LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

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RE: Students, KSAs, and Community Colleges
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

When will I ever use this in the real world? This question has likely been asked, or at least thought about, by most students in our classes. Some of the students might understand the information they are learning, but are unable to see its broader connection. As a result, not only are they unable to transfer this knowledge and relation to the world outside of that class, but many are unable to articulate what exactly they learned to others - including friends, family, potential employers, or even within future educational settings. In summary, a problem we commonly face in academia is that **students don't know what knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) they are learning and will have learned when they leave a community college.** We propose a solution, consisting of using a combination of first year experience (FYEX) courses, professional development for faculty, and progress tracking that could be used or modified to help institutions better serve general education students in their ability to know and articulate the KSAs that they have learned or will learn upon completion of their community college degree.

RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

Colleges should be able to clearly demonstrate that students are learning as a result of their education. Demonstration begins with a foundation or, in this case, the curriculum. Faculty and administrators develop curriculum for courses and programs, which lists student learning outcomes and clearly defines what learning should look like (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). Yet while curriculum "articulates and differentiates learning goals for its ... programs" (Higher Learning Commission, 2020), we still find that students are unable to articulate what they have learned as well as track their accomplishment of a learning outcome.

Program specific first year experiences and on-boarding have been around for many years; however, they have arguably grown in popularity. As an example, the Community College of Philadelphia began offering program specific FYEX courses in 2016 for students in specific programs and expanded to other areas including health care, business, liberal arts, science, technology, and communications (Lahr, Brown, & Fink, 2019). These FYEX courses incorporate advisors, who serve as teaching assistants for every FYEX course, into the learning process to help students explore programs and careers (Lahr, Brown, & Fink, 2019).

As students progress from registration to on-boarding and enter classes, one of the first items they are given is a syllabus. Capitalizing on the fact that this is the moment when course expectations are given in detail, this may also present an opportunity to educate students on expected KSAs. As the University of Indiana Kelley School of Business (2020) states, "when syllabi draw explicit connections between course learning goals and outcomes and

program learning goals and outcomes, both students and faculty ... are able to see how the learning in that particular course relates to the overall learning for a given degree."

DATA EXAMINED

Our initial point of exploration was to determine how visible program KSAs are across the Ohio Community College System. While searching Ohio community college websites, we recognized:

- Eight colleges listed program learning outcomes that could be easily located on departmental or program websites. These sites also included additional information such as the program description, course sequence for program completion, etc.
- Ten colleges listed program learning outcomes for some of their programs on departmental or program websites and many included similar additional information.
- Five colleges did not have student learning outcomes listed on any departmental or program websites.

While we did not complete an exhaustive analysis of each Ohio community college website, we could not easily identify how all Ohio community colleges articulate what students will learn because of their education in a given program. This furthers the point that while we might have stated learning outcomes for our students, they might not be familiar with them. Moreover, if students are unfamiliar with learning outcomes, how do we help them track their progress towards successful attainment?

We also made some inquiries amongst the faculty in our institutions to try to understand how they are emphasizing KSAs within their classes outside of annual course assessments. Several promising practices were identified and summarized below.

PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED

A successful reform of this process will include participation across the college. Fortunately, proposed changes can leverage existing systems to support the setup and continuation of the work essential to accomplishing the goal.

Colleges: While the following is not an exhaustive list, we believe a college could adopt one or more of the following practices to further their work assisting students in the articulation and tracing of general education KSAs:

- Develop FYEX courses or orientation sessions specific to all pathways, especially pathways related to common general education areas, and articulate KSAs to students during the session(s). Encourage students to track activities they engage in during classes that lead to the accomplishment of these KSAs and practice articulating them in preparation for career or transfer opportunities. This should be a joint effort with program faculty and student affairs personnel. Examples of FYEX courses may include transfer, liberal arts, general education, or content specific such as English, math, or communication studies pathways.
- Offer professional development for faculty to develop, articulate, assess, and help students measure their progress and support recognized gaps in KSAs.
- Develop or identify capstone projects that measure KSAs outcomes. Technical programs can easily work backwards to provide formative experiences throughout content specific courses, but general education programs may require more extensive planning and may need the development of a pathway capstone course or project that is more contextualized to the specific pathway.
- Ensure KSAs in courses and programs are aligned and articulate them to students. Students will perform better when they are able to link learning activities to KSAs, as suggested in the [Iowa State University syllabus checklist](#). It is recommended that faculty link KSAs with class activities on course syllabi. Also,

identification of KSAs should be easily found on college websites and articulated during informational gatherings, the course of a class, and at the end of term summaries or celebrations.

- Develop or adopt a mechanism to record KSAs, help students track their accomplishment of KSAs, and give students time to reflect and summarize their progress for their pathway's KSAs. Suggestions colleges may consider to do this include a [simple survey](#) each semester, a portfolio project in a pathway capstone course, a specific page or block in the college's learning management system for information to be articulated, entered, and tracked, or a system in the college's career services or counseling department that can be employed proactively when planning to meet with or educate students.
- Proactively reach out to students to have them reflect on their KSAs throughout their academic program, identify knowledge or KSA gaps, and develop an action plan to address any gaps. Suggestions for doing this include proactive or intrusive appointments through the college's advising/counseling, transfer, or career services centers or communications from a department chair, dean, or pathway faculty member with release time to offer information and support.

Faculty: Student KSAs are introduced, developed, and then achieved/mastered in the classroom. While the college must develop systems to reinforce what will be done in the classroom, it will be up to the faculty to:
- Develop KSAs for all courses.
- Work backwards to design opportunities for students to practice KSAs throughout the course.
- Articulate the KSAs to classes in a manner that students can comprehend and integrate.
- Allow time before and after assessments for students to review and reflect on their progress towards these KSAs.

Students: Finally, students must be invested in their own learning. For a student to learn KSAs for a general education pathway and then be able to articulate them, a student should:
1. Engage in the institution's FYEX course or orientation session that is appropriate to their pathway (transfer, liberal arts, English, etc.).
2. Actively participate in all classes.
3. Track their attainment of KSAs in whatever means the institution provides or in their own learning portfolio.
4. Monitor their attainment of KSAs and develop action plans to address any gaps.
5. Articulate the KSAs they have learned.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES
There are many challenges that an institution may face when trying to employ strategies to help students articulate the KSAs they have achieved. Below are a few challenges and possible solutions:

Program-specific FYEX courses: Many institutions have FYEX courses, but they are not program-specific. This is a natural way to begin orienting students to a program or pathway and it's KSAs. To do this, the instructor(s) must be knowledgeable about and able to articulate pathway or program details, the KSAs, and transfer or career opportunities. Specific to this article, the instructor must articulate KSAs, their value, and how they will apply them over time and record their progress - which is an ideal place to begin the development of a checklist or portfolio. As an example, Washington State Community College (WSCC) is working to provide an FYEX experience for Liberal Arts Transfer students. Students currently in this program take a variety of general education courses and do not have an opportunity to form a cohort or bond with faculty members. WSCC does not have a general FYEX course, so outside of a brief presentation during orientation, students intending to transfer are not provided an opportunity to develop an understanding of the KSAs of their program (which largely reflect the college's general learning outcomes). Starting in the fall of 2020, WSCC will be incorporating FYEX course elements into

the Introduction to Fiction course, which will be used as a platform for making the students aware of the program and general learning goals. Implementation of a portfolio to reinforce awareness and reflections of KSAs will be a next step.

Keeping KSAs continually in students' minds: While technical programs are often better able to keep the KSAs in the forefront of a student's thoughts, transfer programs can have difficulty expressing the big picture. Portfolios have often been a solution, though they require a considerable amount of work to keep up and track. However, this could be accomplished at the course level. As an example, North Central State College's STAT 1010: Probability and Statistics syllabus ties KSAs to course outcomes within the class, and also links them to how they may be used in various professions. In addition, while data has yet to be gathered at WSCC, the Social Services program administers surveys to students after major learning activities so that they can report out on the relationship between their project and the program goals. Lastly, checklists like those provided by many health programs can keep students aware of their progress on skills and recognize deficiencies.

Academic Freedom: Some general education instructors may feel that this is a daunting task, given the volume of material that they must present in order to maintain Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG) and Ohio Transfer Module (OTM) standards. Creating and implementing rubrics, as is often done for general learning outcome assessments, can help to focus faculty in many areas. For example, an English department that has established a rubric for creative thinking (based on the VALUE or other rubric) may embed the criteria within their assignments and utilize it across their curriculum, encouraging other departments and programs to adopt it as well. In addition, faculty already assess student learning based on their course learning outcomes. These learning outcomes should roll up to the KSAs for each pathway; therefore, all the instructor has to do is pick which KSA aligns with each activity.

Proactively reaching out to students: It is common for academic institutions to rely on tradition and culture to drive processes. As a result, being proactive might not be common practice nor would adding on additional work to an already full workload. Hence, embedding the review of student KSA progress into existing mandatory counseling appointments within career services, transfer services, or other advising processes could be a solution. The institution could also invest in content matter expertise and award release time to a full-time faculty member to reach out to students to discuss KSAs, progress, and co-op, intern, transfer, or career options.

CONCLUSION

Demonstrating student learning through general education courses in today's world is more complex than ever before; instructors can no longer afford to teach their subject matter in a silo. Instead, the instructor must ensure that students are aware that they are not only learning about the subject matter but that they can understand and articulate the learning in real-world applications. With the value of higher education being questioned in the past two decades, Ohio community colleges must ensure that students can describe the impact of what they have learned to future employers and be job-ready on day one. To achieve this, students must be deliberately told what they are learning throughout the educational process and faculty must be supported by their institution to lead these changes. The key to this success, however, is in the process of communication between the institution and the student.