

Association of American Colleges and Universities Quality Collaboratives Initiative

Highlights from a Three Year, Nine-State Initiative on Assessment and Transfer Updated: November 2016

Overview

Quality Collaboratives (QC): Assessing and Reporting Degree Qualifications Profile Competencies in the Context of Transfer was a three-year, initiating project that launched in October 2011 with support from Lumina Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as a part of AAC&U's ongoing Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative.

During the project, AAC&U engaged teams of educational, assessment, and policy leaders in nine states. Two- and four-year institutions in each of these states had already been working extensively within the LEAP network of projects, states, and institutions on learning outcomes, curricular change, high-impact practices, and assessment. Building on these prior efforts, QC participants tested ways to assess Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) proficiencies in the context of student transfer.

Problems QC Addressed

- Defining and assessing proficiencies in the context of transfer—how best to assess and make achievement visible and portable.
- Facilitating learning by aligning assignments more intentionally with assessment criteria, with a goal of developing well-crafted and scaffolded assignments (so that proficiencies are actively fostered and can therefore be assessed) in the context of transfer.
- Preparing faculty to align their individual and program-level teaching, learning, and assessment efforts with DQP proficiencies.
- Developing recommendations for an equity-minded transfer policy framework that focuses on completion, ensures quality, and reports levels of learning.

Key Findings and Recommendations for Scaling Proficiency Frameworks and Assessing Learning in the Context of Transfer

- The nature and use of assessment is changing; the emerging strategies are using results to learn more about how to promote learning, how to work constructively with transfer partner institutions, and how to initiate disciplinary starting points to incorporate broader learning outcomes—the DQP proficiencies.
- To assess proficiencies requires change in culture and practice on most campuses—a shift from “my work” to “our work.”
- Even though virtually all campuses have adopted learning outcomes, they have not articulated levels of proficiency necessary to satisfy those outcomes to obtain a degree or other credential.
- The DQP offers scaffolding to guide the path between and among two-year and four-year institutions built collaboratively, but since most campus faculty and staff are not familiar with the DQP, the QC project developed several **strategies for connecting the DQP to emerging practices and awareness**, moving beyond a primary focus on content to consider learning outcomes documented by robust assessment and reflection, e.g. through e-portfolios.

- The DQP is compatible with the mounting campus interest in “high-impact practices,”—e.g., learning communities, first year seminars, undergraduate research, internships, capstone projects—a feature that helps strengthen its appeal to many faculty.
- A starting point for transfer and assessment of learning competencies needs to focus attention on the importance of well-crafted assignments connected directly to the expected level of learning for each outcome.
- Assessment needs to be, and is coming to be seen, as a high-impact practice for both students and for the institution itself. That is, a learning-centered or DQP approach to assessment can improve both students’ persistence levels and their achievement of key outcomes.
- QC documented ways that transfer partners captured the cumulative outcomes of students’ curricular and co-curricular learning; complicated by the fact that so many aspects of the educational context are not easily controlled, e.g., (1) 50% of general education is being taught by adjunct faculty or high school teachers; (2) learning outcomes are not tied to a particular part of the curriculum; (3) students may take classes from multiple institutions.
- “Signature assignments”—keyed to DQP proficiencies—and e-portfolios showcasing students’ achievement on signature assignments have emerged as recommended strategies in most (but not all) of the QCs.

Building Faculty, Campus, and Transfer Partner Capacity to Use the DQP for Program, Assignment, and Assessment Planning

QC has raised awareness of the importance of curriculum, pedagogy and, specifically, the need for more intentional sequencing of assignments that shape student performance over time and courses. Participants found that **assessment must, and can, become something that is integral to faculty teaching and responses to student learning**. To scale up recommended practices beyond pilot institutions, QC is providing the DQP/proficiency movement with:

- A dynamic set of assessment and faculty development tools and approaches, including project case studies and a customizable model seminar for faculty development, housed in a resource hub for campus practitioners from diverse institutional contexts who are interested in learning how to use the DQP to develop or help re-envision their own models for transfer.
- A flowchart that details lessons learned from the QC project and serves as a guide for campus practitioners seeking to collaborate on cross-institutional change for transfer student success.
- Examples of functional cultures of assessment, including transfer partner cultures.
- Strategies for promoting large-scale faculty engagement that includes contingent faculty, and incentivizing that work.
- Ongoing efforts to build support from campus administrators, state legislators, and policymakers since bringing this work to scale requires institutional and systemic change to calibrate structural expectations and processes with the activities necessary to achieving both intra- and inter-campus collaboration and student outcomes/proficiencies.
- A suite of publications that offers resources and recommendations to enhance transfer student success between two- and four-year institutions: 1) [The Quality of a College Degree](#), 2) [Collaboration for Quality Student Transfer](#), 3) [Assessment Practices for Advancing Transfer Student Success](#), and 4) [Action Steps for Advancing Transfer Student Success](#).

These materials offer campuses and transfer partners a range of options for their own plans. Addressing the goal of the QC project to improve student success through transfer, the assessment and faculty leadership materials were written with goals of inter-institutional collaboration for student success in mind. The materials recognize and address the changing conditions of academic labor and the constitution of the faculty—assuming that all faculty, including those working on term contracts, need support and access to robust professional learning if the collaborative is to succeed in improving the quality of learning of all students.

Using the DQP and QC Findings to Produce a Framework for Aligning Quality Assurance Policies and Practices—in State Systems and on Campuses

To ensure quality and connect it to access, success, and completion, QC is developing **frameworks** that focus on:

- Linking statewide/system-wide mandates to professional development opportunities—leading to constructive dialogue among practitioners.
- Using student success initiatives to improve existing frameworks and re-envision general education/transfer policy.
- Leveraging statewide groups/projects to gather evidence for improved student learning through assessment and aligned pathways.
- Generating data about student learning outcomes to advance completion and improve curricula and transfer pathways.

Continuing Strands of the QC Work

The QC project helped to initiate two key strands of work – **assessment** and **faculty leadership** – that are connected to on-going projects at AAC&U:

- The [Multi-State Collaborative for Learning Outcomes Assessment](#) (MSC) is a partnership between AAC&U, the [State Higher Education Executive Officers' association](#) (SHEEO), twelve state higher education commissions or systems, and approximately 100 two- and four-year public campuses in the twelve states. Faculty members from MSC campuses are using common rubrics (i.e., the VALUE rubrics) to assess thousands of student artifacts (i.e., authentic student work such as projects, papers, and research) from institutions other than their own. The MSC is designed to produce valid data on student learning for institutional and statewide benchmarking.
- AAC&U's [Faculty Collaboratives](#) project, which is creating large-scale, sustainable networks of faculty who are connecting in resource hubs across ten LEAP states (with outreach to four additional states). The project seeks to build faculty interest in national initiatives for student learning and success. The project also seeks to connect faculty teaching and learning practices within and across state systems.
- AAC&U's [Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence](#) connects to both of these strands of work, with campus teams from thirteen institutions developing action plans to advance equity in student learning and success—action plans that focus, in part, on increased faculty assessment of underserved students' demonstrated achievement using direct measures (e.g., the VALUE rubrics). Action plans will also focus on increased student access to and participation in high impact practices (HIPs), increased completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation, adult learners and/or minority students, and increased awareness and understanding of guided learning pathways that incorporate HIPs for workforce preparation and engaged citizenship.

Participants in the Quality Collaboratives Project

California	Pierce College and California State University, Northridge (transfer partners)
Indiana	Ivy Tech Community College - Central Indiana and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (transfer partners)
Kentucky	Elizabethtown Community and Technical College and University of Louisville (transfer partners)
Massachusetts	Mount Wachusett Community College and Fitchburg State University; Middlesex Community College and University of Massachusetts Lowell (transfer partners)
North Dakota	Joined the project at the state system level
Oregon	Joined the project at the state system level
Utah	Salt Lake Community College and University of Utah (transfer partners)
Virginia	Blue Ridge Community College and James Madison University; J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College and Virginia Commonwealth University (transfer partners)
Wisconsin	University of Wisconsin-Waukesha and University of Wisconsin-Parkside; University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley and University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (transfer partners)

Each of the relevant states/state systems assigned a liaison to work with AAC&U and the QC project participants.