



# ACADEMICALLY *ADROIT*

Improving Student Achievement  
Through Greater Intentionality

JANUARY 5, 2012: PART ONE

One word to inspire our  
discussion

It's not . . .



The word for today

# INTENTIONALITY

# INTENTIONALITY

- In every program, for every degree

# INTENTIONALITY

- In every program, for every degree
- In every discipline

# INTENTIONALITY

- In every program, for every degree
- In every discipline
- In every course



# INTENTIONALITY

- In every program, for every degree
- In every discipline
- In every course
- In every class

Imagine a Faculty Member  
At Colorado Mesa  
Posting the Following Letter

Department of Ethereal Studies  
Colorado Mesa University

Professor U. R. A. Pedant  
Editor, *Journal of Literary Study*  
University of the Lower Midwest  
Springfield, Iowa 77777

Dear Professor Pedant,

It is with pleasure that I attach to this covering e-mail an article for publication in the *Journal of Literary Study*.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I want to make it clear that **the objectives of this article are nowhere clearly defined or stated**. I ask that you respect my lengthy experience as a scholar and that you assume **my intent will emerge in due course**.

Because **the structure of the article may not be apparent**, a reader may not understand how its different elements add up to a coherent whole. I can't hold every reader's hand! They are adults, after all.

More important is my conviction that **any effort on your part to evaluate my article would be at best premature and at worst a violation of my academic freedom.** Many readers who fail to understand my arguments at first may in time—perhaps many years later—come to appreciate their importance. Frankly, in the short term, who is a better judge of my effectiveness as a scholar than I am?

I will look forward to seeing my article in print as soon as possible.

Ridiculous?

Of course.

# BUT

- Have you ever heard such statements made about the classroom?

# AND

- Do any of the following sound familiar?

# 10

An instructor asks a student in her Anthropology 101 class why she decided to take her course and she responds, "Because I needed something at 10:30 on Mondays and Wednesdays."





# 9

A student completes four semesters in Italian with good grades. When she tries to complain to the super in her apartment building in Firenze that her bathroom sink is stopped up, the super offers her a laxative.



# 8

Odds that two students on the CMU campus, meeting at random, will have discussed the same issues in considerable depth

(a) should be greater than they are.

(b) may be slim.

(c) are not significantly different from zero.

# 7

Interested in CMU's understanding of baccalaureate learning outcomes, a prospective student opens the CMU web site, clicks on "Academics," and . . .

# 6

A frequently heard question during advising appointments: “Why do I have to take all these courses in addition to those in my major?”

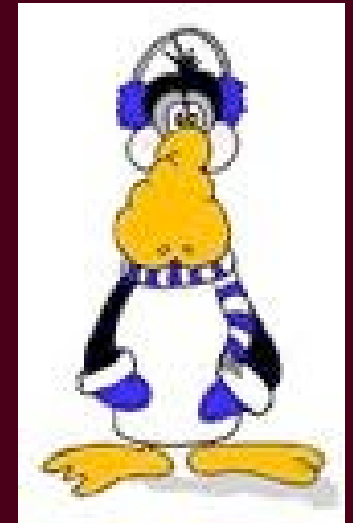
# 5

As a campus tour passes your office you hear a savvy parent ask, “What are Colorado Mesa’s learning outcomes for the baccalaureate?” and the guide says, “Huh?”

# 4

Three students, all of whom have completed the science requirement, are asked, “Why is it colder in the winter than in the summer?” Their answers:

- *Because the days are shorter.*
- *Because the sun is further away from the earth.*
- *Because of all the snow.*



# 3

It's the first day of the semester in your general education course. Your students are becoming acquainted with one another. One leans across the aisle towards another to say,

“What's *this* all about, then?”

# 2

Of all student academic goals, this is the one most frequently voiced: “to get general education *out of the way.*”



# 1

An esteemed CMU academic leader invited to attend a workshop on January 5 and 6, 2012:

“Degree Qualifications **WHAT?** Sounds like more busy work! And what the hell is the Lumina Foundation? And what gives *them* the right to define an academic degree? And who’s this speaker? Is this the heavy hand of the Higher Learning Commission again? And . . .”  
..

# Brief Small Group Discussion

Do any of the prompts imagined above sound familiar? Are there other prompts in your experience that suggest that undergraduate education at CMU should become more “intentional”?

# Our “Learning Outcomes” For This Morning

## PART ONE

- Priorities for the *Degree Qualifications Profile*
- Contexts for the *Profile*
- Genesis of the *Profile*
- DISCUSSION

## PART TWO

- Structure of the *Profile*
- Potential uses of the *Profile*
- The *Profile* and the Higher Learning Commission
- DISCUSSION

# What a Profile Is Intended To Do

- Offer reference points for students, faculty, advisors, accreditation
- Create expectation for a curriculum that is clearly intentional, coherent, cumulative
- Encourage assessment
- Support institutional alignment with accreditors' expectations

and

- ➔ Provide a baseline for institutions seeking to clarify their distinctiveness, e.g.
  - ➔ Expectations *beyond* shared reference points
  - ➔ Innovative curriculums and curricular paths
  - ➔ Alternate strategies for confirming learning
  - ➔ Exceptional student services
- ➔ Clarify the incremental nature of degree levels, thereby encouraging progression

# What a Profile Is *NOT* Intended To Do

- ➔ Standardize degrees
- ➔ Define what should be taught
- ➔ Prescribe pedagogy
- ➔ Encourage rankings, internally or externally

# Contexts for the *Profile 1*

- An increased emphasis on accountability
  - Declining state support, rising tuition
  - Student loan defaults
- A corresponding emphasis on assessment
  - An increasing priority on the part of accreditors
  - Rise of “performance funding”
- *And the recognition that effective assessment and credible accountability both depend on clearly stated, measureable learning outcomes!*

# Contexts for the *Profile 2*

- Europe's "Bologna Process"
  - A coordinated effort to secure European ascendancy through higher education reform
  - An "accountability loop" assuming European and national learning outcomes frameworks
- Strong examples of learning outcomes frameworks (UK, Scandinavia, Australia)



# Contexts for the *Profile 3*

- Degree completion goals in the US
  - President Obama’s declared intent to restore US leadership in the percentage of citizens with college degrees
  - Lumina Foundations 20/25 goal: to increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025
- The recognition that such goals are meaningless unless there is a shared understanding of what “degrees and credentials” mean

# Contexts for the *Profile 4*

- Arum/Roksa: *Academically Adrift*
- Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*
- Employer reports of graduates' inadequacies
- Faculty members' impressions concerning student skills



# Contexts for the *Profile 5*

- Policy makers increasingly critical of higher education—and inclined to intrude
  - Spellings Commission recommendations
  - Department of Education concerns about accreditation
- Approaching debate regarding reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (2013-14)

# GENESIS OF THE PROFILE 1

- Lumina Foundation convenes July 2009 conference in DC expressing “a sense of urgency” regarding higher education
- Consensus of the meeting: what higher education needs above all is a shared understanding of what academic degrees mean

# GENESIS OF THE PROFILE 2

- Lumina Foundation convenes January 2010 conference in DC to consider how most effectively to work towards a shared understanding
- Consensus of the meeting
  - Develop a degree qualifications profile
  - Move quickly—*not* by holding more conferences
    - Appoint a small team to create a draft
    - Circulate the draft for revision among stakeholders
    - Publish the “beta version” of the profile within a year

# GENESIS OF THE PROFILE 3

- Lumina Foundation appoints four drafters
  - President of AAC&U
  - VP of NCHEMS
  - Senior Associate, Institute for Higher Education Policy
  - Faculty member (*Challenge of Bologna* author)
- Draft complete August 1, 2010
- Revisions August-October 2010
- Publication of “beta” document 2011

# In 2011?

- Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Senior) adopts *Profile* as prompt and guide for handbook revision
- Higher Learning Commission of NCA creates cohort of institutions using *Profile* in preparation for accreditation review (more on this later)
- Council of Independent Colleges creates cohort of members committed to innovative application of the *Profile*
- Many institutions not part of these initiatives adopt *Profile* as standard for outcomes development, curricular reform, institutional description, etc.

# Might There be a Resource . . . .

- That would enable students and faculty members to become more intentional about learning?
- That would improve our ability to assess results—and improve the results themselves?
- That would address the criticisms and reassure our supporters?
- That would emphasize the value of accreditation to institutions?
- That would give meaning to national aspirations for degree completion?



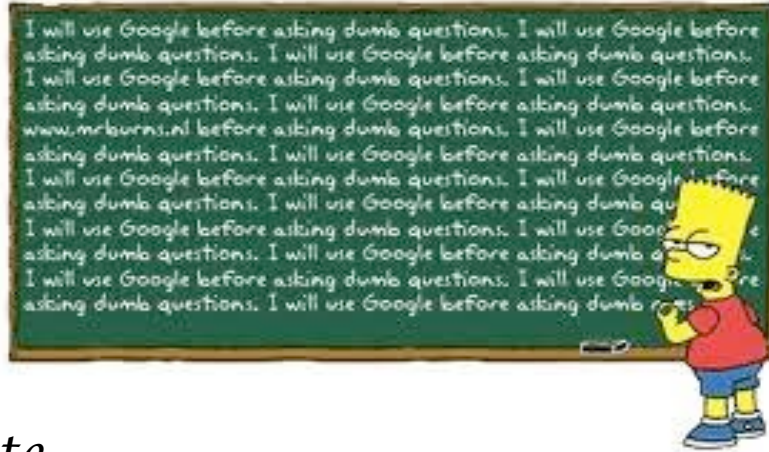
Perhaps

# After the break . . .

- How is the *Profile* structured?
- What are the assumptions behind it?
- What are some possible uses of the *Profile*?
- How is the Higher Learning Commission using the *Profile*?

# But first, your questions . . . .

- Priorities?
- Contexts?
- Genesis?



*La dolce far niente . . . .*





# ACADEMICALLY *ADROIT*

Improving Student Achievement  
Through Greater Intentionality

JANUARY 5, 2012: PART TWO

# Assumptions behind the *Profile*

- The *Profile* should “describe **concretely** what is meant by each of the degrees addressed.”
- The *Profile* should “illustrate how students should be expected to perform at **progressively more challenging levels.**”
- The outcomes expressed in the *Profile* should be **summative**—and should be approachable by multiple paths
- The outcomes should be **illustrative**, as no profile can be comprehensive
- The outcomes defined for one degree level **assume** the outcomes defined for the preceding level(s)

# Organization of the *Profile*

## Five areas of learning

- Integrative Knowledge
- Specialized Knowledge
- Intellectual Skills
- Applied Learning
- Civic Learning

shown as interrelated, not discrete

Example 1

**Communication Skills**



- **Associate's Level**: The student **presents** substantially error-free prose in both argumentative and narrative forms to general and specialized audiences
- **Bachelor's Level**: The student **constructs** sustained, coherent arguments and/or narratives and/or explications of technical issues and processes, in two media, to general and specialized audiences
- **Master's Level**: The student **creates** sustained, coherent arguments or explanations and reflections on his or her work or that of collaborators (if applicable) in two or more media or languages, to both general and specialized audiences

# Example 2

## Engaging Diverse Perspectives

At the associate level,

the student describes how knowledge from different cultural perspectives would affect his or her interpretations of prominent problems in politics, society, the arts and/or global relations.

✓ A basic informed application

At the bachelor's level,

the student constructs a cultural, political, or technological alternative vision of either the natural or human world, embodied in a written project, laboratory report, exhibit, performance, or community service design;

defines the distinct patterns in this alternative vision;

and explains how they differ from current realities.

✓ A creative undergraduate project

At the master's level,

the student addresses a core issue in his/her field of study from the perspective of a different point in time or a different culture, language, political order, or technological context,

and explains how the alternative perspective contributes to results that depart from current norms, dominant cultural assumptions, or technologies—

demonstrated through a project, paper, or performance.

✓ A focused professional application

So much for the theory.

How might the Profile  
support assessment, self-study,  
accreditation?

# 1

CMU could use the Profile as a rubric for identifying gaps in outcomes statements

## 2

CMU could use the Profile as a standard for measuring specificity and measurability of outcomes—for both internal use and external reporting.



# 3

CMU could use the Profile as a platform for discussions with high schools to improve preparation of students for college – thereby reducing CMU’s remedial burden.

# 4

The *Profile* could give high school students a way to evaluate the promotional materials of colleges and universities with respect to a clear understanding of essential competencies.

# 5

At college, students could use the *Profile* as a CPS (curricular positioning system) for understanding and navigating their paths to a degree.



## Now a word from our sponsor

Students who understand what they are *expected* to learn are more efficient, more effective, more enthusiastic students.

Plato

The [allegory of the] cave poignantly illustrates that education is not only progressive in terms of the complexity and accuracy of the material studied (progressing from vague representations of the real to the real itself ) but also progressive in terms of the students' attitude towards it. . . . **Through the process of education, the student not only learns progressively but also loves learning progressively.**

- *Victor Boutros, A Study of Socratic Pedagogy in Plato's Republic*  
<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciBout.htm>

# 6

When learning objectives are clear and the curriculum is coherent and cumulative, students, faculty, other stakeholders (including accreditors) may appreciate the alignment between curricular requirements and such objectives.

# 7

Students studying at the associate level may understand more clearly the incremental learning offered by the baccalaureate and be able to make a more fully informed decision about further study.

# 8

Students pursuing a bachelor's degree may understand more clearly the incremental learning represented by the master's and make a more fully informed decision about further study.



# 9

Degree recipients will be better able to interpret their credentials to potential employers and graduate programs—and to offer assurance of their readiness.

# 10

Institutions could share a common platform for interpreting accreditation results to their publics.

Based on what you have heard so far, can you think of ways in which the *Profile* might be used in an effort to support more effective undergraduate education at CMU?

Based on what you have heard so far, what are your questions, misgivings, reservations?

# An Afterword: The *Profile* and the HLC

The Higher Learning Commission is “exploring the applicability and usefulness of the Degree Qualifications Profile through the Open Pathways accreditation affirmation process.”

# “Open Pathways” Process?

- Separate the continued accreditation process as currently carried out through PEAQ into two components: the Assurance Process and the Improvement Process.
- Assurance Process: require the accumulation over time of electronically stored information and data the institution already collects or prepares, together with an Assurance Argument that makes the case that the institution continues to meet the Criteria for Accreditation and the federal requirements.
- Improvement Process: replace the traditional self-study with a "pathway," a Quality Initiative the institution will undertake as something it wants to do, and will culminate in a Results Visit by peer reviewers.
  - From the HLC Web Site

# So what's happened so far?

- HLC convenes (June 2011) cohort of diverse institutions (including community colleges) eligible for the Open Pathways reaffirmation process
- As their Quality Initiative, institutions are using the *Profile* to analyze and evaluate a negotiated number of programs with an eye on program improvement
- Each campus in the cohort is meeting regularly with other campuses engaged in the project and will report the progress and outcomes of its work to HLC over two years in preparation for the next phases of their accreditation cycle
  - From the HLC Web Site

So much for the morning's fire hose





# Now, the important work begins

- To what extent do the learning goals expressed by the *Profile* describe those that are or should be pursued by CMU? For the associate degree? The baccalaureate?
- Which of the learning goals as expressed by the *Profile* would require substantial revision so as to express CMU goals? (No need for wordsmithing at this point—just an identification of statements that would require considerable editing.)
- Which of the *Profile's* learning goals appear too ambitious for CMU at the associate and/or baccalaureate level? Which appear not ambitious enough?
- Which, if any, of the *Profile's* learning goals are inappropriate or not relevant for CMU?

# The important work, continued . . .

- What learning outcomes are distinctive to CMU? (Note that the *Profile* provides a category specifically intended for institution-specific outcomes.)
- Can such outcomes be stated in terms that are as explicit and as assessable as those of the *Profile*? (No need for wordsmithing at this point—just an idea of elements that such outcomes statements should include.)

*A FURTHER CONTEXT  
FOR DEPARTMENTAL DISCUSSIONS*



*The Essential Learning Outcomes*

*A new framework to guide  
students' cumulative progress  
through college*

*A new framework to guide  
students' **cumulative** progress  
through college*

*A new framework to guide  
students' cumulative progress  
through college*

# *The Essential Learning Outcomes*

## *(1)*

- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
    - Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
- Focused* by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

# *The Essential Learning Outcomes*

## *(2)*

- **Intellectual and Practical Skills, including**

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

*Practiced extensively*, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance



# *The Essential Learning Outcomes*

## *(3)*

- **Personal and Social Responsibility, including**
  - Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
  - Intercultural knowledge and competence
  - Ethical reasoning and action
  - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
- Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

# *The Essential Learning Outcomes*

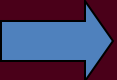

## *(4)*

- **Integrative and Applied Learning, including**

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

# *The Essential Learning Outcomes — Across the Curriculum*

<b>What?</b>  <b>When</b> 	<b>Knowledge of Human Culture &amp; The Natural World</b>	<b>Intellectual &amp; Practical Skills</b>	<b>Individual &amp; Social Responsibility</b>
<b>First-Year Experiences</b>	A plan of study . . . should clearly connect the expected outcomes to the student's choice of courses and major field(s). Learning goals, experiences, resources, and assessments should be aligned . . . .		
<b>Focused Studies, Major/Minor(s)</b>	Milestone assessments as students progress in their studies in both general education and the major should be tied to key outcomes . . . .		
<b>Advanced Integrative &amp; Culminating Work</b>	Experiences in which the student actively demonstrates and is assessed for his or her cumulative accomplishments of the college career.		

# *The Essential Learning Outcomes*

## **Are intended to**

- Provide the academy with a conceptual, aspirational frame for a cumulative liberal education
- Guide student and faculty understanding of *essential* outcomes for learning
- Create the base for a consensus on cross-curricular priorities

## ***Are not intended to***

- *Define in detail what degrees (associate, bachelor's, master's) mean*
- *Offer an explicitly operational basis for assessing student performance*
- *Expose incoherent, arbitrary curricula*

0 minutes

# TUNING PROCESS

- Bologna Process
- USA Lumina-sponsored pilots
  - Utah
  - Minnesota
  - Indiana
  - Etc.

# Today . . .

- To what extent are the learning outcomes of programs offered by your department defined by national standards or accreditation requirements?
- To what extent have learning outcomes been developed within the department by program faculty for programs offered by the department? Are such outcomes widely understood by full-time faculty? By part-time faculty? By students? Are they expressed clearly enough to facilitate such broad understanding?
- To what extent do course syllabi clearly communicate to students the learning outcomes the course seeks to accomplish?

and . . .

- To what extent do the program's stated learning outcomes encourage and support assessment?
- If the learning goals of the department's programs might be more clearly and substantively stated, what process might invite broad participation while ensuring efficiency?
- How might the *Profile* support the development of more easily communicated learning goals for the department's programs?



# For this morning, Thank You

Paul L. Gaston  
Trustees Professor  
Kent State University

