The Degree Qualifications Profile: a Transformational Process

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Where did the DQP come from, and why, Part I?

- Partly from listening to other nations, which were not happy with the meaning of their credentials, and watching what they tried to do to clarify that meaning.
- Partly from trying out what other nations have attempted in establishing reference points for student learning outcomes in specific fields.
- And partly from recognizing that something called “accountability” in U.S. higher education means nothing without a comprehensive set of concrete benchmarks for student learning at 3 major degree levels: associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s.
Where did the DQP come from and why? Part II

• Unlike other countries, we don’t have a central ministry to declare or commit to such efforts---nor do we want one.
• But we do have entrepreneurial, visionary authorities that can provide creative leadership to such an effort.
• The Lumina Foundation not merely sponsored the major analyses of the European “Bologna Process” that contain the nuggets of the DQP, but took the conclusions of those analyses and put them into Beta operation in unique U.S. contexts.
• Lumina was committed to increasing degree awards, but realized that simply counting pieces of paper says nothing unless we know, very specifically, what those pieces of paper represent, so it undertook a challenge to U.S. higher education and set in motion the processes through which that challenge could be addressed.
More specifically. . .

- All we know of what a degree means is that it requires 60 or 66 or 120 or 128 credits, some kind of minimum GPA, passing course X and/or course Y, and majoring in something. We use all kinds of proxy measures for this and pretend that, somehow, they indicate learning.

- What we sometimes say, in addition, is that a small sample of our students, who are paid to be test-taking volunteers, produced “effect size” gains of Q or P when their standardized test scores are regressed on our beloved SAT or ACT, and that’s what our degrees mean.

- As they say. . .”Whoooppee!”

- Other countries don’t do any of this, and they are going to eat your lunch in a globalized work force.
So Lumina started with “Tuning,” something already going on in Europe and Latin America (and now China, Japan, Africa and Central Asia as well). What is it?

- A ground-up faculty-driven determination of a template of reference points for student learning outcomes in a specific field/discipline.
- The process involves consultation with employers and recent alumni who hold degrees in that field.
- In a U.S. environment, Lumina first recruited 3 state systems (Indiana, Minnesota, and Utah) to try it out. Each picked two disciplines (3 in Indiana).
- Each, in turn, recruited the flagship state university, other public 4-year colleges, and (unlike the European and Latin American situations) a range of community colleges to designate faculty participants.
- And unlike the European and Latin American efforts, each disciplinary team included at least one student majoring or preparing to major in the field.
What does “Tuning” in a discipline mean and do?

• After a consultation survey with employers, former students, and faculty, the team sets up a “common language” for expressing what a curriculum in the discipline aims to do,

• But does not prescribe the means of doing it.

• You get “reference points,” not standardization of content, sequence, and delivery.

• There is no straightjacket, but there is “convergence.”
Example: the European Business group definition of a firm as a “value chain” results in:

- A curriculum content map, from procurement to customer service
- “Subject specific skills and competences” as learning outcomes to match the map, and set out as core knowledge, supporting knowledge, communication skills
- The statements are not specified, but the distribution is: 50% core knowledge, 10% economics, 5% each for quantitative methods, law, and IT. Notice: that does not add to 100%---on purpose.
“Business,” of course, is not a monolith, and, at the associate’s level, its components are offered in various ways

- General business administration
- Accounting
- Marketing
- Finance
- Human Resource Development
- Specialty sales and distribution, e.g. agricultural, hospitality

Depending on institutional resources and delivery modes, these can be separate or consolidated degree programs
Let’s see how one of the Tuning USA projects (of the Midwest Higher Education Consortium) did Tuning with Marketing, and think of what you would emphasize as associate’s degree reference points

• **First, by organizing learning outcomes into bins:**
  - Personal Branding
  - Market Sensing
  - Market Interpretation
  - Market Value Creation
  - Market Analytics, Feedback, and Control

You can’t do all of this at the associate’s level, so you develop learning outcome statements under each, decide if they are Basic, Complex, or Integrative, and determine which statements will govern your Marketing program.
Take “Market Sensing,” a very smart piece of this Marketing learning outcomes collection, and note what this faculty group included for component areas

- Environmental analysis
- Research on consumer behavior
- Market segmentation
- Targeting
- Positioning
- Marketing strategy (identifying opportunities and matching them with plans to achieve objectives)

Faculty are attracted to working through a sequence such as this. They identify themselves, foremost, with the discipline/field. They won’t run away from the task.
How long did the Euros work at it? What did they produce? What did we produce?

- While the Euros have been at Tuning in any one discipline for 6 - 12 years, our groups worked for 16 months to date and produced fairly detailed sets of discipline-specific student learning outcome statements.
- If we are to take the Indiana chemistry group product as typical, of 36 core learning outcome templates, 26 were common at both associate’s and bachelor’s levels.
- The best of them from a community college perspective was the work of the Graphic Arts/Design group in Minnesota, since degrees in that field are offered at all levels from associate’s to doctorate.
- We have a way to go with this, ‘cause while our folks (like the Euros) were okay at identifying core reference points, they were miserable at writing learning outcomes statements (as were the Euros, but they’re working on it).
Get enough of this going, across a bunch of fields, and a bunch of state systems, and. . .

- The logical extension moves from the field-specific to the degree-specific.
- Faculty working on Tuning their fields, concluding that X was appropriate at the associate’s level and Y was appropriate at the bachelor’s level, would say “Wait a minute! We’re also talking about something more generic to the degree level itself!”
- Voila! What the Euros, Australians, South Africans, Canadians, etc. call a “[Credential] Qualifications Framework” emerges.
Hence. . .

- Not only did Lumina begin to move into Tuning 2: Texas in 4 engineering fields, with a heavy emphasis on community college transfer; Kentucky in 5 fields, the Midwest Higher Education Consortium (2 fields in 3 states), the American Historical Association (across 15 state systems).

- But took the logical extension of a Qualifications Framework, and made it real.
Except we did not call it that, and. . .

for a lot of reasons that are grounded in the U.S. system.
We called it a “Profile,” and what that means involves both content and process.

• Think of the Alfred Hitchcock face profile.
• Now, turn it into a portrait by Durer, Gaughin, or Picasso.
• Many hands contribute to the full Portrait, and the full Portrait has obvious variations.
• But the palette of colors is the same, and, at the end, you recognize the face in all its details.
• Lumina provided the studio, the easels, the brushes, or whatever else was needed to complete the Portrait, and. . .
obviously, an initial set of reference points (the Portrait outline) and palette (the Portrait language)

- The reference points are concrete statements of student learning outcomes,
- arranged across 5 broad areas of cognitive and allied archipelagos, and
- for each of the 5, the outcomes are in an ascending ladder of challenge, from associate’s to master’s levels.
- The palette consists of active verbs that describe what students actually do to evidence their competence at each degree level.
Why active verbs?

- They lead *directly* to assessment prompts, i.e. if you describe what students should do to demonstrate competence, then
- you can bring on stage a range of appropriate assignments (papers, exhibits, laboratories, performances) and/or examination questions that will facilitate the demonstration.
- You cannot do that with dead-end nouns such as “awareness,” “appreciation,” “ability,” or ‘critical thinking.”
What kind of active verbs are we talking about at the associate’s degree level?

- For analytic inquiry: identifies, categorizes, and distinguishes
- For use of information resources: identifies, categorizes, evaluates, and cites
- For applied learning: locates, gathers, and organizes

You have a handout with some categories of these verbs, and with them you begin to get a flavor of proficiency-based criteria for awarding associate’s degrees. But . . .
. . .verbs don’t stand alone, so one has to think through the context, e.g. for Analytic Inquiry at all 3 degree levels:

• Associate’s: identifies, categorizes, and distinguishes among elements of ideas, concepts, theories, and/or practical approaches to standard problems.

• Bachelor’s: differentiates and evaluates theories and approaches to complex standard and non-standard problems within his or her major field.

• Master’s: disaggregates, adapts, reformulates, and employs principal ideas, techniques, or methods at the forefront of his/her field of study in the context of an essay or project.
Notice what this means at the associate’s degree level, for example:

• First, at all degree levels, the verbs describe what students actually do when they think.

• Second, the associate’s degree level phrasing allows for both general transfer degree programs and occupationally-specific programs (“practical approaches to standard problems”), but does not exclude “ideas, concepts, theories” from occupational programs or “practical approaches” from default transfer degree programs.

• Throughout, the wording is very sensitive to the two major categories of associate’s degrees. And that extends to the other degree levels as well.
The Core Engines of the DQP

- **LANGUAGE**, the palette
- Learning outcomes as **PROFICIENCIES**, not “competencies.” Proficiencies are summative and the DQP is about what students have demonstrated on the cusp of degree awards.
- Faculty-generated **ASSIGNMENTS**, not external testing.
- Institutional **FLEXIBILITY** in shaping, editing, deleting, and adding degree-proficiency statements.
So. . .

- Even accepting the palette of verbs, some of the wording may not strike you as felicitous;
- Some of the examples of proficiencies may strike you as partial;
- And your institution may have special missions that are not accounted for in the range of degree qualifications presented in the Profile.
- So the process invites you to a refinement of the Profile you see.
Who has taken up that challenge?

- 4 regional accreditors, including one represented here;
- Open forum feedbacks from roughly 50 major organizations and stakeholder groups;
- Nearly 400 institutions, roughly 1/3rd of them community colleges.

For a voluntary system (as opposed to what the Euros have), that is quite an accomplishment.
Their feedback influenced changes from the beta DQP to what you see now, e.g.

- **New section on Ethical Reasoning under Intellectual Skills**
- **A lot more “global” under Civic learning**;
- **Significant refinements under Quantitative Fluency**.
- **Heavy emphasis on collaboration and research in Applied Learning**.
- **Concrete examples of assignments matched to proficiencies. These are “Ah-hah!” moments.**
And that’s not all: you have a “push-back” appendix, for critiques and response

- The DQP is not “standardized” anything.
- Applies to the entire degree, not to a portion, i.e. this ain’t “general education.”
- Individual faculty are not responsible for addressing all--or even a majority---of the proficiencies.
- The DQP has nothing to do with financing, labor market conditions, student debt, or job placement.
- Where a student learns X (on the job, on-line, etc.) is secondary to the institution that validates the learning.
At the same time, and in the same appendix, you get confessions of our holes and shortcomings, e.g.

- We did not deal with the complexities of Adjunct involvement in local DQP implementation.
- The DQP does not deal with psycho-motor skills as proficiencies.
- We did not take sides on whether a DQP would be a “wish list” or a set of requirements for degree award.
- The DQP comes off as a checklist, a replacement for credits in which record-keeping would be a major challenge. This perceptive critique is worth taking up:
I. How would proficiency-based criteria for degrees be executed in an institution?

- Through a series of iterations you get consensus on the set of outcomes a student must demonstrate (yes/no).
- Faculty identify currently-used assignments, currently-used but tweaked assignments, and new assignments that elicit student performance to match each competency.
- These assignments/assessments (papers, exhibits, exam questions, laboratories, performances, projects) are all validated and catalogued.
- Let’s say your institution winds up with 42 discrete competencies in its Profile, and a dozen assessments across disciplines and courses that can validate student attainment of each competency.
II. You need a new electronic system on which faculty report student attainment for each competency:

- I am a faculty member who gives an assessment on the list of assessments that validate one of the student competencies under ‘use of information resources.’
- Following the assessment, I log into the system, and, for each student in my class who met the threshold of performance on the assessment, I confirm.
- If a student has previously met the learning outcome on a different assessment, the box will already be checked, and I can proceed to the next case.
- The validation is separate from the student’s grade.
III. When all 42 boxes have been checked. . .

. . . the student has met one of the major requirements for award of the degree, and the competency list becomes a formal “diploma supplement.” It’s unclear whether this process would work.
There may be other ways to record keeping in a proficiency-based system, and other branches of paths to and through a DQP.

... and that’s one heavy reason why the floor is now yours.