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Student Learning Assessment Update



By: Kim Costino

My Purpose Today



- ☞ Share with you what I know about new WASC requirements as they relate to teaching and learning;
- ☞ Start a conversation about how we, the faculty, can be proactive about how we respond to accreditation demands and the requirements for assessment of student learning;
- ☞ Let's think together about how we can address these demands in ways that are useful and meaningful, in ways that are genuinely about the kind of student learning that we care about and not about accountability and efficiency.

My purpose today is not to proselytize about student learning outcomes and the importance of outcomes based assessment. As I hope will become clear by the end of this brief presentation, I have mixed feelings about the whole thing. I've known it's coming, so I've tried to get inside and learn as much as I can, so I'd be better prepared to fight the things that need to be fought and to hopefully accommodate these demands in ways that can do some good for our students. I've attended a couple of AAC&U conferences, the latest WASC resource fair on core competencies, and I've spent the last 9 months participating in the WASC Assessment Leadership Academy, so

New WASC Requirements



- ☞ All programs need to identify programmatic level learning outcomes for students (PLOs), have a plan for assessing these outcomes, and means of “closing the loop” for these outcomes.
- ☞ This outcomes-based program assessment process must be emphasized in the program review process.
- ☞ PLOs must be informed by the student learning outcomes (SLOs) for the courses in the program and they must align with our “institutional learning outcomes” (ILOs).
- ☞ The SLOs for each course must be stated on every syllabus and course outline.

WASC Requirements (cont.)



- ☞ We have to have a plan for demonstrating that our graduates have achieved our institution's stated level of proficiency in the WASC's five "core competencies":
 - ☞ Written & Oral Communication
 - ☞ Quantitative Skills
 - ☞ Critical Thinking
 - ☞ Information Literacy

- ☞ These core competencies will likely form the basis of our ILOs.

- ☞ The ILOs, PLOs, and SLOs must be in "alignment" and "mapped" and assessed across all levels of the curriculum.

Student Learning Outcomes



- ☞ Statements of what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of a particular educational experience (a major, a degree program, a course, etc.).
- ☞ They may be stated in terms of expected knowledge, skills or attitudes.
- ☞ These outcomes must be consistent with the mission of the department, college, and university.

http://www.csusm.edu/assessment/resources/dev_slos.html

Institutional Learning Outcomes:



- ☞ Statements that identify content or learning parameters - what students should learn, understand or appreciate as a result of their studies.
- ☞ They are found in the mission statement of the institution and can be embedded in the General Education Outcomes.
- ☞ They are also likely to align with or reflect the five core competencies.

http://www.csusm.edu/assessment/resources/dev_slos.html

Program Learning Outcomes



- ☞ Statements about student learning that identify what students should be able to demonstrate, or represent or produce as a result of what and how they have learned in a degree program.
- ☞ These are not taught in any one course but rather applied and assessed throughout.
- ☞ They therefore must be “mapped” across the program’s required courses.

http://www.csusm.edu/assessment/resources/dev_slos.html

Course Learning Outcomes



- ☞ Statements about student learning in a specific course.
- ☞ Some of these must align with the PLOs, but a course can have more SLOs than are reflected in the PLOs.

http://www.csusm.edu/assessment/resources/dev_slos.html

And all of this brings me then, to what's the difference between a course objective and a course outcome?

Objective vs. Outcome



- ☞ Objective – describes what a faculty member will cover or what students will do in a course.
 - ☞ Students will read and analyze seminal works in 20th century American literature

- ☞ Outcome – describes what a student will know and be able to do at the conclusion of a course.
 - ☞ Students will be able to identify and describe the postmodern elements of 20th century American literature.

http://wac.sfsu.edu/sites/default/files/student_learning_outcomes.pdf

So, again, the idea is that the course-level outcomes will feed into the program level outcomes and the program level outcomes will work toward to institutional level outcomes.

Basic premise of outcomes-based assessment makes logical sense. We define these goals, line them up, evaluate how well students are achieving them, and close the loop by making adjustment when/where necessary.

There is, to be sure, some value in approaching teaching and education this way. For example

Benefits of OBA



- ❧ Explicit outcomes give instructors and students targets to shoot for; they can provide focus, stability, clarity, and transparency.
- ❧ They can provide programmatic and institutional coherence, a means of breaking down the silos, and fostering faculty conversation about our collective enterprise.
- ❧ They force us to be intentional about how we actually go about achieving our learning goals and outcomes; we don't leave learning to chance.

Dangers of OBA



- ❧ Evil administrators might do nefarious things with the data we generate. (Program cuts, etc.)
- ❧ Focusing so much on outcomes can narrow education and curricula to what is assessed, cutting off openness to emergent educational opportunities.
- ❧ Outcomes-driven education can reduce curricula to mechanics and formulas and decontextualized skills, rather than the inquiry, the why and how that educational pursuits are supposed to be.
- ❧ Too much rigid alignment can squelch academic freedom, innovation, creativity, and discipline-specific ways of knowing and doing in favor of “generic skills” and traditional ways of knowing and doing.

So, although I promised I wouldn't make an argument or pitch for any one way of approaching the demand for OBA, I do want to at least mention “integrative learning” as a way of possibly avoiding some of these dangers.

Integrative Learning



- ☞ Intentional opportunities for students to pull the pieces of their education together, to integrate and reflect on their learning in various parts of the curriculum and in the “real world.”
- ☞ Allows us to define, for example, the core competencies in different ways; we just need to be aware of and explicit about the differences and provide students opportunities to reflect on these differences.

This is just one example, one approach that I happen to like, but as I said at the beginning, I’m not here to offer answers or solutions or to argue for a particular course of action

My point(s), really...



- ☞ Change/OBA is coming; let's take control of this ourselves and be proactive, rather than reactive;
- ☞ Let's make our approach to WASC's demands about improving student learning, scholarly inquiry for pedagogical purposes, and not about accountability and efficiency;
- ☞ Let's approach OBA in a way that is not reductive, standardized, rigid and inflexible, not about everyone getting in line and doing the same thing, but about being more aware, more intentional, more explicit, and more reflective about what we are trying to do for and with our students.

How we do this, I do not know, so let's talk, let's brainstorm, let's have inclusive conversation.