

How Do We Assess Essential Learning Outcomes?

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Outline

- Introductions
- What learning is essential?
- LEAP, Assessment, and Accountability
- Institutional Context Sets the Stage for Institutional Understanding
- Create "Convergence", Discover Learning
- Assessment tools, processes, techniques

This is a "think, pair, share"
exercise.

If you want to write down your
thoughts, please do.

Essential Learning

Think about a course you teach,
a program you work with,
or a learning experience
over which you have some influence.

In many areas, specific content
changes rapidly; what students learn
becomes quickly out of date.

Thinking broadly: what do you want
students to learn beyond the
boundaries of the specific content of
the course/program?

Report out

- Brief overview of program/course you're thinking about
- What are the broader learning goals?

**For further reflection:
Why did we use this
strategy?**

The question is: What stays with students?

- LEAP and Essential Learning
- How many know about LEAP project?
- Liberal Education and America's Promise
 - Overview (for more about LEAP)
 - AAC&U LEAP website:
<http://www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm>
- If you know about LEAP –
How far along are you?

next

Assessment and Accountability

- These terms are **not** interchangeable; however, they do intersect.
- Assessment – engaging attention for improvement
 - Discover what students are learning, if learning goals are met, and if not, what/where to improve
 - Complex questions, many tools
- Accountability – compliance to assure that minimum standards are attained
 - Tend to be simple, quantitative
 - *May* use assessment data to make a case to stakeholders that resources are being used responsibly

Assessment should...

- Provide a framework within which programs (instructors, administrators, perhaps other campus stakeholders) can participate in discussions about student learning
- Provide data that instructors and programs can use to advocate for students, programs, and possibly themselves
- Be ongoing and situated in both local and national contexts

Brainstorming

As a group, choose one of the
Essential Learning Outcomes,
and one context in which to
assess it.

How would you assess learning
in that area?

The Role of Institutional Context

- There are many types of institutions in AAC&U
- Contextualizing questions about "essential learning":
 - What has been important, historically?
 - What aspects of our institutional context are challenges for assessment?
 - What aspects of our institutional context create opportunities for assessment?
 - How does context influence decisions we make about the future?

So, who are we?



University of Wisconsin-Madison
500 Lincoln Dr, Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1380

General information: (608) 262-1234

Website: www.wisc.edu

Type: 4-year, Public

Awards offered: Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctor's degree

First-professional degree

Campus setting: City: Midsize

Campus housing: Yes

Student population: 41,563 (30,166 undergraduate)



IPEDS ID: 240444
OPE ID: 00389500

Note:

This screenshot is taken from the College Navigator website, maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. See: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

UW-Madison's Challenges

- Budget – declining state share
- State relations – strained (“micro-managing”)
- Expectations – low tuition, high ROI
- Engagement – tension between cosmopolitan, discipline-forged identity and more locally developed identity (are faculty defined by discipline, or institution?)
- Communication – calls for accountability, effective connection with stakeholders
- Scale – we are very large and have many programs!

How does this affect assessment?

- Many students, programs, and learning opportunities – spread out in many different places
- Research mission drives a lot of our activity
- Instructional staff is diverse
- Variable integration/connection between academic and co-curricular programming
- Faculty must be “on board”
- “The Wisconsin Way”
(to name a few...)

Every institution is different. And yet...

- All need to respond to national demands
- All need to certify that degrees conferred reflect attainment of commonly understood skills & knowledge
- *Essential Learning Outcomes* provide opportunities to participate in broad common conversation about higher education, both with colleagues and external audiences.
- Assessment becomes a tool for speaking constructively in the realm of accountability.

But how?

"Setting the Stage"

- We created "convergence" by fostering conversations
- Who is at this table?
 - informal
 - broad perspectives
 - academic & co-curricular
 - all can effect change through usual work



What "convergence" did for us:

- Led to an audit of current practice to "discover" what is "essential learning" in what we already do
- Led to a clear articulation of a "UW-Madison Experience"
- Shared language that describes our work in shared institutional context
- Created a foundation of strong institutional support

Moving from "Talk" to "Action"

- Locating "Essential Learning" in the "UW-Madison Experience"
- Engage campus

Now: Assessing Essential Learning

- Translate current practice:
 - ✓ Create EL template to map variety of activities
 - ✓ Map General Education to EL
 - Assessment plans/reports use EL language

Where Assessment of Essential Learning Can Happen

Curricular

- Projects, assignments
- Courses
- Specific programs (majors, general education)
- Degrees

Co-Curricular

- Student orgs and activities
- Advising
- Res Life
- Employment
- Health Services

Experiential Learning

- Service Learning
- Internships

Assessment Tools/Processes

- Rubrics to rate papers, portfolios, performance
- Standardized testing (CLA, CAAP, etc.)*
- National surveys (NSSE, FSSE)*
- Locally developed exams & surveys
- Entry/Mid/Exit interviews, surveys, or exams
- Certification exams (boards, state licensure, etc)
- Longitudinal studies

* These are best combined with other tools.

Assessing Institutional Outcomes

- "Know thyself" – and know your comparison group, too
- Consider the concept of "standards without standardization"
- Look at the whole student
- Look at the whole learning experience, wherever it may occur
- Tell your tale within your institution – and beyond its boundaries

Reflect upon our earlier
discussion of broad, essential
learning outcomes.
Think about your institution's
context, current practices.

As an institution, how might
(or do) you assess
essential learning
in your students?

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