NQFs and the DQP:

How Did We Get Here and Where Would Oregon Go---and How?

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Why the World is Awash in Statements of Qualifications for Educational Credentials

- A mode of reassurance on the efficacy of public and private investments in the distribution of knowledge;

- A mode of clarification to students on the nature and ends of the paths on which they set out;

- Prods to convergence among providers of education, who otherwise have no reference points for shaping and judging their delivery.

Where do we see QFs in this world?

- In higher education, either completed or in progress across all 47 participants in the Bologna Process—from Cork to Vladivostok.

- Vertical frameworks from kindergarten to doctoral levels, either completed or in progress in the 27 countries of the EU;

- Australia, South Africa, selected Canadian provinces.

Now, just because the Irish and the Danes and the Brits and the Germans, etc. do these things doesn't mean we are compelled to follow.

But as macroeconomic historians have demonstrated:

Countries that at least learn from other countries grow; those that don't, don't grow! So . . .

What features of the Bologna Process attracted particular attention in the U.S.?

- **National degree qualifications frameworks (NQFs)**
- **"Tuning," the discipline-based version of NQFs.**
- **"Diploma Supplements."**

All of these are related, with the student at the center, and as student-centered responses to the otherwise "white noise" of accountability.

No surprise that we in the U.S. are now registered for the course!

Let's take the easy one first: Diploma Supplements

- or "what Sally really did to earn the degree," including a brief description of her senior project, major learning outcomes in her discipline (this ties the DS to both Tuning and Qualifications frameworks), a brief list of contributions to the institution and/or its surrounding community, etc.

- You will see it in the Utah system next year in the form of a standardized e-portfolio.

- State systems have the leverage on this, and if it's done the way it should, it will do what the Europeans intended but didn't fully pull off (as in "Nice idea, folks, but mediocre execution.")

- This document (or e-document) is separate from a transcript, and speaks concretely for the student far more than the paper diploma.

Then We Have Tuning: a Prolegomena to Degree Qualifications Frameworks

- **Started in 2000 outside Bologna, and folded into it in 2005**

- Simultaneously, the EC required all its Thematic Networks with academic components (e.g. Engineering, Performing Arts, Social Work) to include the Tuning process in their work.

- Tuning began with 9 disciplines in 137 institutions in 29 countries. It's now in 28 disciplines in at least 37 countries (I don't have the Thematic Network memberships which could push these numbers further).
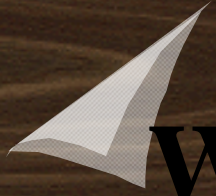
What is Tuning? What does it do?

- **Puts together faculty teams from a number of universities first, to agree on templates of key reference points in their fields that any degree program should cover. The idea of a "template" is convergence, not standardization.**

- **And then to write student learning outcomes based on the reference points.**

Tuning (continued)

- **The process at both stages involves surveys of employers and discussions with former graduates (and the Thematic Networks automatically include professional organizations, learned societies, and industry associations, so those perspectives are accounted for).**

- To repeat: the reference points may be common, but not exclusive. Student learning outcome statements may vary widely. This guidance was carried forward in the U.S. into the DQP *process*.

Whatever the field, the template covers:

- Foundation and history of the field
- Structure of field and its sub-fields and relationships to other fields
- Communication of information and theories
- Methods, techniques, and critical analysis
- Criteria for evaluating field-related research

Tuning Illustration: Business

- **The "firm" as a "value chain" from procurement to customer service is part of the template.**

- **Representatives from 15 universities in 12 countries speaking 11 languages agreed to this.**

- **What happens next in terms of learning outcome statements is critical, and these were grouped in terms of**

- **(a) "Core knowledge," e.g. operations management, (b) "supporting knowledge," e.g. law, IT, and (c) communication skills, e.g. languages, presentation modes.**

Faculty speak their own discipline here, e.g. from ECTN

- "nature and behavior of functional groups in organic molecules"

- "risk assessments concerning chemical substances and lab procedures"

- "error analysis, order-of-magnitude estimates, correct use of units"
  Notice something: these are all noun phrases. SLOs start with verbs.

No wonder learning outcome statements are a swamp. You get:

- **Statements that are not really competencies, e.g. "..able to discuss in an informed manner, the implications of. . .";**

- **Statements so vague as to be meaningless, e.g. ". . .able to apply the knowledge to solve qualitative and quantitative problems of a chemical nature";**

- **Statements that do not tell anyone precisely what graduates of a program are supposed to do, e.g. ". . .able to conduct a whole range of laboratory procedures. . .";**

- **Statements of the obvious, e.g. . . .student should be able to undertake appropriate further training or study. . ."**

I didn't make up these judgments. They come from a 2007 external evaluation of Tuning by a Dutch research group.

After Tuning spread to Latin America in 2005, we got "Tuning U.S.A."

- **Illustrates the connection between research sponsored by a foundation (Lumina) and foundation programs grounded in that research.**

- **If we were going to start the process of degree clarification in the U.S., the disciples and their faculty, were the most promising nutritional environment.**

Differences between U.S. and European "Tuning"

- **We relied on state systems (Indiana, Minnesota, and Utah to start, then Texas and Kentucky), and with the flagship state university on every panel.**

- **We have community colleges in with state systems, and include associate's degrees in Tuning;**

- **We have a student on every discipline panel.**

- **We obviously work in one language, which, in the matter of learning outcomes, makes things easier.**

Each participating state system chooses a limited number of disciplines, e.g.

- **History (Indiana and Utah)**
- **Biology (Minnesota and Kentucky)**
- **Elementary Ed (Indiana & KY)**
- **4 Engineering fields (Texas)**
- **Graphic Arts/Design (Minnesota)**
- **Physics (Utah), Business (KY), Chemistry (IN), Nursing (KY), Social Work (KY)**

Once Tuning USA had moved ahead for 9 months. . .

- Lumina decided to put a Beta version DQP on the table, i.e. our version of a Euro QF;

- 4 long-time higher education analysts, each from a different background (and including 2 who had published on Bologna and QFs in other countries), were asked to draft the document.

- Connections to pre-collegiate reforms were minimized; connections to objectives of increased degree production were precluded. **This was about ensuring the competence-based transparency of higher education's major degrees.**

What do all QFs do?

- **Divide the universe of student learning outcome behaviors and goals into a limited number of metaphysical blocks, e.g. "knowledge and understanding."**

- **At each attainment level, attempt to state threshold qualification benchmarks for student academic behavior.**

- **Notice: I did not say "threshold *learning outcomes*."**

- **Learning outcome statements are different types of statements than those made in the vast majority of QFs (we will come back to this observation).**

What do QFs hope for?

- **Tacit assent to the benchmarks by instructional staff and policy-makers;**
- **Active enforcement at all levels affected by a national authority---where there *is* a national authority, and**
- **Very implicit and quietly in enforcement, a mechanism for denying credentials or grade promotion to students who have not met the threshold levels of performance specified.**
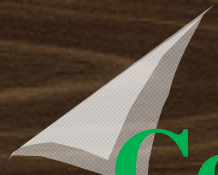
Convergence of the Competence Territories in 7 Countries*

- Everyone has "knowledge," though expressed in different forms and with unique addenda;

- "Autonomy" of greater or lesser degree is explicit in 4 of the 7; implicit or subsumed in the other 3;

- Applied learning is explicit in 5 of the 7;

- Communication is subsumed as a "skill" in 3 QFs and warrants a separate territory of its own in another 3.

- "Evaluation" turns up as a specific "skill" in 3 QFs and is subsumed either under skills or applications in 3 others.

*Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Australia, U.S.

Structurally, the U.S. DQP Departs from Others With:

- **Civic Learning (originally a sub-set of Applied Learning)**
- **Intellectual skills separate out Analytic Inquiry (which tells you what the core of "critical thinking" really means)**
- **Intellectual skills includes differential perspective ("Engaging diverse perspectives"), another aspect of "critical thinking"---but at least you know what it is!**
- **Applied Learning as a separate archipelago (well, the Australians have this one, too, in a way)**
- **No section devoted to "autonomy" in learning**

Enforcement works in many ways, but still relies on hope

- In France, through 4-year contracts with specific degree programs in each IHE, contracts that must specify concrete learning outcomes.

- In the UK, through the benchmarking and auditing process of the QAA.

- In federal systems (AU,DE,US) with assumptions that Territory, L□nder, and State authorities will not deviate significantly in enforcement to the extent to which they have a role.

The Beta-DQP reflects a great deal of learning from the European experience---and from U.S. contexts

- The "ratchet principle," under which all competences are set forth in increasingly challenging forms from Associate's to Bachelor's to Master's degrees follows the QFEHEA schema.

- Unlike most European versions, the competences are expressed as true learning outcomes, with verbs dominating the outcome statements (schoolyard brag: we did it better!);

- Unlike other frameworks, the Beta DQP is explicit in proposing that students who do not meet competency thresholds will not be awarded degrees, though this feature was softened in the final text of the DQP.

- No battles between vocational (our preferred phasing is "occupationally oriented") and academic: the competences are written to encompass both.

Generally, when a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) starts a process such as the DQP…

- Federal and state governments are pushed away or to the background.

- But other organizations must be supported to continue the process.

- The agencies in the U.S. with the most leverage are the regional accrediting associations, and 2 of the 6 regional accreditors are among the initial engines for the progress of the DQP.

- The organizations with the second greatest leverage are state higher education systems, and Oregon is in the best position to be the lead state in exploring the potential of a DQP. The others are watching.

All the initial efforts are for 2 or 3 years; if responses to these explorations are positive, the entire undertaking will take a decade to reach "critical mass."

# Learning outcome statements and the DQP: What is truly transformational

- **These are operational competence statements**
- **"Operational" means real verbs that describe what students actually do, and that lead directly to assessment.**
- **"Dead end" nouns such as "appreciation," "awareness," "ability," and "critical thinking" are not part of this vocabulary.**
- **Why? Because they do not lead directly to assessments (assignments, exam questions, performances, projects) and, in the DQP world, sample assessments must accompany each adopted statement of required competence!**

Where we really departed from the Europeans: why we called it a "Profile?" And what do we expect will happen?

- **The U.S. higher education "system" is a lot more diverse than is typical elsewhere and, at least to some extent, we value this diversity. "Framework" is out of place in this environment.**

$ "Profile" defines the shape and basic parameters of the outcomes statements, but not the portrait itself:
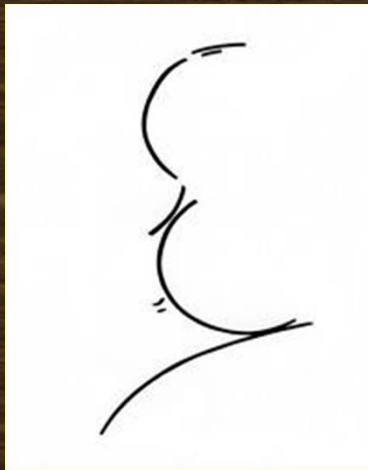
- **Institutions or consortia of institutions or state higher education systems can add new elements and tailor the content of the DQP statements to match their missions.**

- **We tell them they are Kahlo, Dᵣrer, Van Gogh, Stuart: finish the portrait, but you are confined to the same palette of active, concrete verbs!!!**

So what the DQP really provides is a framework for a process

And we may eventually find 20-30 analogous-but-not-identical versions of the DQP.

We will live with such an outcome: it is infinitely better than what we have now.

What can our IHEs use the DQP for?

- To ground the award of a given degree in specific competences (credits become merely an accounting metric; grades are a separate issue), the public statement of which becomes a de facto degree warranty.

- To provide a template for learning contracts between students and institutions

- To align standards for inter-institutional transfer.

- To support the quality assurance (accreditation) process.

- To guide the development of new assessments embedded in teaching and learning---thus reaching all students, and not added on at the end of a course of study to a sample of volunteer test-takers.

Operational Challenges, I

- **Every competence requires a sample of assessments that would validate it.**

- **So faculty have to nominate assessments they use or can tweak, and these, in turn, have to be validated and recorded.**

- **An individual faculty member does not cover all competences or assessments, just those that would most likely emerge in his/her instruction.**

- **All this means a new record-keeping system, separate from standard transcripts---just like Diploma Supplements.**

Operational Challenges, II

- As drafted for the Profile, each competency adopted indicates only a threshold level, i.e. we don't say "how well."

- "How well" is a matter of faculty grading, and the DQP does not interfere with that judgment tradition.

- However, some institutions may wish to write competencies at an ascending range of challenge, and that would create additional pressures on faculty beyond the default of grading.

Operational Challenges, III

- **It is also possible for institutions at different levels of selectivity to re-write the competency statements to match their students' perceived talents.**

- **If undertaken, this would have to be done delicately (while we all know such differences exist, rivalries and politics abound).**

Given the iterative process of designing and implementing versions of the DQP, most of the objections to it are nonsense, e.g.

- **It will standardize and mechanize curriculum and assessment;**
- **It intrudes on faculty's academic freedom;**
- **It is foreign to U.S. higher education;**
- **Governments will take it over and change it every time a different political party is in control;**
- **It's too complicated to implement; it requires a new record-keeping system (True on the issue of record-keeping);**
- **My institution already states its student outcomes (But most of these statements are not really learning outcomes).**

The most common objections, though, are Field-Referenced

- **We did not allow enough time for Tuning to spread, hence a continual confusion between field-oriented and generic statements of competencies and learning outcomes. Faculty instinctively respond in terms of "my field"---which is not the point of a QF.**

- **While the DQP is carefully written to accommodate all types of fields, we see resistance particularly from faculty and associations in occupationally-oriented areas (a broader category than the European VET sector).**

- **Specialized accreditation, e.g. in business, engineering, nursing, teacher education, also gets in the way of understanding what a generic QF means, so we're trying to organize a group of specialized accreditors to explore the intersections of their territories and a DQP structure, and trust that Lumina will sponsor them.**

Sooner or later, though, the voluntary adoption of the DQP will spread

- **The Lumina Foundation, as NGO, is the impressario of both sponsorship and targeted inclusion. It is very strategic in enabling:**

- the different types of organizations, stakeholder groups, consortia of institutions, and public agencies that are stepping forward with their own approaches to adoption.

- **We already have 2 regional accrediting bodies, 2 national higher ed associations, and one consortium (of independent colleges) funded to explore the position and potential of a DQP, and Oregon as a state system in line to join in 2012.**

One could continue, but the point is that

- When one starts working through all of these challenges in the context of competence-grounded criteria for the award of degrees, one learns more than one ever imagined about instruction, assessment, and curriculum---what's redundant, what needs to be sharpened, what you can say to students about what should happen to them and how.

That's not a bad idea to begin with!!!

So let's make a deal. . .

- Recognize that we aren't going to explore all the variations in the content and processes of a DQP in the context of a state system in a one-day discussion, and that we can't run away from this,

- Try a manageable group with, e.g. 4 representatives from each of Oregon's 25 public IHEs to carry out the exploration over 3 years, consulting and reporting annually with their faculty senates and the state central administrations.

- My line-item budget for this effort is $1.35M, and Lumina will fund more than half of that (how much, precisely, I can't say).

- If, at the end of that period, you determine that you have reached a dead-end, if your faculty senates say they don't want to go forward, then you can call it a day. Sunset! Oregon will have taught everyone---and yourselves---a great deal in the process. Agreed?