Designing a Curriculum Alignment Program

bridge
THE DIVIDE

The Bridge Method –
Supporting successful education transitions.

DESIGNING A CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT PROGRAM

Colleges invest in student success by connecting effective curriculum and competencies through an ongoing, phased examination process. Aligned curricular pathways ensure that learning outcomes match career and educational goals. They provide confidence to students and employers that vital knowledge and skills are represented by a credential and may influence the success and completion rates of students.

Identify the Problems to Solve

Before implementing any process or program, it is important to identify the immediate and long-term problems the college aims to address. Curriculum alignment can be a part of the solution for addressing many common problems.

- **Immediate Problems** like low rates of completion in gateway or developmental education courses or low rates of minority, first-generation, or low-income students enrolling from targeted high schools
- **Mid-Range Problems** like difficulty transferring course credits across intuitions, resulting in students losing time, money, and motivation
- **Long-Term Problems** like poorly prepared graduates with skills that do not meet market needs or low college completion rates

Select Scope and Focus

The focus of an alignment effort can be as narrow as the alignment of two courses within a postsecondary program of study (for example, a developmental math course and the first college-credit mathematics course) or broadened to include all courses in a department or discipline. The scoping might implicate the alignment of an entire program and related credentials, both within colleges and across institutional boundaries such as K-12 to local community colleges

Identify Inputs and Resources

Once the scope and focus is determined, the next step is to make sure that all the necessary inputs and resources for the alignment process are in place to yield the targeted results. Along with a plan and a budget, successful alignment efforts incorporate the following:

1. **Technology.** Curriculum development and alignment software to expedite information gathering and sorting and data systems that track student learning and progression.
2. **Standards/Competencies.** Selection of internally established standards or proposed frameworks from professional discipline-based organizations, industry groups, competency-based standards at the K–12 level, or even the Degree Qualifications Profile framework developed by Lumina[1] to guide the alignment work.
3. **Faculty and staff development.** Professional development and time that will allow all those involved in building the curricular pathway to understand and assist in the selection of standards/competencies, be adept at collaboration, and have the capacity to analyze data.
4. **Institutional research capacity.** Staff time and technology in the institutional research office to provide data for student cohort analysis as alignment brings focus to achieving

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[1] Lumina Foundation. (2014, October). Degree Qualifications Profile. Retrieved from http://degreeprofile.org/press_four/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/DQP-web-download.pdf

measurable results. Colleges must also commit to measure and report results and share data with K–12 and university partners.

5. **Partnerships.** Effective collaboration within colleges and with partner institutions is essential to address the gaps within a disjointed educational system where "different sectors have established their own expectations and requirements for learning objectives, assessment, graduation, and admissions, creating great variance both within and between educational systems."[2]

Sequence the Work

Colleges take the following steps when aligning the curriculum and pathways:

1. **Outreach to partners** (including high schools, partner universities, and business and industry) invites joint planning of initial alignment that crosses institutional boundaries and ensures connection to workplace standards/competencies.

2. **Professional development programs** prepare faculty and staff to engage in curriculum and co-curriculum alignment. After the alignment activities, development programs are planned related to teaching, advisement, and assessment within the newly aligned curriculum and co-curriculum pathways.

3. **Faculty and staff** collaborate to revise the pathways to meet college alignment goals, ensuring that curricula, co-curricula, standards, competencies, instruction, and assessment are documented electronically to be in vertical and horizontal alignment, reflecting clear and consistent expectations of students, within the college and across institutions. For example, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education partnered with the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) to create a regional network of high school and college faculty creating paired courses to promote a seamless transition for students from high school to college.

4. **Curriculum mapping** at the program level aligns the content and assessment of outcomes throughout a program of study, ensuring that curriculum is properly sequenced, that students are exposed to program outcomes, and student mastery of those competencies is assessed in a purposeful and meaningful way. Valencia College, for example, wants to make sure that regardless of the unique set of courses a student has selected, the college is intentional about where, when, and how the student will encounter each of the program's student learning outcomes and how the student's mastery of those outcomes will be assessed.[3]

5. **Assessment and data analysis**, supported by the institutional research teams, enables faculty and staff to access and interpret data, to monitor student progress, and to evaluate the success of aligned curricula and co-curricula pathways. Online reporting systems provide routine feedback on student learning and progression within the college and across boundaries with partner institutions.

6. **Outreach to high school students** is emphasized to make clear that postsecondary education is possible and to explain what is required to be successful.

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[2] McGaughy, C., & Venezia, A. (2015). Supporting the dream: High school–college partnerships for college and career readiness (p. 79). Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin.

[3] Valencia College. (2011). College planning council goal two team report. Retrieved from http://valenciacollege.edu/academic-affairs/institutional-effectiveness-planning/strategic-plan/Archives.cfm

Educational Policy Improvement Center

The Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) is an innovative, nationally recognized non-profit organization founded by Dr. David Conley, a pioneer in college and career readiness policy and research. EPIC conducts research and provides consulting services and systems to support educators in promoting college and career readiness and post-secondary success and completion.

EPIC's focus is college and career readiness across the P-20 continuum. Our alignment experts have been working with schools for over 8 years to help educators across the country ensure their courses cover the necessary content to prepare students for postsecondary education.

Contact us:
- to learn more about the impact the Bridge Method can have on your community college
- for an extended planning toolkit (including a logic model)
- to access white papers and case studies of institutions successfully addressing alignment
- on the web for testimonials about how the Bridge Method *connects* students to success

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Through faculty and staff engagement and empowerment focused on articulating and smoothing curriculum transitions, the Bridge Method supports academic curriculum alignment as a catalyst to both prevent and solve challenging educational problems with the goal of increasing student academic success and institutional success.

We'd love to talk with you about how the Bridge Method can help strengthen the quality, transparency, and connectivity of credentials.

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