Towards a Coherent Curriculum: Alverno College’s Outcomes-Based Learning Program

Presented by John C. Savagian for the Faculty and Administrators of the Hong Kong Institute of Education

December 6, 2007
“Non-Negotiable” Assumptions about Learning

- All students can learn
- Students need to learn how to learn
- Education goes beyond knowing to be able to do what one knows
- Learning can be assessed
- Educators are responsible for making learning more available by articulating criteria for successful performance
Ability-Based Education at Alverno College
One of the Questions the President asked each Department to Address:

- What are you teaching that is so important that students cannot afford to pass up courses in your department?

Which led 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?
In 1973, new curriculum initiated based on eight institutional abilities or outcomes.

Graduation requirements based on demonstration of outcomes rather than distribution requirements.
PRINCIPLE

Education GOES BEYOND knowing to being able to DO WHAT ONE KNOWS
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Writing

Speaking
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Reading

Listening
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Quantitative Literacy

Media Literacy
EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION

Computer
Literacy
ANALYTICAL CAPABILITY
PROBLEM SOLVING ABILITY
VALUING IN DECISION
MAKING CONTEXTS
EFFECTIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION
DEVELOPING A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
EFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP
AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT
Abilities that

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 and make relationships
- Level 4 – Analyze structure and organization
- Level 5 – Employ frameworks from major and support disciplines in order to analyze
- Level 6 – Independently employ frameworks
PRINCIPLE

Designing for learning involves INTEGRATING abilities with disciplines and across disciplines
Abilities Are Developed in Multiple Performance Tasks

- For instance, demonstration of level 2 of analysis is required in three different areas of study

- Tasks include: Written reports, speeches, project work, portfolios, small groups, etc...
PRINCIPLE

Abilities must be carefully IDENTIFIED and COMPARED to what CONTEMPORARY LIFE requires
PRINCIPLE

ASSESSMENT

is INTEGRAL
to LEARNING
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.
Student Assessment-as-Learning

Institutional and Program Assessment
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 provide 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/Criteria
- Performance
- Self Assessment
- Feedback
Problems or Obstacles to Outcomes Based Learning

1. Not enough time
2. Societal expectations for grades
3. Lack of expertise
4. Innovation threatens identity
Grades
Expertise
Identity
Affirmative Factors in Outcomes Based Learning

- Leads to better student learning
- Student Centered approach
- Many tools and models available
- Government policies favor assessment
The Alverno Impact
assess (ə ses’) v.t.

[late ME <ML <L
assess (us) ptp. of
assidere (ad + sedere)]

to sit down beside