

The 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project Seminar 2001

Issue Sessions
Sunday, March 4
10:00-11:30 a.m.

During the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project Seminar 2001, five issues sessions were offered:

- 1. CREATING ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE FOR LEARNING**
- 2. INSTITUTIONALIZING THE EFFORT**
- 3. GETTING BUY-IN**
- 4. MAINTAINING MOMENTUM**
- 5. CONNECTING TO OTHER COLLEGE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES**

Facilitators worked to capture the concepts from each of these discussion sessions, and these emerging ideas are provided as catalysts for further dialogue within and among project colleges.

1. CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE FOR LEARNING **CINDY MILES, FACILITATOR**

The ultimate success of any new initiative lies in its ability to be integrated into the organization's culture. Participants in this issue session grappled with defining a culture of learning, identifying strategies they are using to promote such a culture, clarifying obstacles they face in their efforts, and envisioning ways to work together and with the League to facilitate the growth of organizational cultures that engender programs, policies, and practices focused on learning.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN IDEAL ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE FOR LEARNING

- Safe environment for learning
- Mistakes are O.K.
- Mission, Vision, and Values reflect learning
- Shared language of learning
- Actions reflect the value of learning
- Shared understanding about what student learning means
- Conversations about teaching and learning (formal/informal)
- Nonthreatening climate
- Gathers and uses good data about student learning
- Commitment to assessment and improvement of student learning
- Commitment to work collaboratively on the business of student learning
- Open environment (student centered)
- Expectations are communicated to students
- Administration, faculty, staff, & students participate in the development of learning
- Students receive feedback about their learning

- Educational culture is demystified
- Evolutionary—always growing and changing to meet needs
- Learning occurs within and outside the classroom (faculty, staff, students, administrators think about teaching and learning in new and different ways)
- All members of organization are learners
- Prepares, supports, and guides learners in their learning journeys

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE A CULTURE FOR LEARNING

- Change language from Teaching/Learning to Learning/Teaching (shift from teaching to learning paradigm)
- Assess learning styles of faculty & staff; facilitate dialogue about differences in learning approaches and interactions with colleagues and students
- Publicize faculty teaching styles in course schedules and syllabi
- Conduct staff development workshops to promote awareness of teaching styles and connections between learning style and teaching approach
- Assess expanding methodologies for teaching and learning
- Conduct inventory of learning modalities available for delivery of student services (admissions/financial aid/registration)—increase options for access (phone, web, text, face-to-face, self-directed, mentored, etc.)
- Use an annual institutional theme (e.g. Learning College, Learning Works, Show Me the Learning, Learning First, Learning by Design, Leadership for Learning)—theme is reflected in each year’s publications, convocation, strategic plan, other college activities & programs throughout the year
- Identify target Knowledge, Skills, & Abilities (KSAs) in every course outline
- Offer multiple learning pathways (service-learning, self paced, online, etc.)
- Conduct conversations on the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Showcase local successes and great ideas for teaching & learning
- Validate prerequisites for courses (mandatory testing and placement; alternative pathways for movement through developmental sequences)

OBSTACLES TO A CULTURE FOR LEARNING

- Idea that assessment threatens academic freedom
- Belief that Good Instructor = Content Expert
- Top-down, imposed ideas from the “Adminisphere”
- Losing focus on learning in the assessment maze
- Traditional architecture we can’t work around (especially funding structures)
- Lack of affirmation for progress and achievements already accomplished
- Mystifying critics and empowering critics (giving power to the naysayers)
- Fear of accountability
- Tradition—the way we’ve always done it
- Lack of resources

LEAGUE’S ROLE IN HELPING PROMOTE CULTURE FOR LEARNING

- Share data
- Share resources, best practices, and lessons learned (project website)
- Provide facilitators for campus-based workshops

2. INSTITUTIONALIZING THE EFFORT

MARY HJELM, FACILITATOR

The conversation about institutionalizing the effort was organized around five topics that were identified by the group at the beginning of the session:

- Bridging the Gap Between Supporters and Resisters
- Protecting Academic Freedom
- Marketing Strategies for Selling New Assessment “Addenda”
- Creating Positive Buy-In From Students
- Identifying, Celebrating, and Rewarding Champions

Once these topics were clarified, three rounds of discussion ensued, focusing on communication, personal integrity, and persuasion, in turn. Comments brought up in each of the three conversation rounds are offered as points for further consideration regarding the process of institutionalization.

FIRST ROUND OF DISCUSSION: COMMUNICATION

- Establish the importance of inclusion
- Frequent and loud talk about successes or improvements by faculty on individual and informal basis
- Increase or create more discussion of assessment in college or department newsletters
- Extend demand for assessment into other/new areas of instruction
- Create focus groups to discuss aspects of part of the program
- Achieve an agreement on internal vocabulary

SECOND ROUND OF DISCUSSION: PERSONAL INTEGRITY

- Identify what is already working and build on it
- Initiate a faculty driven conversation about assessment and improvement
- Establish specific guidelines and a shared vocabulary
- Provide resources for faculty who need help (training, professional development, release time, etc.)

THIRD ROUND OF DISCUSSION: PERSUASION

- Set a clear and explicit vision
- Keep a sense of humor
- Reinforce what is already in place and working
- Post reminders of new objectives in public places for students and faculty
- Provide subtle reminders
- Create the need by extending assessment into all areas of college
- Celebrate and reward participants

3. GETTING BUY-IN

RON BAKER, FACILITATOR

To sustain an organizational reform effort such as that of outcomes-based education, it is necessary to get buy-in for the initiative from stakeholders of the institution. In this issue session, the discussion centered on issues and strategies related to garnering such support. Four major themes related to achieving buy-in from a college community to the notion and use of learning outcomes emerged from this discussion:

BUYING IN TO THE CONCEPT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Find agreement for 21st Century Learning Outcomes Strategies
- Use common, acceptable, non-inflammatory language
- Establish a glossary of terms with operational definitions
- Use an inclusive process to reach general agreement on overarching categories of 21st Century Learning Outcomes (e.g., affinity process)

REFINING THE MEANING OF THE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- What do the learning outcomes (e.g., communication, critical thinking) really mean?
- Strategies
 - Define indicators of Knowledge, Skills, & Abilities (KSAs) for each learning outcome
 - Leave the means for achieving the KSAs open to individual faculty interpretation
 - Examine current practices and related learning outcomes/KSAs to these practices
 - Establish/confirm the relevance of learning outcomes/KSAs to institutional mission
 - Look at general education patterns
 - Seek external perceptions of 21st Century Learning Outcomes/KSAs
 - Use professional/technical programs as models

ACHIEVING PERSONAL BUY-IN

- Why is the notion of explicit learning outcomes important to faculty and what are the attendant issues?
 - Academic freedom
 - Concerns that student learning outcomes will be used for faculty evaluation
 - Fear regarding loss of control of faculty autonomy
 - Concern that faculty values regarding the nature of learning will be lost
 - Perceptions that many learning outcomes are not measurable
 - Ambiguity regarding the learning outcomes, indicators of learning (KSAs), and levels of achievement
 - Concerns that learning outcomes will be defined by top-down processes
 - Lack of understanding of how learning outcomes relate to a specific discipline
 - Concern that learning outcomes is just another in a list of passing phases that will soon run its course
 - Lack of time to do more than what is already being done
- Strategies for Achieving Personal Buy-In
 - Separate assessment of learning outcomes from the faculty evaluation process
 - Focus on learning outcomes as extensions of (not a contradiction to) faculty values
 - Focus on the assessment as positive feedback for improvement to students and faculty
 - Allocate time and other resources for faculty to develop and implement learning outcomes
 - Ensure faculty involvement in the determination of learning outcomes/KSAs

PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Strategies for facilitating a move to a learning outcomes based curriculum
 - Highlight successful implementations of learning outcomes based curricula
 - Start with a small, committed core faculty
 - Establish peer-to-peer faculty mentoring partners for mutual support
 - Develop pilot projects and build upon what is learned from them
 - Model outcomes-based behavior (meetings, planning, projects, etc.)
 - Include issues of effective instructional design in the discussion of learning outcomes
 - Explore the use of instructional design software packages (e.g., WIDS)

4. MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

NOREEN THOMAS, FACILITATOR

Once begun, what work is needed to sustain the drive to achieve a goal? Participants gathered together in this session and shared suggestions that have helped them maintain their momentum in this project.

- Building students into the process can be a very effective tool in engaging colleges in the learning outcomes process. For example, techniques such as using student focus groups to determine outcomes, aggressively publicizing the benefits of the outcomes, and continually reminding students about the outcomes makes learning outcomes become a “real” part of the educational plan.
- Linking into the college’s strategic planning process can re-energize learning outcomes and curriculum revisions. If staff can see a connection between the mission and the values of the college and the documentation of learning outcomes, it becomes more meaningful, longer lasting, and more firmly grounded.
- Supporting faculty with accessible and meaningful tools can generate new excitement for the process. Professional development programs, assessment fairs, and effective automated support systems can go a long way to institutionalize the effort.
- Curriculum design specialists are very useful to help identify learning activities that are meaningful, measurable, and able to be documented. They can be effective change agents in the process.
- Organizations that appear to be successful in documenting learning outcomes have a champion for the process who is very well respected and accepted by the faculty and administration.
- Change often requires the commitment of financial resources—in the group discussion, some colleges said they provided supplemental pay to faculty and others just encouraged participation with no pay. Both approaches appeared to work.
- Documenting learning outcomes for students also suggests that colleges should revisit faculty and staff job descriptions so they address similar demonstrable skills and expectations.

5. CONNECTING TO OTHER COLLEGE PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

JOAN WARREN, FACILITATOR

In all participating colleges, the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project is being integrated with existing college initiatives and activities. From the discussion in this issue session came the recognition that most colleges are using core competencies identified before they joined the project and building on this foundation for their project activities. In essence, most institutions had created core competencies at an earlier period and, to complete the process, are developing student learning outcomes around those competencies.

This discussion session also revealed a variety of connections project partners are making to other institutional projects, to inter-institutional collaboratives, and to state and national activities. Recommendations were identified for promoting linkages to institutionalize and share 21st Learning Outcomes Project activities and processes.

LINKS TO OTHER INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE COLLEGE

- Tying with core competencies already in place
- Tying learning outcomes to the budget (a faculty activity)
- Linking to criteria for excellence & DACUM
- Tying to governance and strategic plan
- Tying technology to literacy in a FIPSE grant

LINKS TO STATE AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

- Use state databank in the 21st Century Learning Outcomes project
- Tie in with new partnerships with businesses; colleges must meet employer needs and student outcomes must match employer needs
- Create a data warehouse so users don't have to depend on Institutional Research (Title III grant to look at AA programs)
- Connect with information sessions with other colleges (e.g., North Central's assessment forum)

CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER CONFERENCES

- Institutional research (e.g. Southern Association Institutional Research)
- Assessment Institutes —California
- Midwest Institute for International and Intercultural Education
- Midwest Institute - two workshops a year
- Florida Teaching and Learning Conference
- NISOD

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Connect with data that already exists
- Link with peer teams for support, review, and collaboration
- Develop state-level curriculum template for 21st Century Learning Outcomes