

LUMINA FOUNDATION

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A new lens for learning

'DQP' has promise
as a tool to ensure
degrees' quality

On the cover: Michael Semenoff, an adjunct professor of mathematics and director of institutional research at Marymount College, is among the faculty and administrators who are studying how the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) can guide Marymount as it makes the jump from a two-year to a four-year college.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As the nation strives to reverse the economic downturn and set a course for long-term growth and stability, one thing is clear: Increasing Americans' educational attainment must be Job 1. More and more leaders — in federal and state policy, in business, in economics and in education — are embracing what we at Lumina Foundation call "Goal 2025": ensuring that 60 percent of Americans have high-quality college credentials by 2025.

These leaders know that, to succeed in the modern global economy, workers need higher-level skills than ever before — skills that can only be obtained through participation in rigorous and relevant postsecondary programs.

Quality is key. In other words, it's not enough to make sure that many more Americans earn degrees or credentials; those degrees must have demonstrable value. They must reflect genuine and credible *learning* on the part of students.

That quality imperative, that national need for widespread assurance about student learning, is the driving force behind the development of the Degree Qualifications Profile. The DQP is a framework for clearly defining learning outcomes, a baseline set of reference points for what students in any field should be able to do to earn their degrees.

Of course, the DQP is by no means a finished product. It was drafted just a year ago, and it is still very much a draft —

a "beta version" that is being tested by front-line faculty members at colleges and universities all over the nation.

This issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* magazine takes you right to those front lines — to Marymount College and National University, two very different institutions in Southern California that are using the DQP to help reshape their work. In this issue, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Susan Headden talks to faculty members and administrators at both institutions. Offering supporters' views as well critics' comments, she paints a full picture of the opportunities inherent in the DQP and the challenges it confronts.

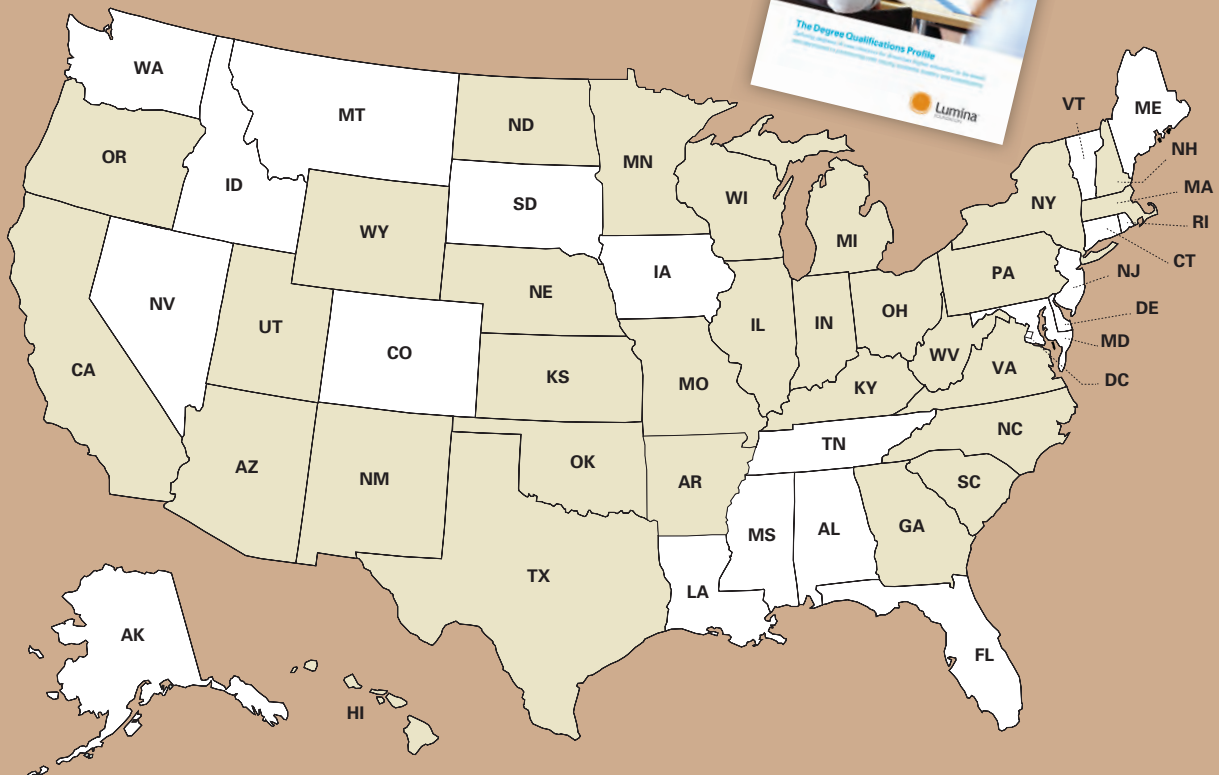
Admittedly, the challenges *are* significant, but the task of ensuring educational quality is a challenge that simply must be met. We believe the DQP, though nascent, shows great promise as a tool in that vital effort. We're grateful to our partner organizations (listed in the graphic below) for helping realize that promise by testing the Profile at more than 100 institutions all across the nation.

I encourage you to learn more about the Profile in these pages, and to visit our website, www.luminafoundation.org, where *Focus* offers much more on this important experiment in quality assurance.

Jamie P. Merisotis
President and CEO
Lumina Foundation



A nationwide test for the DQP



More than 100 institutions in 30 states (shaded above) are testing the Profile under the auspices of several partner organizations: the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Council of Independent Colleges, the Higher Learning Commission and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

A New View

The DQP sharpens perspectives on student learning

By Susan Headden

Marymount students (from left) Andrew Traub, Ryan Haase and Marcos Topolos came to the spectacular Palos Verdes, Calif., campus from different backgrounds and for different reasons, but all of them appreciate the college's commitment to the sort of integrated knowledge, applied learning and civic engagement that the DQP seeks to ensure.



"How do they *study*?" A visitor to Southern California's Marymount College can't help but ponder that question while climbing the steep switchbacks toward the tiny hilltop campus with its jaw-dropping views of the Pacific.

The question is likely to recur while the visitor watches students stroll the campus under mature eucalyptus trees in the warm Palos Verdes sunshine. Vice President for

Academic Affairs Ariane Schauer has no doubt heard the question a hundred times before. But to her, it's not relevant. She knows that Marymount students *do* hit the books. They have traditionally come to this 940-student school highly determined to hone their skills so they can transfer to other institutions — which they do, with such success that too many of them were leaving after the first year.



Still, the school is taking no chances. This year, Marymount, founded in 1932 as a two-year school affiliated with the Catholic Church, will award its first baccalaureate degrees, to 50 students in three fields. Over the many months it has been making the transition to a four-year institution, faculty and administrators have been asking some essential questions, such as: How do we make sure our associate degree is aligning properly with the bachelor's? Are our courses in proper sequence? Is our curriculum optimally designed to produce learning in key areas? And just what *are* those key areas anyway?

At a time when college outcomes are being aggressively challenged, these are the sorts of questions that even longstanding four-year institutions grapple with — queries that might make anyone wish for a road map. As it happens, a map has come along at just the right time.

Marymount's GPS is something called the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), a matrix developed by a team of academic experts with more than 150 years of combined experience in higher education. The Profile's purpose is clear: It explicitly defines what college graduates should know and be able to do at specific degree levels so that learning becomes more intentional.

The DQP, which focuses on essential competencies and their application, aims to provide a unifying framework for discussions and decisions about outcomes, as well as serve as a kind of learning contract between educators and students. In the published version of the Profile, the authors state: "We can imagine students signing a statement upon enrollment that says: 'I have read and understand the learning outcomes for the degree I seek, and I commit myself to investing the time, energy, organization and creativity to qualify for that degree.'"

The DQP, funded by Lumina Foundation, is by no means a finished product. It was published in January 2011 and is now being tested by faculty-led teams at more than 100 institutions in 30 states. The idyllic Marymount campus in California is one of those testing sites.

If students here are indeed ignoring their surroundings to crack open the books, they may be an exception to an emerging rule. According to Richard Arum's and Josipa Roksa's much-discussed book, *Academically Adrift*, full-time college students today on average report spending only 27 hours per week on academic activities — less time than a typical high school student spends at school. Average time studying fell from 25 hours per week in 1961 to 13 hours per week in 2003. And yet, the authors note, this apparent slackfest has had little impact on students' grades and has only modestly slowed their

progress toward degrees. Today's students have perfected "the art of college management," the authors report, "in which success is achieved primarily not through hard work, but through controlling college by shaping schedules, taming professors and limiting workload."

College classrooms, meanwhile, are islands of academic independence. Typically, faculty members are free to teach courses based on their narrow research interests, subjects that may or may not produce the desired broader outcomes. Or if they do, faculty don't help students make the necessary connections. Such failings aren't necessarily surprising, since the higher education system traditionally rewards faculty for research accomplishments more than it does for pedagogical skill.

Standards don't always help, as few institutions now require a core curriculum. According to an August 2011 review of 1,000 colleges and universities by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, only 5 percent of colleges required students to take economics, and less than 20 percent required courses in U.S. government or history.

The Profile's purpose is clear: It explicitly defines what college graduates should know and be able to do at specific degree levels.

A skills deficit

Students' habits, combined with whatever shortcomings in instruction and curricula come into play, have caused many employers, parents and policymakers to question the value of college credentials. The critics — even many of the friendly ones — say too many students graduate from college without gaining the skills and knowledge they need. They say far too many graduates are unable to communicate forcefully, think critically, compute accurately, or reason through and solve the sorts

of complex problems they will confront every day in the real world.

When the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) asked employers in a recent survey whether they thought graduates were well-prepared to succeed on the job, 63 percent of them said, "No." On overall competence on a number of measures, the employers gave these graduates a D-minus/C-plus.

Says Wayne Johnson, an assistant vice president in the Institute of Corporate Relations at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech): "I have had a 30-plus-year career in aerospace and the IT industry, working respectively for Raytheon, MSFT (Microsoft) and HP (Hewlett-Packard). Based on that experience, and considerable work in recruiting and managing people, it was always apparent that most engineering graduates could not write coherently, communicate effectively and work well in teams."

And there is this: Based on the results of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a respected test of college



Ariane Schauer, vice president for academic affairs at Marymount College, says the DQP helps institutions demonstrate student progress more visibly. “How do we know that there has been growth from year two to year four? (The Profile) articulates that.”

Shannon Tabaldo, director of educational technology at Marymount, uses an iPad to demonstrate the potential of the latest technology to her student support staff. Marymount is increasingly leveraging technology to expand learning opportunities. The college uses electronic portfolio assessments and student reflections to determine learning outcomes, something the DQP seeks to make more intentional.



outcomes, Arum and Roksa found that 45 percent of college students made no learning gains whatsoever in their first two years.

The first step toward addressing these deficits, many reformers believe, is to come to a universal agreement on just what a degree ought to mean — on what knowledge and competencies a postsecondary diploma should represent at each level: associate, bachelor's and master's. Serving as a framework for this essential discussion, the Profile provides, in concrete terms, a set of benchmarks for each degree.

The DQP is not, its backers insist, an attempt to standardize degrees; rather, it is a guide that leaves room for each institution to emphasize different skills. It also describes applications of student performance that indicate the cumulative nature of learning. Significantly, the Profile modifies the traditional distinction between specialized knowledge and broad knowledge by emphasizing the importance of both, as well as the relationship between them. And to a greater extent than educators have expressed in the past, it stresses civic learning, as well as the necessity for putting learning into practice.

The product of months of discussion, informed by visits to hundreds of college campuses, the Profile has defined the five essential learning outcomes as follows: specialized knowledge; broad, integrative knowledge; intellectual skills; applied learning, and civic learning. (See accompanying story.)

Colleges, it turns out, generally see eye to eye on what society should expect from a higher education — and on what they want their students to get out of their time on campus. The architects of the DQP agreed fairly easily, as well. More challenging was agreeing on what colleges and students should actually *do* to make sure these desired skills are learned and demonstrated. But agree they ultimately did, and so the Profile proceeds, in deliberately active language, to lay out a sort of prescription for postsecondary success.

Take, for example, the desired outcome of "broad, integrative knowledge." This means, essentially, that college students should learn a lot of things and pull those things together. The DQP says that students might demonstrate this essential competency by, among other things, the following: "Explain(ing) a contemporary or recurring challenge or problem in science, the arts, society, human services, economic life or technology from the perspective of at least two academic fields, explain(ing) how the methods of inquiry or research on those disciplines can be brought to bear in addressing the challenges..."

It may seem a given that the DQP's list of competencies are what we want degree-holders to have. But while many colleges have written mission statements and expressed program goals, the Profile goes deeper and broader. "It's so obvious that one wonders what is new," says Schauer. "Each program has that, but institutionally it's much harder. You know what a psych graduate looks like, and somebody else knows what a biology graduate

The DQP's authors

Clifford Adelman. Adelman is a senior associate with the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), where he plays a leading role in IHEP's research on international system development and data, student geographic mobility, and degree completion rates. He also continues to work on subjects that have been a focus throughout his career, including assessment, determinants of college completion, and the role of community colleges. Prior to coming to IHEP, Adelman served nearly 30 years as a senior research analyst for the U.S. Department of Education.



Peter Ewell. Ewell is vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), a research and development center founded to improve the management effectiveness of colleges and universities. A member of the NCHEMS staff since 1981, Ewell has authored seven books and numerous articles on the topic of improving undergraduate instruction through the assessment of student outcomes.



Paul Gaston III. Gaston, the trustees professor at Kent State University, is an experienced scholar and author who focuses on higher education reform, public policy and the humanities. He has published more than 40 scholarly articles on a wide range of topics and has also authored five books, including *The Challenge of Bologna*.



Carol Geary Schneider. Schneider is president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), a national organization devoted to advancing and strengthening undergraduate liberal education. An executive with AAC&U since 1988, Schneider also spent 10 years at the University of Chicago and has published extensively on such issues as educational quality, general education, diversity and assessment. Under her leadership, AAC&U has been a national leader in the learning outcomes movement.



The five essential outcomes

The Degree Qualifications Profile provides a framework for higher learning and a set of common benchmarks at each degree level, describing the student performance that should be expected at each. It does not attempt to standardize degrees or to define what should be taught and how it should be taught. But it does define desired learning outcomes. Here is what the DQP identifies as the five “essential competencies” that should result from a college education:

Specialized knowledge. Across all fields or majors, learning must be deep enough to assure mastery of a chosen subject. In all fields there are common learning outcomes involving terminology, theory, methods, tools, literature, complex programs or applications, and understanding the limits of the field.

Broad, integrative knowledge. While learning must be deep, it must also be wide — to support inquiry into different subjects and to help students appreciate how all subjects connect. The DQP says that students should be engaged in the practices of core fields from the sciences through humanities and the arts, and that they should develop global and cultural perspectives. It says that learning should be integrated and furthered at all degree levels and provide a cumulative context for specialized studies.

Intellectual skills. The DQP defines these as “manifestations of well-defined cognitive capacities and operations.” Five crosscutting intellectual skills, which overlap and interact, should transcend disciplinary boundaries. They are analytic inquiry, use of information resources, engaging diverse perspectives, quantitative fluency and communication fluency.

Applied learning. Although typically not stressed in discussions of higher education outcomes, applied learning is actually the most critical outcome of all; what students can actually do with what they have learned is the ultimate benchmark of learning. Connecting all degrees and all areas of learning, applied learning emphasizes a commitment to analytical inquiry, active learning and real-world problem solving. An example of applied learning is integrated theory and practice through research and field experience.

Civic learning. This kind of learning prepares students to be responsible citizens of their democracy. Civic inquiry requires that students combine knowledge and skills in both broad and specialized fields. But it also demands engagement — actually *applying* these skills to relevant questions and problems. Students realize these objectives largely through experiences outside of class, and by reflecting and analyzing those experiences.

looks like in terms of skills. But institutionally, what does a B.A. mean? That cross-program dialogue is more difficult. What I think is helpful is to visibly demonstrate growth, from the A.A. to the B.A. to the M.A. How do we know that there has been growth from year two to year four? (The Profile) articulates that.”

Carol Geary Schneider, president of AAC&U and one of the DQP’s authors, explains further: “These are areas and goals that cut across the curriculum. You could be majoring in nursing, but you still need broad knowledge and a set of intellectual and practical skills... I came to the table knowing that there was a high level of agreement across colleges about what students should know and be able to do, but I also knew that this agreement was broad but shallow. Many had not taken the desirable next step. Many had not told their students what their intended outcomes were and what they looked like. Instead they send them on a scavenger hunt.”

The DQP was many months in the making, the product of discussions by Schneider and three other luminaries of the higher education world (see accompanying story): Paul Gaston of Kent State University; Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems; and Cliff Adelman of the Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Again, the DQP is still very much a draft document. And so, through its partner organizations, Lumina is taking the document on the road, inviting faculty members and administrators across the country to test it in the full hope and expectation that they will refine and improve it. Even in its embryonic stage, the Profile is starting to generate some rich conversations on campus as colleges start laying it over their existing practices to see how well they measure up.

“What we have recommended they do,” says Schneider, “is take a look at, say, whether they have any capstones on the books or something that constitutes culminating work. How pleased are you with the work you are getting, and what has to happen early in the curriculum to get them ready? And if they don’t have culminating work, the question is why not? If this is what you want (students) to gain, then where in the department are they being reliably taught?” Schneider calls the DQP a framework for “how faculty plans, how students plan, and how advisers advise.” And for colleges like Marymount that are building curricula from the ground up, it can serve as a solid foundation.

As with many trends, interest in the Profile seems to be moving from west to east. Literally the farthest west, the University of Hawaii system is discussing how to use the DQP to align programs among its colleges. And in California, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), which also oversees Hawaii, is working with a \$1.5 million Lumina grant to use the Profile as it revamps its accreditation processes. (Other grantees include the Higher Learning Commission and the Council of Independent Colleges.) The dozen or so California colleges that have so far agreed to establish

DQP “learning communities” — to get together and investigate the possibilities — include some small, faith-based institutions; some traditional liberal arts schools, and some big state universities.

Among the colleges is National University in San Diego, a 40-year-old, nonprofit institution that primarily serves working adult students with a curriculum that is offered largely online. It also departs from most traditional colleges in that students take just one course a month, a schedule designed to accelerate time toward a degree.

With 22,000 full-time students in 30 locations, National offers programs leading to everything from a master’s in fine arts to a certificate in casino management. It has also certified more teachers in California than almost any other school in the state. Like Marymount, its flagship campus enjoys a spectacular Southern California setting, and it has recently undergone a radical shift: Once exclusively a master’s-granting institution, it now confers more bachelor’s degrees than master’s.

National’s personable and dynamic leader is Patricia Potter, a former marketing executive and American history scholar who was named the university’s interim president in April 2009. Potter has enthusiastically embraced the DQP, and she has engaged select faculty members in thoughtful and spirited discussion of how the framework can improve and guarantee quality to serve as

a sort of a seal of approval, beyond accreditation, for this unconventional institution.

Dee Fabry, head of National’s master’s program in teaching, also leads the university’s assessment efforts, so perhaps more than most, she delights in having another tool with which to map, measure and grade. She is testing the Profile as an aid in her program reviews, aligning it with courses to see what’s missing.

Identifying gaps

“Absolutely, I have clear gaps,” she says. “One that really screamed out at me was the civic learning. I don’t have anything in this program that assesses a position on public policy. We have one assignment that looks at NCLB (No Child Left Behind) legislation and how it impacts teachers in the classroom, but that is just one.” Other gaps? “Looking at intellectual skills, there are a couple on communication fluency, and I certainly could beef up the program in that area. We do a lot of writing, but we don’t do a lot of oral communication.”

Kenneth Goldberg, an assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences, saw the Profile’s focus on applied learning as a way to improve his course in emergency management. “One of the things I’d like our students to have is more practitioner experience, looking



Marcos Topolos of Sonoma, Calif., a former Division III soccer player, helped start the soccer program at Marymount. Although he still plays, he has turned his competitive energy to business. For his senior capstone project, which the DQP recommends as a way to integrate disparate learning experiences, Topolos is developing a plan to help a firm that specializes in environmental remediation technology establish a distributorship in South Africa.

at emerging (public emergency) plans and things like that. I think we do a pretty good job here in San Diego, but that's because we are located here. What I realized is that I may not be as strong in our online program where we have students in Virginia, Florida, Texas and around the country. The challenge I see is how do I equal out that applied learning to them, too? What I would plan to do is contact county offices of emergency management where students are located and see what I could arrange — because everybody is doing tabletop exercises and emergency plans."

These opportunities for real-world experience can be critical to students' full understanding of the material, Goldberg insists. "If you make it meaningful and are as accommodating as possible, they are successful at it. It can't be just a review of your content. It has to add to the value of their experience."

The DQP helps educators answer fundamental, but often unasked questions, such as: What should a 100-level course look like? A 200? A 400? "You have this notion of each professor teaching exactly how he wants to do it," says Schneider. "So, you might have a faculty member teaching a 400-level course in a history department who says to himself, 'I am writing my book. So I am going to give lectures, I am going to give a multiple-choice midterm and a multiple-choice final.' Down the hall, another faculty member also teaching a 400-level course in the same department is saying to himself: 'These students need more practice in research. I'm going to give them another research paper.' But what *doesn't* happen, typically, is that the department sits down and says: 'OK, what are they supposed to do in a 400-level course?'"

National's faculty say they *are* having those discussions. For instance, in response to a recent program review,



Patricia Potter, National University's interim president, is an enthusiastic backer of the Degree Qualifications Profile, largely because of the flexibility it affords faculty members in customizing their own "webs" of learning outcomes. "We can decide what our webs look like," explains Potter. "I believe that this university will probably end up with five slightly different constructs."



National University administrators and faculty members (clockwise, from upper left): Assistant Professor Maryam Davodi-Far, Associate Professor Jeffrey Mueller, Associate Professor Tyler Smith, Assistant Professor Dee Fabry, Professor Patric Schiltz, Assistant Professor Huda Makhluaf, Associate Professor Kenneth Goldberg, Associate Provost Debra Bean and Associate Professor Amber Lo.

they now require “signature assignments” in each course, projects that require students to show mastery of certain skills. Fabry points to her 600-level course on diversity, a course that teaches future educators how to deal with cultural, race, gender and disability issues in the classroom. Led by a core group of five instructors (online), students must select a question on diversity, review five scholarly journal articles, and write questions to address the issue. Then all teachers grade the project using the same rubric. Again, these signature assignments are mandatory — for students and instructors. “There is no easy way out,” Fabry says.

At both National and Marymount, the DQP serves not just as a catalyst for improvement, but as validation for what they are already doing. Applied learning might be a strength at National, but faculty are also mindful of a higher, broader objective. Maryam Davodi-Far, an assistant professor in National’s College of Letters and Sciences, could be quoting the DQP when she says that

her job is not only to prepare students for work, but also to turn them into scholars — even when she is teaching basic composition to police academy recruits.

At Marymount, an emphasis on capstone projects aligns with an important recommendation of the DQP. Starting with the project proposals, students are asked to demonstrate how their capstone efforts will help them integrate and apply a variety of skills they should have learned. One student, for instance, is working on leapfrogging technology in Ghana — showing a community how GPS systems can help with land surveying and title granting. Other students teamed up on a biodiesel project they hope to launch into a business. “Every undergraduate can be engaged in this level of work; it is truly an honors experience with customized support and lots of attention from faculty,” says Schauer, Marymount’s vice president. “And what is fascinating is that they have all chosen to have some sort of social or community impact.”



Dee Fabry, who leads National University’s master’s program in teaching, praises the DQP because it has helped her identify gaps in the program. “One that really screamed out at me was the civic learning,” she points out. “I don’t have anything in this program that assesses a position on public policy.”

The Profile has its roots in Europe's Bologna Process

In developing the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) for American higher education, Lumina Foundation looked to Europe for inspiration.

Specifically, the Foundation took a page from something called the Bologna Process, a higher education reform initiative undertaken by 47 European Union countries in response to many of the same concerns that are driving reform efforts in the U.S. As with the DQP, Bologna (named for the Italian city in which it was launched) is an attempt to provide quality assurance, transparency and coordination among institutions across the continent. And like the DQP, it provides degree frameworks and articulates expectations for what degrees should mean. According to a 2010 report by the European University Association, Bologna has acted as a catalyst for improving college teaching and for putting students at the center of learning.

Ralph Wolff is president of the Senior College Commission of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), which is piloting the DQP to help with accreditation reviews. He recently took a fact-finding trip to Europe and came home further convinced of the need for the sort of framework the DQP suggests. But he says that Bologna, which is also being adopted in South America, goes even further.

"What we call Bologna is really one piece of a multi-phase, multi-dimensional vision and plan," he explains. "It is multi-national and trans-national. The idea of a strategic vision that's consistent over more than a decade – that was powerful to see. There is nothing comparable in the U.S."

An important element of Bologna is a process called "tuning," the attempt to "harmonize" programs and degrees among institutions and to define learning outcomes in individual subject areas. Tuning, its proponents insist, is not an attempt to standardize curriculum or teaching methods. As DQP co-author Cliff Adelman of the Institute for Higher Education Policy often puts it: "Universities are singing in the same key, but not necessarily the same song."

With funds from Lumina, universities in four states are piloting programs that seek to tune degrees in seven

disciplines; they are laying out the specific skills, knowledge, and capacities that students are expected to demonstrate in their majors. In Indiana, they are focusing on education, chemistry and history; in Minnesota, in graphic design and biology; in Utah, history and physics; and universities in Texas have started work on tuning in engineering. Faculty in all of these departments have asked students, alumni, employers and others to identify general and subject-specific competencies that students should attain.

The tuning process makes the value of any degree more clearly visible and more directly comparable by and among students, academics and employers. It serves as a starting point for shared definitions of quality and excellence, and it does this without limiting the flexibility and diversity of the individual institutions.

If that sounds a lot like the DQP, it is. Essentially the DQP takes tuning to a higher, institutional level.

But the DQP is not exactly an American Bologna. It embraces and accommodates the particular American focus on diversity, access, innovation and academic independence — as well as its emphasis on the application of skills and knowledge. And, as Wolff notes, the DQP is more limited than Bologna. In Europe, he says, "I came away with the general view that frameworks were at the center; they are valid and real, but they're not the only thing. Bologna is more holistic."

In other words, he says, the DQP is one part, but it's not the only part. Wolff says he has also learned that Bologna is the product of considerable collaboration and involvement of university faculty; it works from the bottom up. Yes, Bologna was imposed on faculty, but, Wolff says, it "reflects a broad inclusion of stakeholders." Its standards are "applied," he says, "but they are not rigid."

What Wolff finds in both Bologna and the DQP, he says, is "the basis for a common conversation."



Ralph Wolff

Patrick McMahon, a professor of English at Marymount, says the DQP should help the college detect student learning in "a new world." Already, he says, the document has prompted discussions about whether students should be held to what he calls "standards of the past," a habit he says may only further exclude the first-generation college students who make up a good chunk of the college's student body.

In particular, he cites the concept of information

literacy, pointing to a recent Duke University study that found that students were writing with great wit, intelligence and lucidity on their personal blogs and Facebook pages, but showed poor skills on old-fashioned college essays. At Marymount, a recent assessment revealed that research literacy was lacking across the board, prompting a revamping of an introductory English course and an examination of writing across the curriculum.

McMahon says the DQP will give colleges a tool for discerning student learning “in a way that sees student literacy where it is — in the new literacies, in the electronic forms. We can move from textual domination more toward those DQP conceptualizations.” (The Profile emphasizes communication skills in multiple media.) “It is more important for a school like Marymount to acknowledge applied learning and to examine reflectively what it is that we are asking students to do,” McMahon says. “The DQP gives us an opportunity to redefine what students bring to us, to re-examine not just our students but *ourselves*, our curriculum.”

For institutions that grant degrees at all three levels, the DQP also serves as a guide along what it considers a continuous academic pipeline. Much in the way that reformers are urging us to stop separating K-12 from higher education and instead see the system as a P-16 or P-20 continuum, the Profile imagines better alignment among levels and more sensible course sequencing.

It's more holistic

National's Goldberg says the DQP has changed his perspective in that regard. “When I was managing two degrees, I didn't look at them in the same holistic manner as the DQP does. I think, for example, if I was developing a bachelor's program, I would not be looking at the expected outcomes of a master's degree as compared to expected outcomes of bachelor's degrees and see the continuum of growth. When I was doing degrees, they were handled more independently of each other. Now, with the DQP, I can see how they need to flow into each other. I want students to see that there is a steppingstone, and that there is a reason to continue your lifelong learning.”

A related goal of the DQP is to ease students' transfer among institutions — an increasingly pressing concern. One in three American students attends more than one university within six years. And in California, transfer difficulties even afflict students who simply want to move among state institutions. Of the 2.7 million students who received associate degrees from the state's community colleges in 2009, only 14,000 transferred to University of California campuses, and 55,000 transferred to the California State University system.

Students at Marymount have generally had little trouble transferring, Schauer says, but students at National have. Despite National's strong accreditation reviews, its unorthodox schedule and mode of delivery

have made some traditional institutions reluctant to accept its students' credits. Thus, some faculty members at National see the DQP as a sort of product guarantee.

“One of the things I like about the DQP is that it actually has deliverables built into it,” says Patric Schiltz, chair of National's School of Health and Human Services. “It's not that the student should *be able* to do something. (It) is now saying you should *have done* it. The DQP is an opportunity for us. Talk about transfers: We cannot transfer our students to the UCs. Why not? Because UC looks over at us and says, ‘Your courses are not equivalent to ours.’ What (current practice) allows them to do is to play the other hand — to say: ‘We are better than you; we do it better than you. We don't have to prove it to you ... because we are (U)SC, we're Stanford, we're Harvard, we're MIT.’ The fact of the matter is, no, you

are *not* special. And this is an attempt to actually put into place the idea that if I got an associate (degree) from National, it should have the same value and the same strength as an associate you got from anywhere else, or a bachelor's or a master's. So the idea that you could prevent me from transferring to a public university — that's a travesty.”

In making his passionate point, Schiltz brings his fellow academics dangerously close to the “S” word — one that generally gets them howling in protest. Schiltz doesn't share their fears.

“Standardization?” he asks. “Yes, it is. When I go out to get a job, the employer says: ‘There is a floor, and all of you need to be able to do work at that floor; you need that floor of knowledge. Where the ceiling is, is up to each individual, and as a manager I want to push you to that ceiling, but the floor is going to be the

same.’ This is an attempt to point out to academic institutions that the floor should be the same regardless of where you are in this country.”

To be sure, the DQP has its resisters and doubters. And its critics represent a highly influential swath of California educators, including faculty and administrators at Stanford University, Caltech, and the vast University of California system who have raised concerns about what they perceive to be the Profile's prescriptive nature.

Hilary Baxter, coordinator of educational relations in the Department of Academic Initiatives within UC's Office of the President, insists the university has “no problem with the concept of the DQP,” but she says it would add work to what the UC system is already doing.



Eileen Heveron, National University's provost, formerly headed up information technology at the university. She also serves with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which is working to pilot the Profile.

Nursing student Isaias Gutierrez uses his stethoscope to test a "patient" in Adrian Han Miu's class at National University. Applied learning is one of the five segments of the Profile's "spiderweb," and National sees it as one of its strengths.



In an October 2011 e-mail message to WASC's Ralph Wolff, Robert Anderson of the UC system's University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) conveyed pointed questions about WASC's decision to explore the use of the Profile as part of the review process by which institutions earn accreditation.

In the e-mail, UCEP asks: "What evidence exists that a highly structured framework (such as the ... DQP) will improve the quality of education? Is this evidence specific to traditional institutions?" Institutions differ, the UCEP e-mail points out, and yet the DQP would seem to subject them to the same standards and expectations. "Clearly, however, there exist significant differences among institutions that could require different accrediting practices ... What is the rationale for evaluating traditional and non-traditional institutions using the same criteria?"

In embracing the Profile — or at least studying it — WASC cites the need for a more holistic definition of degrees and, given the concerns about college outcomes, sustained emphasis on student learning. But Anderson's e-mail cites UCEP's worries about how the Profile would prescribe the *assessment* of that learning. Essentially, Anderson and UCEP fear that instructors will begin teaching to an overly specific DQP test.

Questions from critics

"Many university faculty believe the Lumina Profile and rigid benchmarks are far more atomistic than existing WASC standards," UCEP says, "reducing the opportunity to engage in meaningful, nuanced, discipline-based appraisal of complex learning processes and instead requiring, at best, reports on superficial learning proxies and, at worst, hollow compliance activities that interfere with meaningful instruction."

Likewise, the UCEP memo raises incisive questions about how to test what college students know and can do, suggesting that adhering to the DQP could become a matter of simply checking another accountability box. Now, the memo notes, measures of student learning at UC institutions are grounded in the major academic disciplines "rather than (through) standardized tests or prefabricated frameworks for general skills." UCEP then asks: "What mechanism will prevent this from degrading into evaluations of programs via set rubrics, leading to universities simply viewing this as a 'jump through hoops' exercise?"

In response, WASC's Wolff again stresses that the DQP is still in development. "We know that it needs to be reviewed at the institutional level to see if it is appropriately framed. We are not intending to adopt the text or complete language of the DQP, but to first pilot it within institutions that voluntarily request to do so, and within the accrediting process using a set of questions that will be openly shared."

Even among those who embrace the concept of the Profile, opinions vary about what it should and should not include, and how faculty and administrators should





Maryam Davodi-Far, an assistant professor in National University's College of Letters and Sciences, says the DQP isn't just a tool to help her prepare her students for work; it also underscores her commitment to inspire them to be true scholars.



Patrick McMahon, an English professor at Marymount, says it's important for colleges and universities to "acknowledge applied learning and to examine reflectively what it is that we are asking students to do." He likes the DQP because it "gives us an opportunity to redefine what students bring to us, to re-examine not just our students but ourselves, our curriculum."

tailor it to their particular institutions. Particularly once they get beyond general education and into the specific majors, some find the DQP too specific or off-point.

At National University, for instance, President Potter wonders how civic learning might be incorporated into a curriculum that serves “fully formed adults who represent every flavor of the cultural, demographic, and economic rainbow.” And Dee Fabry wonders how an instructor teaches oral communication online.

Others have questioned the Profile’s recommendation that master’s candidates, in whatever discipline, know two foreign languages. Also, does a foreign language major need to demonstrate a firm understanding of statistics? (The architects of the DQP would say “yes.”) And does the frequently stated recommendation for “multiple perspectives” mean team-teaching? (If appropriate, the authors would say “maybe.”)

One faculty member from the University of Hawaii, during a workshop with WASC representatives, said she thought the whole DQP needed streamlining. “Some of the language is too complex; it needs simplifying,” she said. “The recommendation for applied learning started out fine, but as you read on, it’s overwhelming.”

Ethical lapse?

While most of the concerns seem focused on what the DQP puts in, co-author Schneider takes issue with one thing it leaves out: a requirement for ethical learning. Schneider says that, in a survey, 75 percent of the members of AAC&U say they have addressed ethical learning and reasoning in their learning outcomes, and that some 75 percent of employers the organization surveyed think they should. But, as Schneider notes, readers of the DQP won’t find any references to ethics. She expects this is one aspect of the DQP that is likely to change as it undergoes field-testing.

For those who worry about rigidity or standardization, the DQP is intended to foster neither. It was designed to be flexible and customizable. In fact, its authors say, it is helpful to look at the framework as a spiderweb (see accompanying illustration), where segments representing the five individual areas of learning are both independent and interconnected, and can grow both wide and long. It may make sense for some institutions to pull harder on some strands than on others.

“We can decide what our webs look like,” says Potter. “I believe that this university will probably end up with five slightly different constructs. I can imagine that in the College of Letters and Sciences, for instance, the focus on civic learning will be more important than applied knowledge because that’s where my liberal arts

students are. And in the College of Engineering, Technology and Media, there will be much more focus on specialized knowledge and applied knowledge.”

Potter thinks that “the energy and excitement” will come when faculty get down to the business of weaving these patterns with their own touches. And beyond the five core outcomes, the DQP also encourages colleges to identify a sixth competency — a sort of institutional signature — that is uniquely suited to them. A faith-based school might add something about service or spirituality; an art school might add competency in creativity.

National has not yet decided how, or whether, to fill in the sixth segment of the web. But Marymount has been discussing it, and Schauer seems close to an answer. “We meet students where they are,” she says. “We have always been a transformative place for students. And we have transformed ourselves, as well.” So, she says, Marymount may call that sixth space “learning to learn.”

Although adopting the DQP seems to demand the push of a strong leader with a broad institutional vision,

it also needs the support of faculty. And faculty will have to overcome their natural reservations about anything that seems to even suggest telling them how to do their jobs. “I know the pushback will come,” says Potter. “Faculty in different disciplines are very concerned about one-size-fits-all.”

Instructors are also likely to react in what Fabry calls “the outright frustration of having another task on our plate.” Unless communication is clear and open, Potter says, “then faculty will be concerned that something is happening in private.” She echoes the thoughts of many when she

says: “If faculty don’t own this process from the start, it does not have a prayer of sticking.”

The broad critiques, the practical ideas, the institutional self-reflection — all of these are marking the DQP discussion at Marymount, National, and at campuses across the country. And as the Profile continues to circulate, the discussion itself is of immense value, whether or not an institution or system ultimately adopts, or adapts, the DQP. Wherever they end up, they will have gone a long way toward ensuring the quality of their degrees.

Says Potter: “What I see to be the end result of this is that, three or four years from now, this institution will be in a position to say to prospective students very clearly: ‘Here’s what the educational contract is going to look like between us. This is what we are going to deliver.’”

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Susan Headen, a senior writer/editor at the independent think tank Education Sector, is a former senior editor at “U.S. News & World Report” and a freelance education writer based in Washington, D.C.

“If faculty don’t own this process from the start, it does not have a prayer of sticking.”

— Patricia Potter
National University’s interim president

the DQP spider

To best understand the practical application of the Degree Qualifications Profile, it is helpful to view it as a spider-web: a structured and interconnected series of ladders that simultaneously build on and support one another. The web is strung among five anchor lines, each line representing one of the basic areas of learning. Along each line, three points are fixed to indicate the extent of learning required to reach each rung on the ladder: the associate degree, the bachelor's degree and the master's.

Once the points are fixed, it's fairly easy to discern a "core" of learning — the combination of competencies from each of the five areas of learning that collectively define the requirements for a specific degree. These cores of learning grow progressively larger as students build on their knowledge — and this growth in learning is

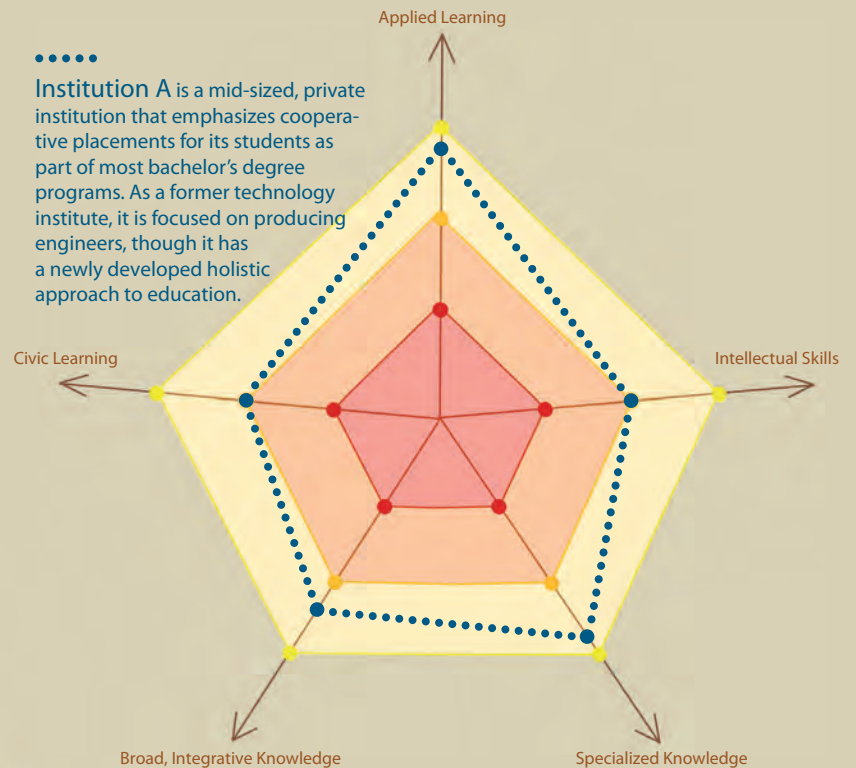
predictable and transparent to all concerned.

And yet, predictability and transparency do not lead to rigid standardization. In fact, though certain core learning outcomes are expected in all programs, the range of course content can vary widely — by institution, by discipline — even by individual class section.

erweb

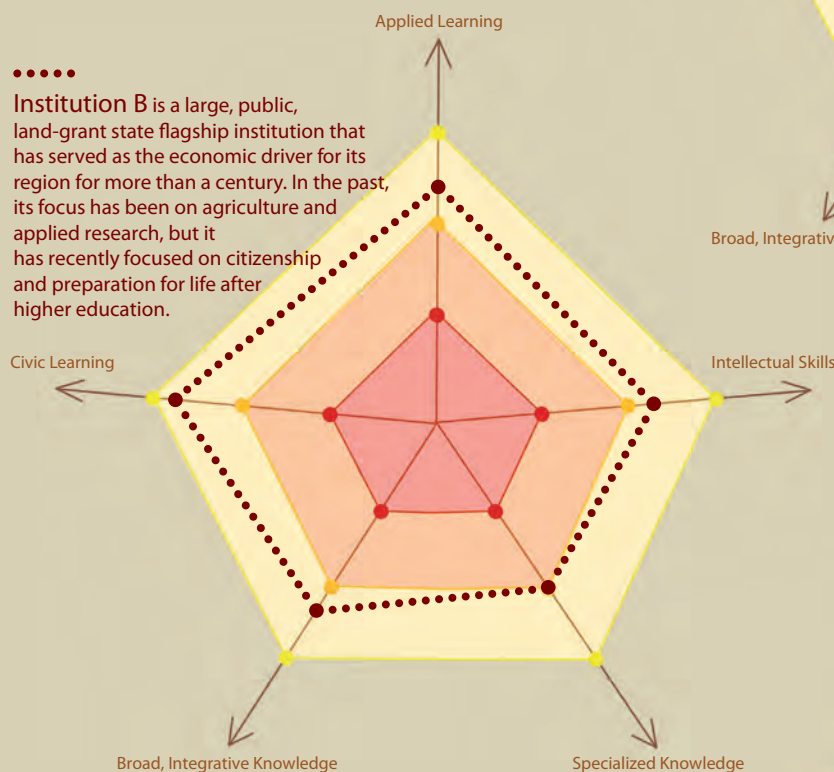
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Institution A is a mid-sized, private institution that emphasizes cooperative placements for its students as part of most bachelor's degree programs. As a former technology institute, it is focused on producing engineers, though it has a newly developed holistic approach to education.



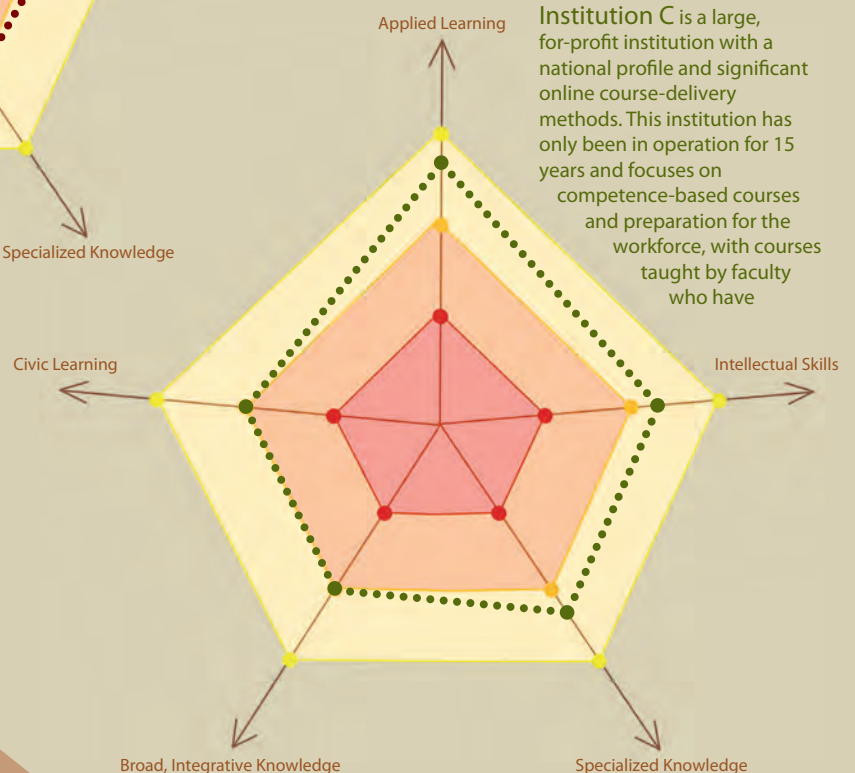
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Institution B is a large, public, land-grant state flagship institution that has served as the economic driver for its region for more than a century. In the past, its focus has been on agriculture and applied research, but it has recently focused on citizenship and preparation for life after higher education.



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Institution C is a large, for-profit institution with a national profile and significant online course-delivery methods. This institution has only been in operation for 15 years and focuses on competence-based courses and preparation for the workforce, with courses taught by faculty who have



- 3 degrees
- 5 areas of learning
- 3 types of institutions

To illustrate the DQP's ability to accommodate almost limitless variety among institutions, three types of institutions are plotted on spiderwebs. Though the bachelor's degree requirements for all three institutions encompass the core learning outcomes, it is clear that each institution also has discrete areas of emphasis and focus for its students.



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