

Academically Adroit

Improved Student Learning
Through Greater Intentionality



*California Association for Institutional Research
2011 Conference
November 10, 2011*

Imagine a Faculty Member
At Your College or University
Posting the Following Letter

Euphoria State University
Department of English
Euphoria, California 94444

Professor U. A. Pedant
Editor, *Journal of Literary Study*
University of the Lower Midwest
Springfield, Iowa 77777

Dear Professor Pedant,

It is with pleasure that I am sending you
the enclosed article for publication in the
Journal of Literary Study.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I want to make it clear that the objectives of this article are nowhere clearly defined or stated. I ask that you respect my lengthy experience as a scholar and that you assume my intent will emerge in due course.

Because the structure of the article may not be apparent, a reader may not understand how its different elements add up to a coherent whole. I can't hold every reader's hand! They are adults, after all.

More important is my conviction that any effort on your part to evaluate my article would be at best premature and at worst a violation of my academic freedom. Many readers who fail to understand my arguments at first may in time—perhaps many years later—come to appreciate their importance. Frankly, in the short term, who is a better judge of my effectiveness as a scholar than I am?

I will look forward to seeing my article in print as soon as possible.

Ridiculous?

Of course.

BUT

Do any of the following
sound familiar?

10

An instructor asks a student in her Anthropology 101 class why she decided to take her course and she responds, “Because I needed something at 10:30 on Mondays and Wednesdays.”



9

A student completes four semesters in Italian with good grades but when he tries to complain that his bathroom sink is stopped up, the desk clerk offers him a laxative.



8

Odds that two students on your campus, meeting at random, will have discussed the same intellectual issues in considerable depth

(a) should be greater than they are.

(b) may be slim.

(c) are not significantly different from zero.

7

Asked to serve on a core curriculum committee, a professor responds, “I don’t teach general education courses.”

6

Frequently heard questions during advising appointments: “Why do I have to take all these other courses? What do they have to do with my major? What do they have to do with anything?”

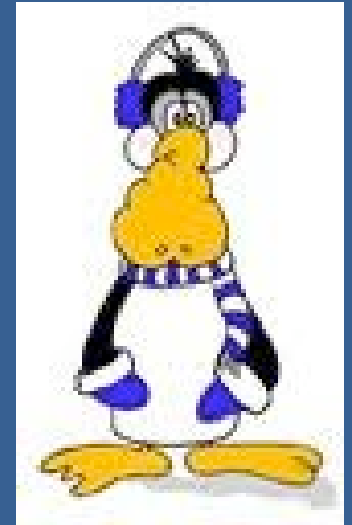
5

As a campus tour passes the IR office you hear a savvy parent ask, “What are the college’s learning outcomes for the baccalaureate?” and the guide says, “Huh?”

4

Three students, all of whom have completed the science requirement, are asked, “Why is it colder in the winter than in the summer?” Their answers:

- *Because the days are shorter.*
- *Because the sun is further away from the earth.*
- *Because there is no such thing as global warming.*



3

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RESPONSE: BLANK STARES

2

Of all student academic goals, this is the one most frequently voiced:

“I want to get general education *out of the way.*”

1

An esteemed professor asked to attend a faculty development seminar on assessment in the classroom responds, “You’ve GOT to be kidding!”

Brief Small Group Discussion

What other prompts might suggest that undergraduate education on your campus might be further strengthened?

Some Concerns

1

- Without broad understanding of what is meant by an associate or baccalaureate degree, students (and faculty) may find it difficult to align courses with the outcomes intended by the institution.
- General education may indeed (as in our example) be regarded as something to “get out of the way” prior to beginning a major.
- Accreditation may feel more like a burden to be borne than an opportunity to be seized.

2

- The mutually beneficial partnership that should join IR and the faculty may appear to be neither “mutual,” “beneficial,” nor a “partnership”

3

- Students at many institutions are accomplishing less than they should in college
 - According to recognized assessments
 - According to employers
 - According to faculty members
 - And according to . . .

Our critics

- Arum/Roksa: *Academically Adrift*
- Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*
- Employer reports
- Faculty members' Impressions

Not to mention . . .



YOU

Consequences?

Consequences

- Indications the public is losing confidence in higher education—with dire results for funding of public institutions
- Policy makers increasingly critical of accreditation—and inclined to intrude
- Public strategies to increase college participation and degree completion appear meaningless without shared understanding of what degrees mean

Might There be a Strategy

- That would enable students and faculty members to become more intentional about learning?
- That would improve our ability to assess results—and improve the results themselves?
- That would address the criticisms and reassure the supporters?
- That would emphasize the value of accreditation to institutions?
- That would give meaning to national aspirations for degree completion?

Perhaps

OUR “LEARNING OBJECTIVES”

- To review the Degree Qualifications Profile
- To appreciate how well positioned IR may be to make use of the Profile
- To consider whether the Profile might support a higher level of intentionality, effectiveness, accountability
- To provide feedback that might improve the Profile

Why a Degree Profile?

- The Profile “describes concretely what is meant by each of the degrees addressed.”
- The Profile “illustrates how students should be expected to perform at progressively more challenging levels.”

What a Degree Profile Is Intended To Do

- Offer reference points for students, faculty, advisors, accreditation, IR
- Create expectation for a curriculum that is clearly intentional, coherent, cumulative
- Encourage assessment
- Support institutional alignment with accreditors' expectations

and

- ➔ Provide a baseline for institutions seeking to clarify their distinctiveness, e.g.
 - ➔ Expectations *beyond* shared reference points
 - ➔ Innovative curriculums and curricular paths
 - ➔ Alternate strategies for confirming learning
 - ➔ Exceptional student services
- ➔ Clarify the incremental nature of degree levels, thereby encouraging progression

What a Degree Profile Is *NOT* Intended To Do

- Standardize degrees
- Define what should be taught
- Prescribe pedagogy
- Encourage rankings, internally or externally

Organization of the Degree Profile

Five areas of learning

- Integrative Knowledge
- Specialized Knowledge
- Intellectual Skills
- Applied Learning
- Civic Learning

shown as interrelated, not discrete

Guidelines for understanding the outcomes

- They are summative—and may be approached by more than one path
- They are illustrative, not exhaustive
- They define students' achievement of competence for students but do not enable rankings
- They assume/build on the outcomes defined for prior levels

Example 1

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- **Associate's 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

Example 2

Engaging Diverse Perspectives

At the associate level,

the student describes how knowledge from different cultural perspectives would affect his or her interpretations of prominent problems in politics, society, the arts and/or global relations.

✓ A basic informed application

At the bachelor's level,

the student constructs a cultural, political, or technological alternative vision of either the natural or human world, embodied in a written project, laboratory report, exhibit, performance, or community service design;

defines the distinct patterns in this alternative vision;

and explains how they differ from current realities.

✓ A creative undergraduate project

At the master's level,

the student addresses a core issue in his/her field of study from the perspective of a different point in time or a different culture, language, political order, or technological context,

and explains how the alternative perspective contributes to results that depart from current norms, dominant cultural assumptions, or technologies—

demonstrated through a project, paper, or performance.

✓ A focused professional application

So much for the theory.

How might the Profile
support assessment, self-study,
accreditation?

1

Institutions could use the Profile as a rubric for identifying gaps in outcomes statements

2

Institutions could use the Profile as a standard for measuring specificity and measurability of outcomes—for both internal use and external reporting.

3

Institutions could use the Profile as a platform for discussions with high schools to improve preparation of students for college – thereby reducing the remedial burden for institutions.

4

The Profile could give high school students a way to evaluate the offerings of colleges and universities with respect to a clear understanding of essential competencies.

5

Once at college, students could use the Profile as a CPS (curricular positioning system) for understanding and navigating their path to a degree.



Now a word from our sponsor

Students who understand what they are *expected* to learn are more efficient, more effective, more enthusiastic students.

Plato

The [allegory of the] cave poignantly illustrates that education is not only progressive in terms of the complexity and accuracy of the material studied (progressing from vague representations of the real to the real itself) but also progressive in terms of the students' attitude towards it. . . . **Through the process of education, the student not only learns progressively but also loves learning progressively.**

- *Victor Boutros, A Study of Socratic Pedagogy in Plato's Republic*
<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciBout.htm>

6

When learning objectives are clear and the curriculum is coherent and cumulative, students, faculty, other stakeholders (including accreditors) may appreciate the alignment between curricular requirements and such objectives—and IR may be in a better position to document such alignment.

7

Students studying at the associate level may understand more clearly the incremental learning represented by the baccalaureate and make a more informed decision about further study.

8

Students pursuing a bachelor's degree may understand more clearly the incremental learning represented by the master's and make a more informed decision about further study.

9

Degree recipients will be better able to interpret their credentials to potential employers and graduate programs—and to offer assurance of their readiness.

10

Institutions could share a common platform for interpreting accreditation results to their publics.

Based on what you have heard
so far, can you think
of other ways
in which the Profile
might support the work of IR
at your institution?

One word to inspire our
discussion

It's not . . .



The word for today

INTENTIONALITY

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- In every program, for every degree

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- In every program, for every degree
- In every discipline

INTENTIONALITY

- In every program, for every degree
- In every discipline
- In every course

INTENTIONALITY

- In every program, for every degree
- In every discipline
- In every course
- In every class

Questions left unanswered

- Why—among many possible projects—did Lumina Foundation decide to sponsor the development of a degree qualifications profile?
- What process was followed?
- How were the authors chosen?
- What sources (such as AAC&U's *Essential Learning Outcomes*) influenced development of the DQP?

These, too

- What's happening so far with the Profile?
- What happens next?

Your Turn

- Want answers to any of the unanswered questions?
- Want answers to other questions?
- Misgivings, reservations, anxieties, issues?

Thank You—From Me

Paul L. Gaston
Trustees Professor
Kent State University



And From



APPENDIX NOT FOR PRESENTATION



*The Essential Learning
Outcomes*

*A new framework to guide
students' cumulative progress
through college*

*A new framework to guide
students' **cumulative** progress
through college*

*A new framework to guide
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through college*

The Essential Learning Outcomes (1)

- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
 - Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
- Focused* by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

The Essential Learning Outcomes (2)

- **Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**
 - Inquiry and analysis
 - Critical and creative thinking
 - Written and oral communication
 - Quantitative literacy
 - Information literacy
 - Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

The Essential Learning Outcomes (3)

- **Personal and Social Responsibility, including**
 - Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
 - Intercultural knowledge and competence
 - Ethical reasoning and action
 - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
- Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

The Essential Learning Outcomes (4)



- **Integrative and Applied Learning,
including**

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across
general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and
responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

The Essential Learning Outcomes

Across the Curriculum

What?  When 	Knowledge of Human Culture & The Natural World	Intellectual & Practical Skills	Individual & Social Responsibility
First-Year Experiences	A plan of study . . . should clearly connect the expected outcomes to the student's choice of courses and major field(s). Learning goals, experiences, resources, and assessments should be aligned		
Focused Studies, Major/Minor(s)	Milestone assessments as students progress in their studies in both general education and the major should be tied to key outcomes		
Advanced Integrative & Culminating Work	Experiences in which the student actively demonstrates and is assessed for his or her cumulative accomplishments of the college career.		

Questions for Consideration

- Are you familiar with the Essential Learning Outcomes?
- Has your campus made any use of the ELO's?
- If the ELOs are known on your campus and are in use as a measure of program quality and effectiveness, how did you accomplish this?
- If the ELOs are not well known on your campus and are not in use as a measure of program quality and effectiveness, have you adopted some other standard for objectives and outcomes?

The Essential Learning Outcomes

Are intended to

- Provide the academy with a conceptual, aspirational frame for a cumulative liberal education
- Guide student and faculty understanding of *essential* outcomes for learning
- Create the base for a consensus on cross-curricular priorities

Are not intended to

- *Define in detail what degrees (associate, bachelor's, master's) mean*
- *Offer an explicitly operational basis for assessing student performance*
- *Expose incoherent, arbitrary curricula*