Beyond the Looking Glass: Tenets of Meaningful Transparency

NATASHA JANKOWSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NILOA
RUTH SLOTNICK, BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY
CHRISTINA OUELLETTE, BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY
WELCOME

What’s the series about?

How will our time together today flow?

In case you are wondering:

- Slides will be shared
- This is being recorded and will be shared
- You can keep the convo going on twitter with #NILOAwebinar
- Google doc of updated resource on the NILOA website and all prior webinars as well: https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org
Community Check-in Recap

This is not a test of online education. Remember: It’s not about learning online; it’s about learning in a global pandemic crisis.

Compassion not compliance should drive decisions at this time.

Listen to students and be flexible.

Do not require a higher-level of proof in an online class then you would in face-to-face.
More Community Check-in Recap

Don’t start from a point of negativity in perceptions of students to create policy. **A policy should not be about blocking cheating but enabling learning.**

Modify end of course/faculty evaluations and use them as a formative planning tool.

Assessment of student learning is ongoing this semester, the reporting of those efforts is a lower priority that can be postponed or altered.
Assignment Design Conversations

Assignment Charrettes in a Time of COVID-19

Assignment, or structured peer review of assignment design, provide an opportunity for faculty members to come together and discuss, through a structured peer review process, the dos and their assignments in relation to learning outcomes, evaluative criteria, and the means by which students are prepared to complete the assignment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Elements of an Assignment Design Conversation

- **Scaffolding Learning**
- **Assignment**
- **Learning Outcomes**
- **Evaluative Criteria**

1. What learning outcomes will students demonstrate with this assignment? How does it need to be modified to better align with the learning outcomes of interest?
2. How does the assignment align with the evaluative criteria? Are there mixed signals sent to students?
3. Thinking about the assignment from the point of view of students, what questions or suggestions do you have regarding clarity in instructions, prompts, or purpose?
4. How does this assignment allow for flexible options, alternative demonstrations, and/or culturally responsive demonstrations of learning?
5. How does this assignment need to be modified or adjusted to reflect current faculty and student circumstances and situations in light of COVID-19?
6. What unnecessary constraints, if any, may need to be removed to accommodate learning during a global pandemic crisis?

Planning with Curriculum Maps

Program Planning in a Time of COVID-19

Students had already completed a fall term and part of the spring when campuses switched to remove instruction in response to coronavirus, or COVID-19. For those students graduating, they had been refining and practicing various institutional and programmatic courses over the entirety of their degree path. For those still on the leading edge of their educational journey, one principle of learning rings very true: that the learning we most desire for our students cannot be acquired in a single class or single experience. Students must run into it over and over again, in different classes, in different ways. Thus, as we look to planning a possibly virtual Fall learning experience for students, faculty and staff need to come together and explore curriculum plans in relation to learning outcomes and assignments. In other words, it is a great time to dust off curriculum maps and use them to engage in future planning for students.

One conversation is not about updating a curriculum map document or starting into a rigorous discussion of mapping curriculum. Instead, assessment professionals can offer several questions to faculty during discussions in planning for the summer and fall:
- When our campus made the shift to remote instruction, what learning outcomes had we addressed, and which were left to cover? Basically, what learning outcomes will students need additional application or review in follow-on courses?
- Are the courses planned for next term already addressing those outcomes, or do they need to be modified? How might I rethink my course(s) and assignment(s)?
- How is my course setting students up for learning success in future courses?

It’s the time to return to the basics of assessment and instructional design. Consider discussing the following questions:
- Why does this course even exist?
- What are the learning outcomes that students need from this course that they will apply elsewhere?
- How can we think about learning from a program perspective? Where does this fit into overall curriculum?
- Can we consider this a flipped semester or a flipped summer -- where students learn about a concept over the summer and then apply and practice it when they return?

Feel free to pull from this list of questions to assist in conversations on learning in the upcoming sessions/semesters/terms. In addition, ask the students what learning outcomes they think they have acquired and/or where they think they need additional work. This is also an opportunity to actively involve your students in planning discussions as well as assessment conversations as they have interesting ideas to bring to the table.

Virtual Discussions for Future Planning

When undertaking programmatic planning conversations based on mapped and aligned curriculum, please consider current virtual constraints. Questions to consider include whether the discussion should be conducted synchronously or asynchronously? What technology should be used?

Given the differences in the lived experience of faculty and staff as well as differences in current ability to offer chunks of undistributed time to a task, virtual discussions of mapping learning may need to be flexible in different ways. For instance, one model may be that faculty come together in a Zoom meeting and discuss learning in specific courses at the same time. However, synchronous sessions may limit faculty involvement due to timing, Internet requirements, and ability to focus.

Another model might entail a mapping exercise that is shared in a Google doc, grouped by courses, programs, etc., and made available to faculty over the span of a week or other set amount of time, with questions to guide their engagement with materials. Faculty are then able to add their course/program learning outcomes information and comment as they have time. A further option is a modified course evaluation or survey to faculty, staff, and students to capture what learning students think they have met thus far and what learning they think they need to continue to work on in future terms. It might even be that the best path forward is a combination of various approaches mentioned.

Resources

For additional mapping considerations and ideas, you can access the NILA Mapping webinar recording which is part of the NILA webinar series in response to COVID-19 (coronavirus) situations. You can also access the Mapping Learning Toolkit for information on what curriculum mapping entails, how to go about doing it, sample maps, and examples from other institutions.

Telling our Stories and Effective Communication

Transparency Online: Communication or Posting?

Evidence of Student Learning
- Interpreted results
- Contextualized to institution
- Presented graphically
- Disseminated

Use of Student Learning Evidence
- Targeted to audience
- Provides examples
- Describes improvement
- Defines next steps

Common to All
- Clearly worded
- Prominently posted
- Updated regularly
- Receptive to feedback

Assessment Plans
- Descriptive
- Defines measures
- Easily downloaded

Assessment Resources
- Easily downloaded

Current Assessment Activities
- Defines activities
Transparency in Process:
Clarity in Structure

Why are we doing the things we are doing?

What is the process?

Who is involved?

What is my role?
Transparency in Learning: Transparency to Students

Who is aware of learning outcomes? When and in what ways?

Are students clear on why they are doing assignments or different tasks? How their learning connects across courses or experiences or employment?

Can we measure students on things they weren’t aware they were being measured upon?

Do they know they learned something? And is it what we intended?
NO TIME TO EXPLAIN

GET IN THE LLAMA
Transparency and Covid-19

Transparency can be a mechanism by which we make the value and worth of educational experiences clear to students, help them make decisions on how to navigate education, as well as determine where to put their attention during a global pandemic crisis. It’s also just smart educational practice.
Leveraging the Student Voice in the Transparency of Student Learning Outcomes

April 30, 2020 Virtual Presentation, NILOA webinar

Ruth Slotnick, Ph.D., Director of Assessment
Christina Ouellette, Graduate Assistant of Assessment
Joanna Boeing Bratton, Assistant Director of Assessment (non-presenting)

@ruthslotnick  boeingbratton  @BSU_COuellette
About Bridgewater State University

- Largest of the 9 Massachusetts state universities
- 9,000 undergraduate
- 1,500 graduate students
- 53% first gen students
- 28% students of color
- 94 academic degree programs
BIG Problem with Transparency in 2014

- Academic program learning outcomes were difficult to find
- Mostly located in self-study documents or hard drives
- Very limited visibility of outcomes for 94-degree pathways
External Drivers of Transparency

NILOA Transparency Framework (2011)

Excellence in Assessment (EIA) designation criteria and rubrics (2016)

Appeals (without GA)

Academic Affairs Assessment Council for why transparency matters – if only starting with visibility of learning outcomes

Program Chairs & College Deans and tried to have them take small steps forward

BSU Marketing & Communications to include the outcomes on the university’s external site including the BSU Catalog
General Campus Response
How bad was our transparency? 100+ hour project

Transparency definition: Prominently posted at or linked to multiple places across both internal & external websites. Published in handbooks, reports, or elsewhere. Easy to find & read.

Figure. BSU Transparency Results for Academic Degree Programs
So, what did we do?

Scratched our heads, swore like sailors, we re-routed our efforts,

AND WE

Hired a graduate assistant who posted program outcomes on the Office of Assessment website
Holistic Score of Degree Program Handbooks by College (n=14)
TRANSPARENCY TR[ACTION]

No GA
Transparency data alone; no action 2015

Kerri
Internal posting of program outcomes 2017

Rafa
Handbook data, Assessment Council listening 2018

Christina
Outcomes published BSU website 2019
"Students don’t care about program learning outcomes" - Professor

"They don’t care how assignments align and don’t want to see a grid in the syllabi" - Adjunct Faculty

"I don’t think anyone is going to sit down and talk to you about learning outcomes transparency" - College Dean
BSU Transparency Framework

Level 1: Visibility of Program Learning Outcomes
- Low Visibility (Zero transparency)
  - Found only in department documents
- High Visibility (Actively communicated)
  - Accessible to the public and easy to find
  - Shared only at the program/college level
  - Accessible only within the institution

Level 2: Active Communication of Program Learning Outcomes with Students

Level 3: Connection and Application at the Program Level

Level 4: Integration Beyond the Program Level

Level 5: Highest Transparency
Current Situation

BUDGET CUTS & LOSS OF GA

COVID19 PANDEMIC
Recap and moving forward: Integrating the student voice to increase transparency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify</th>
<th>Identify key students or student groups to promote visibility for prospective and current students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empower</td>
<td>Empower students to ask how learning outcomes tie into the selection of a student’s major, especially during the pandemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite</td>
<td>Invite current students to share their stories of connecting program outcomes to classes, internships, and a future career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wrap-up & Resources

- We have a NILOA Assessment in Practice paper coming out in May with our strategies tool kit
- We will be presenting at the virtual Higher Education Assessment Conference on May 12
- In June, Christina will be featured on a NILOA podcast
- We are launching the BSU National Learning Outcomes Transparency survey today [RIGHT NOW!]
Webinar with Watermark

May 5, 2020 | 3:00-4:00 pm EDT
COVID Conversations: Adapting Assessment & Focusing on Outcomes During a Crisis

Tracey Floto
Trine University

Bliss Adkison
University of North Alabama

Susan Brooks
University of Findlay

Natasha Jankowski
NILOA

Join Our Email List: learningoutcomesassessment.org/joinemail/

@NILOA_web @LearningOutcomesAssessment
Thank You for Being a Part of the Series!

https://youtu.be/etviGf1uWlg?t=33