

The logo consists of the letters 'DQP' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letter 'Q' is a light red color and has a small red arrow pointing downwards from its bottom-right corner. The logo is set against a solid red rectangular background.

DQP

Degree Qualifications Profile

IMPACT STUDY

Framing and Connecting Initiatives to
Strengthen Student Learning

Natasha A. Jankowski & Laura Giffin

June 2016

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)

Established in 2008, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) assists institutions and others in discovering and adopting promising practices in the assessment of college student learning outcomes. NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

Abstract

Following the release of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) in 2011, many institutions of various types tried out different ways to use the DQP. Although over 680 institutions have used the DQP to date, until now the impact of the DQP on institutions and students has not been documented in a systematic manner. To determine the effects of DQP use on institutional policies and practices, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) conducted a study of the more than 400 (n=425) institutions that used the DQP between the 2011 release and the October 2014 revision. The study explored how institutions engaged with the DQP and how working with DQP was associated with changes in curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment activities.

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Degree Qualifications Profile Impact Study: Framing and Connecting Initiatives to Strengthen Student Learning

Natasha A. Jankowski and Laura Giffin

Introduction

Following the release of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) in 2011, many institutions of various types tried out different ways to use the DQP. Although over 680 institutions have used the DQP to date, until now the impact of the DQP on institutions and students has not been documented in a systematic manner.

To determine the effects of DQP use on institutional policies and practices, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) conducted a study of the more than 400 (n=425) institutions that used the DQP between the 2011 release and the October 2014 revision. The study explored how institutions engaged with the DQP and how working with DQP was associated with changes in curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment activities.

Four assumptions guided the inquiry.

First, we assumed that the DQP provides a framework that integrates and aligns explicit student learning outcomes with learning-centered pedagogical practices, fostering collaboration within higher education institutions (such as students, faculty, and staff), as well as with those outside higher education (such as industry, employers and other stakeholders).

Second, we assumed that effective DQP implementation would result in changes in student learning outcome statements, curriculum, and programs.

Third, we assumed that meaningful faculty, staff, and student involvement in DQP-related processes would positively affect instructional practices, assessment initiatives, institutional policies, faculty development activities, and faculty values.

Finally, we assumed that curriculum would become more coherent, streamlined and transparent, leading to increased levels of student persistence and greater clarity in terms of the intended desired student outcomes. That is, when faculty, staff, and administrators articulate intended learning outcomes and create guided pathways that will lead to those outcomes, students will benefit to greater degrees.

In general, the findings of the study confirm the validity of these assumptions.

Data sources informing the study included five Lumina funded DQP project final reports (see Appendix A), more than 1,000 Institutional Activity Reports¹, 15 DQP case studies, 25 institution-authored examples of practice, information

This study explored how working with the DQP was associated with changes in curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment activities.

¹ The Institutional Activity Report (IAR) is an online data collection form institutions complete or update every six months from the point of discovery of their involvement or engagement with the Degree Qualifications Profile. 1,242 IARs were reviewed and coded as part of the study.

The typical institution using the DQP has a number of initiatives underway to improve collegiate quality.

located on institutional websites, and a survey administered to DQP users at 425 colleges and universities about their perceptions and attitudes related to working with the DQP. Of the 425 institutions that worked with the DQP from 2011 up to the release of the revised version in October 2014, 226 (53%) completed the survey. Of those, three fifths (61%) indicated they were currently working with the DQP at the time of the study and 39% stated they were no longer actively using the DQP framework.

Findings

DQP implementation is more successful when connected to and integrated with other institutional improvement efforts.

The typical institution using the DQP has a number of initiatives underway to improve collegiate quality. Some of these efforts began prior to working with the DQP and some were undertaken as a result of DQP work. Regardless of timing, all 226 responding institutions were working on various learning initiatives in addition to DQP (Figure 1).

The average number of initiatives was three; six institutions were involved with six different initiatives at the same time. When institutions pursued two to four initiatives simultaneously, their work with the DQP went further and faster than schools involved in only one in addition to DQP or more than four. Thus, connecting the DQP to additional work already underway within the institution appears to have a salutary effect on implementation of the DQP.

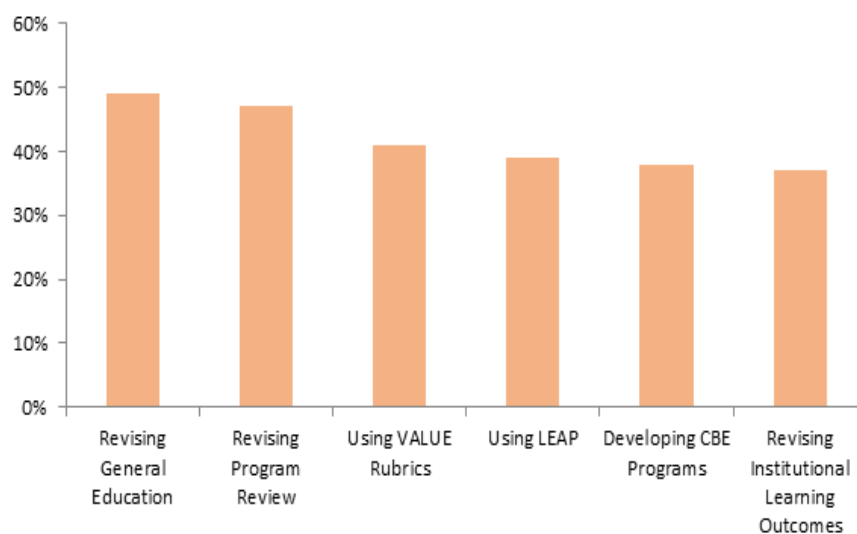


Figure 1. Percentage of reported involvement with additional initiatives.

There were trends within the types of pairings of initiatives within institutions. For instance, institutions using LEAP were also using the VALUE rubrics. If an institution was revising its general education program, it was also revising institutional learning outcomes. Consider Berry College as to how using the DQP can help integrate and leverage the impact of multiple improvement efforts²:

²<http://degreeprofile.org/example/berry-colleges-degree-qualifications-profile-project/>

We expected the DQP to serve as the common thread bringing together the efforts of these various areas of campus to promote student development...As a result of our DQP project, a broader initiative has been integrated into our new ten-year strategic plan. One goal in the plan seeks to leverage Berry's assets to provide *powerful learning experiences* for our students.

Institutions that used the DQP for revision of learning outcomes saw better alignment, more changes in the design of programs in relation to alignment, and increased faculty engagement in assessment conversations..

Institutions used the DQP to serve multiple ends.

In addition to being involved in multiple initiatives, institutions that had used or were continuing to use the DQP typically did so for more than one purpose (Figure 2). Transfer always involved alignment of learning outcomes; revising learning outcomes was almost always undertaken along with alignment with the expectations of external audiences.

The smallest number of institutions (22%) used the DQP in the context of improving student transfer, followed by 40% using it to align with external expectations. The majority of institutions used the DQP for general education and program review (60%) as well as revision and alignment of learning outcomes (73%). Institutions that used the DQP for general education and revision and alignment were more successful in terms of reported impact than those that used it for transfer and alignment with external expectations. For instance, schools that began with a focus on general education were more likely to apply the DQP institution-wide and add the co-curriculum in their efforts. Institutions that used the DQP for general education also reported making headway toward greater curricular coherence and needed modifications in review processes and policies of courses and programs. Institutions that used the DQP for revision of learning outcomes saw better alignment, more changes in the design of programs in relation to the alignment, and increased faculty engagement in assessment conversations.

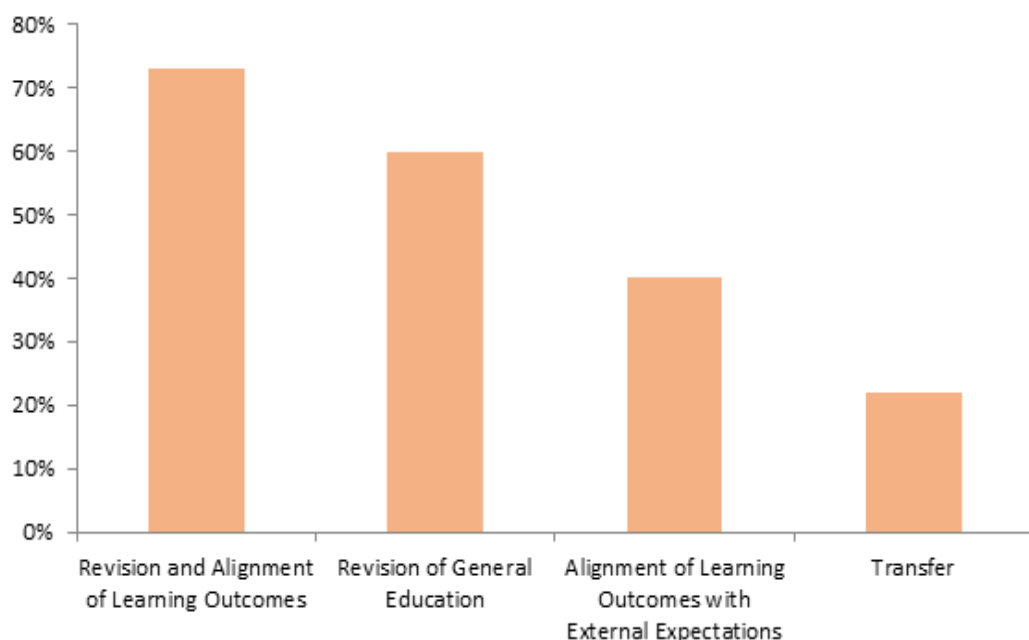


Figure 2. Percentage of reported uses of the DQP.

The DQP served to foster cross-campus collaborations through entry points of general education or department-level faculty-led discussions.

The longer an institution worked with the DQP, the more widespread the involvement of a range of departments and units and purposes for engagement.

The longer an institution worked with the DQP, the more widespread the involvement of constituents across the institution and levels at which engagement occurred. Institutions reported using the DQP at the following levels: department or program, general education, institution-wide, and co-curriculum (Figure 3). However, institutions only reported working at co-curriculum levels when also undertaking DQP work at an institution-level.

To illustrate how the DQP was used regarding the co-curriculum and brought in additional constituents to cross-campus discussions on supporting student learning, DePauw University stated³:

At first it seemed like we were really stretching things to associate participation in a co-curricular activity with a DQP outcome. But, if the activities did not meet an outcome, they often were important steps toward meeting it... This shift from simply participating in an activity to developing an important skill or competency through it is very typical of the way DQP outcomes are phrased.

If an institution was using the DQP at two levels within the institution, it was most likely to be working on general education and department-level efforts. The potential of the DQP to foster cross-campus collaborations via entry points of either general education or department-level discussions is persuasively explained by Sandra Bailey on the work of Oregon Tech⁴,

At Oregon Tech, the value of the DQP lies in the conversations it elicits. These conversations lead to collaborations. Collaborations increase curricular connections and intentional educational pathways for students... This new model will make it clear for Oregon Tech students and faculty the role of every course and general education requirement in support of our Institutional Student Learning

The Power of Aligning Initiatives

McKendree University began work with the DQP as part of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) DQP project in 2011. This initiative complemented their ongoing “Assessment 2.0” initiative on the campus, which sought to revise institutional learning outcome statements. As part of this project, the faculty-driven assessment committee created a crosswalk, comparing the McKendree University learning outcome statements with the areas of learning outlined in the DQP, along with the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and the NCAA key attributes for student learning. McKendree used the DQP and crosswalk process to consider their “Appreciation of Diversity” learning outcome, now known as the “Diverse Perspectives” outcome. They revised their diversity outcome and aligned specific courses in the existing curriculum to that outcome to ensure students met the goal. The DQP allowed McKendree faculty and administrators to deepen their understanding of their own campus-wide initiatives, and to understand how they fit into larger conversations about learning outcomes assessment and curricular alignment.

³ <http://degreeprofile.org/example/depauw-university-co-curricular-inventory/>

⁴ <http://degreeprofile.org/example/oregon-institute-of-technology-and-the-dqp/>

Outcomes. Learning will be connected to prior knowledge, between general education courses, major courses and co-curricular activities encompassing the entire educational experience. Along the way, at graduation, and beyond, students will know what an Oregon Tech education is...

The two most common effects were the revision of learning outcome statements through faculty discussions, as well as the development of coherent and integrated programs or curricula.

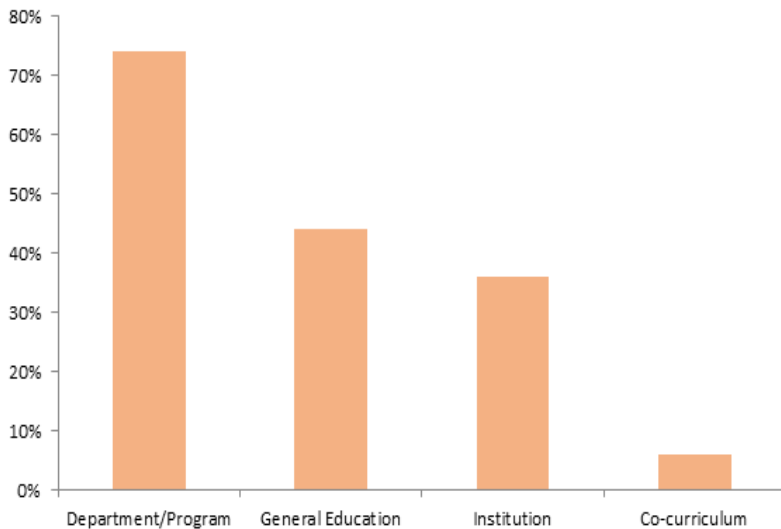


Figure 3. Percentage of reported levels of use of DQP.

Institutions experienced multiple positive implications from working with the DQP.

When asked to report the changes that took place as a result of working with the DQP, respondents indicated the two most common effects were the revision of learning outcome statements based around faculty discussions and shared meaning-making, as well as the development of coherent and integrated programs or curricula (Figure 4).

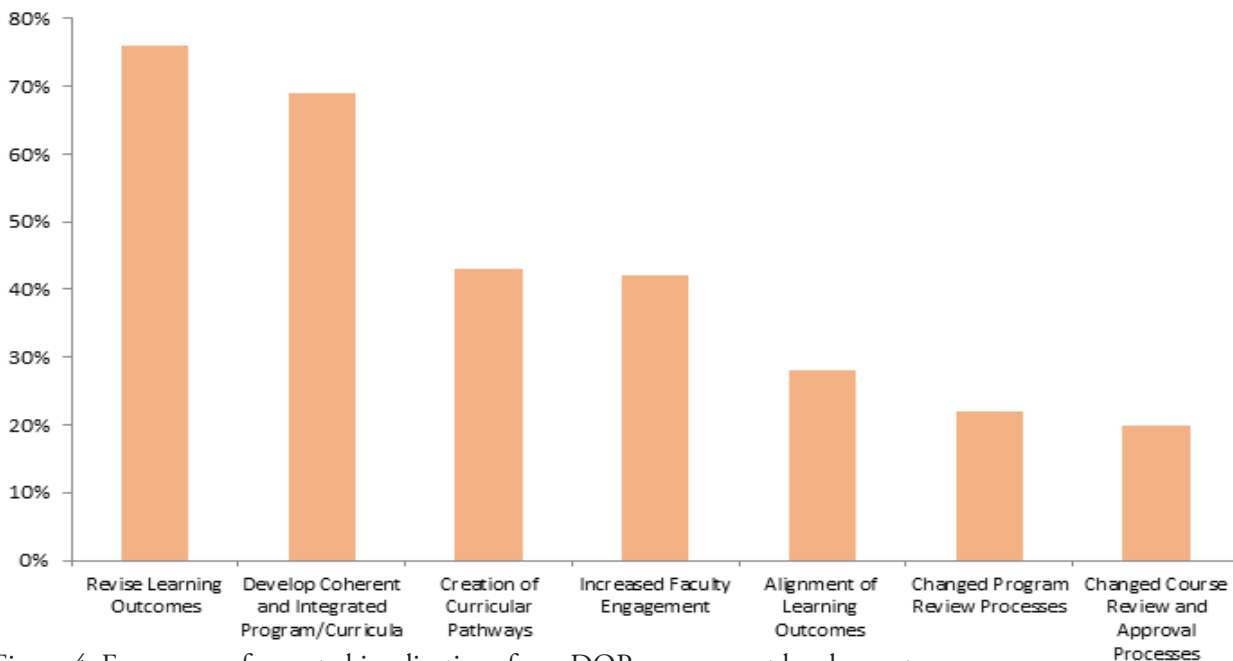


Figure 4. Frequency of reported implications from DQP engagement by change type.

The more programs and policies addressed with the DQP and the more time engaged with the DQP, the greater the potential to impact key areas of student and institutional performance.

Over half of the institutions (53%) reported three or more of the above implications with 85% reporting at least two. The longer an institution worked with the DQP, the more changes took place, and the more likely it was that the work led to policy modification. At Copper Mountain College⁵:

Our institution's work with the DQP/Tuning has led to significant improvements in our understanding of Student Learning Outcome (SLO) assessment and our ability to identify connections between learning outcomes at the course, institutional, and program level. The most notable success is in the discussions we have related to curricular development...The DQP has provided us with tools that allow evidence-based and targeted changes in our approach to writing, assessing and analyzing SLOs...Finally, our campus leadership has been encouraging in this endeavor. One of our Trustees, Emeritus Professor Gilbert, briefly attended a DQP meeting and was impressed. His support and the support of our President, Vice-president, and Dean has been unwavering. The Board and our administrative team have encouraged our use of the DQP's lessons as great tools to promote student success. Thanks to the DQP, our college is consistently prioritizing course, institutional, and program learning outcome development and assessment. Dr. Kersey, our Chief Instructional Officer, has emphasized the significance of the work we are doing and committed to provide support to our faculty.

Survey respondents agreed (96%) that the DQP helped enrich discussions about student learning outcomes and assessment (Figure 5). This finding comports with statements made in the final reports for each of the DQP Lumina funded projects (see Appendix A). In addition, survey respondents (89%) agreed that the DQP helped to clarify distinctions between levels of learning at different degree levels, align outcomes with employer needs, and help integrate general education and the major. Further, using the DQP supported development of competency-based education models⁶ and alternative transcripts, and advanced efforts to foster student success through scaling up practices and student participation in high-impact practices. The institutions that worked with the DQP for more than three years or were engaged with the DQP at the institution-level strongly agreed that the DQP stimulated consideration of alternative transcripts, generated discussions about issues related to reverse transfer, and helped focus equity-minded conversations around student success and support. Thus, *the more programs and policies address with the DQP and the more time the institution is engaged with the DQP, the greater the potential to impact key areas of student and institutional performance.*

⁵ <http://degreeprofile.org/example/copper-mountain-college-using-the-dqptuning-to-improve-student-learning-outcomes/>

⁶ For information on a DQP project related to competency-based education see <http://degreeprofile.org/example/brandman-university-builds-associate-and-baccalaureate-competencies-using-the-dqp/>

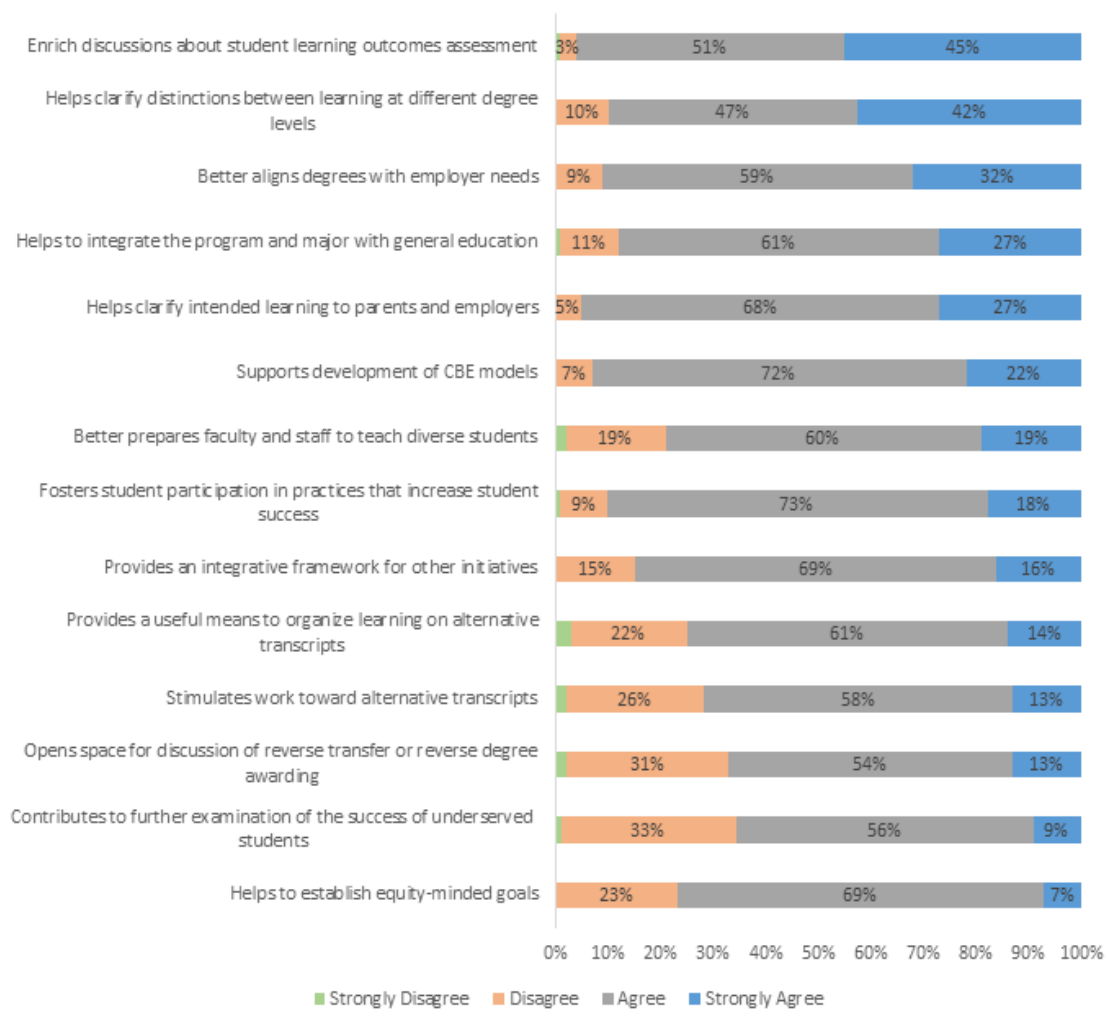


Figure 5. Respondent Perceptions of DQP Impact.

Areas of Impact

Four main influences of working with the DQP emerged from the study:

1. quality-focused conversations,
2. clarified learning and personal development outcomes,
3. curriculum revision, and
4. assessment of student learning.

These four areas are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the impact from conversations is connected with related impacts in the curriculum, and assessment impacts are connected with outcomes. As an example, Colorado Mesa University⁷ described the connections between conversations on outcomes, curriculum, and assessment when they used the DQP to:

⁷ <http://degreeprofile.org/example/colorado-mesa-universitys-work-with-the-dqp/>

One of the main effects reported by DQP users was the fruitful conversations that review of the framework fostered.

improve student learning outcomes at every level within the institution to provide meaningful information upon which to make decisions on curriculum. Nearly every semester since 2012, faculty development sessions have been held to assist faculty in writing and improving student learning outcomes and making assessment more meaningful and manageable.

Marshall University, in its Institutional Activity Report, stated that the benefits of engagement with the DQP were multiple and interconnected including:

1. Emphasizing the importance of intentionality in designing student learning experiences.
2. Fostering widespread involvement of faculty, staff, and students in assessment and improvement of student learning.
3. Providing the structure to enable degree programs to make changes as needed to improve student learning. For us, these included curriculum revision, expansion of students' capstone experiences, making the appropriate connections among courses that lead to the learning outcomes expected of students in their programs, reevaluation of assessment tools, making program outcomes more explicit for students, making the relationship between course and program outcomes more explicit for students, establishing consistency of outcomes across course sections and using assessment results to improve degree programs.
4. Encouraging comprehensive review of the curriculum by providing a vehicle for higher education to achieve excellence. The DQP has the potential to improve student learning through setting clear expectations and encouraging self-reflection.
5. Highlighting the importance of connecting students' learning experience to expectations of the Marshall University Degree Profile. This should entail a move away from "covering" material to providing students with meaningful opportunities to practice the skills the university deems important, as articulated in its Degree Profile. This, in turn, should increase the amount of active learning in which students and faculty engage.

DQP work fosters meaningful cross-campus dialogue.

"Anything that encourages and facilitates discussions regarding the essential questions of who our students are, who we are, and what our learning outcomes are for students earning degrees at different levels can only be seen as a desirable outcome!"

-Administrator, public, four-year university

One of the main effects reported by DQP users was the fruitful conversation that review of the framework fostered. From the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) Quality Collaboratives project report, the conversations were referred to as a "community-minded approach to change" (Humphreys, McCambly, & Ramaley, 2015, p. 15) because the project participants used the DQP to "inform their thinking about student work and how, together, they can promote and document student achievement..." (p. 13). Thus, conversations involved shared meaning making and identification of points of connection across programs and learning experiences. The time needed for conversations took longer than most institutions had projected. In part, this was because

campus project leaders had assumed agreement and shared understandings existed related to desired outcomes or curriculum design that in reality were not present (Jankowski, 2015). Thus, most DQP-informed improvement efforts had to back up and slow down to allow the conversations to take place in order to unearth assumptions (ACCJC, 2015).

Of note, the conversations did not continue indefinitely. Rather, they led to fruitful realizations. A public institution reported that there was considerable interest in the DQP project on the campus due to the work “galvanizing the campus community to discuss the essential skills that we want students to possess after they complete requirements...it has also led to a greater understanding of the need to map the curriculum, to articulate learning outcomes, and to develop appropriate assessments. Realizations that came out of our conversations.”

Respondents to the DQP post-convening survey in October 2014 following the launch of the revised DQP indicated that this work “brings together faculty, advisors, and student affairs professionals.” Through the conversations faculty recognize the importance of involving other stakeholders, reflect on current practices, and bring people together from across the educational experience with a renewed institutional self-awareness (Rogers, Holloway, & Priddy, 2014). Institutional Activity Reports indicated that a positive outcome was the productive conversations across campus that provided “context for the collaboration of faculty members from disparate universities who otherwise would have little ability to have these discussions.” New Mexico Junior College reported that they felt work with the DQP:

has a) brought us significantly closer to our communities and organizations within our communities, b) provided a level of focus and context for development of internal data and measures of performances, c) served to motivate a broad, in-depth look at who we are, what we are trying to accomplish, and who we serve, and d) served to bring diverse campus groups together.

Productive dialogues typically included exploration of the value and purpose of degrees, a conversational lens that fundamentally changed ways of operating, organizing and aligning learning (ACCJC, 2015), in part through bringing a heightened awareness to the need to understand the student experience in relation to proposed reforms (SACSCOC, 2013). The vast majority (89%) of Institutional Activity Reports suggested that the DQP helped faculty to talk across disciplines about learning outcomes, build shared values and culture focused around students and their success, and discuss mutual expectations along with ways to develop and attain them. As mentioned in the Institutional Activity Reports, the conversations helped to shift faculty “perspectives from what is taught to what is learned” as well as to “open new conversations about curriculum and student learning” by “bringing people into the conversation that generally wouldn’t be because we forget it’s about learning and not our operational structure.” One faculty member stated that working with the DQP “reinvigorates the idea of democracy and shared governance within our institutions by inviting everyone to think about what outcomes are desired and how the whole curriculum fits together to support them.” Although more people involved in conversations means a slower process, it also means that there is raised awareness, larger impact across an institution, greater possibilities of

The DQP helped faculty talk across disciplines about learning outcomes, build shared values and culture focused around students and their success, and discuss mutual expectations along with ways to develop and attain them.

The impact of DQP work on faculty involvement and engagement with assessment has been pronounced and served as a means to address long-standing issues of faculty engagement by moving assessment conversations away from compliance and towards faculty-led conversations and dialogue on learning.

culture shift, and time for revisions and changes to move through college and university approval structures. Indeed, the conversations were the main driver for expanding DQP work across an institution, connecting various initiatives, and broadening the organizational lens of learning.

DQP work actively engages faculty in meaningful assessment of student learning.

“I didn’t realize when we started this project that I would be saying now – this work has shifted our faculty culture! All from conversations around the meaning of the degree. Those conversations enriched dialog with faculty across disciplines, encouraged more attention to applied learning, and made us enthusiastic about discussing pedagogy and assignment design.”

- Faculty member, four-year public university

While faculty conversations were crucial for the DQP to be used effectively, several benefits accrued that were not expected.

The first was faculty interest and engagement with assessment as well as an enhanced awareness of intentionality and control – a sense among participants of a return to faculty ownership of curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning. From community college projects, “faculty reported a substantial growth in SLO confidence and expertise, which led to more productive discussions on campus regarding both SLOs and the value provided by degree completion at a community college” (ACCJC, 2015, p. 10). In the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) project, private institutions reported that faculty were more interested in professional development opportunities and that “Participants... recognized that use of the DQP to improve student learning significantly affects how faculty members plan and teach their courses” (CIC, 2014, p. 21), thus bringing together student learning outcomes with teaching and program design.

The Institutional Activity Reports showed that administrators indicated that DQP projects “increased faculty engagement with the challenges of assessing learning outcomes,” “assisted faculty in viewing the process as a campus-wide endeavor,” and “validated our faculty-led process to engage in methods to inform teaching and learning through meaningful course-level assessment across disciplines.” Faculty members reported that DQP work led to “embracing of learning outcomes,” “developing outreach to adjunct faculty to help them connect course content to core learning,” and to “richer and deeper discussions on how we can improve our teaching and learning practices while making learning visible and valuable to our students.” Finally, assessment staff noted that, “given the very positive response from faculty who participated in this assessment process, we are quite confident that we have good momentum to continue this for the 2013-2014 academic year (and we have already set aside funds to do so). This is a huge accomplishment for us!” The impact of DQP work on faculty involvement and engagement with assessment has been profound and served as a means to address long-standing issues of faculty engagement, in part by moving the work away from compliance issues and allowing faculty conversations and dialogue on learning to unfold.

DQP work drives revision of learning outcome statements for enhanced clarity and alignment to assignments.

“The faculty find the DQP outcomes in general to be better attuned than most to the actual work that their students do. They like the fact that they are explicit and assignment-focused rather than vague and general. The five categories make a lot of sense to us institutionally and allow us to adapt the outcomes to our mission. Thus, learning outcomes assessment has received a great boost from our participation in the project. Also, departments can see the value that assessment brings to their program and their students in a very concrete way.”

- Administrator, four-year private institution

Almost all (98%) of institutions using the DQP revised their student learning outcomes at the departmental, program, general education, or institution level. More than a third (38%) have rewritten learning outcomes at all levels of the institution as a result of working with the DQP. Another benefit of using the DQP was increased transparency and clarity of outcomes (Jankowski, 2015) as well as revised desired institution-level and course-level student learning outcomes that are better aligned and integrated (CIC, 2014). Revisions of learning outcomes also helped to align outcomes to assignments within courses, as demonstrated by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) (2015) project report:

Department faculty learned from this experience that they can use the DQP aligned outcomes to help students go beyond *understanding* sociology to *actually doing* sociology. Having students be active in the tasks of what sociologists do is a new way of thinking for the department...Knowledge and learning is being facilitated in ways that allow students to *be sociologists*” (p. 49).

The Institutional Activity Reports revealed that faculty found the DQP to be “an excellent tool for helping to frame discussions of where what we consider essential learning occurs on campus,” and that “re-envisioning learning outcomes helps us articulate the value of the degree and lay a common groundwork for learning across disciplines.” Administrators indicated that the DQP provided “alignment to a national framework for external validation” and that the “institution-wide learning outcomes are now enhanced with more detail and specificity.” Assessment staff claimed that the impact has been “clarifying learning goals and aligning core and program curriculum,” creating “focused learning outcomes which are easier to assess and report on, leading to increased faculty participation which in turn led to increased faculty participation in DQP assessment and greater exposure to and understanding of the value of assessment.” Institutions reported greater awareness of the connections between learning outcomes throughout the institution, and the identification of ways in which learning outcomes could be developed due to “our learning outcomes being written in ways that are more concrete, observable, actionable, and assignment oriented.”

DQP revised learning outcome statements lead to curriculum mapping and curricular reform for enhanced integration and curricular coherence.

“We thought we were adopting the DQP to help with assessment, but instead it first transformed our thinking about our curriculum and how we design it. The

Institutions reported greater awareness of the connections between learning outcomes throughout the institution, and the identification of ways in which learning outcomes could be developed.

Curriculum redesign was possible because the DQP focuses on how each course and other learning experiences add up to greater than the sum of their parts - bring attention to coherence and integration of student learning.

DQP became a platform from which to launch an institution-wide discussion regarding curriculum design.”

- Administrator, two-year public university

The CIC final project report (2014) concluded it is difficult to map the curriculum if the learning outcomes are not clear. Once faculty revised learning outcomes, the next place to turn became examining the curriculum through curriculum mapping and course redesign. In the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) DQP project, institutions reported curricular changes including removal of duplicate courses, course-redesign with outcomes in mind, syllabus modification, and examining “their curricula for consistency, quality, and progression” (SACSCOC, 2013, p. 18). Through the process of reviewing course content in relation to learning outcomes and additional curricular components, “faculty members became more convinced that there is a compelling need to revise the learning environment to make it more student-focused by integrating competencies into our existing course-based model” (SACSCOC, 2013, p. 60). In the ACCJC project, considering the curriculum broadly in relation to revised learning outcomes helped career and technical education with course sequencing and scheduling, outlined needed professional development for adjunct faculty, and shifted a focus from course completion to learning within and across courses (ACCJC, 2015).

Funded project reports indicated that institutions improved processes for curricula modifications, increased dialogue and consensus-building among faculty on curricular issues, and enhanced interdisciplinary communication for curricula review (ACCJC, 2015; CIC, 2014; Rogers, Holloway, & Priddy, 2014; SACSCOC, 2013). Widening the lens of curriculum to include a focus on educating “the student as a whole person” (Rogers, Holloway, & Priddy, 2014, p. 33) helped to foster coherence of academic programs and embed general education within the major (CIC, 2014). The AAC&U DQP project saw a shift to shared ownership of the curriculum (Humphreys, McCambly, & Ramaley, 2015) and the impact of the creation of an intentional educational experience focused on clarity to students, designed around developmental scaffolding of learning (Jankowski, 2015).

Curriculum redesign was possible because the DQP focuses on how each course and other learning experiences add up to greater than the sum of their parts – bringing attention to coherence and integration of student learning. The focus on curricular coherence led the HLC project to see improvement in alignment of curriculum through revision of courses. In fact the report stated that the most salient finding was the “importance of intentionality in designing student learning experiences across courses, the required linkages among course outcomes, and how students practice and instructors assess these outcomes (Rogers, Holloway, & Priddy, 2014, p. 31). In its final report, CIC (2014) concluded that “The DQP served as a useful model to ensure the cumulative development of skills designed to foster higher levels of attainment during students education” (p. 12) by *threading* competencies into experiences rather than embedding into specific courses, leading to the DQP project affecting “every academic program at every level within the institution...causing faculty and staff to rethink some aspects of the co-curricular program” (p. 17).

The potential for curricular transformation is expressed well in the case study of Kansas City Kansas Community College where the DQP was originally used to re-invigorate assessment but ended up having an impact on the curriculum committee course review process.

Meanwhile, to more firmly connect the new outcomes to the ongoing work of teaching and learning, the long-standing Academic Policy Committee, which approves all new or modified courses, has adopted a new guideline. The committee now requires that every course seeking approval submit not only a syllabus, but also a Degree Profile Index (or DPI) specifying which of the 21st Century Outcomes the course will assess. In the 2013-14 academic year, approximately 75 courses were reviewed under this new guideline, each of them specifying a DPI. According to committee chair Susie Myers, the process has made a tremendous difference: “Now when we create a course, we start with the outcomes we want.” It has helped, too, she says, by giving faculty a firmer sense of what to expect in terms of learning from other courses. “We can look up the DPI from courses students would have taken before ours and find out what proficiencies they bring to our course.” (Hutchings, 2014a, p. 4)

As illustrated by the example of Kansas City, curriculum impact was realized through a combination of conversations, revision of learning outcomes, and heightened awareness of curricular intentionality, coherence, and clarity for students.

Retention and graduation data are not yet available from institutions that have used the DQP and experienced curriculum revision. Even so, because of the collaborative nature of the work, benefits for students are starting to appear as noted by a student participant in a DQP driven curriculum redesigned program, “The professors really emphasize making sure that you’re not cramming, cramming, cramming and then taking a test and forgetting everything. They want to make sure that you’re actually fundamentally understanding information and how to apply it later on.” As Humphreys, McCambly, and Ramaley wrote about the AAC&U projects, “In the end, students are the clear beneficiaries; they are able to document, within their educational pathways and to potential employers, evidence of their achievement of specific learning outcomes” (p. 33). The CIC (2014) project report indicated, “Consortium projects demonstrated that the DQP could provide helpful – though at times sobering – insights into the student experience” (p. 16) and provided opportunities for students to reflect on their personal learning experiences. From the Institutional Activity Reports, faculty have noted increased student engagement, enhanced student performance on assignments, and the realization “as one student noted that they understand what the education they were trying to achieve entailed and how good it was.” Administrators reported in their IARs that while the more desirable implication of working with the DQP has been the engagement of faculty and students in the teaching and learning process, “Engaging students in the learning process and improving the quality of the instructional process are possible with this work. Students become stakeholders of their learning and their degree. It is not a mystery any longer when we tell them how the pieces of the curriculum fit together.”

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Work with the DQP brought greater emphasis to meaningful assessment and demonstration of student learning.

From the Institutional Activity Reports, administrators indicated that work with the DQP has led to scaffolded learning experiences, alignment of outcomes to the institutional mission, course redesign, a renewed focus on intentionality, changes in pedagogy towards more active and engaged learning activities, and the use of the DQP as a tool to guide curricular reform. Faculty reported that, “it is helpful to see skill expectations repeating across programs at the same degree level; this is not a lens we had taken before at our university” as well as indicating that the “DQP has been helpful to us in a variety of ways...with pedagogy discussions and ...in examining our curriculum to make sure that it is meeting the learning goals.” In addition, work with the DQP led to recognition of curricular areas that needed to be strengthened, where there were gaps, and shared understanding of how courses contribute to the curriculum. For instance National Louis University reported that a new program was created “based on the DQP and it is the most organized, detail oriented, rigorous program here” while CIC participating institutions indicated that the “DQP has opened our eyes to many more opportunities to improve the student learning experience...it has become the guidepost by which the undergraduate faculty has made some critical decisions for the undergraduate curriculum” (CIC, 2014, p.13). The possibility of curricular coherence has impacts for the entire institution as indicated by an administrator at four-year university in its Institutional Activity Report

The DQP project that our undergraduate programs have implemented over the past three years has made dramatic improvements in the quality of the curriculum, scalability of offerings, and has made assessment much more efficient and effective. We are now conscious, as a faculty, and as an administration, of precisely the types of proficiencies, habits, skills, and attitudes we’re teaching our students.

DQP work led to greater focus on course-embedded assessments and strengthened alignment through assignment design.

“Use of the DQP has helped our community grasp the benefits of assessment: helping students achieve the competencies at a level appropriate to their degree. Specifically, the main benefit has been to focus and strengthen faculty participation in assessment. We used to try to coerce them into doing it, now they are telling us why it matters.”

-Administrator, four-year public university

Work with the DQP brought greater emphasis to meaningful assessment and demonstration of student learning. In response to requests from the field, NILOA provided resources to campuses on implications for assessment from the DQP (Ewell, 2013), alignment of assessment with teaching and learning (Hutchings, 2016), and faculty-driven assignment design efforts (Hutchings, Jankowski, & Ewell, 2014). While DQP project participants agreed that learning looked different at different levels (such as associate, bachelor’s, and masters), they weren’t sure of the ways in which student learning looked different.

Institutions working with the DQP not only revised learning outcomes statements, but then used those statements to restructure assessment activities including focusing on signature assignments, rubric development or revisions, assignment design, revision of capstone experience, and integration of portfolios (ACCJC, 2015; CIC, 2014; Jankowski, 2015). Project coordinators reported an “unparalleled degree of collaboration among faculty to use assessment results to

improve the general education program” (CIC, 2014, p. 9). From Institutional Activity Reports, faculty indicate that their “assessments are more meaningful” and that DQP work has led to the “development of a culture of assessment among faculty – I can now tell my colleagues why this matters and what it can do for student learning.” Faculty development offices also provided support to the work and reported that the “DQP work allowed us to create a robust, well-defined roadmap for moving forward with assessment and development at course, program and institutional levels in ways that are meaningful to and build from our faculty.” Connecting assessment efforts to the shared learning outcome statements and redesigned curriculum allowed faculty to see the value of assessment as part of, and intricately linked with, teaching and learning (Jankowski, 2015).

In NILOA’s assignment charrettes (see Hutchings, Jankowski, & Ewell, 2014), 80% of faculty participants stated that the assignment charrettes helped them see their assignment through the eyes of students more clearly. In addition:

- 78% revised additional assignments
- 59% claimed they were more aware of aligning their assignments with desired institutional outcomes
- 50% increased their understanding of how assessment informs teaching
- 44% returned home and participated in an event about assignments on their own campus
- 43% prompted changes in their teaching and approaches to pedagogy

From the Institutional Activity Reports, institutions indicated that “faculty doing assignment work documented improved learning outcomes at the course-level; faculty who created assignments aligned to learning outcomes reported that student performance is greatly improved in courses using the revised assignment.” While there is a “tendency in some national conversations to equate educational competencies with the accumulation of isolated bits of information and skills, the university’s intentional, integrative curriculum is not easily replaced by a series of competency tests” (Rogers, Holloway, & Priddy, 2014, p. 29) – a point solidified by faculty in the alignment and revision of course-embedded assignments.

Also, focusing on meaningful assessment connected to teaching and learning tends to increase intentionality in course design and meaningful use of data to improve student learning. From the AAC&U evaluation, the example of Kentucky is useful:

It is worth underscoring the power of assessment to alter the dyads approach to supporting student movement through transfer experiences. In Kentucky, the teams developed a Biology assessment for incoming students and transfer students, along with assessments in general education areas that were given to all general education students at the end of the semester. What the results from the Biology assessment indicated was that students were at the same starting level on the biology major assessments, indicating to faculty that it was not actually a lack of consistency of assessment or curricular benchmarks, but that the transition from the two-year to the four-year institution was an advising issue. Instead of needing to better align the curricula, students needed

Institutions connected assessment efforts to the shared learning outcome statements and redesigned curriculum, allowing faculty to see the value of assessment as part of, and intricately linked with, teaching and learning.

The positive effects of using the DQP are increased when the work is connected to and builds on existing initiatives, structures, and processes.

assistance to get into the best courses that prepare them for entry into science programs – a possibility that had not been considered prior and an example supportive of using data to inform decisions and define problems (Jankowski, 2015, p. 10).

Conclusions

The impact of working with the DQP is broadened and deepened when implemented as a larger-scale change effort. Peter Ewell (2005) summarized the characteristics of successful change initiatives in higher education. One key ingredient is the presence of permanent structures that foster collaborative work across the organizational silos that are ubiquitous within colleges and universities of every size and stripe. These silos, organizational constraints if you will, were noted by DQP project participants as an area in need of reform or under current revision, with the cross-campus dialogues facilitated by DQP engagement helping to break down silos. In addition, Ewell (2005) stressed the “importance of employing collaboration among project participants *themselves* as a strategy for project success, both within and across institutions.” (p. 6). The institutions that were among the most successful were those with strong administrative support for faculty to partake in cross-campus conversations, where faculty were able to develop shared understandings and collaborations to move connected and integrated change efforts forward.

Collaboration is key to effective DQP implementation efforts. Following the October 2014 launch of the revised DQP, one respondent commented, “This work is a collective effort and our president’s and CEO’s need to know that.” In Hutchings’ (2014b) case study, she observed that “Campus leaders note that interacting with other campuses, whose leaders sometimes interpreted the DQP in quite different ways, was very helpful, ‘prompting us to shift our thinking’ and see new ways of understanding the potential of the DQP” (p. 3). In addition, Ewell stated for change to be successful that clear channels of communication be established, something seen in DQP projects in part because the work allowed for greater clarity about what institutions, faculty, and students were doing and why.

Paraphrasing organizational change consultants, George Kuh opines that change moves at the speed of trust. The collaborative nature of the work not only allowed for shared understanding but the development of trust amongst participants. Ewell (1997) has stated that change fails in part because of a lack of shared understanding about the very nature of learning. He argues that “Change requires a fundamental shift of perspective...requires all members of the institution to fundamentally rethink what they do” (p. 4) and “...must also attempt to imbue faculty with a sense of collective accountability for learning” (p. 6). Once an institution is in agreement on what learning means as well as the strategies and opportunities that promote it, Ewell (1997) claims then can we move into transformational change at various levels. The process faculty and other stakeholders went through of self-reflection and intentional redesign aligns well with fundamental shifts in perspective as mentioned by Ewell.

The positive effects of using the DQP are increased when the work is connected to and builds on existing initiatives, structures, and processes. For instance, if an institution is already thoughtful in their approach to assessment and program design then working with the DQP serves to validate their approach, it also starts conversations around the creation of an intentional culture of evidence and

improvement – to re-examine assessment processes and practices to ensure they routinely foster the types of learning institutions are interested in creating in students (Hutchings, 2014b). Those already thinking intentionally about assessment began to more systematically integrate their efforts with teaching and learning, and those engaged with multiple initiatives across campus as well receiving support through consortiums or substantial technical assistance were able to span organizational divides between institution-level assessment and course-level assessment, subsequently moving away from compliance forms of assessment to those more consequential in nature (Kuh, et al, 2015).

A case study by Jillian Kinzie (2015) indicated that to develop increased ownership, the “DQP provided an institution-wide common base for discussion about curriculum and learning outcomes” (p. 3) but also provided faculty with a “reason and structure, tools, and time to engage in this substantive review” (p. 4) through existing channels and review processes.

Salutary effects of the DQP accrue when students and their learning are the major focus of the work. In the DQP October 2014 post-convening survey, respondents indicated that the DQP “focuses attention on what is the most important thing – what graduates know and can do with their knowledge and skills.” Further, participants reiterated that, “It is one framework – not THE framework” and that “this is a long-term project in and of itself which will require fundamental change in how higher education operates.” As institutions engaged in working with the DQP, they experienced a shift in perspective through conversations, leading to a change in the questions they ask about the structures supporting students and the role of students in fostering learning. Thus, impacts were interwoven making it difficult to discuss outcomes without exploring curricula, or to discuss assignments without considering pedagogy. The inter-related nature of the conversations allowed faculty to view the educational experience as holistic, the impact of which is summarized nicely by Pasadena City College:

The DQP is a valuable tool to prompt deeper thinking about the nature and value of learning outcomes and their potential to link disciplines around solving real world problems of human need. The flexibility and generality of the model makes it highly adaptable and easily communicated. The strength of the DQP as an independent system that acknowledges the essential qualities of lifelong learning, along with a structured learning framework, creates a common currency across disciplines and institutions that deepens educational engagement by both faculty and students alike. As a process, the DQP provides a clear roadmap from course and program outcomes to the development of rigorous, authentic assessments, which increase the validity and transferability of stackable credentials from certificates to degrees and transfer into baccalaureate degree programs. Most importantly, students engaged in DQP aligned courses are more engaged, more successful and more focused on long-term learning and career development. (ACCJC, 2015, p. 66).

While the DQP framework itself was used as a conversation starter and may not be regularly reviewed or invoked, the principles behind it caused ripple effects throughout entire institutions to restructure, design, and rethink their efforts

The DQP can serve as a point of convergence around which various initiatives, constituents, and learning opportunities meet to enhance student learning, integrate learning experiences, and bring greater clarity and coherence to educational experiences for all parties involved.

The DQP has the potential to foster development of faculty designed, student focused, intentional and coherent learning experiences for all students.

with a lens towards students, intentionality, coherence, and learning. The DQP has the potential to foster development of faculty designed, student focused, intentional and coherent learning experiences for all students when approached in a thoughtful manner that allows time for conversations to unfold that set the stage for launching and connecting improvement initiatives. The DQP can serve as a point of convergence around which various initiatives, constituents, and learning opportunities meet to enhance student learning, integrate learning experiences, and bring greater clarity and coherence to educational experiences for all parties involved.

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Appendix A: Funded DQP Projects and Related Initiatives

* = Had a final project report that was reviewed as part of the study.

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) *

The mission of the Degree Qualifications Profile Project (DQPP) is to enhance educational quality, increase institutional effectiveness and promote continuous quality improvement in higher education. The initial stage of this project involves two initiatives: 1) Tuning Clusters; and 2) Associates Degree Cohorts. The Tuning Clusters Cohort emphasizes the goals of assuring quality and comparability of programs in regard to core competencies and learning outcomes and the Associates Degree Cohort will work toward validation of multiple uses of the DQP toward increasing institutional effectiveness.

American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)

AASCU is working with three university systems to test the feasibility of using the DQP within the unique context of each system's present circumstances. Download "Conversation about the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)", a presentation with more information on the AASCU DQP projects.

Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)*

AAC&U worked with assessment professionals across multiple states towards developing better knowledge, practices, and policies when it comes to student learning in the 21st century in the Quality Collaboratives project. The three-year project challenged participating professionals to extend their knowledge of what works at their own institutions towards establishing new frontiers of exemplar student assessment. Some of the resources participants used during the project are located here. With the help of the DQP framework, participants crafted effective assessment approaches that facilitate student learning while also being aware of how to communicate these outcomes to the public along with possible policy implications.

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC)*

CIC selected 25 institutions to work as a consortium to examine the usefulness of the DQP to improve student learning as well as its applicability in the independent liberal arts-oriented college context. Additional information on the DQP consortium may be found here: <https://www.cic.edu/p/Pages/Degree-Qualifications-Profile.aspx>.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC)*

HLC is examining a new model of accreditation referred to as Open Pathways through three institutional pioneer cohorts, one of which is focused on the DQP. Additional information on the Open Pathways and the third institutional cohort working with the DQP may be found in the Open Pathway Booklet: <http://ncahlc.org/Information-for-Institutions/pathways.html>.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges*

In collaboration with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), 22 historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) were invited to "test-drive" the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) to map their curriculum, particularly in mathematics and English, and identify weaknesses and strengths in teaching and learning.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

WASC is examining the usefulness of the DQP as a framework for assisting institutions to assess the quality of degrees or portions of degree programs. Additional information on the WASC work with the DQP may be found here: <http://www.wascenior.org/redesign/dqp>. For a list of questions institutions can ask when thinking about their work with the DQP, see WASC's Framing Questions for Use by DQP Learning Communities.

Other Associated Projects

LEAP

Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is a national advocacy and research initiative that stresses the importance of liberal education. LEAP promotes Essential Learning Outcomes, Principles of Excellence, High-Impact Educational Practices, Authentic Assessments, and Inclusive Excellence.

VALUE Rubrics

The Value Rubrics are part of AAC&U's LEAP Initiative with each rubric developed from frequently identified characteristics of learning for each of the 16 learning outcomes. The VALUE Rubrics add to the dialogue on assessment of student learning.

Additional projects and initiatives may be found here: <http://degreeprofile.org/related-initiatives/>

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