

**Making a Difference
in Student Learning:
Competencies and Assessment
as Core Strategies**

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Goals of Workshop

- Gain knowledge of Alverno College's educational program to more fully comprehend benefits of using abilities/competencies and assessment processes.
- Discuss benefits and challenges of competency-based models
- Show examples of assessment from different disciplines
- Engage in a conversation of consequence: What does UCT need to talk about? Why is it important?



Alverno College

- Integrated professions and liberal arts college
- Women's college at undergraduate level; masters programs are co-ed
- Approximately 2,200 undergraduate students, plus three masters programs
- Who our students are:
 - 34% students of color
 - 75% first generation; 87% receive financial aid
- Ability-based curriculum
- Organizational structure: Traditional and Matrix

Key Educational Principles

- Abilities must be carefully **identified** and **compared** to what **contemporary life** requires
- Educators are **responsible** for making learning more available by **articulating outcomes** and making them **public**

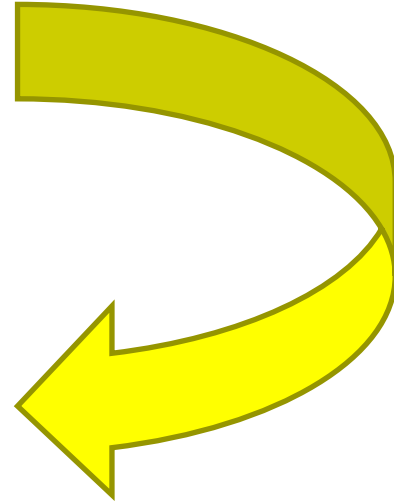
Outcomes are a set of statements that describe what a student can do with what s/he knows as a result of a set of learning experiences.

Alverno's Eight Abilities/Competencies

- Communication
Writing, Speaking, Reading, Listening, Quantitative Literacy, Media Literacy, Computer Literacy
- Analysis
- Problem Solving
- Valuing in Decision Making
- Social Interaction
- Developing a Global Perspective
- Effective Citizenship
- Aesthetic Engagement

Important Dimensions of Abilities:

- Involve the whole person
- Are teachable
- Can be assessed
- Transfer across settings
- Are continually re-evaluated and re-defined



Key Educational Principles

- Abilities need to be defined in a way that our teaching of them can be **developmental**
- Education **goes beyond** knowing to being able to **do what one knows**
- Designing learning involves **integrating** abilities within disciplines and across disciplines

Increasing Degrees of Specificity

Competencias Genéricas (Institutional Outcomes)



Competencias Especificas (Major Outcomes)



Competencias del Curso (Course Outcomes)



Evaluación (Assessment of
Course Outcomes)

Benefits of Using Outcomes

- Provide direction for learning
- Provide continuity
- Help students transfer learning because learning experiences are embedded in multiple performance contexts

More Benefits of Using Outcomes

- Foster cross-discipline communication: create community of faculty with common goals
- Enable evidence-based judgments of how students benefit from the curriculum and university culture

More Benefits of Using Outcomes

- Provide departments with standards to judge university level learning
- Establish in an objective, public way the rigor of the curriculum
- Assure accountability by making teaching/learning public and explicit

Connections between Outcomes and Assessment

How can we take outcomes and turn them into something concrete and observable that students could be expected to do?

Create learning and assessment experiences and develop criteria, all of which are explicitly linked to student learning outcomes.

Student Assessment-as-Learning

A process in operation at Alverno College, integral to learning, that involves **observation** and **judgment** of each student's **performance** on the basis of explicit **criteria**, with **self assessment** and resulting **feedback** to the student.

It serves to confirm student achievement and provides feedback to the student for the improvement of learning and to the instructor for the improvement of teaching.

Institutional and Program Assessment

Processes that yield patterns of student and alumna learning, development, and performance on a range of educational outcomes. They provide meaningful feedback to faculty, staff, and various publics for improvement, shared learning, and demonstrated effectiveness.

These processes ensure comparisons to standards (faculty, disciplinary, professional, accrediting, certifying), and enable evidence-based judgments of how students and alumnae benefit from the curriculum and university culture.

Key Educational Principles

- Assessment is **integral** to **learning**
- **Essential to learning and assessment are:**
 - Public, Expected Outcomes and Criteria
 - Performance
 - Feedback
 - Self Assessment

Two Examples of Assessments

- Behavioral Science Research
Methods, BSC 255
- Understanding Terrorism, GEC 311

Criteria -- A Definition

Criteria: Indicators of an ability and knowledge as seen in performance

Criteria need to be specific enough for a student at a given level to understand and use, without being so specific that the performance is limited to following directions.

Criteria

- Explicitly express qualitative judgment
- Function as standards of what we expect in student performance
- Collectively, provide a picture that students can use to imagine an acceptable performance
- Become a learning objective when students discover they do not meet a particular criterion

Characteristics of Less Effective Criteria

- Do not adequately reflect essential learning outcomes. Instead, contain format requirements, directions, steps, or tasks, such as:
 - *Select a framework to analyze the work*
 - *Must be 3-5 pages*
 - *Must be typewritten or word processed*
- Lack qualitative elements, such as:
 - *Presents an analysis that includes your hypothesis, a graph of progress, and a summary of results*

Purposes of Feedback

- Document distinctive performance
- Diagnose and prescribe
- Motivate
- Warn
- Plan for future success
- In summative feedback, communicate performance determinations (e.g., allocate the grade; certify the ability)

Feedback is most effective when it:

- Is based on clear criteria
- Focuses on observation rather than inference
- Is timely, accurate, and specific
- Identifies strengths of performance as well as areas to be developed
- Provides the amount of information the person can receive and use

Key Educational Principle

The effectiveness of assessment for everyone involved depends on the existence of a total dynamic system that contributes to the coherence and continuous improvement of the curriculum

What We Have Found Essential to Our Assessment System

- **Providing time and space for cross-institution conversation**
- **Focusing on student learning and what good practice would imply for it**

What We Have Found Essential to Our Assessment System

- **Rewarding teaching, learning and risk-taking**
- **Doing what we say we do, continuously**
- **Creating context and structures to make it work as a system**

Tips on In-Course learning and Assessment

- **Connect learning and assessment strategies with the nature of your discipline**
- **Err on the side of being overtly explicit with your students about course goals, learning connections, instructor rationale**
- **Expect students to become increasingly responsible for their learning as the course develops. More challenging material at the end of the term may still require support from you.**

Assessment Tips

- **Start with what you got**
- **Embed assessment in practice**
- **Celebrate success**
- **Assess what you value most**

Tom Angelo, Peter Ewell, Cecilia Lopez
AAHE Assessment Forum 1999

Basics of Good Conversation Design

- Begin with an honest and open question
- Invite people who care about the question
- Start where you want to – follow where it goes
- Ensure that every voice is heard
- Appreciate silence
- Be intentional about creating the future

Monica M. Manning. 2005. *Creating Conversations of Consequence*.

Inviting a Conversation of Consequence: What does your university need to talk about?

In a small group, record your responses to the following questions:

- What do we most want to have a conversation about? What do we hunger for the opportunity to talk about?
- Why is this important to us?

Groups will share their thoughts with the large group.

*There is no power for change
greater than a community
discovering what it cares
about.*

- Margaret Wheatley

From: *Turning to One and Other: Simple Conversations to
Restore Hope to the Future.* (2002)