Association of American Colleges & Universities
Quality Collaboratives Initiative

Highlights from a Three Year Nine-State Initiative on Assessment and Transfer
March 2014

Overview
Quality Collaboratives (QC): Assessing and Reporting Degree Qualifications Profile Competencies in the Context of Transfer is a three-year, $2.7 million project launched with support from the 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.

Beginning in October 2011, AAC&U engaged teams of educational, assessment, and policy leaders in nine state systems. 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 issues of learning outcomes, curricular change, high-impact practices, and assessment. Building on these prior efforts, QC participants are testing ways to assess Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) proficiencies in the context of student transfer.

Problems QC Addresses

- Defining and assessing proficiencies in the context of transfer; how best to assess; how best to 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 own and program-level teaching, learning, and assessment with DQP proficiencies,

- Developing a recommended quality assurance framework that campuses and policy leaders can use to ensure quality and report levels of learning. The framework is intended to complement or help re envision current reporting frameworks for completion.

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 through disciplinary starting points to incorporate broader learning outcomes – the DQP proficiencies.

- To assess proficiencies requires a culture and practice change 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, QC is developing 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 will document ways the transfer partners are trying to capture 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 have found that **assessment must, and can, become something that is integral to faculty teaching and response to student learning**. To scale up recommended practices beyond pilot institutions, QC will provide the DQP/proficiency movement with:

- A dynamic set of assessment and faculty development tools and approaches that can be applied in various ways to fit diverse institutional contexts;

- Models that feature the application of relevant tools within successful collaborative networks across transfer partner campuses;

- 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;

- A short point-by-point document linked to design principles supported by practical campus artifacts and strategies and tactical moves for leaders that assist successful implementation, drawn from the project;

- A customizable model seminar for faculty development together with a tool to help campus leaders gauge the readiness of the community to begin a change process (a resilience and sustainability guidelines tool);

- 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.

These materials will 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 faculty leadership and engagement materials will be written with goals of <u>inter-institutional collaboration for student success in mind</u>. The materials will 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, will 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 Influence Quality Assurance Policy and Practices—in State Systems and on Campus
To ensure quality and connect it to access, success, and completion, QC is developing **a quality assurance framework** that recommends:

- Information about shared learning goals and outcomes mapped across institutions and state systems and/or transfer partner institutions;

- Information about the extent to which expected outcomes or DQP proficiencies have been mapped across programs, including major and general education programs;

- Levels of student involvement in select high-impact educational practices, with the specific practices to be chosen by campus and transfer partner faculty;

- Evidence of students' achievement of selected DQP proficiencies, as evidenced by rubrics- based assessment of representative samples of students' curriculum-based work.

- Disaggregated data about both native and transfer students, in terms of their participation in high impact practices, demonstrated achievement of DQP proficiencies and persistence, transfer and completion levels.

Note: While this framework has been developed through the QC project, it is being refined and advanced through the quality assurance components of AAC&U's current GEMs/VALUE initiative.

Participants in the Quality Collaboratives Project

<u>California</u>: California State University, Northridge and Pierce College
<u>Indiana</u>: Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and Ivy Tech Community College - Central Indiana
<u>Kentucky</u>: University of Louisville and Elizabethtown Community and Technical College
<u>Massachusetts</u>: Fitchburg State University and Mount Wachusett Community College; University of Massachusetts Lowell and Middlesex Community College
<u>North Dakota</u>
<u>Oregon</u>
<u>Utah</u>: University of Utah and Salt Lake Community College
<u>Virginia</u>: James Madison University and Blue Ridge Community College; Virginia Commonwealth University and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College
<u>Wisconsin</u>: University of Wisconsin-Parkside and University of Wisconsin-Waukesha; University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley

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