

# **From Principles to Practice: Designing Assessments for Student Success**

January 7-9, 2008

**Jeana Abromeit**

Chair, Council for Student Assessment

Professor of Sociology

**Paul Smith**

Associate Professor of Psychology

# Goals of Workshop

- Have a sense of each others' educational principles – both unique and shared.
- Grasp the ways that “competencias,” criteria, and assessment work in successful curriculum development and implementation.
- Collaboratively determine which “Competencias Genéricas” fit in the first year course you are refining.
- Collaboratively design a course assessment.



# 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

# Principles of Teaching and Learning

- Share a story about a time when you were successful teaching something.
- As a group, identify the characteristics of “good teaching” that are reflected in the stories and what they suggest about student learning.

# Principle

Educators are **responsible** for making learning more available by **articulating outcomes** and making them **public**

The principle leads to questions like:

- How do you want your students to be able to think as a result of studying your discipline?
- What do you want your students to be able to do as a result of studying your discipline?

# Definition of “Outcomes” or “Competencias”

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.

# Principle

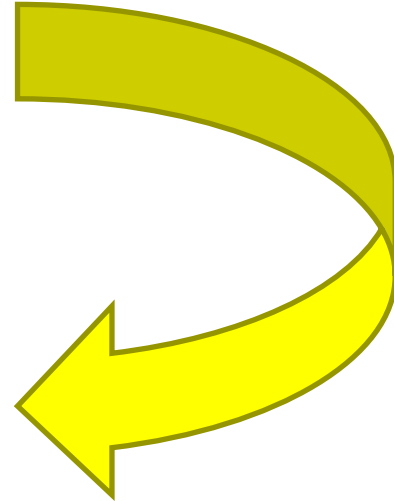
Education goes beyond  
knowing to being able to **do**  
**what one knows**

# Alverno's Eight Abilities/Outcomes

- 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



# Principle

Abilities need to be defined in a way that our teaching of them can be **developmental**

# Analysis

- Level 1 – Show observational skills
- Level 2 – Draw reasonable inferences
- Level 3 – Perceive & make relationships; use concepts
- Level 4 – Analyze structure & organization using concepts and frameworks
- Level 5 – Employ frameworks from major and minor disciplines in order to analyze
- Level 6 – Independently employ frameworks

# Principle

Designing learning involves  
**integrating** abilities within  
disciplines and across  
disciplines

# Increasing Degrees of Specificity

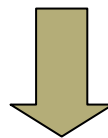
Competencias Genéricas (Institutional Outcomes)



Competencias Especificas (Major Outcomes)



Competencias del Curso (Course Outcomes)



Evaluación (Assessment of  
Course Outcomes)

# Example from selected Outcomes for Early Childhood Education

1. Integrates content knowledge with educational frameworks and a broadly based understanding of the liberal arts in order to plan and implement instruction.
2. Uses verbal, nonverbal and media modes of communication to establish the environment of the classroom and to structure and reinforce learning.
3. Acts with professional values as a situational decisionmaker, adapting to the changing needs in the environment in order to develop students as learners.

# Benefits of Using Outcomes

- Provide direction for learning
- Provide continuity
- Provide departments with standards to judge college level learning
- Assure accountability by making teaching/learning public and explicit

# More Benefits of Using Outcomes

- Help students transfer learning because learning experiences are embedded in multiple performance contexts
- Fosters cross-discipline communication: creates a community of faculty with common goals

# Principle

Abilities must be carefully  
**identified and compared** to  
what **contemporary life**  
requires

# Principle

Assessment is **integral** to  
**learning**

# 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.

# Principle

## Essential to learning and assessment are:

- Public, Expected Outcomes and Criteria
- Performance
- Feedback
- Self Assessment

# 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**

# 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.*

# 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

# Implications for Improvement

How might you analyze students' performances and your feedback to improve the assessment? Your teaching? Your program? University curriculum?