Are we swimming upstream or moving towards a sea change in higher education?

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The Challenges and Opportunities of Competency-Based Education

A Flipped Session with pre-readings

1. Peter Ewell’s “The Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment,” with an afterword by Carol Geary Schneider


3. Brief handout on UW Flexible Option
Starting Assumptions

- Growing consensus about the credit hour’s inadequacy as currency for student learning.

- Increasing recognition of the potential of competency-based education to:
  - elevate expectations for student learning and
  - provide better evidence for what students know and are able to do.
Flex your potential. Fulfill your dreams.

Introducing a smart new way for working adults to earn a University of Wisconsin degree.

PROGRAMS
Nursing, information science and technology, diagnostic imaging, communication, and associate degree programs are the first ...

ADMISSION
If you're ready to flex your potential and achieve your goals, then you've come to the right place! If you haven't ...

TUITION & FINANCIAL AID
The UW Flexible Option offers working adults a more affordable way to earn a UW degree or certificate. Instead of paying ...

STUDENT SUCCESS
Every student enrolled in a UW Flexible Option program is partnered with an Academic Success Coach for personalized ...

Learn More
Learn More
Learn More
Learn More
What is the Flex Option?

“21st century face of the Wisconsin Idea”

- The UW Flexible Option is a portfolio of degrees and certificate programs offered in a self-paced, competency-based format.

- Targets adult students with some college and no degrees.

- UW faculty:
  - create the Flex curricula;
  - identify the competencies—skills and knowledge—necessary to earn a UW degree;
  - develop robust assessments to measure the competencies;
  - determine performance standards and mastery thresholds.

- Mastery model: students make progress by taking assessments and demonstrating mastery of competencies.

- Proactive, wrap-around advising provided to students.

- First students admitted in November 2013; first students enrolled on January 2, 2014.
Personalized Service and Assistance

• Students receive personalized service and assistance from the point of first contact through graduation

• Interested students asked to take “Flex Fit” pre-assessment tool

• Proactive advising and wrap-around support:
  • Each student works with a “Flex Team”: Outreach Specialist, Admissions Advisor, Academic Success Coach
Interest & Activity by the numbers
January 6, 2014

• Without targeted marketing
  o 15,524 unique visitors from 75 countries
  o 3,928 started Flex Fit 1
  o 2,490 completed Flex Fit 1
  o 1,224 began Flex Fit 2
  o 906 completed Flex Fit 2
  o 273 submitted applications

• Most interest in IT (almost half)
Challenges when Moving from Credits to Competencies

Building a new virtual university

• New Educational Model:
  o Self-paced vs. semesters
  o No set curricular materials
  o Blends technology with human interaction
  o New roles and workloads for faculty and ASCs

• New Operational Model:
  o From admissions to bursar to registration to transcripts to financial aid...
  o New Student Information System (SIS)
  o New Customer Relations Management System (CRM)
  o Integrated Learning Management System (LMS)

• New Business Model:
  o Self-supporting and need for scale
  o No ongoing state support
Challenges when Moving from Credits to Competencies

A different set of policy requirements

• Substantive Change Approval from HLC/Accreditor
  o First Flex institutional partners received HLC approval in July 2013
  o Each new Flex institution will need to also apply

• Department of Education and Title IV funding
  ● Applications to the U.S. Dept of Ed for Title IV eligibility for direct assessment (competency-based) programs being submitted by Flex institutions
  ● Application underway to qualify as “Experimental Site”

And political pressures . . .
Why Competency-based Education?

Four Factors Driving Higher Ed Revolution

1. Increased Need for Higher Ed + Increased Accountability
2. Demographics of Undergrads
3. State Funding and Fiscal Models
4. Technology
2018 JOBS REQUIRE MORE EDUCATION

By 2018, 61% of jobs in Wisconsin will require PSE. (National Average in 2018 63%)

17.6 million undergrads -

- 15% attend 4-year colleges and live on campus
- 43% attend 2-year colleges
- 37% enrolled part-time
- 38% older than 25; 25% older than 30
- Nearly 25% enrolled students are parents
- 1/3 undergrads employed full-time; 44% part-time
- More than half of enrolled students seeking “sub-bachelors” degree
- In 2008-09: 806,000 certificates & 787,000 AA vs. 1.6M bachelors awarded
State Investment in Higher Ed has been in Decline since 1980

States provided
- In late 1970/early 1980s, about 40% of operating budget in public education ($10.50 per $1000 personal income)
- In 2013, less than 20% ($5.58 per $1000 personal income in 2013)

Steady decline – not determined by politics or economy
State Fiscal Support for Higher Education per $1000 of Personal Income
FY1961 to FY2013

Trend Since 1980
Intercepts Zero in 2058
Trend Since 2000
Intercepts Zero in 2057
From Information Access to Information Utilization

What Happens in an Internet Minute?

639,800 GB of global IP data transferred
20 New victims of identity theft
204 million Emails sent
204 million App downloads
$83,000 In sales
20 million Photo views
3,000 Photo uploads
61,141 Hours of music
320+ New Twitter accounts
100,000 New tweets
277,000 logins
6 million Facebook views
2+ million Search queries
30 Hours of video uploaded
1.3 million Video views

And Future Growth is Staggering

Today, the number of networked devices = the global population
By 2015, the number of networked devices = 2× the global population
In 2015, it would take you 5 years to view all video crossing IP networks each second
First universities (1000 – 1300 AD) modeled after learning promoted by monasteries

University of Bologna, 13th century
In google world, classrooms go from this...
To this...
Foundational Changes and Challenges

• National need for more educated workforce is critical
• Eroding public support
• Higher education viewed as private investment rather than public good
• For-profit higher education growing rapidly
• National culture bifurcated and conflicted
• U.S. global supremacy eroding
What, then, does competency-based education bring to this challenging context?

Can CBE make a difference in terms of:

• Access and Affordability

• Equitable outcomes across more diverse student populations

• Eroding public support

• Coherent Curricula organized around a set of integrated competencies

• Accountability: better evidence for what students know and are able to do
Questions

• Do existing structures and policies impede more, and more effective outcomes-based curricula, more rigorous assignments to assess student learning, more authentic documentation of student learning through student work?

• Do entrenched disciplinary silos and faculty roles create barriers to change?

• Policy-makers at the state, regional and federal: are they helping or hindering?

• Are we about setting standards for every student, or assessing a selection of students’ best work?
“The motivation for ditching time is money.”

“An entire program built around assessments necessitates a high degree of confidence in their quality. But there are no widely adopted measures of learning across higher education.”
And what about the DQP

- Is the Degree Qualifications Profile the answer to the range of problems outlined above?
- The Lumina Foundation and AAC&U think so . . .

“The DQP is a bold effort to help higher education move beyond credit hours to competency and beyond the fragmented learning too many students experience to intentionally preparing students to integrate and apply their learning to unscripted problems and responsibilities.”