SAAF DISCUSSION FORUM: Sharing Experiences on Learning Outcomes Initiatives

Thursday, October 16, 2014; 1-5pm at The Melville Centre for Dialogue, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 8771 Lansdowne Road, Richmond, BC

FEEDBACK FROM DISCUSSIONS

INTRODUCTION: The What, Why, How and Implementation of Learning Outcomes

What key points did you take away from this session?

- Important to consider – are learning outcomes intended as a fix or improvement? Main focus should be to consider what is in line with the purpose of post-secondary education.
- Learning should be linked to mastery, not time. Time is increasingly irrelevant in assessing learning.
- Should take into account shifts in context and spectrum of education and the role of the teacher.
- Learning outcomes can serve a number of different purposes – accreditation, quality assurance, credit transfer/pathways for students; qualification frameworks.
- The challenge comes in *demonstrating* competency.
- Learning outcomes can be perceived as taking away from a rich learning experience, as dictated and only oriented towards lower level employment.
- For consideration:
  - Common language/glossary
  - Usefulness of the transcript?
  - Additional materials required?
  - Outcomes as the basis for credentials?
  - Agreed upon outcomes around literacy and numeracy?
  - Articulation committees to map?

Are there approaches or examples of learning outcomes used in other jurisdictions that you think would be useful for institutions to consider in the BC post-secondary system? If so, please specify.

- A focus on collaboratively meeting higher level cognitive skills, e.g. citizenship and critical thinking could be exciting – a team effort.
- Accreditation systems in the US – are there some commonalities or common approaches?
- Bologna Process could be instructive.
- The University of Guelph model of curriculum renewal.

BREAKOUT A: Addressing Learning Outcomes through Multiple, Simultaneous Strategies

- Motivation and interest of different groups needs to be taken into account – with everyone having a voice. Requires multiple, simultaneous strategies.
- Student voice. Value in engaging students in process.
- Consistent external expert.
- Grassroots momentum.
- How the strategies align and work simultaneously rather than linearly. (Linear approach usually too time consuming.)
- Involve students in the process.
- Structured timelines important.
- Curriculum improvement model. Curriculum audit.
- Need to differentiate between accreditation process (administratively driven) and learning outcomes process (faculty involvement and faculty driven).
- Importance of engaging faculty in the process of learning outcomes development and assessment – many points of entry.
- Keep the accreditation process separate from the outcomes project.
- There are challenges to a multi-strategy approach.
- Important to integrate learning outcomes into program review process.
- Engaging all stakeholders is important.
- Effective training program and support system is important.

BREAKOUT B: From Learning Outcomes to Educational Goals at SFU

- Faculty resistance needs to be addressed.
- Be flexible in how departments develop their own processes.
- Have people get out of their habitual thinking.
- Support and resources are key – faculty and programs need support to move the conversation forward.
- Importance of clarity – mapping assessment process to accreditation process(es) very helpful.
- Keeping curricular design principles in mind (start with outcomes, not topics to cover).
- Faculty ownership of the development process is key.
- Important to use plain language when developing LO guidelines
- Start by asking "What do you want the students to learn?" This led to the development of educational goals.
- The use of language was critical: learning outcomes was seen as top down, bureaucratic. The term "educational goal" felt more collaborative and encouraged ownership by faculties
- The language used for learning outcomes needs to be specific to the discipline. What works for one department may not work for others.

BREAKOUT C: The Institutional Development Process

- The "why's of learning outcomes

- Strategizing and integrating course, program, and institutional outcomes.
- The quick pace of their process. (UFV)
- UFV's initiative started with institutional learning outcomes, then filtered those down to program, then to course outcomes.
- Consider how to engage organization. (Approaches to recalcitrant attitudes.)
- Ensuring faculty buy-in is key.
- Possibility of aligning learning outcomes with secondary school outcomes/goals.
- Learning outcomes are more useful than transcripts.
- They set two institutional strategic goals to help everybody focus.

Examples of questions raised in discussion:
a) What kinds of experts were selected to put together the outcomes and themes? (mainly Teaching and Learning, and Ed Co. – and those most actively engaged with the issues and respected as such).
b) Would they have done anything different? (Find new ways of engaging students in process.)
c) How will they be reviewing the process? (This is a living document, expect it to go through continual change through time. Not necessarily dramatic changes, but still need to adapt as context changes.)

BREAKOUT A: Learning Outcomes and Accreditation

- Continual program improvement.
- The total shift to outcomes required. It is not the same as before.
- Learning outcomes once part of a continual important process.
- Learning outcomes as a change driver.
- Importance of accreditation as a driver of the process.
- Thinking of the "long-gone" – move beyond immediate administration/curricular needs to looking at what will be gained in terms of teaching and learning. (Link between learning outcomes assessment and fostering to scholarship of teaching and learning.)
- Need to allow for resources to implement outcomes project. Important to train the implementers.
- Importance of accreditation as a driving force for promoting meaningful assessment.
- Benefit of accreditation is requirement for service department to align with learning outcomes.

BREAKOUT B: Measurable Learning Outcomes = Students' Learning

- Grassroots development.
- Offer different types of program outcomes/customize.
- Introduce, Reinforce, Master – very helpful.
- Appreciated the approach to program mapping.
- How different the process is when it starts with faculty. Different process and feel that starting at institutions.
- Importance of faculty understanding learning outcomes and how they relate to the way a course is delivered.
- Linking assessment closely to outcomes.

BREAKOUT C: Integrating Learning Outcomes and Service Standards

- Emphasis on validating course/learning outcome link to program outcome of evidence.
- Getting support services to be part of the process.
- Challenges: resourcing learning outcomes, aligning service courses with program outcomes.
- There is value to an integrated approach vs. program by program.
- "TUNING" process interesting.
- External experts and research can support the process.
- Pedagogical shifts require learning to be central rather than teaching.
- Changes needed beyond learning outcomes, program, and curriculum change. (e.g. addressing space, support, service courses, etc.) The change to learning outcomes approach leads to the need for other changes.
- There's really only one question: Does this help learning?
- Advantages of articulating program learning outcomes.

CLOSING DISCUSSION

What key points did you take away from this session?

- Create relevance!
- How to go the next step – assessment.
- Nice synthesis of the key ideas.
- Still grappling with outcomes – not sure why such a struggle.
- Learning outcomes take input from faculty, students, staff, community, employers, etc.
- To be effective, learning outcomes and assessment need to be linked to continuous improvement.
- Importance of faculty involvement and buy-in – different ways to achieve this.
- Could be helpful to use different terminology to help combat fears. (e.g. term "outcomes" can be scary for some).
- Collateral benefits of learning outcomes approach – some very good reasons for it.
- Training and support is key.
- There are potential barriers as well – e.g. lack of clarity or purpose, counteracting cynicism.
- It needs to be understood as a measurable process – not just another initiative.
- Need to clearly articulate meaning and define the process.
- Meaningful assessment of learning outcomes can lead to meaningful change (fostering development of teaching and learning).
- Best if it's an institutional initiative, otherwise may run into roadblocks.
- Fear about learning outcomes is mainly around the issue of assessment.
- Involve the broader institutional community. Not just faculty but support staff.
- Get faculty deeply involved from the get go and in a way that is not threatening
- There is a fear factor to LO that needs to be addressed
- Time and resources are barriers
- Need to properly explain rationale behind move to LO
- A Lot of people do not understand what LOs mean

There are also institutional barriers to creativity. There needs to be institution wide support to move to an LO model

Do you have suggestions for how issues surrounding learning outcomes might be further explored? If so, please elaborate.

- How learning outcomes align (rather than conflict) with academic freedom.
- How do we know we've done it right? (assessing students to see if school has met outcomes.)
- Resources – what types of resources have institutions developed to support this conversation? Shared online in a central location.
- More focused discussion on the types of training and support needed for meaningful implementation.
- Strategies for assessment (at an institutional level) – future presentations.
- Within our institutions – through curriculum committees – senate committees, faculty councils.

- Discussion or forums through above venues.
- When "service" courses don't align with program outcomes, there are two options: 1) try to work with "resistant" faculty (doesn't always work) or 2) develop a new course that probably won't articulate. (How can we open articulation up to accommodate "other than ENGL 100" courses?)

Was there something you thought should have been addressed today and wasn't? If so, please specify.

- We didn't discuss how all the resources/contacts would be shared, i.e. TRU Committee did an extensive review of where BC institutions are at with learning outcomes.
- Interested in connection with K-12 (transitions)
- Qualification frameworks and learning outcomes (such as US model.)
- How do we know we've done it right? (assessing students to see if school has met outcomes.)
- The impact all of this will have on articulation and transfer – might be too far along in process given focus of today.