



*Creating Authentic Academic Cultures of
Evidence: A Perspective on Learning
Outcomes*

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Learning Outcomes and Quality in Higher Education: What is Needed?

- Concrete Evidence of Attainment for Quality Assurance
- Assurance that Institutions of Higher Education are Using Evidence about Learning to Align and Improve the Provision of Instruction (“Culture of Evidence”)
- Accreditation Must Address **Both** of These Things





Attributes of a Meaningful “Culture of Evidence” for Learning Outcomes

- Shared Recognition That Many (But Not All) Things Are Knowable
 - A Comprehensive Framework for Thinking About Learning Outcomes
 - An Accessible Store of Information About Student Learning and What Produces It
 - An Attitude Toward Problem-Solving that Minimizes “Finger-Pointing” at Institutions and Individuals
 - Clear Follow-Through On Decisions Made and the Evidence Used to Make Them
 - Willingness to Stop Doing Things When They Don’t Work
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A Taxonomy of Terms Commonly Used in Connection with the “Assessment” of Student Learning Outcomes

Units of Analysis	Ways of Looking at Performance	Ways of Looking at Outcomes	Ways to Review Performance
Institution	Efficiency Productivity Effectiveness	Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment• Further Education• Career Mobility• Income	Evaluation
Program	Output Productivity	Satisfaction	Measurement Indicator
Student	Outcome	Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge• Skill• Ability• Attitude/Disposition Attainment Development	Assessment Evidence of Achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examinations• Performances• Student Work







Advantages of an Outcomes Approach

- Clarity of Goals and Objectives
- Flexibility Across Different Modes of Provision
- Allows Comparisons of Performance Across Populations, Treatments, and Settings
- Supports Establishment of Portable Credentials Across Institutions and Jurisdictions





Pitfalls of an Outcomes Approach

- Definitions of Outcomes [Conceptual and Operational]
 - Lack of Legitimacy Among Traditional Academics
 - Fractionation: Losing a Sense of the Whole with Respect to Complex Abilities
 - Loss of Serendipity Because Not All Important Outcomes May be Specifiable in Advance
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Institution-Level Applications

- Program Evaluation and Improvement (for Institutions and/or an Individual Academic Course of Study)
- Competency or Mastery-Based Instructional Designs
- Managing Student Transitions from One Educational Setting to Another (e.g. Secondary to Tertiary)





State or National Level Applications

- Institutional or Jurisdictional Performance Indicators for Benchmarking and Comparison
- Resource Allocation and Institutional “Steering”
- Aligning Academic Standards
- Accreditation and Quality Review (Audit)





A Taxonomy of Approaches to Assessment

		Assessment Focus or Purpose	
		Learning/Teaching (Formative)	Accountability (Summative)
Assessment Level	Individual	<p><i>Instruction</i></p> <p>Individual Tests Portfolios</p> <p><i>Placement</i></p> <p>Diagnostic Tests Advanced Placement Tests Vocational Tests</p>	<p><i>“Gate-keeping”</i></p> <p>Rising Junior Exams Comprehensive Exams Certification Exams Capstone Performances</p>
	Group	<p><i>Program Enhancement</i></p> <p>Individual assessment results may be aggregated to serve program evaluation purposes</p>	<p><i>Campus and Program Evaluation</i></p> <p>Productivity Reviews Performance Indicators</p>



Challenges and Stakeholder Reactions to Outcomes-Based Approaches

- Unclear Motives
- Philosophical Objections
- Implementation Challenges in Building a “Culture of Evidence”
- Implementation Challenges Particularly Associated with Outcomes Approaches





Strategies for Dealing with Unclear Motives

- Consciously Delimit the Initiative
- Involve Stakeholders Early and Often
- Take an Incremental Approach
- Adopt a Consciously Experimental Approach
- Limit Consequences





Strategies for Dealing with Philosophical Objections

- Adopt the Language and Stance of Scholarship
- Encourage Faculties to Reflect on How They Are Already Embodying and Assessing Learning Outcomes
- Inventory Existing “Outcomes-Like” Practices
- Recognize that Some Learning Results are Easier to Frame than Others





Implementation Strategies for Building a Culture of Evidence

- Start Small with Some “Easy Wins”
- Emphasize Positive and Collective Incentives
- Adjust the Approach to Fit Important Differences in Context
- Share Approaches Across Institutions and Faculties
- Involve “Middle Managers” and Hold Them Accountable





Strategies for Addressing Key Difficulties In Outcomes-Based Approaches

- Keep the Outcomes Framework Simple
- Think Constantly and Explicitly About Performance and What It Looks Like
- Use Multiple Forms of Assessment
- Articulate Assessment Into the Curriculum and the Everyday “Rhythms” of Teaching and Learning





Some “Points of Attack” in Building Cultures of Evidence

- Expectations Exercises
 - > What Do You Expect to Find?
 - > At What Point Do We Have a Problem?
- Use Results to Inform and Initiate Discussions, Rather than “Give Answers”
 - > Focus on Why Results Occurred
 - > Create “Data Dialogues”
- Initiate Visible Opportunities to Consider Results and What They Mean





Some “Points of Attack” in Building Cultures of Evidence (Continued)

- Present Results as Discrepancies
 - > - Between Perceptions and Reality
 - > - Among Different Constituencies or Groups
- Disaggregate Results to Show Variations
 - > - Across Different Student Populations
 - > - Across Different Dimensions of Ability
- Package Results Around Problems or Embed Them in Regular Decision Processes





Some Final Reminders: Building an Effective Culture of Evidence Means....

- **Not** “Measuring Everything that Moves”
- **Not** Just “Checking up After the Fact”
- **Not** Searching for “Final” Answers
- **Not** Always Being as “Precise” as Possible
- **Not** Ever Expecting to be Done



