

The 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project Seminar 2001

Concurrent Sessions

Saturday, March 3

4:00-5:15 p.m.

During the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project Seminar 2001, six concurrent sessions were offered:

1. REACHING CONSENSUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES
2. DEVELOPING AN OUTCOMES-BASED CURRICULUM
3. GOOD PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT
4. ALTERNATIVE DOCUMENTATION FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES
5. DEVELOPING DISSEMINATION MODELS: LOCAL AND NATIONAL
6. PROJECT EVALUATION

Key discussion points from each session follow.

1. REACHING CONSENSUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

NOREEN THOMAS, FACILITATOR

Is it possible to agree on a common set of learning outcomes that can be measured by all involved in education? Session participants indicated that while unanimous consensus is unrealistic, steps can be taken to work toward agreement on learning outcomes within a college community. Recommendations and observations from participants in this session suggest best practices for helping move an institution toward agreement on what learning looks like from an outcomes perspective.

- Faculty and staff must have a clear understanding as to why identifying learning outcomes is important. To some it appears to be “the soup du jour” approach because it is not significantly linked to the values, mission, and strategic plan of the college.
- It is strongly recommended that strategic planning and assessment be linked; as a result, awareness and ownership are enhanced. By so doing, the feedback loop is also re-enforced.
- It’s not only about strategy; it’s also about people.
- Honor the past—it’s about continually improving and not about what we are doing wrong.

- Once outcomes are determined, colleges must define the level at which assessment will occur—organizational, program, course, and student; how it will occur—measuring in terms of *absolute* or *value added* outcomes; and what kind of communication systems and resources will be needed—specialty staff, newsletters, dialogue groups, automated systems, professional development opportunities, etc. It requires a major organizational commitment at all levels.

Discussions in this session also centered around ideas articulated in the work of Ron Baker who is one of the Project Facilitators:

- Create opportunities for dialogue within your college about learning outcomes by asking these guiding questions:
 - Who are we? (*values*)
 - What do we claim to do? (*mission*)
 - Are we doing it? (*integrity*)
 - How do we know? (*assessment*)
 - What data do we collect? (*evidence*)
 - What do the data tell us? (*analysis*)
 - What are we doing as a result? (*feedback*)
 - How can the organization support this effort? (*resources*)

2. DEVELOPING AN OUTCOMES-BASED CURRICULUM

MARY HJELM, FACILITATOR

Transitioning from a teaching objectives approach to one that focuses on learning outcomes can be difficult. To accomplish such a transition, participants came together in this session to discuss methods for creating an outcomes-based curriculum within a college. Ten questions were raised, and answers as well as cautions were voiced around each.

- What is an outcomes-based curriculum?
 - It is similar to competency based.
 - All courses are interwoven; programs integrate all outcomes.
 - Academic and skills are combined.
 - Knowledge, skills, and abilities need to be integrated into all outcomes.
 - Are Gen Ed & discipline programs separate? Should they be?
 - What about people not in program specific courses?
 - Is this about liberal arts?
 - The community wants people coming out having employable skills.
- Is teaching about assessing those skills? Or is it about teaching knowledge (general education)?
 - Most feel that both are very important.
 - We need to agree on definitions – but at our own schools, not necessarily as a group here.

- Outcomes as opposed to what? Many views have been focused on “outcomes” – but whose?
 - Outcomes can be related to economics principle of supply and demand.
 - In the past, we have supplied people with the knowledge.
 - Now, our focus is in meeting the demand of the students.
 - Both views are economics, just as both views can be outcomes.
 - If we are a higher educational institute, we have a responsibility to give more information, too. (Not everyone agreed on this.)
- What kind of learning?
 - Outcomes are knowledge, skills, and abilities.
 - The highest level of learning is integration.
 - We need to restructure to utilize more general applications.
 - For example, when Inver Hills implemented the model, most were doing the assessment anyway. The transition was more an awareness of how it was being done.
- Is it student centered, student-learning centered, or employer centered?
 - There is a fundamental difference between community colleges and technical colleges.
 - What is the function of schooling? To help students get a better job or to love learning?
 - Learning and job training are inherently different.
- Do 21st Century Learning Outcomes cut across the curriculum or reside in specific courses?
 - Most agree that a learning outcomes curriculum is comprehensive – includes the entire program, not just a focus on courses.
 - To make these transitions work, the emphasis on courses as stand alone needs to be changed.
 - If you want to inspire, go ahead, but it should not be the reason students arrive.
 - We have to define curriculum based on the specific disciplines and the climate of our own schools.
- What parameters are we looking for to assess outcomes?
 - We can't make assumptions about the learning that is occurring.
 - How do we know that students are learning?
- Where is our common ground among this group?
 - We all have core outcomes and address all in programs (not in each individual course).

- When should we assess?
 - Why not look just at the end of the program? See how the students do at the end. But then we don't have a chance to do something about deficiencies. We'd just be recording them.
 - We need to give meaningful feedback to students throughout. Some instructors do that, but not all.
 - All instructors need to take responsibility along with academic freedom to incorporate these skills into their programs. These skills are "value added".

- What is the responsibility of the student?
 - The Interactive Learning Model (ILM) is designed to make the student an independent learner.
 - Regardless of the instructor, the students will be able to learn what they need.
 - Student assessment helps the students come to know their own weaknesses and build on them.

3. GOOD PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT

RON BAKER, FACILITATOR

Key to the success of the entire project is the development of effective strategies for assessing student learning. The following issues and questions surfaced during the concurrent session on good practices for assessment.

- What is the focus for assessment? Is the assessment strategy designed to assess each individual student or is it designed to assess program and institutional effectiveness?

- At what level should assessment be conducted? What data should be collected?
 - Institutional
 - Program
 - Course
 - Student

- Is assessment designed to assess identified learning outcomes in absolute terms or is it designed to measure the value added through institutional efforts (programs, classes, etc.) toward a student's achievement of the identified learning outcomes?

- Does or should assessment take different forms depending on the program? Should assessment of general education programs be different than assessment of professional or technical programs?

- What are the implications of value-added assessment as compared to outcomes assessment?
 - Value added requires an initial assessment and an exit assessment.
 - Outcomes assessment measures exiting Knowledge, Skills, & Abilities (KSAs) without regard for student intake preparation, abilities, or circumstances.
- Should assessment take formative or summative form (or both)?
 - Formative assessment provides feedback to student and instructor that enables corrective action to be taken during the learning process.
 - Summative assessment provides feedback after the fact to inform decisions on future efforts.
- What are the expectations and requirements of external constituencies regarding assessment?
 - Regional accreditation
 - Specialized accreditation
 - Employers
 - Other educational institutions
 - Governmental agencies
 - Legislatures
 - Grant funding agencies
- Is there a clear understanding of what is to be assessed? Do we assess what we expect students to learn?
- Are assessment strategies consistent with what is being assessed?
- How can we document and track student achievement of learning outcomes?
- Is there more than one model of assessment of learning outcomes or is there an expectation that institutions will agree on only one model?

4. ALTERNATIVE DOCUMENTATION FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES

CINDY MILES, FACILITATOR

To address issues of portability, transcription of learning outcomes beyond course grades and credit, and student access to evidence of their learning progress, nontraditional methods for authenticating student learning are needed. Participants in this session explored challenges and approaches to such alternative documentation.

Two project colleges were invited to share examples of their progress toward alternative documentation systems: Miki Martin-Erschnig reviewed Waukesha's Critical Life Skills Transcript model, and Julia McGregor shared an overview of Inver Hills' web-based transcript approach.

In addition, representatives from League corporate partners iLearning (Larry Schwartz) and The Chauncey Group (Steve Quimby) presented an introduction to the League for Learning project, in which the League for Innovation is partnering with these organizations and community colleges across the country to build a portal network to bring together key resources for the training, certification, and documentation of IT workers. Two 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project colleges—Foothill and Central Piedmont—are pilot schools for the League for Learning project, and opportunities for linking these two initiatives to build a comprehensive network for nontraditional documentation of learning outcomes were explored.

Session participants also articulated a number of needs, issues, and recommendations regarding development of alternative documentation systems:

NEEDS

- Concrete examples (models to follow)
- Sense of how to proceed
- Technology partners to help with development
- Identification of successes and failures in this arena
- "Different strokes" — multiple approaches
- Connection to the League for Learning Project
- Connections to other teams' IT folks
- Identification of standards for e-transcripts

ISSUES

- Resource challenges
- Interoperability among different colleges' transcribing systems
- Demography of web-systems
- Usefulness—will colleges, students, employers recognize or use these alternative transcripts?
- Ways to link these systems to what we do (teaching and learning)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Keep it simple – individualized
- Develop "E-free" alternative documentation models (not just digital/web-based systems)
- Include students in the development process
- Remember WHY for alternative documentation (Ask, "Does this improve student learning?" and "How do we know?")

5. DEVELOPING DISSEMINATION MODELS: LOCAL AND NATIONAL

JOAN WARREN, FACILITATOR

Sharing model programs for defining, developing, delivering, and documenting learning outcomes calls for dissemination mechanisms to help institutionalize these programs and to share information with other colleges interested in such work. Session participants discussed methods for such distribution at both the local and the national level and generated a variety of suggestions for how information about the work of this project can be distributed.

- Design a retreat for all faculty members after initial plan has been piloted.
- Ensure that dissemination models are data driven.
- Share lessons learned as well as best practices.
- Develop a mandatory orientation program for new employees so they will know about 21 Century Outcomes; this could be on video.
- Create directed information on the Web for adjunct faculty.
- Use technology to create a centralized information system with shared files.
- Give faculty and staff release time to work on the project.
- Let students know about what we're doing.
- Add members outside of instruction to the group to facilitate collegewide support.
- Develop advocacy plans for influencing educators and policymakers to support learning-centered educational approaches.

6. PROJECT EVALUATION

KAY McCLENNEY, FACILITATOR

The League and the participating colleges will measure the success of the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project based on the extent to which the outcomes defined for each of the project objectives are met. This session involved project participants in a discussion of how best to evaluate the project success and the expected roles of each institution in college-level project evaluation.

From the ideas and questions raised from session participants, Kay McClenney, as the facilitator of this session and the Project Evaluator, developed a set of guidelines, highlighted below. The complete Guidelines for Evaluation of the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project are available from college Team Leaders.

EACH COLLEGE IMPLEMENTS A PLAN FOR MEETING THE 5 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- **Define** ... a set of core competencies that encompass 21st Century Learning Outcomes; assess the status of development and use of new standards for learning in the institution
- **Develop** ... a set of curriculum components for the 21st Century Learning Outcomes with (a) specific learning outcomes for each competency, (b) levels of performance that students should meet, (c) concrete indices of student work to demonstrate each level, and (d) assessment strategies for measuring student achievement at each level
- **Deliver** ... i.e., identify and implement best practices and multiple models of delivery and support of 21st Century Learning Outcomes
- **Document** ...i.e., develop nontraditional methods for documenting student achievement of 21st Century Learning Outcomes beyond traditional grades, credits, and degrees
- **Disseminate** ...i.e., each college will (a) share their model programs and practices with other institutions, (b) develop an advocacy plan for influencing local and state educators and policymakers to support movement toward performance-based practices in higher education

THE EVALUATION QUESTION

- *What is the appropriate and credible evidence that our college (first) is progressing toward and (then) has achieved the project objectives?*

ASSUMPTIONS

- Each participant college is at a different point in this work, each has a unique culture and tradition, and each will take a different approach to achieving the objectives.
- Each college will also have an individualized evaluation plan.
- All evaluation plans will be explicitly tied to the 5 project objectives.
- Evaluation plans will be posted on the Web along with project plans.
- Prizes are for cogency and reader-friendliness, not for length!
- All participant college teams have completed the "Survey of the Status of 21st Century Learning Outcomes" provided by the League for Innovation.

COMPONENTS OF COLLEGE-LEVEL EVALUATION

- Public exhibition of work products related to each of the 5 major objectives
- External review/critique of work products
- Institutional self-assessment
- Quarterly progress reports (the 4th quarter report serves as the college's annual report)

THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE

- The bottom line is learning itself: Is the work of this project expanding and improving student learning? And how do we know?