

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Past, Present, and Future

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Council of Graduate Schools

“Taking Student Learning Outcomes Assessment to the Next Level”
A University of Maryland System Convening
Bowie State University
Bowie, MD
April 19, 2017

Student Learning Outcomes and Outcomes Assessment

- For what?
- So what?

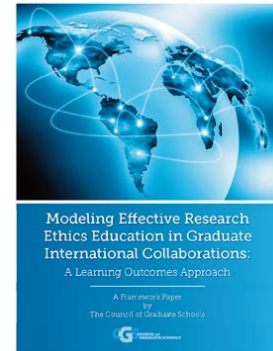


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- Member organization with 500 universities US and Canada + 25 international members
- Our mission is to advance and improve graduate education and research
- Advocacy, Research, and Best Practices

CGS Best Practice Projects and Publications with Implications for Learning Outcomes Assessment

- Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning
- Research Ethics and Graduate International Collaborations
- Doctoral Learning Outcomes and Frameworks



Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning

- 3-year project (2012-15)
- Funders: Teagle Foundation and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
- This project sought to enhance faculty involvement by preparing graduate students in the assessment of undergraduate student learning before they begin their careers. The long term project goal is to support integration of skills and understanding in student learning assessment into the majority of existing professional development programs to prepare graduate students for faculty careers.
- Through the project, graduate students who aspire to faculty positions learned to:
 - Identify needs and opportunities in their classrooms and in their programs,
 - Respond to those needs through enhanced teaching and learning techniques, and
 - Engage with other graduate students and faculty in evidence-based conversations within and across the arts and sciences.

Research Partners

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North Carolina A&T State University
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University of North Carolina at Greensboro



What is the National Context for Graduate Student Preparation in Undergraduate Learning Assessment?

PREPARING FUTURE FACULTY TO ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING

A report on a CGS project supported by a grant from the Teagle Foundation



The Teagle Foundation



- Heightened attention to SLO's and their use by accrediting bodies. #1 reason for follow-ups in 2009 was a deficiency in learning assessment.
- Faculty required to document learning objectives in new ways unfamiliar to prior generations.
- Vigorous debate around instruments and approaches that some faculty saw as bureaucratic, jargon-mired, based on insufficient evidence, and accountability-driven vs. improvement focused.
- Faculty engagement was essential but they were not yet on board.

Unanswered Questions, Opportunities and Challenges

- **How do we engage more faculty, more fully?**
 - Two thirds of survey respondents with PFF programs reported that SLO's and/or the assessment of student learning are an integral feature of their PFF or similar programs. PFF and other similar programs reach only a fraction of PhD and master's students who will comprise future faculty.
- **How do we engage TA's and other graduate students more meaningfully?**
 - E.g., help them to think beyond their individual course to the program and curricula as a whole; reach those with limited TA opportunities and/or curricular influence.
- **What are the operational challenges and how do we overcome them?**
 - E.g., lack of centralized university support, overly mechanized requirements, contradictory university-wide and program-driven assessment efforts.

Research Ethics and International Collaborations



- 3-year project (2012-15)
- Funder: National Science Foundation (NSF #1135345)
- This project developed model approaches to assessing the learning of students who participate in graduate international collaborations such as joint and dual degree programs and research collaborations and exchanges.
- CGS worked with funded institutions to:
 - Identify and test learning outcomes in STEM international collaborations.
 - Document approaches to using those outcomes to enhance the preparation of graduate students to confront the ethical challenges of international research.
 - Develop case studies based on successful program strategies and an online repository of graduate learning outcomes for international collaborations.

Research Partners

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cgsnet.org/modeling-effective-research-ethics-education-graduate-international-collaborations

What is the Context for Using a Learning Outcomes Approach to Research Ethics and International Collaborations?



Modeling Effective Research Ethics Education in Graduate International Collaborations:

A Learning Outcomes Approach

A Framework Paper
by
The Council of Graduate Schools



- Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) and Research Ethics training largely omits ethical issues that arise in international collaborations.
- International collaborations often launch without key issues resolved that may later lead to confusion and/or conflict among researchers and students.
- Universities have struggled to engage faculty in defining learning outcomes for graduate students, including these two areas.
- Our 'hypothesis': Reverse engineering a "curricula" from key skills, competencies, and behaviors can improve explicit training of graduate students in research ethics and heighten faculty engagement in assessment and RCR.

Unanswered Questions, Opportunities and Challenges

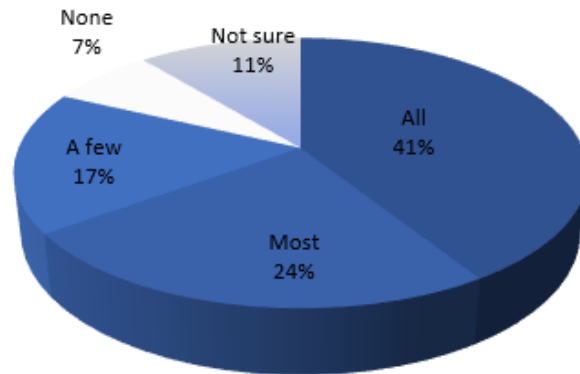
- How should learning outcomes be defined and used in an international, collaborative context?
- Do cultural differences (e.g., among student from different countries of origin) in approaches to ethics merit different curricular or co-curricular experiences to achieve the same learning outcomes for all?
- What role can/should graduate students play in working with faculty to identify learning outcomes in new or underdeveloped areas of a graduate program?

Doctoral Learning Outcomes and Frameworks

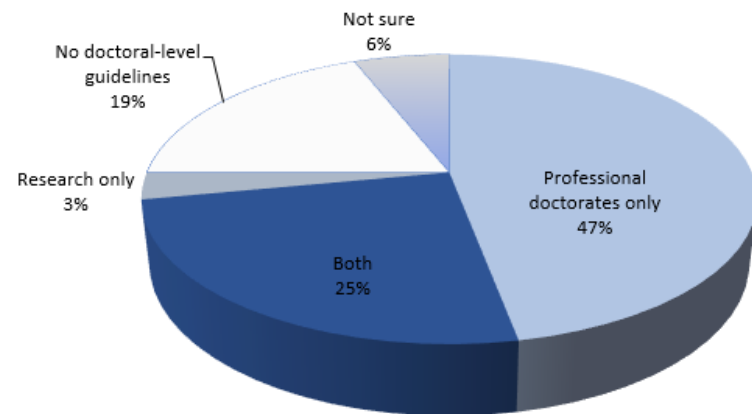
- 1-Year Project (2016-17)
- Funder: The Lumina Foundation
- Purpose statement. Lumina's Degree Qualifications Profile and Beta Credentials Frameworks in defining doctoral outcomes
- CGS activities included:
 - 3 Commissioned Papers
 - A Fall 2016 Stakeholders Workshop
 - A CGS Member Survey, focus groups and interviews
 - A final report with a summary of project findings and recommendations

What is the National Context for Heightened Focus on Doctoral Learning Outcomes?

What proportion of your PhD programs have developed student learning outcomes?



Does your accrediting body put forward guidelines specifically related to the assessment of learning at the doctoral-level?



Sources: Source: CGS Pressing Issues Survey, 2016. Council of Graduate Schools, and CGS Survey of US Accreditors on Doctoral Learning Outcomes and Assessment, 2016. Council of Graduate Schools.

How Might Doctoral Frameworks Be Used?

- **To raise the level of the conversation around program purpose and degree requirements.**
- **To serve as a corrective when faculty appear only interested in doctoral students as research or teaching assistants** and not also, more fundamentally, in graduate student learning.
- **To serve as a quality check amid a proliferation of doctoral degrees.**
- **To foster more transparency to students, faculty, and the public.**
 - To ensure student milestones reflect objective and explicit (rather than subjective and/or implicit) understandings of faculty-expected competencies.
 - To encourage clear and consensus definition of the value of the PhD (and combat perceptions of the PhD as steeped in the “arcane”).
 - To more clearly articulate and demonstrate the value of investments in doctoral education.

Unanswered Questions about the Use of Frameworks for Doctoral Education

- **Whose learning expectations should SLO's articulate?**
 - E.g., faculty, students, employers, TA's, other?
- Can the U.S. PhD and professional doctorate be successfully included within the same framework or do these distinct degree types merit different frameworks?
- Do frameworks define common elements essential to the PhD/professional doctorates or rather a menu of options?
- How should doctoral learning outcomes frameworks be used to reflect and inform co-curricular professional development programs and experiences for those considering multiple career pathways?
- Are certain broad skills (such as communication, collaboration, etc.) needed at a higher levels for master's and doctoral degrees than for other degree levels? Or are these simply "general" skills that enhance the versatility and effectiveness of doctorate holders?
- How can national degree frameworks best reflect and build upon complementary work in the disciplines (such as Tuning efforts History and other fields)?
- How useful are frameworks for students? How might doctoral students be made aware of, and encouraged to use (or test), frameworks?
- If frameworks are designed to help prospective and current students, employers, and the broader public, by what mechanisms would these audiences be informed about frameworks and how have they informed respective programs?

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