

Spring 2017 Assessment Plan Feedback: comments collected from emails and survey responses

History section - need a new area on why we went to the Coaches model? What was the rationale for that? Jumps from history to need Assessment coordinator. What was the final document from the Closing the Loop workshop? (Sally and Tanya - 2012 workshop?) Do we have that evidence piece anywhere?

Page 6 - Jumps from analysis of history, gaps, but then jumps to Student Service and support units. Seems it skips over instructional? Need transition and look at it from culture of self improvement rather than from accreditation compliance. Needs the honest introspection.

-This report is all about process, not about Data and the use of data

-Some items are weirdly specific to the Assessment director - "Oversee the creation of a link from each class...."

Strengths:

1. A&S discipline coordinators coming back. Like the idea of having them coming back. Breaks things down into manageable workloads. Already have for CTE, should have for A&S. Like TEs for coordinators.
2. Focus on recognition and professional development which is much needed.
3. Course level SLO handbook that will be created. New faculty and those that don't have the background will need the handbook.
4. Regular deadlines for completion - p.11.
5. Assessment dialog p.14 two hour sessions.
6. Emphasis on adjunct faculty completing assessments. If lecturers are now responsible for assessment, shouldn't that be a part of the person's job? Culture shift difficult to understand.

Questions and areas for improvement:

1. Who is the audience of this document? Need attention and clarity on who the audience is.
2. Take out reference to contract renewal. Have a well known established deadline and timeline
3. P. 11 Number 11 and 12: presumes most courses are only five years. Some CTE programs do them in a shorter cycle. What do you mean by "Set current practice"? Need to reword.
4. SLO committee is interested in creating a new paradigm that is inquiry based and we should set aside time during every convocation that breaks the assessment cycle into 4's.
5. Should recognize programs, not individuals for the recognition.
6. May have up to 27 Discipline coordinators? That's a lot of cost and TEs.
7. Convincing people that grading is not assessment is a big chore.
8. P.10, #5 - Establish an Assessment Committee - what is the structure of organizing this

group? Does it supplant the SLO committee? Don't we already have an Assessment work group?

9. Missed opportunity: Why is OFIE not mentioned in this document? What role does OFIE play and shouldn't Institutional effectiveness be a large part in assessment? Re-envision OFIE? What are their roles, what are they doing? Need to review the structure of OFIE - IR, grants, service learning, sustainability. Request an analysis of the structure of the campus? If OFIE has 3 people in the office, what are the roles of people that work there, what is the justification for the hiring?

10. Gen Ed assessment issue - why are we reviving Cornerstone project? Don't know that we ever decided that this is a way to go and not sure that it was effective, so why revisit?

11. SUOs - creating a committee of non instructionals? Should be a mixture of staff and faculty, not just faculty. Why SUOs and LERAs and SERAs? Stick to terminology people already know.

12. Make sure CTE assessment is included in all areas - it seems to be mentioned here and there, but not consistent.

13. Certificate and non-credit should go together but not include Gen Ed - only ILOs

14. Need to reorg - need to have an AA Program Director (Have ASNS and Hawn Studies, but not a Program Director for the AA). Would be able to do better assessment of the programs in the area.

15. Culture of Inquiry is not widespread - how do we get to that point?

General Concerns:

- More than anything else, this Draft is totalitarian in its depth and scope across the campus. If implemented, it will completely alter all forms of student instruction, dramatically reduce available instruction time, and further stifle any passion one has for teaching.
- Put more simply, it will reduce faculty to perpetual accountants more concerned with reporting (invalid) numbers than engaging students and promoting success (whose true measure goes beyond any contrived metric).
- Primary assessments are already done, and have always been done, in courses in the form of exams, quizzes, assignments, presentations... Therefore, this Draft is requiring assessments of assessments.
- Ethically and professionally, the results of the aforementioned forms of primary assessment are already acted upon and instructional approaches modified in an ongoing manner to improve courses and the success of students. But this Draft is now requiring endless cycles of documentation, reporting, and justification of assessments of assessments.
- While this Draft states that a great deal of campus input was utilized in its development, the

majority of faculty was not involved, and most likely do not support the comprehensively excessive philosophical and curricular changes proposed in this Draft.

- Conclusive data qualifying these additional layers of assessment have never been presented or justified to the faculty, and not fully conclusive, even now.
- By most accounts, the primary driver for additional assessment consistently comes from meeting accreditation standards, which other campuses have also had strong reservations to.
- While supporting accreditation is cited as a major portion in the genesis of this Draft, the accreditation standards themselves do not frame/outline/explicitly cite such extensive forms of reformulation within campuses.
- This Draft tries to convince the reader that assessment is a modern teaching practice, but it is merely repackaging of traditional assessment with contemporary words and superfluous layers added.
- If the campus truly wanted to implement modern teaching practices, the resources allotted to assessment could immediately be implemented for improvements to nearly all instructional rooms and laboratories, which are sorely lacking as is.
- In a voluntary and independent form, the spirit of assessment is something that is enacted by astute instructors. However, imposing such a grotesque framework upon faculty merely reduces them to workers subservient to administrative policies and goals.
- There was no properly shared governance in the development of this Draft, and therefore it is in violation of the current faculty UHPA contract.

Dubious Endorsements:

- Certain individuals listed within the preface actually do not support this Draft in its current form. For example, certain Taskstream Coordinators appear to have their own reservations to these proposed policies.
- In fact, Taskstream Coordinators have responded to faculty disapproval in the past and have more recently been working towards to a more reasonable approach to assessment.
- Related to this, stumbles at other campuses suggest that the best approach to develop any form of assessment must begin with the faculty (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/01/27/aacu>).
- Many entities listed as stakeholders in the development of this Draft do not in fact instruct, or have withdrawn from instruction; and none have freely come forward to champion the current Draft. This immediately raises the question as to why these leaders/administrators should dictate policy onto the faculty, when in fact they do not have firsthand or current experience in courses, or how best to instruct in them.
- Cites within the Draft come from assessment and accreditation administrators and coordinators, which merely shows self-promotion and preservation to ideals that these references have clear financial and employment stakes.
- Conversely, academic literature also suggests assessment is often artifactual, inaccurate, and

used inappropriately to justify success of a campus and its leadership
(<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/04/07/essay-how-fixation-inane-student-learning-outcomes-fails-ensure-academic-quality>).

Historical Context:

- Citing past campus documents does not validate the authenticity or implementation of this Draft. Many of these statements were generated through previous accreditation rounds and not vetted through the faculty at large.
- This Draft states that “Assessment is driven by faculty and staff,” when in fact this Draft is being driven a drastic shift in leadership policy, potentially under the guise of accreditation needs. More clearly stated – this is a top down policy, and therefore not in the best interest of the instructor or student.
- This Draft states that assessment is supported by “transparency of decision-making,” when in fact few knew of the genesis or subsequent inception of this plan.
- Putting such superficial weight on Student Learning Outcomes actually diminishes the greater value of education, which includes proper preparation for downstream degree pathways and meaningful employment. These are more accurate measurements of course success, yet this Draft addresses neither and instead chooses arbitrary standards set at the individual course level.
- The 2007 “4-Step Assessment Cycle” states that it is “faculty determine who will be assessed, when they will be assessed, what will be assessed, how they will be assessed, and how the data will be collected, stored and used.” While stated (transparently), quite obviously the current Draft does not offer this. Instead, a small group of individuals are seeking to direct the future efforts of all. And, as mentioned above, many of these individuals won’t even be responsible for implementing these provisions on a daily basis since they do not instruct.
- The stated 2016 Faculty Senate Course Level Assessment Plan provides broad language on assessment, which is currently done in any course. The proposed Draft goes far beyond this language in providing a formalized, institutionalized framework that becomes unreasonably onerous on faculty that are already working at full capacity.
- On page 5, the Draft states that “assessment looks at student learning across students, sections and courses.” This degree of accountability is far beyond the workload defined in any hiring policies or union contracts. Instructors are (rightly) hired primarily due to their area of expertise. The broader responsibility of aggregate data collection of sections and courses falls upon individuals that are hired in administrative and specialized positions.
- Related to this, when new faculty are hired they must provide justification of their expertise and instruction abilities, not their assessment methods.
- This Draft would require faculty to continually justify their efforts, while simultaneously taking away their (already limited) time to actually improve their teaching. Most certainly, this Draft is a first step in subsequently implementing course completion and student success rates in

promotions.

The Course Level Assessment Plan – Options 1-3:

- These options would automatically drive faculty to shorten their course competencies in order to make all the additional assessment work manageable within their workloads. To any reasonable instructor already carrying four to six courses each term, this is simply an impossible policy to satisfy.
- Therefore, a small number of faculty would determine how to shift precious time/resources into assessing all their competencies, while many will simply remove most of their course competencies.
- Given that competencies provide a framework for other faculty to instruct a course, an abbreviated version of them would be a disservice for incoming instructors, and it would not truly reflect the content of a course.
- Consequently, these policies would be yet another step in lowering the rigor of courses in order to meet a fabricated set of goals that address nothing other than increasingly bloated accreditation standards and/or administrative policies that would allow greater control over the faculty.
- The additional work responsibilities required to satisfy content within the Draft are not found in the current union contract, would be time-consuming, dissuade faculty from being course coordinators, and have little or no reassigned time provided.
- The program/discipline coordinator would be tasked with directing peers to institute changes in their courses, this would inevitably pit faculty against faculty and directly contravene academic freedom

The Course Level Assessment Plan – Option 4:

- Although many campus faculty already use student surveys such as the SALG, this Draft suggests that our current UH-mandated surveys are not adequate.
- If this is true, and yet another form of student self-assessment must be done, then why have the mandated surveys even remain in the first place?

A much more reasonable Assessment Plan proposal – Option A:

- Assessment Coordinators have already been spending ample time fine-tuning the approach to assessment, and have more recently proposed a reasonable compromise for instructors.
- This approach allows instructors to independently determine one or more of their critical course areas and implement a plan to evaluate and (actively try to) improve it.
- This approach allows instructors the academic freedom to determine key components of their course, determine what is working and what is not, and modify it in an effort to improve student success.
- This approach does not foist simply all of the course competencies/SLOs upon the instructor

(in all classes) for evaluation and modification. Instead, it allows the instructor to systematically manage the more relevant competency/outcome, and then work on others in turn.

- This approach more logical and reasonable given the instructors workload and expertise.
- And importantly, assessing, devising, modifying, collecting data, assessing (again), and reporting on conclusions made on all competencies/SLOs simultaneously (across all sections and courses) in just pure fantasy and cannot be accomplished with any true rigor or success.

Administrative, Student Service and Support Units Assessment:

- This section of the Draft implies that nearly all campus entities will now become engrossed in assessment cycles. Some of these units don't relate to the classes (or topics conveyed within), and certainly have other primary responsibilities that require their efforts. The incorporation of armchair directors and external evaluators is wholly demoralizing to scholarly instructors.
- Put more simply, this Draft dictates that many non-instructional members of campus would now become involved in course instruction, which is simply unacceptable and impractical.
- The hiring of a full-time assessment coordinator (like so many other things) stretches limited campus resources and creates yet another administrative position to develop and direct policy. It can be assumed that this new position would then institute policy to further satisfy ever-increasing and meaningless accreditation standards, while also justifying their own employment/position on campus.
- Does the campus truly need: course coordinator assessors, group/unit assessors, Learning Effectiveness Research Advisors, Support Effectiveness Research Advisors, a full-time assessment director, a Faculty Senate assessment committee, and a CAC assessment work group????
- Put more plainly, at what point would this cancerous assessment growth stop?
- This Draft outlines that the new Assessment Director position would be chair of the Assessment Committee, this would put administration in charge of a faculty committee. Clearly this is an improper line within campus structure.

Assessment Recommendations:

- Contrary to the justification provided in this section, and as mentioned before, there exists individual faculty members observations on the World Wide Web that indicate assessment may serve as a fool's folly pontificated by specialists staked in this area.
- This passion-suffocating Draft is already proof itself that campus leadership is determined to implement assessment further, with or without the support of faculty or the staff.
- As stated previously, the creation of an Assessment Director is not supported by a large portion of the faculty, and would simply create a self-feeding entity that consumes campus resources and faculty time/effort in order to satisfy accreditation.
- One immediate question would be how relevant any (suggested to be online) posted SLOs would be given that most courses will remove the majority of them because it is not possible to

assess them given the ongoing course demands.

- Once again, there is a conflict of interest to have this administrative position oversee a Faculty Senate committee.
- There is no justification possible as to why this Director would oversee/facilitate the development of cornerstone projects, this responsibility lies solely with the faculty.
- LERAs and SERAs will presumably be provided with reassigned TEs, which means instructors are pulled out of instructing in order to assess (often misrepresented data) and contribute to accreditation.
- The idea of an “Excellence in Assessment Award” is simply ludicrous, gee – let’s see who can massage the data the best?
- Applying professional development funding contingent upon LERS or SERS designation creates a fissure within the faculty.
- The repeated statements of “mandatory” assessment training/workshops is Orwellian in nature and insulting to those already considered scholars.
- Before any assessment deadlines should ever be imposed, the campus should actually impose its own deadlines for repairs and adequately addressing other professional development and sabbatical needs.
- Related to this, the campus should impose a better cohesion between counseling and instructors, addressing this gap is more immediate than any presumed deficiency in assessment.

Concluding remarks:

- Taken as a whole, this Draft does not come from the faculty, nor do the majority of faculty support it.
- Given that Community College faculty are burdened with three additional TEs beyond that of four-year UH campuses, and are charged with polishing/preparing open/newly enrolled students for more challenging downstream courses, why is it that our accreditation standards include a higher level of assessment that our four-year colleagues are not required to do? This inequity is even greater given that those campuses typically have greater support (in the form of teaching assistants, lab supervisors, specialists, and support staff) than two-year campuses.
- While many involved in this Draft may believe this is a means of improving campus instruction, most instructors would disagree. Our campus already has the highest number of students, higher percentage of certificates and degrees, and the highest percentage transfer students when compared to all other Community Colleges within the UH System.
- This clearly indicates that the instructors are highly successful with their current responsibilities and are already continually improving.
- Therefore, there is no need to detract from these efforts in order to ascribe meaningless numbers and data to satisfy unreasonable accreditation/policy edicts.
- While the intention of this Draft may appear to provide instructors with the tools necessary to

improve their teaching, in reality it actually takes away from their abilities to successfully teach their courses. Instead, it imposes the constant reporting of false metrics to inflate numbers for others benefits.

The assessment strategic plan, while laudatory in principle, is not evidence-based and needs to be substantially revised.

(A) Among other things, the data from the first 5 years of attempted "every SLO assessment in 5 years" is entirely missing. This is important, because the plan treats that model like it's the norm, never discusses its validity or where it comes from (it does NOT come from ACCJC, which just requires that "every course" be evaluated, not every SLO), and demands that the faculty reaffirm something that is a FAILED model ("12. Reaffirm with all faculty the college's current "Course Level Assessment Plan" (CLAP) that mandates all course SLOs be assessed during the five year assessment cycle.")). Our data on SLO evaluation, which OFIE is warehousing, clearly shows that the campus did not meet that goal during the last 5 years. One key reason it did not is that it operates under the flawed premise that 1. courses are only updated every 5 years (untrue; some are updated more frequently), and 2. SLOS never change. This means that in real life, when courses are revised, and SLOs are changed, if the former SLOs has not been assessed during that cycle, they will never be assessed, and that will be considered noncompliance instead of evidence of good educational practices.

Example: Say that NURS 101 has 5 SLOs, A, B, C, D, AND E. In year 1, they assess A. In year two, they receive a new mandate from their accrediting agency and delete SLOs B, C, D, and E, and add new SLOs F, G, and H. Even if they go on to assess F, G, and H within the 5 year period, they are never going to assess former SLOs B, C, D, and E, so the statistics will show that of the 9 SLOs for NURS 101 in this period, they only assessed 5. In fact, that is exactly the problem with the OFIE data from the first 5 year cycle; it makes us look worse than we are because it includes every SLO during the period, even the deleted ones.

Another key reason that it failed was because requiring every SLO to be assessed amounted to bean counting; faculty often did not have time to concentrate on the SLOs that were particularly important to them as the goal seemed to just be to give lip-service to them all. This often meant that the critical "closing the loop" element was dropped or glossed over.

The much better approach is the one currently being shared by the SLO committee, which is for each course to have meaningful assessment done during the 5 year period. It is up to the faculty teaching that course to determine which SLO or SLOs are most in the need of improvement and work on them for as many semesters as needed to move the needle and show student improvement.

(B) The plan also runs amiss when it requests a return to the Cornerstone Initiative (1. ...Revive the Cornerstone Assessment Initiative); that is a failed project that even its participants do not support any more.

(C) "7. Regular deadlines for completion and uploading of course and support unit assessment data into Taskstream needs to be established similar to the model followed for Contract Renewal and Tenure & Promotion applications." There already ARE regular deadlines built into Taskstream in the Assessment Plan section, which provides scheduling for five years out. I am concerned that this language appears to tie failure to upload to CR and T&P requirements (or why else is it phrased as it is?). Especially in courses where multiple faculty teach, one instructor's failure to do so should not be held against the others.

(D) The whole section award for excellence in assessment is just bizarre; first, when assessment more many courses is a collaborative act, why are awards directed to an individual faculty member? Second, why are faculty and support staff supposed to be "scholars" (LERS and SERS)? This is a task on which everyone on campus should participate without the reward of fancy titles and faux rewards.

(E) While is is a good idea to have assessment knowledge distributed across disciplines at a micro level (LERAs and SERAs), and to see the recognition thatr this takes time as so that TEs should be awarded, the idea that the LERAs and SERAs would "2. ... Serve on the GE Board" is ridiculous. There would be almost 30 of them which is much too large and inefficient to work. I also disagree with deleting the roles of the Assessment Coaches. They have served as the institutional memory for the campus on since before the last Accreditation Report. They also receive specialize training through WASC that it would not be feasible to give to all the LERAs and SERAs. It is the coaches who should serve on the Gen Ed board and as liaisons to the LERAs and SERAs. They have attended all of the meetings that have explored the big picture assessment on campus, such as those on formulating GEs and ILO and using Taskstream. Removing them would only leave one source of scholarly assessment knowledge on campus - the new Assessment Director - and what would happen if the next one leaves as abruptly as the last one? The assessment coaches were the force on campus moving assessment forward on campus during this year. They are positions valuable to the forward movement of assessment on campus.

(F) "5. Establish a college Assessment Committee for the purpose of systematically and thoroughly reviewing all campus assessment reports looking for patterns, trends, and successes and gaps. Committee members would be LERAs, SERAS, representative PDs, OFIE representative, and the AD. The Assessment Committee should report to the CAC assessment work group." This appears duplicative and bureaucratic. Just what KCC needs more of.

(G) Lest it seem that I don't care for anything in the plan, let me say that I support an Assessment Director (although the PD should be rewritten to focus on key areas only - weird little bean-counting tasks such as ensuring that there are links to each course syllabus should be omitted). I also support the idea of an excellence in assessment day on campus. The rest of the plan needs substantial and careful revision.

Instead of having a fixed term cycle of assessment such as 5 yrs, why don't we have a range (minimum and maximum) such as 3-7 years and allow departments and programs to decide their own cycle? This will allow for a diversity of approaches and buy-in, with programs creating their own parameters.

First of all, thanks to the drafters of the Assessment Plan. This was a big job, and I know that they had conversations with a lot of different people involved in assessment to get a full picture of the assessment issues and concerns on campus. The plan has certainly gotten people talking about assessment!

Also, the process of collecting feedback from the campus about the plan has been an open and transparent process, with many avenues for feedback. Thank you!

I did speak at the campus forum on the assessment plan, but feel negligent if I don't also formally record my feedback here. I am basing my feedback on the request for 2 or 3 things that could be immediately implemented to start moving the needle on campus.

1. A dedicated time on campus to discuss student learning and assessment. This time needs to be part of the campus culture and eventually it will become something everyone expects and hopefully looks forward to doing. At this time, it seems like the same day as convocation may be the easiest way to get everyone on board. Maybe eventually it could be held on a different day, once everyone sees how fun and enriching it is to talk with colleagues about student learning.

How can we ensure that assessment results from this dedicated time? Faculty can fill out sheets that mimic Taskstream fields and submit them to a Taskstream administrator who can then

input the data into Taskstream. That administrator could maintain a simple checklist of courses. In a perfect scenario, groups that would benefit from a trained facilitator could request one. (Maybe there could be a cadre of facilitators on hand who are willing to have their assessment conversations on a different day).

What can we "give up" to make time for these conversations to happen? I don't know. I think convocation is important, so we can't replace that. Other meetings on that day are also important, but maybe each of the meetings can give up a little bit of its time the first time through so that the learning and assessment conversations can occur.

Maybe someday it could be something like: Monday: Convocation and Dean-level meetings; Tuesday: department and assessment meetings. That gives us the rest of the week to prep for the semester and attend other mandatory training sessions. However, I see the risk of having people not show up for two different days. But it is a duty period...

2. Having someone input assessment data in Taskstream is a good idea. People are taking a lot of time learning the basics of Taskstream, and then if they don't use it right away, they forget and have to learn it all over again. This is frustrating for people. It is not something used often enough to remember easily, and it is a bit clunky in ways that can't be fixed by us. TS may be coming out with a new interface for the AMS, but I'm not sure that will help all that much. We could provide faculty members with a document that helps guide them in their assessment conversations and also documents what comes of it would be helpful in two ways: it could provide structure to the conversation, and it could be handed over to the Taskstream administrator who could input it into Taskstream.

3. There is a big question about whether an assessment coordinator should be hired. I see the value of having someone coordinate assessment efforts and initiatives, especially ones at the institutional level. Faculty with partial release time will always be torn if they have to juggle teaching at the same time. It does need to be someone's 100% focus, and the person needs to be knowledgeable about assessment already. However, I am gun shy because I believe that the most recent assessment coordinator was not a good fit for the campus. One idea is that there could be some sort of internal position that could be filled for a ~3 year period by an existing faculty member. Maybe positions such as the Student Success coordinator and C3T Coordinator are structured this way. However, this does take qualified faculty out of the classroom, to be potentially replaced by less-qualified lecturers.

I also like the vision about restructuring in a way that OFIE, Student Success, and Assessment initiatives are housed together in a cluster that supports the KELA model for student success. But that is not something that can be done immediately.

Thank you for hearing our feedback about a plan moving forward.

We do need a person who is knowledgeable in assessment, but I firmly believe it needs to be someone from our College, at least for now. To understand the campus culture is essential in moving assessment forward. There needs to be four assessment leaders in each of the areas - student support, services, and instructional (CTE & A&S).

I do not believe there is a need for a College Assessment Director. Such a position will contribute to administrative bloat and would be better fulfilled by individual members of a department working in concert to determine their department's and their discipline's needs. If the administrative duties are deemed to be overwhelming, it might be a good idea to allow these duties to count in place of teaching a course.

I very much appreciate the time and effort that Sally and Tanya put into the 2017 Draft Assessment Strategic Plan. It is, as expected, wide-ranging and thorough. Overall, I think that it hits some of the right notes. It incorporates many elements that the Coaches and the SLO Assessment Committee, among others, have proposed in the past: A Director of Assessment (as opposed to a Coordinator), an Excellence in Assessment Award, a campus-wide Assessment Day, an assessment component for New Faculty Orientation, and above all, TE support for some form of assessment assistants. I am happy to see that Sally and Tanya found merit in these ideas.

Based on my involvement in assessment efforts on campus for the past seven years, four of them as Assessment Coach for Arts & Sciences, I would like to make a few comments and suggestions:

(1) Assessment Director: Given the duties proposed, the AD will need staff (clerical) support and probably an assessment assistant of some sort. The current Coaches plus the Interim Taskstream Manager together receive 17 TE per semester, and that is not enough to do the work that currently needs to be done, nor is it enough to do the work that is listed in the AD duties, IMHO. In the past, the Coaches pushed for a Coordinator / Director to be associated with CELTT ("learning"), which would send a better message to faculty about the purpose of the Coordinator / Director, and hence, of assessment itself. Not sure if this still makes sense for someone who is supposed to oversee assessment across the entire campus, though. The suggestion to revive the Cornerstone Project is, IMHO, not appropriate. I do not believe this is the best way to assess either the AA in Liberal Arts degree nor Gen Ed, one reason being that it did not work in the past. This is not just my opinion; the Cornerstone

Project assessment convener also does not believe the Project is a useful method of assessment.

My recommendation: Create an Assessment Office consisting of a Director of Assessment and at least one clerical staff position. Begin to use course-level assessment results from Taskstream to assess the AA in Liberal Arts degree and Gen Ed (when the time comes). Let the Cornerstone Project rest in peace.

(2) Coaches: Let me start by saying that although I am currently an Assessment Coach, I personally have no attachment to the "coach" system (though I believe it has merits). I have previously explained my desire to make the Coaches irrelevant as the FS SLO Assessment Committee and the Institutional Assessment Coordinator (IAC) roles in assessment increased. But then the IAC resigned. That being said, I believe the College will still need Coaches, in addition to an AD and LERA-type assessment assistants. The Coaches could best play a role at a level between the AD and the LERA-type assistants. The College has invested substantially in the Coaches (WASC ALA) and should use that investment to its advantage. At the very least, Coaches will be needed

It's too much. When will we have time to actually teach our students between all of the constant paperwork of assessment.

Requires substantial effort on the faculty, but lacks any scientific evidence that substantiates why this actually benefits faculty or students. Requires more faculty input.

When an accreditation report requires an assessment program be instituted, make it a broad, loose, minimal program with details left up to the departments. Do not install a detailed, cyclical, tome of requirements and hire a permanent middle manager to oversee it all.

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In terms of the history of assessment at KCC. I was hired in 2009 to coordinate many courses. No one ever showed me the 4-step framework of 2007. No one ever told me how to make CLR or justified their importance to me. No one really explained what it meant to be a course

coordinator, there was no guidance. I didn't do CLR's until we organized them for the last accreditation. So in terms of making assessment apart of the culture of KCC, the last attempt didn't work, why will this one? It's rushed and there is no input from faculty. I coordinate 9 courses and run a program all on my own. If admin wants me to assess in this prescribed way, I need 3TE's off every semester to do so and still maintain an acceptable level of teaching excellence. I think instead of hiring an AD, all course coordinators should have 3TE's off every semester to do this work.

Who better to tell you what they feel they have learned in a course or gained from a counselor or campus service than those whom these services were created to serve. A SALG is my best indicator of whether students learned or felt mastery in SLOs, aside from my primary assessments. And many times I assess "in the moment", and make changes based on class dynamics and comprehension at the time of learning. Assessment is sometimes much more organic, fluid, and complex than this plan lays out. The document keeps talking about dialogue. There is no dialogue on campus. We can't even get our department to meet more than once a semester because everyone is so busy.

I'm also quite offended at the notion of incentives like an award or points program, special treatment, etc. We are professionals, not kindergarteners.

Vehement responses

I'm STRONGLY OPPOSED to this plan. There is NO evidence provided from either the literature or experimentation that SHOWS that implementing any of the tedious assessment processes will ACTUALLY improve student learning!!!! I STRONGLY believe that if this plan is implemented, KCC will LOSE the most CREATIVE and INNOVATIVE teachers we have.

Whoa!

I say no! no! no!

The regime espoused by this 'document' proposes a stultifying, tedious process of continuous SLO review AND the compulsive documentation of the minutia of that review and assessment. If this process becomes the mandate and gets tied to tenure and promotion I predict that it will contribute to the loss of our most talented, imaginative, creative people. This document paints a very bleak picture of what we do and I fear the direction that it is pushing us into pursuing: mediocrity masking as the pursuit of excellence.

Look at this assessment strategic plan document: it represents pages and pages of formulae and rules proscribing how each of us should plan and assess our courses and programs, establishing a standardized "6-step assessment process" among many other mandates. How do we know that following this will make what we do better? Why are we being asked to do this anyway? Is something wrong? This plan is full of bureaucratic busy-work that is dull and of unproven and dubious effectiveness.

As part of our hiring process all of us were vetted by our peers as experts in our fields of study and work. All of the colleagues I know maintain their professional credentials and expertise and understanding of their field, and we all have a pretty good understanding of what it takes for students to succeed in academia and in the work world. We are all professionals and we each have an understanding of what we want and need our students to learn in our courses. I know that for each of my courses, if I were to really do what is being mandated here, I would have to come up with a long list of outcomes, not just a couple of general statements so non-specific that they are meaningless. (I have recently participated in group discussion trying to develop a single general ed outcome statement for all science courses. The process has taken hours of quality time and has so far come up with a blah statement that means almost nothing.)

One of my points is that we are already doing all of this. Every effective class or program does this all the time. Every class has numerous outcomes, some are written down but some are not. These outcomes are communicated to the students in many ways including in the syllabus and during class discussions and in all of the routine assessment tools we routinely use in our classes throughout the whole semester — exams, quizzes, papers, lab reports, presentations, discussion, participation, etc. Many of these outcomes are nuanced, neither black nor white and they are also generally not mutually exclusive — they overlap and fulfill various levels of the learning hierarchy.

The assessment of these outcomes is a constant and continuous process that can happen on the fly in the classroom during a lecture or discussion or more formally as we analyze an exam's effectiveness or the performance of a student or of a class on a particular assignment. We all assess way more than the content that students learn or master, we are also aspirational, we want to know if we have succeeded in getting our students to think in new ways. We look for creativity. The classroom is also not a oneway street — we also want to learn from our students. In the end you give your students grades and you use your best judgement to assess the learning of the individual student as well as how the class did on its own and in comparison to the other classes you teach and you come up with ideas on how to do it better next time. How do you capture all of this and state it in the rubric and in the charts that this assessment plan demands? Why would you want to deflect your energy away from doing what you are already doing to get bogged down in a tedious task analysis process without a clear clue of its

effectiveness?

Actually that is one of the main deficiencies of this assessment strategic plan. It is not an academically sound document. It presents no evidence from the literature or experimentation that this plan will actually make things better. There is no bibliography and the only citations are of itself or of the previous iterations of planning documents of the same ilk. Do we really want to pursue this with such vigor when we really have no idea if it will make anything better. My thesis is that it will make things worse.

Thanks for reading this. Please see the attached article for perhaps a more graceful and cohesive argument questioning this SLO/assessment movement:

<http://www.worc.ac.uk/edu/documents/WJLTIssue5PersonalperspectivesIScott.pdf>

Pasted Below:

Worcester Journal of Learning and Teaching, Issue 5 Personal Perspectives Section

The Learning Outcome in Higher Education: Time to think again?

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As a head of an academic development and practice unit it is with some trepidation that I set out to write this critique of learning outcomes. For the learning outcome has become the bed-rock of the infra-structure that determines quality assurance processes in higher education in the UK and elsewhere. In theory, they should be used to design courses, determine appropriate learning opportunities, measure the level of courses and provide the standard against which students' achievement can be measured. In this article I will argue that the learning outcome is a false god, to whom too much attention is paid and probably by the wrong people. It is important to say, that I am not the first to make this case, but do so in the hope of raising a greater level of critical discourse on what has become a hegemony within higher education.

The learning outcome, purpose and origin

The learning outcome in higher education can be seen as a development from outcome based education within the vocational sector (e.g. National Vocational Qualifications a.k.a. NVQs). In the vocational sector learning outcomes based on competencies are used to underpin the assessment of job related skills. Once the notion of having to account for learning had been set in place the adoption of a system related to one already introduced into parts of the education

system was relatively simple and as James (2005) notes, the learning outcome is a seductively simple concept, it seems to 'do what it says on the can' but does it?

The pedagogic purposes of learning outcomes are clear, in that they are designed to give a clear indication of the learning destiny, that the learning opportunity provider intends the learner to reach. In doing-so they give power to the learner, as armed with knowledge of the destiny the learner can if they wish, chart their own journey to this destination. It is this potential for empowerment which allow the proponents of outcomes based education to claim that is „student-centred“ and in contrast to the previous models where often the destination was perceived to be hidden, and based largely on what teachers teach. Curriculum models that use learning outcomes, as logic would dictate, try to ensure that assessments test that students have reached the destination described by the learning outcomes. A further development to this is seen in the constructive alignment model of Biggs (1996). In this model the totality of the curriculum and assessment is aligned with the learning outcomes. Indeed it is Biggs“s model that underpins much of the UKs quality assurance system. The learning outcome is used to define the level learning (Davis 2000 and it is worth noting that it also used to describe learning and differing scales of opportunity, for example at the level of the individual session, unit or course.

To the potential learner, the learning outcomes describes what will be learnt, to the potential employer they describe what should have been learnt , to the quality agencies they provide a system for audit and for the funders (if there are still any left) they provide a means to account for how the money was spent .

A learning outcome is a description of what a learner will have learnt at the end of a period of study. Learning outcomes in theory can encapsulate a wide range of knowledge types skills and behaviours. We can thus have learning outcomes that describe: particular skills, such as operating a microscope, ways of thinking, such as analyzing, ways of behaving, such as respecting clients and the possession (de novo) of good old fashioned declarative knowledge. In some setting, learning outcomes are also written in relation to the values that will (must) be acquired during a period of study. In many education systems the word learning objective is synonymous with the use of 'learning outcome' in UK HE. There is however some disagreement with this position (see Adams 2004). The term 'learning outcome' being seen as identifying what was actually learnt, whilst the learning objective, what the tutor intends should be learnt. Thus the learning objective could be seen as being more akin to the 'intended learning outcome'.

The origin of the learning outcome in education theory is difficult to trace, but may stem from the Mastery learning movements, variously promoted by authors such as Block (1971), Bloom (1981)and Carroll (1963). The mastery movement is interesting in that it proposed that the vast majority of learners were capable of achieving to the same extent, but that learners would take differing amount of time and input to achieve. Within Mastery programmes learners must achieve (Master) specific learning outcomes before being permitted to proceed to the next

stage. The mastery approach was an overtly behaviourist strategy, yet in recognising that, given time, most learners can achieve to a high standard it also seems to have been fundamental in the birth of the Outcome Based Education [OBE] movement in the 80s which puts emphasis on the outcomes of learning processes rather than the inputs. Outcome based education, at least in theory, claims to be more constructionist in its approaches.

At a more local level it is possible to trace the growth of the learning outcome in UK HE to the formation of UK wide quality assurance bodies that needed models; against which the standards of degree programmes could be compared and affirmed and the spending of UK tax payers' money justified. Thus we see learning outcomes feature within the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)'s documentation and then the QAA's; that for many people was originally seemingly built around the structures of the CNAA. Hussey and Smith (2002) argue that the rise of the learning outcome is a response to the state's need for Universities to be seen as more accountable but also represents part of the growing commoditisation of education. Learning outcomes being the 'goods' placed on the table for sale at the new market place. Outwith any pedagogical discussion, Hussey and Smith see the rise of learning outcome being equated with 'loss of trust'. The learning outcome is the tool by which educators can be audited and judged.

Difficulties (or even problems) with learning outcomes

What are they again?

For a seemingly simple concept learning outcomes seem hard to really define. James and Brown (2005) produced a 3 x 7 matrix of learning outcome types based around Sfards (1998). Acquisition and Participation metaphors of learning and seven categories of outcome located by the Learning Outcomes Thematic Group of the UK wide Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP). The categories were: Attainment - often school curriculum based or measures of basic competence in the workplace. Understanding - of ideas, concepts processes. Cognitive and creative - imaginative construction of meaning, arts or performance. Using - how to practice, manipulate, behave, engage in process or systems. Higher-order learning - advanced thinking, reasoning and metacognition. Dispositions - attitudes, perceptions, motivations. Membership, inclusion, self-worth - affinity towards or readiness to contribute to the group where learning takes place. (James and Brown 2005, 10-11).

Using this matrix James (2005) found that sixteen differing conceptions of learning outcomes could be produced, one for each site of their study. This difference probably stems from difference in conceptions of learning, the relative importance placed on different forms of learning and an understanding of what that learning is for and how it is achieved. In other words, learning outcomes are socially constructed by a varied community and thus, common

understanding across the entire sector (FE) that James studied, was absent, this, despite the fact that learning outcomes essentially (at least in theory) dictate what is important to 'know' and what it is not (James 2004). This latter point is important because students often give more significance to the personal and social dimensions of change that occur for them at University than the learning gained through the formal curriculum. Yet this learning, because it is not formally given a 'learning outcome' escapes the learning accountants (TLRP 2008).

Words alone fail me and our students

To illustrate this issue I will take a relatively simple learning outcome from a hypothetical competency based carpentry course.

After the period of learning the student will be able to: bang a nail into a plank of wood without splitting the wood.

At first glance, this seems like a straightforward learning outcome, but the carpenter might well ask, "which type of wood" or "which type of nail". So I would need to moderate the outcome so that it might become;

After the period of learning the student will be able to: bang the appropriate nail into a plank from a range of commonly used timbers without splitting the wood.

Of course, after speaking again with the carpenter, she thinks that accuracy is also important and of course safety. So, after embarking on defining the seeming obvious, I am confronted by the carpenter from the ship yard, who notes that what is a common wood for some is not common for him, how was he meant to know what I meant or what his student was meant to learn. The only defence from the carpenter's demands is to either write with more and more specificity or greater generality. The problem with the former being that increased specificity starts to exclude many practices and as Yorke (2003 p210) suggest leads to;

" the entangling and disorientating jungle of details as was experienced by those faced with the system of NVQs developed under the aegis of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in the UK...."

On the other hand, writing very broad and general learning outcomes means that either no one is clear what the learning outcome is about or that you can work it out only if you have sufficient prior knowledge and understanding of the subject in question and its context. This argument, as demonstrated in the example above, also applies when we try to use specific and precise language. Hussey and Smith (2002 p225) suggests that in order to explicate a phenomena a learning outcome must "parasitise" that which they are meant to be explaining. The issue of context is also a significant confounding issue. This is because the meaning of particular words varies depending on the academic subject in question. A word such as analyse means something quite different depending on whether your subject is English, Chemistry or Biology. What this means of course, is that the only way the meaning of a learning outcome is understood is through „experiencing the subject“ and the real utility of a learning outcome to

the „outsider“ albeit a prospective student, employer or external scrutinisers is very limited. Owing to these issues of language and context, even when learning outcomes use very precise terms they are in fact always quite hazy (Knight and Yorke, 2003) their exact meaning only comes into being when tutors and students interpret them, although we have to hope they interpret them in the same way.

Are learning outcomes really student centred?

For teaching to be student centred the student voice should be at the heart of both what is learnt and how it is learnt. In addition there should be a shift of power towards the students and away from the tutor. But can this be achieved if the 'authority' pre determines learning outcomes and objectives and the assessment methods? The original empowering feature of the learning outcome approach is that they provide transparency of the destination and that learners should then be free to plot their own course to their arrival point.

To do this students would need to be able to choose their own learning opportunities, resources and time required to achieve their learning outcomes. To do this tutors may need to appreciate that they are „side-kicks“ in the overall learning process; something which paradoxically seems difficult to achieve in a massified system of education.

The use of learning outcomes to define courses and programmes removes power from students. They do this by failing to recognise that for many students the learning outcomes that emerge are not the ones that were intended by the designer (Megginson, 1994). Given that learning is inherently relational at the individual level this is no surprise. What I learn from a learning event will be different from what you learn because we relate to it differently, because of our differing abilities, motivations and past experiences. Thus to some extent the whole notion of pre-defined learning outcomes become spurious. If this is true, then the best that learning outcomes can hope for is that they are loose notions of what it is intended a student might learn.

It could be argued that for some programmes that prepare people for professional practice having pre-defining learning outcomes is axiomatic. However there is no evidence that those professional qualifications that have become incorporated into higher education have become more clearly defined. Furthermore the NVQ system used to qualify people for a wide range of roles, using outcomes to define those roles, has been widely criticised (see for example Eraut, 1989, Field, 1991 and Callender, 1992). The case of professional learning outcomes may demonstrate that; just because there is a need to define something does not mean that it is meaningfully definable. Definitions based on learning outcomes in reality will always remain unclear irrespective of the specificity of the language used (Hussey and Smith, 2002).

An extension and perhaps wider element to this is the issue of construct validity and assessment raised by Daugherty et al (2007). Assessment theory would suggest that if a phenomenon does not have construct validity then it is difficult to assess. In Daugherty et al.,s

study of the relationship between curriculum design and assessment in five contexts in the UK and mainland Europe they found for example that „none of their participants.... Was confident that „business studies“ had been adequately defined (Daugherty et al 2007 p247). Clearly if you can“t agree on what something is, assessing it is rather tricky.

Assessment and Level

The academic level of a course or programme of study is often set by its learning outcomes. During course approvals and reviews it is often a requirement that it be confirmed that the learning outcomes are at a suitable level, with reviews looking for the appropriate words used at the appropriate level. Below are two genuine learning outcomes/objectives from two differing subject areas. Can you locate what level of study they are from?

„describe the strengths and weaknesses of a range of available models and select the most appropriate“

„analyse how texts are shaped by audiences' preferences and opinions“

If you had noted that they were from key stage 3 of the national curriculum (Year 9) then you would be correct (<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>). Yet, they would look reasonable at home in module outlines of many universities across the United Kingdom. Here again, we have met the issue of language in context, if you were a secondary school science teacher, you would have a good idea what level of learning the first outcome was referring to but the same language placed in the context of HE may mean (we hope) a different level altogether. So it would seem that in terms of level, learning outcomes again only have meaning in the context of their subject and in the context of the level at which they are applied. Thus suggesting that their utility is only to those who understand these contexts and without knowledge of this context the notion of levelling using learning outcomes becomes meaningless.

Similar problems can also occur when learning outcomes are too closely linked to assessments. If we accept that to understand what is meant by the language and context of a learning outcome then a detailed knowledge of the subject and context of that learning outcome is required then, whilst this may be possible for some students, many modular schemes require students to gain meaning from these outcomes before they have been apprenticed into their areas of study. This leads tutors to give more and more detailed information about what is „required“ to pass the assessment which, in turn, results in „surface“ engagement (sensu Marton and Säljö, 1976) with the learning that the assessment was intended to help students achieve (Gibbs and Simpson 2004). Gibbs and Simpson (2004) suggest that for students to succeed on assessments they must indeed internalise what is required but the way that this is best achieved is through rehearsal and feedback on performance.

Perhaps a more complex problem to overcome is that which relates to whether or not the learning outcomes are those that must be achieved and therefore assessed or whether they are

intended learning outcomes only. If they are fixed learning outcomes then if a student assesses as a genius against 80% of a module's learning outcomes but does not achieve the others then they must be given a fail overall. Given the intractability of defining learning outcomes (described above) we need to ask if such a position is justifiable. A related issue was described by Biggs (1996) who discussed the importance of assessing unintended learning outcomes as well as the intended learning outcomes with the following metaphor:

Teacher: How many diamonds have you got? Student: I don't have any diamonds Teacher: Then you fail! Student: But you didn't ask me about my jade!

Conclusion: Learners amass treasure not just diamond. (Biggs J. 1996 p352).

From this metaphor it is possible to see how the use of learning outcomes as a basis for assessment can drive us to adopt processes that ignore substantive learning simply because our system makes it not liable to assessment. Furthermore, once students realise that only the learning described by learning outcomes is to be assessed they focus only on demonstrating this learning (although not necessarily achieving that learning (see Gibbs and Simpson 2004-5)). Thus rather than encouraging learning learning outcomes can end up subverting it.

The way forward

It is obviously a good idea for students and tutors to have a common understanding of what they are trying to achieve and having learning outcomes seems a reasonable starting point as a means to achieve this. Learning outcomes also form a good departure point when considering how to formulate learning opportunity and develop resources. As soon, however, as we start to believe that learning can be precisely defined and articulated and that these articulations should form the basis of the design, development, definition and assessment of courses then we are divorcing ourselves from the process and outcomes of real learning. It is this lack of authenticity that Hussey and Smith (2002) claim lead to the widespread derision in which the „learning outcomes culture“ is held by many academics. Just as students do with assessments, academics have learnt to mirror what is required by the quality process and revel in their conspiracy at the cappuccino bar. We should not therefore seek to measure quality and define our programmes by such a simplistic and ill define concept as the learning outcome, but seek to encapsulate the richness of the learning experience that are provided by the university community..

Learning outcomes, at best, should be seen as an intended broad notion of where the learners and tutor think they may be going. As if they were a proposed destination for an exploratory sailing trip. And just with such a trip, although the skipper may have some idea of how to get to the intended destination, the actual route and eventual destination will depend on many factors, such as the weather and abilities of the crew.

Much of the critique above stems from the argument that learning outcomes only have meaning if their context and the prior knowledge they are built on is understood. But how do

students know this context and knowledge? In reality students learn what is required by becoming part of the communities in which they are learning. This is the case whether the learning concerns becoming a plumber or becoming a philosopher. Students learn the ways and language of their disciplines by participation and being part of the discipline, vocation or profession. This picture is in many ways similar to the idea of „communities of practice“ as described by Lave and Wenger (1991); with new students standing on the edges of the community and eventually becoming „experts“ themselves. Indeed this process is often seen in metaphor at degree ceremonies, where new Graduates „full“ membership of academic community is acknowledged by granting them permission to join the exit procession. Following on this line of thinking, learning outcomes and the associated documentation (Programme specifications and the ilk) could be seen as tools that might facilitate a student’s journey into a community. Indeed, Wenger (1998) further elaborated on the community of practice model, distinguishing between the practice elements and those that are structural; programme documentation could be seen as part of this „structural“ aspect of the community. It is important to note however that the understanding of the ways of the community only emerge through active participation, thus without rehearsal and engagement a student will never be able to discover the context and the true underpinning language of the community’s documentation.

Learning outcomes originated in the movement for more student centred learning. Returning to this aspect of student centeredness may indicate how we can really use this concept. If students were „permitted“ to design and formulate their own intended learning outcomes in their own language it would alleviate the problems associated with context and language described above. Such an idea is at the heart of the Personal Development Movement and the thrust behind many work based learning programmes (Boud and Solomon 2001). Adding credence to this position it is interesting to note that several work based learning providers are working on systems to facilitate translation between work based learning outcomes and academic learning outcomes (see for example the co-gent project at <http://www.pebblelearning.co.uk/cogent/>).

The challenge for institutions of education, if we really do want to embrace student centred learning, is to produce system and practice that allow students to negotiate and define their own learning outcomes, to be able to revisit and adapt these outcomes and at the end of their learning journey at university to be able to say where they have been and what they have learnt.

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