UNIVERSITY of GUELPH

CHANGING LIVES IMPROVING LIFE

Developing a Culture of Learning Outcomes Assessment:

Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead

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Learning Outcomes Practically Speaking
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Fostering the Culture

- 1987 U of Guelph's 10 Learning Objectives
  - Inspirational and lofty
  - "desired characteristics of graduates"
  - Used to guide new course and new program proposals
  - Departments required to account for them during Internal Review process
  - Not transparent to students, public, government
  - Recognized need to move to "evidence-based outcomes" . . . away from objectives

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Fostering a Culture

- Reimagining the undergraduate learning experience since 2005
  - 2005: Provost's White Paper
  - 2006-2007: 21st Century Curriculum Committee
  - 2006: Introduced Integrated Planning
  - 2007: Educational Developers begin shifting focus in teaching and learning support from course to program level redesign focus
  - 2008: UUDLEs & GDLES
  - 2010: IQAPs at U of G & across the province

Fostering the Culture

- First strategic steps
  - Introduced “Outcomes” as a priority for governance: Board of Undergraduate Studies and Program Committees
  - Institutional Quality Assurance – new Senate committee; assist departments in meeting requirements under IQAP
  - Engaged Associate Deans with program-level responsibility in the discussion
  - Increased staff support: more teaching & learning staff

University Learning Outcomes

- Two year process of broad consultation with faculty, staff and students

- New learning outcomes combine:

U of G's learning objectives (1987) + LEAP + Bases of Competence (Evers, Rush & Bedrow)

University Learning Outcomes

5 University-wide Outcomes approved by Senate

December 2012:

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Literacy
- Global Understanding
- Communicating
- Professional and Ethical Behaviour

Critical and Creative Thinking

. . . one applies logical principles . . . to solve problems with a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking and risk taking.

. . . show evidence of integrating knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. Depth and breadth of understanding of disciplines essential to this outcome.

	Introduce	Reinforce	Mastery
Inquiry and Analysis			
Problem Solving			
Creativity			
Depth and Breadth of Understanding			

Critical and Creative Thinking

- Problem Solving
  - **Level 3**: evaluates appropriateness of different approaches; devises arguments using these methods and articulates reasons for choosing the solution

	Introduce	Reinforce	Mastery
Inquiry and Analysis			
Problem Solving			**X**
Creativity			
Depth and Breadth of Understanding			

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Critical and Creative Thinking

- Depth and Breadth of Understanding
  - **Level 3**: Compares the merits of alternate hypotheses in many different disciplines. Demonstrates mastery of a body of knowledge and critically evaluates the limits of their own knowledge and how these limits influence analyses.

	Introduce	Reinforce	Mastery
Inquiry and Analysis			
Problem Solving			
Creativity			
Depth and Breadth of Understanding			**X**

Literacy

. . . Ability to extract information from a variety of resources, assess the quality and validity of the material, and use it to discover new knowledge.

. . . Comfort in using quantitative literacy, using technology effectively and developing visual literacy.

	Introduce	Reinforce	Mastery
Information Literacy			
Quantitative Literacy			
Technological Literacy			
Visual Literacy			

Literacy

- Visual Literacy
  - **Level 2**: Evaluates images and their sources; situates images and media in cultural, social, historical and disciplinary contexts.
  - **Level 3**: Creates meaningful images and visual media, uses these effectively, and critically analyses their content. Accesses and uses visual materials ethically and legally.

	Introduce	Reinforce	Mastery
Information Literacy			
Quantitative Literacy			
Technological Literacy			
Visual Literacy		**X**	**X**

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Pilot – Assessing LOs

- Collaboration with Desire2Learn to develop the assessment tools within the LMS
- Our eventual goal: an assessment method that will be used by all departments and programs
- The initial development plan engages two programs:
  - Bachelor of Arts and Science
  - Bachelor of Engineering
- Represent opposite ends of the curricular spectrum, from highly planned and accredited (B.Eng) to highly flexible (BAS)

Pilot – Assessing LOs

- Now to mid-summer, committees and educational developers mapping assessment strategy, determining which courses to target for assessment and working with D2L on software development

- Fall 2013 and Winter 2014:
  test the software and assessment methods

- Pilot includes a cohort comparison study: learning outcomes achievement of newly admitted students (baseline) and students in their final year of studies

- Side project: standardized course outlines and database to support links between levels

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Pilot – Assessing LOs

- Highly positive level of engagement from faculty of programs chosen for the pilot
- Software development is not the most complex aspect of the project
- Decisions re: which outcomes to assess at what point in the curriculum progression is complex
- Long term, challenge is to gain full departmental and faculty engagement but some positive signs….

Challenges: Resistance

- "Calls to reaction" (arguments for doing nothing):
  - Focus on trivia
    - "You call it a 'White Paper' but it's really a 'Green Paper'"
  - Complacency:
    - "There is no crisis; there is no urgency; why upset the status quo?"
  - Denial:
    - "We are already recognized leaders in teaching and learning excellence so what is the problem?"
    - Or: "We are good enough; we don't need to try harder"
  - Paranoia:
    - "This isn't about learning quality; it's really about budget cuts…"
    - "What's the hidden agenda?"
- Disruption is not easy, even when it is necessary
  - … especially when it is necessary

Challenges: Friction

- Moving to a culture of evidence-based continuous improvement is hard work
  - Requires a different mindset across the institution
    - And broad agreement on strategy
  - Requires procedural infrastructure
    - To provide the evidence
    - To assess improvements
- Integrated Planning helps
  - As a process, to oversee efforts
  - As a principle, and statement about how things are done and change is managed

Lessons Learned

- Consultation is key
- Need vision *and* direction
  - Change does not emerge out of thin air
  - We would still be talking without White Paper as a catalyst to provoke action
- Transparency and Accountability:
  - Need to assess your performance and share the results of enhancements with the whole campus
- Incentives: provide investment to help get the kind of change you are looking for
- Identify your champions
  - And leverage their enthusiasm and persuasiveness

Thank You

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