This chapter provides an overview of the League for Innovation in the Community College’s project on learning outcomes. The 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project was a three-year project involving sixteen diverse community colleges that supported the development of practices for assessing and using student learning outcomes to improve student success.

Learning Outcomes for the Twenty-First Century: Cultivating Student Success for College and the Knowledge Economy

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During the 1990s, community colleges faced mounting external pressure to demonstrate results for what happens in college classrooms and to ensure that their graduates possessed core competencies for success in the burgeoning knowledge economy. McClenney (1998) describes some causes underlying these demands for demonstration of learning outcomes: “The ugly truth about the current situation in American higher education, even in most community colleges, is that we do not have a clue what and how much students are learning—that is, whether they know and can do what their degree (or other credential) implies” (p. 4).

In summer 2000, with funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the League for Innovation in the Community College (the League) developed a network of sixteen pioneering community and technical colleges in the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project to design and test innovative, outcomes-based methods for defining, delivering, assessing, and documenting student learning. The colleges that participated in the project are Butler County Community College (KS), Central Piedmont Community College (NC), Cuyahoga Community College (OH), Foothill College (CA), Hocking College (OH), Inver Hills Community College (MN), Johnson County Community College (KS), Kingsborough Community College (NY), Mesa Community College (AZ), Midlands Technical College (SC), Montgomery College (TX), San Diego Miramar College (CA), Santa Fe
Community College (FL), Schoolcraft College (MI), Skagit Valley College (WA), and Waukesha County Technical College (WI).

The 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project described in this chapter was Stage Two (Implementation and Advocacy) of a larger-scale League effort to bring new outcomes-based standards for student learning to the community college field. In Stage One (Planning and Research), the League, supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts, researched the extent of U.S. and Canadian community college efforts to define, assess, and document student achievement of twenty-first century learning outcomes (Wilson and others, 2000). Stage Two was a three-year project funded for the first two years by The Pew Charitable Trusts and continued with support from the League and participating colleges through June 2003.

The sixteen participating colleges shared a commitment to the project’s central goal to increase the capacity of community colleges to define and document the acquisition of the critical competencies that students need to succeed in the workplace, in transfer education, and in today’s society. All sixteen colleges developed learning outcomes Web sites to share their project plans, reports, and activities as well as self-assessments, outcomes rubrics, and assessment or documentation models. Many of the colleges are maintaining these public Web sites, accessible through links from the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project section of the League’s Web site (see http://www.league.org/projects/pew).

**Approaches to Implementing Learning Outcomes**

Over the three years of the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project, the sixteen participating colleges made individual progress toward the project’s goal of enhancing the capacity of community colleges to define and document students’ acquisition of critical learning outcomes. Each college worked independently, with feedback and support from partner colleges and project staff, toward the common project goal by focusing on five institutional objectives:

**Define.** Define a set of core competencies that encompass 21st century learning outcomes.

**Develop.** Develop a set of curriculum components for 21st century learning outcomes with specific learning outcomes for each competency, levels of performance that students should meet, concrete indices of student work to demonstrate each level, and assessment strategies for measuring student achievement at each level.

**Deliver.** Identify and implement best practices and multiple models of delivery and assessment of 21st century learning outcomes.

**Document.** Develop nontraditional methods for documenting student achievement of 21st century learning outcomes beyond traditional grades, credits, and degrees.

**Disseminate.** Share model programs and practices with other institutions.
The sixteen project colleges came to this work with varying expertise, needs, resources, and constraints regarding student learning outcomes, and college progress toward project objectives varied accordingly. Preliminary focus groups with college leaders in Phase I of the project convinced the funding agency and project directors that community colleges varied too much in structure, governance, and culture to expect a single common solution to such a complex endeavor. Differences notwithstanding, the project partnerships and interchanges led to similarities in outcome sets and in assessment and documentation strategies. Notably, the colleges continue targeted institutional work in support of the project’s goal more than a year after the end of the funded phase of the project. Universally, colleges reported achievements in their learning outcomes initiatives, and many point to this project as a landmark in their work toward improving the quality and documentation of student learning in their institutions.

**Definition of Learning Outcomes**

All sixteen participating colleges successfully identified sets of 21st century learning outcomes for their institutions. The paths that project colleges took to reach these ends varied considerably, as did the resulting sets of learning outcomes, which range in number from four broad knowledge, skill, and ability domains to twenty-seven specific learning competencies. Although only the first step on the learning outcomes journey, reaching shared institutional agreement on the core competencies all those completing degrees or certificates should achieve was a significant undertaking for several colleges, marked by activities spanning a year or more. College approaches to defining student learning outcomes (or critical life skills, essential skills, or core competencies, as they are variously termed), fell into three categories: adoption of the set of “21st century skills,” revalidation or amendment of existing sets of competencies associated with the general education core, and development of altogether new sets of core competencies.

**Adoption of the Stage One Set of “21st Century Skills.”** In November 1999, the League convened academic leaders from fifteen colleges to develop consensus on a set of cross-curricular core competencies that two-year college graduates should possess to succeed in work, transfer education, and life. Drawing on results from a preliminary survey and document analysis conducted by League staff, the focus group identified a set of eight broad categories of 21st century skills, encompassing the following so-called hard skills of literacy, numeracy, and technical ability, as well as soft skills such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, and the ability to interact with diverse groups:

- Communication skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)
- Computation skills (understanding and applying mathematical concepts and reasoning, analyzing and using numerical data)
• Community skills (citizenship; appreciation of diversity and pluralism; local, community, global, and environmental awareness)
• Critical thinking and problem-solving skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, decision making, creative thinking)
• Information management skills (collecting, analyzing, and organizing information from a variety of sources)
• Interpersonal skills (teamwork, relationship management, conflict resolution, workplace skills)
• Personal skills (ability to understand and manage self, management of change, learning to learn, personal responsibility, aesthetic responsiveness, wellness)
• Technology skills (computer literacy, Internet skills, retrieving and managing information via technology)

Using these results, the League conducted five institutional site visits and a survey of U.S. and Canadian community colleges to test agreement on this set of 21st century skills and to assess the status of North American community colleges in establishing and assessing student achievement of such skills. Of the 259 institutions that responded to the survey, 92 percent indicated their colleges were addressing the issue of 21st century skills; more than two-thirds identified the 21st century skills from the focus group among their college’s list of core competencies, with the exception of personal skills (47 percent) and community skills (59 percent). Two Learning Outcomes Project colleges (Central Piedmont Community College and Santa Fe Community College) adopted the Stage One set of 21st century skills for implementation in their college learning outcomes plan. (For complete Stage One study results see Wilson and others, 2000.)

**Revalidation or Amendment of Existing Sets of Core Competencies.**
Most of the participating colleges (Cuyahoga Community College, Hocking College, Inver Hills Community College, Johnson County Community College, Mesa Community College, Midlands Technical College, Montgomery College, Schoolcraft College, Skagit Valley College, and Waukesha County Technical College) had previously identified sets of core competencies associated with their general education cores. Some of these colleges used project activities to refine their existing competencies, while others with recently developed sets of competencies or more mature learning outcomes approaches moved directly to other project objectives.

A variety of factors, including institutional culture, age of the existing competencies, and workforce demands led colleges on different paths to revising their student learning outcomes. For example, Cuyahoga Community College revalidated its existing General Education and Life Competencies: communication, mathematics, sciences, arts and humanities, social and behavioral sciences, cultural diversity-interdependence-global awareness, computer and information literacy, critical thinking, and consumer awareness and health. As part of its ReVISIONing Learning
Project, Hocking College revalidated its Institutional Core Competencies and renamed them Success Skills to reflect a stronger focus on employer and student learning needs.

Midlands Technical College revised its General Education Core, in place with modifications since 1990, to include an across-the-curriculum emphasis on information literacy, speaking, writing, and teamwork. Skagit Valley College built on general education principles formulated in the early 1990s to create an updated set of learning outcomes for the college, adding principles of technology and management to reflect the skills and knowledge necessary for current academic and workplace success of its students.

Several colleges entered the project with well-developed learning outcomes. Mesa Community College had a mature Student Outcomes Assessment Program, including learning outcomes for general education, the workplace, and developmental education (for a description of the program and assessment results see http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/organizations/employee/orp/assessment). Both Inver Hills Community College and Waukesha County Technical College had fully developed sets of 21st century learning outcomes with extensive rubrics or matrices illustrating levels of student achievement (see Iver Hills’ Essential Skills and Rubrics at http://depts.iverhills.edu/LSPS/index.htm and Waukesha’s Critical Life Skills Assessment Rubrics at http://www.waukesha.tec.wi.us/home/info/adm/skills.htm).

Through the project, Johnson County Community College (JCCC) built on its nationally recognized Institutional Portfolio model of Institutional Effectiveness evaluation of General Education Learning Outcomes (writing, speaking, culture and ethics, mathematics, modes of inquiry, and problem solving). To review the validity of their general education outcomes, JCCC conducted a 2002 survey with follow-up focus groups of Kansas City business representatives to investigate what skills and abilities employers sought in hiring new workers (Lindahl, 2002). Listening headed the list of sought-after skills in the survey results, followed by personal responsibility and ethics; workplace responsibility, teamwork, and leadership; reading; decision making; observation; and ability to manage self. JCCC has used these findings to strengthen its Keeping Options Open high school career development and academic readiness program (Lindahl, 2002) and to guide development of an outcomes-based curriculum developed in collaboration with area employers and focused on core competencies employees need to be successful (Carlsen, 2002).

Montgomery College demonstrated an unusual approach to building institutional commitment to a core competencies curriculum. Prior to this project, districtwide curriculum teams from the North Harris Montgomery Community College District identified nineteen core competencies to be addressed in all AA or AS degree programs. Still, the Montgomery College Learning Outcomes Team, directed by the college president, invited faculty, administrators, and staff to prepare white papers on each of the eight Stage
One 21st century skills as a way of encouraging broader participation in curriculum reform efforts and to “discern the many nuances of classroom activities that address the core skills at Montgomery College” (Montgomery College, 2004). Volunteer authors included full- and part-time faculty members, associate and assistant deans, and a writing tutor. These papers became a springboard for collegewide electronic dialogues using the Daedalus software system, breakout sessions at the college’s annual staff development day, and curriculum renewal efforts in the college’s re-accreditation process.

**Development of New Sets of Core Competencies.** Four colleges (Butler County Community College, Foothill College, Kingsborough Community College, San Diego Miramar College) developed new sets of learning outcomes, giving particular consideration to institutional history or culture that might influence the acceptance and successful implementation of an outcomes-based approach to student learning.

Butler County Community College (BCCC) took a comprehensive, institutional approach to involvement in the Learning Outcomes Project. BCCC’s Learning Outcomes Project Team included active involvement from the president; vice president of instruction; chief information officer; dean of business, technology, and workforce development; director of research and institutional effectiveness; director of academic assessment; and director of advising, as well as six faculty members. The team began meeting in November 2000 to make plans for a new, student-centered, faculty-driven program to address learning outcomes. In early 2001, the college determined that its current academic assessment outcomes were inadequate for a program of individualized student assessment and revamped the complex list of Lifetime Learning Abilities and Skills and Performance Characteristics from its earlier learning outcomes plan to a streamlined Learning PACT skills (personal development, analytical, critical thinking, and technological skills). The new Learning PACT outcomes, a set of learning outcomes deemed critical to a person’s success in the twenty-first century workplace, were approved by the college’s Board of Trustees, and an introduction to the Learning PACT was added to the college Web site and catalogue; distributed in a brochure given to faculty, staff, and students; and included in spring and fall semester college in-service activities (Butler, 2001).

Kingsborough Community College (KCC) also used a strategic institutional approach to identifying learning outcomes that began with a review of the college mission and development of a college values statement. From this foundation, the KCC project team drafted a set of core learning outcomes, shared these with faculty during an open forum and by e-mail for discussion and feedback, and integrated this feedback into a set of learning outcomes comprising seven skill areas: communication (written and oral); critical thinking and problem solving; computation, mathematics, and statistics; interpersonal (teamwork and team building); proficiency in computers and related areas; general education core (science, history, art, and music); and additional knowledge and skills in the major. In keeping with
its institutional culture and governance marked by a strong faculty union, KCC reinforced the voluntary nature of participation in its learning outcomes program to encourage grassroots support.

Curriculum Development and Mapping

Participating colleges moved from identification of the critical learning outcomes to be achieved by students to development of comprehensive curriculum components for each outcome with the following elements: levels of performance, concrete indices of student achievement for each level, and assessment strategies for measuring student achievement at each level.

Such curriculum components took shape through the development of extensive learning outcomes rubrics and matrices. The most advanced among the project colleges in learning outcomes curriculum integration, Waukesha County Technical College, has worked since 1986 in a faculty-led grassroots approach to identify and integrate “critical life skills” throughout the curriculum. This integration of skills also extends beyond the classroom to include co-curricular areas such as financial aid, student life, and cooperative education. Waukesha’s twenty-three critical life skills are grouped into the four broad areas of communication skills, analytical skills, group effectiveness skills, and personal management skills, with each individual skill defined by a rubric with six levels of indices of student achievement linked to recommended assessments for measuring the achievement of each skill at each level. In addition, each student has a Student Growth and Development Plan that includes a student self-assessment inventory for each of the twenty-three skills as well as a list of suggested services, activities, and programs available to enhance development of each skill. For example, a student assessed as needing development in problem solving is recommended, among other activities, to attend a District Board meeting and observe the decision-making process in action.

Several project colleges have engaged in extensive curriculum mapping using the rubrics to determine what courses address which core learning outcomes at what level. As noted, many participating colleges have posted learning outcomes curriculum rubrics and resulting curriculum matrices developed during this project on their public project Web sites.

Implementation

The ultimate goal for all project colleges was to implement all learning outcomes across the curriculum for all students. Colleges decided on one of three areas for initially integrating the outcomes-based curriculum components they developed: in discrete courses, in some programs or academic areas, or across the curriculum. The approaches described below indicate differences only in starting points—that is, how colleges staged their learning outcomes implementation strategies. Within the three years of project
activities, colleges moved from discrete course implementation to broader program area implementation for one or more of the learning outcomes. Several moved from pilot courses to programs to integration of one or more learning outcomes across the curriculum.

Implementation in Discrete Courses. A number of colleges began integrating learning outcomes with pilot implementation in a small number of courses. In this approach, a specific course is designed to address one or more learning outcomes (such as writing and critical thinking in a humanities course, computation and problem solving in a math course, diversity awareness in a sociology course), and individual student achievement of learning outcomes is assessed at the individual course level. At Butler County Community College, a speech class and an addictions counseling class pioneered implementing learning outcomes; two years later student learning outcomes are addressed in every course outline and assessed in general education courses across the curriculum.

Implementation in Some Programs or Disciplines. Approaches to curriculum integration at the program level followed three general typologies:

Some courses in some programs are designed to address some learning outcomes; student outcomes achievement is assessed at the course and program levels.

Some programs are designed to address all learning outcomes; student achievement of learning outcomes is assessed at course and program levels.

Certain broad academic areas (such as liberal arts, professional or technical studies) are designed to address all learning outcomes; student outcomes achievement is assessed at the course level.

Several colleges began integration of learning outcomes curriculum approaches across one or two divisions or program areas. At Foothill College, implementation began in fall 2001 in the Computers, Technology, and Information Systems division and the Language Arts division. Since then, the college has developed online course- and program-level matrices for evaluating core competencies across the curriculum. Skagit Valley College updated all its existing program level assessment plans to include 21st century learning outcomes.

Learning Outcomes Implementation Across the Curriculum. Learning outcomes integration across the curriculum followed three general approaches:

One or more learning outcomes are piloted across the curriculum.

Every course is designed to address some number of core competencies (but perhaps not all competencies in all courses); individual student achievement of learning outcomes is assessed and documented at the course level.
Individual student achievement of learning outcomes is assessed and documented at the program or institutional level.

Hocking College developed a core competency map for each discipline to determine the integration of its success skills. Beginning with the success skill “communicates effectively,” each academic program developed its own curriculum map and assessment strategies, such as capstone experiences and the use of internal as well as external evaluators. Similarly, Santa Fe Community College developed a system of curriculum mapping via a learning outcomes audit of all courses to determine the level and indices of each core competency delivered in each course across the curriculum.

At San Diego Miramar College, learning outcomes were integrated into the college’s 2000 to 2005 strategic plan, reflecting a shift from broad institutional performance measures toward a focus on individual student learning. Like Foothill College, Miramar developed and implemented online matrix forms to evaluate core competencies at the course and program levels. Through participation in this project, Miramar has developed a comprehensive three-stage approach, with associated instruments, to assess courses and programs for learning outcomes competencies:

- Evaluate individual courses (Comprehensive Core Competency Description, Levels of Competency Mastery, Course Assessment Sheet).
- Evaluate entire programs (Program Review Assessment Excel Worksheet).
- Make necessary changes to course or program content to achieve desired level of learning outcome competency integration.

For a number of years, Mesa Community College (MCC) has been a leader in the outcomes-based education movement and recognized nationally for its collegewide annual student outcomes assessment model. The program is overseen by the Student Outcomes Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, in collaboration with the dean of instruction. Through its student outcomes assessment program, MCC measures and documents the degree to which a focused sample of students attains specific learning outcomes valued and defined by faculty. MCC’s program includes three targeted assessment areas: general education, career and technical education, and developmental education. During its annual Assessment Week, a sample of students participates in assessment of learning outcomes to help answer the question, “Are students learning as a result of their experience at the college?” Assessment results are aggregated and used to measure and compare learning among entering and exiting students. Assessment week results are not made available to individual students; however, results are reported to faculty to guide modification of curriculum and teaching practices. As a result of involvement in this project, Mesa has expanded its assessment pool tenfold to include more than three thousand students from nearly two hundred class sections each year.
A proven leader in implementation of individual student learning outcomes assessment, Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) has integrated learning outcomes extensively throughout the college curriculum. WCTC has developed comprehensive curriculum rubrics and matrices for each learning outcome, with a plan to make them available electronically to all faculty members for all courses. Through the rubrics and matrices, each learning outcome is plotted throughout a program, indicating the level of its inclusion in a course and the level to which a student must achieve the outcome. Waukesha’s Critical Life Skills Assessment Rubrics are available online at http://www.waukesha.tec.wi.us/home/info/adm/skills.htm.

Nontraditional Documentation of Student Learning Outcomes

Several colleges have made advances in nontraditional methods for documenting student achievement of learning outcomes that extend beyond traditional grades, credits, certificates, and degrees, such as electronic transcripts and portfolios (e-transcripts and e-portfolios). In November 2001, Learning Outcomes Project staff conducted an invitational E-Transcript Summit to link project work on nontraditional learning outcomes documentation with similar work in other higher education organizations, including Alverno College, Florida State University, Johns Hopkins University, iLearning Inc., and The Chauncey Group International. Five e-transcript or e-portfolio models were featured: Diagnostic Digital Portfolio, Alverno College; Skills Profile, Inver Hills Community College; Career Portfolio, Florida State University and Santa Fe Community College; Critical Life Skills Transcript, Waukesha County Technical College; and Career Transcript, the Johns Hopkins University. Fifty-eight participants shared best practices and lessons learned from their approaches to electronic documentation, and linkages were made that bolstered documentation activities in project colleges.

Waukesha County Technical College remains involved in implementing its Critical Life Skills electronic transcript, which enables students to demonstrate their growth and development for technical skills and life skills. The transcript includes numerical ratings and descriptions that translate academic language into more commonly understood evidence of student learning. Waukesha also documents learning outcomes in extracurricular activities as well as in traditional courses.

Inver Hills Community College designed an Internet-deployed database to record and report student achievement. Faculty apply cross-disciplinary rubrics defining exemplary, acceptable, and unacceptable achievement levels to assignments, tests, and projects. (See http://depts.inverhills.edu/LSPS.rubrics.htm for the rubrics and a sample Skills Profile.) Students then receive a Skills Profile—a complement to the traditional transcript—that documents their skills, citing specific projects, tests, or assignments as evidence. In the early phases of the Internet system, a small group of volunteer faculty participated; however, faculty members now use the
Internet to track levels of achievement for each competency, and the project is stimulating faculty involvement toward a goal of institutionalizing this approach to documentation of learning outcomes. Currently, e-transcripts and e-portfolios documenting student learning outcomes are under development or implementation at six of the project colleges: Waukesha County Technical College, Inver Hills Community College, Schoolcraft College, Johnson County Community College, Hocking College, and Midlands Technical College.

**Unexpected Outcomes**

Although the project began with the goal of cultivating a focus on learning outcomes, several college teams quickly found this work to be a catalyst for major institutional change. In some cases, it led to a complete shift in approach, particularly for colleges that had extensive institutional effectiveness and program review processes but no comprehensive processes for assessing and documenting learning at the individual student level. For others, the project served as a means of connecting a number of loosely related initiatives all aimed at improving the quality of undergraduate education.

Shifts in thinking occurred in curriculum design, with an emphasis on learning outcomes replacing a traditional focus on course objectives. Colleges also began exploring ways of ensuring that student learning outcomes would become the central success factors used in determining institutional effectiveness.

**Why Is This So Hard?**

Throughout the project, the recurring refrain was the same: “This is hard work!” McClenney (2001), the project’s external evaluator, identified key reasons that colleges find this undertaking so difficult:

- Lack of collaboration among disciplines and other groups within the institution
- Lack of knowledge about assessment processes and tools
- Lack of awareness of the need for outcomes-based education
- Lack of appropriate, effective assessment tools and models
- A perception that some important learning outcomes are not measurable
- Traditional insulation from accountability for individual student learning at the classroom level
- Traditional resistance to self-assessment in higher education
- Lack of incentive for outcomes-based efforts resulting from past external requirements for accountability, funding, and policy that are rarely tied to individual student learning
- Increasing demands and constricting resources, which leave little time or incentive for educational reform efforts of this magnitude
Assessment Is the Really Hard Part

Throughout the project, participants universally identified assessment as the most difficult aspect of this work, and during seminars, focus groups, and site visits they explored the reasons for this determination. Team members from all areas of the colleges admitted that they do not know how to assess and that, as one participant put it, “the tools stink.” One participant explained the difficulty with assessing learning outcomes by pointing out, “We are unaccustomed to being asked to gain consensus on what we’re trying to achieve.” Another acknowledged the bliss of ignorance as a complement to the fear of failure, noting, “We don’t really want to know how we measure up.” The lack of data also makes the work more difficult. As one member put it, “We don’t know what we don’t know.” And still another pointed to the busy schedules of everyone in the college: “I’m already dancing as fast as I can.” Despite these challenges, most college team members agreed that the hard work was worth it, citing such advantages as “Faculty and students are completely transformed in their thinking about why they are here,” and “For the first time we can begin to answer the ‘How do we know?’ questions about learning.”

Recommendations

Nearly all of the sixteen colleges that joined the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project with the League in July 2000 remain engaged more than three years later in targeted institutional work toward implementing their learning outcomes agendas. Today many others have joined these colleges as the learning outcomes movement gains momentum in higher education, with accrediting commissions and other higher education associations advancing the cause. Other institutions embarking on a learning outcomes journey might take the following lessons from the pioneering experiences of these sixteen forerunners:

Learning outcomes implementation must be a continuous campus conversation. Such conversation allows for more natural emergence and implementation of ideas and integrates new employees into the ongoing conversation with veteran staff, through which they learn the history of the process, participate in the current analysis and implementation, and help shape the future through continued discussion.

The impetus for adopting an outcomes-based approach should be the institution’s stated and lived value of student learning. Colleges may adopt an outcomes-based approach to learning as a means of pacifying external demands for accountability or securing sufficient funding; however, if the motivation for change does not stem from an explicit focus on student learning, the effort may fall short of its potential.

Since the accountability movement is not progressing in some colleges with the speed and urgency it might if the need were critical, other motivators can be
The movement to an outcomes-based educational approach can be adopted, for example, as a means of clearly distinguishing an institution in a crowded, competitive market. The movement may be prompted by the vision of a strong leader or the experience and prestige that come from joining a cutting-edge movement.

Faculty should be deeply engaged and supported from the onset in the leadership of any effort toward outcomes-based learning. Full support of faculty should include adequate professional development and reassigned workload for new curriculum development. Special assistance should be provided as needed, particularly from experts in outcomes-based curriculum and assessment when redesigning curriculum. Taking the stance that this is work that faculty should be doing anyway is likely to be counterproductive; instead, acknowledging the outstanding work faculty are already doing and finding incentives to help them shift traditional teaching and curriculum methods to more outcomes-based approaches will be more successful.

A college should implement outcomes-based learning using a model that fits its culture and values. In no case should a college adopt another institution’s program wholesale; however, a college can customize one or more approaches that resonate with its fundamental philosophy. Learning outcomes approaches and assessment of student learning can strengthen academic quality and institutional effectiveness (Baker and Hjelm, 2001).

Clearly, one of the major lessons of this project is that this work is extremely difficult. Changing a college culture to a focus on learning outcomes requires long-term commitment and dedication of resources. Internal as well as external forces can cause the work to ebb and flow.

Although cuts in budget, changes in leadership, and temporary shifts in priorities pull colleges from this work, the underlying commitment to student learning remains. What matters most is that a learning outcomes approach can help a college demonstrate to its students that it offers them relevant curricula, meaningful information about their learning achievements, and more control over their learning to help them prepare for success in their professional and personal lives.

References


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