌘ External: Perceived “Crisis of Quality”
[Mostly in K-12]
- ⌘ Both Arose at About the Same Time

Why Not Grades?



- ⌘ Can't Communicate About the Outcomes of *Groups* of Courses
- ⌘ Lack of Agreed-Upon Content/Outcome Referents ["Standards I"]
- ⌘ Judgements are Inter-subjectively Unreliable ["Standards II"]

Assessment Approaches: A Basic Distinction



- ⌘ *Accountability-Based*: Assessments Added onto Instruction to “Check Up” on the System in the Aggregate
- ⌘ *Quality-Assurance*: Assessments Built Into the System to Assure Levels of Individual Student Attainment

Quality Assurance: Three Policy Approaches



⌘ Assessment-Based Credentials

⌘ Aligning Locally-Developed Standards

⌘ “Auditing” Local Assessment Practices

Assessment-Based Credentials



- ⌘ Assumes Common Standards and Common Assessments
- ⌘ Model: CLEP/AP Examinations and Local Placement Tests
- ⌘ Requires Assessments that are Face Valid and Demonstrably Effective in Predicting Success in Differing Curricular Settings

Attractions of Assessment-Based Credentials



- ⌘ Straightforward and Clear
- ⌘ Applicable to Every Student
- ⌘ Externally Credible

Drawbacks of Assessment-Based Credentials



⌘ Lack of Instrumentation

⌘ Inappropriate Assessment Modalities

⌘ Danger of Excessive Standardization [and a “Lowest Common Denominator” Effect]

Aligning Locally-Developed Standards



- ⌘ Assumes Common Standards but Not Common Assessments
- ⌘ Model: “External Examiner”
- ⌘ Basic Method= “Secondary Reading” of Selected Student Work Products
- ⌘ Requires Sampling [of Students/Products]
- ⌘ Requires Rubrics for Scoring Dissimilar Examples

Attractions of Aligning Local Standards



- ⌘ Accommodates [Appropriate] Variations in Curriculum
- ⌘ Actively Engages Faculty Across Disciplines and Institutions
- ⌘ Directly Examines Actual Examples of Student Work

Drawbacks of Aligning Local Standards



- ⌘ Requires Agreed-Upon Rubrics or Criteria for Judgement
- ⌘ Demands Considerable Time and Training
- ⌘ Doesn't "Guarantee" Individual Student Attainment

Auditing Local Assessment Practices



- ⌘ Assumes Neither Common Detailed Standards nor Common Assessments
- ⌘ Models: “Academic Audit”/Baldrige Award/ISO9000
- ⌘ Focuses on Department’s Own “Quality Assurance Processes”
- ⌘ Must Examine How Students Are Assessed [Graded and Tested] Locally

Attractions of Auditing Assessment Practices



- ⌘ Accommodates [Appropriate] Variations in Curriculum
- ⌘ Doesn't Require a Common "Qualifications Framework" for Each Ability
- ⌘ Can Potentially be Linked to Other Kinds of Review [e.g. Accreditation]

Drawbacks of Auditing Assessment Practices




- ⌘ Requires Appropriate Review Protocols and Training
- ⌘ Raises Issues of “Academic Freedom” If Applied to Grades
- ⌘ Doesn’t “Guarantee” Individual Student Attainment

Some Ongoing Reminders...



- ⌘ Continually Reference Real Students and Actual Student Work
- ⌘ Don't Just "Make Measures;" Emphasize Building "Communities of Judgement" Instead
- ⌘ Remember that Things Don't Stand Still

Some Unavoidable “Bottom Lines” for Policy



- ⌘ “Show Me” Needs to Replace “Trust Me”
- ⌘ “It’s About Competency...[Stupid]”
- ⌘ “Feel-Good” Standards Help Nobody
- ⌘ “The Pig’s no Fatter from Being Weighed”