

## How Do We Assess Essential Learning Outcomes?

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### Outline

- Introductions
- What learning is essential?
- LEAP, Assessment, and Accountability
- Institutional Context Sets the Stage for Institutional Understanding
- Create "Convergence", Discover Learning
- Assessment tools, processes, techniques

This is a “think, pair, share”  
exercise.

If you want to write down your  
thoughts, please do.

## Essential Learning

Think about a course you teach,  
a program you work with,  
or a learning experience  
over which you have some influence.

In many areas, specific content  
changes rapidly; what students learn  
becomes quickly out of date.

Thinking broadly: what do you want  
students to learn beyond the  
boundaries of the specific content of  
the course/program?

## Report out

- Brief overview of program/course you're thinking about
- What are the broader learning goals?

**For further reflection:  
Why did we use this  
strategy?**

## The question is: What stays with students?

- LEAP and Essential Learning
- How many know about LEAP project?
- Liberal Education and America's Promise
  - Overview (for more about LEAP)
  - AAC&U LEAP website:  
<http://www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm>
- If you know about LEAP –  
How far along are you?

**next**

## Assessment and Accountability

- These terms are **not** interchangeable; however, they do intersect.
- Assessment – engaging attention for improvement
  - Discover what students are learning, if learning goals are met, and if not, what/where to improve
  - Complex questions, many tools
- Accountability – compliance to assure that minimum standards are attained
  - Tend to be simple, quantitative
  - *May* use assessment data to make a case to stakeholders that resources are being used responsibly

## Assessment should...

- Provide a framework within which programs (instructors, administrators, perhaps other campus stakeholders) can participate in discussions about student learning
- Provide data that instructors and programs can use to advocate for students, programs, and possibly themselves
- Be ongoing and situated in both local and national contexts



## Brainstorming

As a group, choose one of the  
Essential Learning Outcomes,  
and one context in which to  
assess it.

How would you assess learning  
in that area?

## The Role of Institutional Context

- There are many types of institutions in AAC&U
- Contextualizing questions about "essential learning":
  - What has been important, historically?
  - What aspects of our institutional context are challenges for assessment?
  - What aspects of our institutional context create opportunities for assessment?
  - How does context influence decisions we make about the future?

## So, who are we?



**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
500 Lincoln Dr, Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1380

**General information:** (608) 262-1234

**Website:** [www.wisc.edu](http://www.wisc.edu)

**Type:** 4-year, Public

**Awards offered:** Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctor's degree

First-professional degree

**Campus setting:** City: Midsize

**Campus housing:** Yes

**Student population:** 41,563 (30,166 undergraduate)



IPEDS ID: 240444  
OPE ID: 00389500

Note:

This screenshot is taken from the College Navigator website, maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. See: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

## UW-Madison's Challenges

- Budget – declining state share
- State relations – strained (“micro-managing”)
- Expectations – low tuition, high ROI
- Engagement – tension between cosmopolitan, discipline-forged identity and more locally developed identity (are faculty defined by discipline, or institution?)
- Communication – calls for accountability, effective connection with stakeholders
- Scale – we are very large and have many programs!

## How does this affect assessment?

- Many students, programs, and learning opportunities – spread out in many different places
- Research mission drives a lot of our activity
- Instructional staff is diverse
- Variable integration/connection between academic and co-curricular programming
- Faculty must be “on board”
- “The Wisconsin Way”  
(to name a few...)

## Every institution is different. And yet...

- All need to respond to national demands
- All need to certify that degrees conferred reflect attainment of commonly understood skills & knowledge
- *Essential Learning Outcomes* provide opportunities to participate in broad common conversation about higher education, both with colleagues and external audiences.
- Assessment becomes a tool for speaking constructively in the realm of accountability.

But how?

## "Setting the Stage"

- We created "convergence" by fostering conversations
- Who is at this table?
  - informal
  - broad perspectives
  - academic & co-curricular
  - all can effect change through usual work



## What "convergence" did for us:

- Led to an audit of current practice to "discover" what is "essential learning" in what we already do
- Led to a clear articulation of a "UW-Madison Experience"
- Shared language that describes our work in shared institutional context
- Created a foundation of strong institutional support

## Moving from "Talk" to "Action"

- Locating "Essential Learning" in the "UW-Madison Experience"
- Engage campus

### Now: Assessing Essential Learning

- Translate current practice:
  - ✓ Create EL template to map variety of activities
  - ✓ Map General Education to EL
  - Assessment plans/reports use EL language

## Where Assessment of Essential Learning Can Happen

### Curricular

- Projects, assignments
- Courses
- Specific programs (majors, general education)
- Degrees

### Co-Curricular

- Student orgs and activities
- Advising
- Res Life
- Employment
- Health Services

### Experiential Learning

- Service Learning
- Internships

## Assessment Tools/Processes

- Rubrics to rate papers, portfolios, performance
- Standardized testing (CLA, CAAP, etc.)\*
- National surveys (NSSE, FSSE)\*
- Locally developed exams & surveys
- Entry/Mid/Exit interviews, surveys, or exams
- Certification exams (boards, state licensure, etc)
- Longitudinal studies

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\* These are best combined with other tools.

## Assessing Institutional Outcomes

- "Know thyself" – and know your comparison group, too
- Consider the concept of "standards without standardization"
- Look at the whole student
- Look at the whole learning experience, wherever it may occur
- Tell your tale within your institution – and beyond its boundaries

Reflect upon our earlier  
discussion of broad, essential  
learning outcomes.  
Think about your institution's  
context, current practices.

As an institution, how might  
(or do) you assess  
*essential learning*  
in your students?

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