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**FACILITATE:  
Facilitating Academic Curriculum in Learning, In Teaching, and Threaded Evidence**

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**ABSTRACT**

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are often the center of discussion among faculty in higher education during discourse about curriculum conceptualization, design, planning development, and implementation. This commentary offers a functionally-centered framework that places faculty feasibility, fluidity, freedom, and flexibility around a core conceptualization of SLOs in the context of overall alignment within the college curriculum. The framework could be useful to readers failing to have shared governance over the curriculum, readers facing accreditation adherence, as well as readers confronting the sensitive topic of instructional quality, credibility, and integrity.

**Keywords:** Strategic curriculum alignment, planning, and design; student learning outcomes; faculty expertise; andragogy; curriculum coherence and cohesion; instructional delivery; shared decision making; higher education collaboration, cooperation, and alliance building; academic community of practice; faculty autonomy

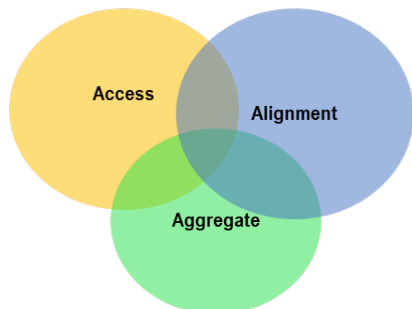
Several years ago, not too far from the University of California at Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education and the headquarters of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission in Alameda, California, is the home of the former world champion Golden State Warriors of the National Basketball Association. They were in Oakland; now they are in San Francisco. This award-winning team was widely recognized, referenced, and revered for their interdependent teamwork and individual athletic contributions to meeting team-targeted goals. Go Warriors. When serving as a provost in California during the Warrior's winning season, one of these authors would often explain the success of the team in the context of student learning outcomes. Each individual player recognizes other individual players' freedom and assessment to shoot a winning basket in a unique, tactical, and strategic way. The team is quite fascinating to watch, observe, and analyze based on the exhibited evidence of the team's display of well executed objectives to win. Each player has a different delivery style, but the team manages to collectively meet the mutually agreed upon goals. That is, they, the winning team recognize that while all individual players deliver the goal objectives in different ways, the entire team must move forward in alignment for game-winning outcomes games as champions. Could this be an appropriate metaphor for curriculum alignment in modern higher education for systems that have different faculty delivering different objectives to meet student learning outcomes (SLOs) across multiple departments and divisions in multiple time zones and online?

This commentary (originally published in the *Journal of Education and Human Development*) has been titled, FACILITATE, which means *Facilitating Academic Curriculum In Learning, In Teaching, And Threaded Evidence*. The title has been developed to capture a new paradigm for thinking about curriculum alignment and as a verb to describe how a steward of curriculum alignment should take the role of facilitating the fundamentals of fluidity, freedom, flexibility, and focus within curriculum alignment. While curriculum alignment does require strategic levels of continuity, consistency, and concerted content, how these levels are delivered should be decided upon and strategized based on faculty expertise and their professorial acumen for the study within the academic

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discipline. In other words, perhaps as long as faculty teach with a relationship between course content to student learning outcomes, the institution should provide institutional fluidity, flexibility, and freedom to teach toward learning outcomes.



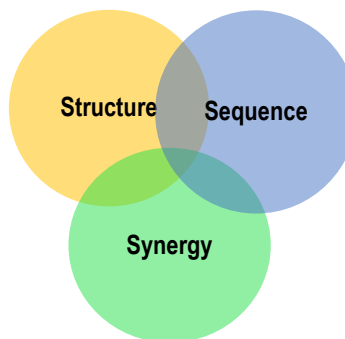
In the case of institutions of higher education, the relationship should incorporate synergies between program competencies, program learning outcomes, course learning outcomes, and institutional learning outcomes. While this is a monumental task, the journey to create this type of intellectual synergy will build a scholarly community of practice across academic departments and divisions with varying instructional modes, modalities, and methodologies in teaching and instructional delivery. This white paper has been conceptualized and crafted for several purposes. First, it serves to provide a general discussion on the definition of curriculum and the impact of curriculum in higher education for both faculty and students. Second, it ignites a general discussion about the curriculum in higher education and its relationship to student learning outcomes for empowering graduates with skills, competencies, and other knowledge that is fundamental for the global workplace. Third, it begins a conversation about the

curriculum, in higher education, in relationship to alignment and accreditation in preparation for meeting accreditation requirements relative to mission, meaning, quality, credibility, and integrity of degrees.

## 1. DEFINING CURRICULUM

There is a wide range of definitions for describing curriculum and defining its purpose in higher education. These definitions and descriptions include the totality of student experiences that occur in the academic process from planned sequence of instruction; to a course of study, program, or curriculum with integrated classes in academic studies; to planned interaction of students with instructional content, based on materials, resources, and processes for assessing learning objectives; and the aggregate of courses of study, given in a learning environment. The term “alignment” is frequently used in higher education to describe how agreed-upon, or accreditation-related standards are implemented in a sequential and organized way. Alignment is often used by accreditors and other academic stewards to not only describe instructional strategies, but the academic assessment that is employed against targeted student learning outcomes.

Frequently, users of this term will apply it in both vertical and horizontal application and practice. This is particularly challenging for institutions of higher learning as academic enterprises made up of multiple campuses in multiple time zones with a myriad of diverse disciplines within the study of higher learning. In some cases, the curriculum could be conceptualized vertically in a scaffold paradigm so that teaching and instruction can be organized based on previous and anticipated student learning. In other instances, the curriculum can be aligned horizontally, which means that mutually agreed upon content by faculty within disciplines teach the same subject matter based on content but may develop mechanisms to teach the learning outcomes differently in four different locations.

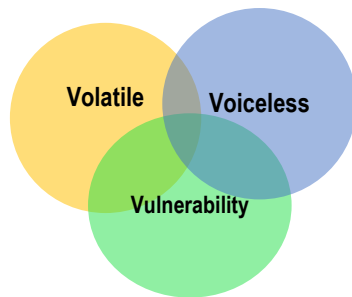


In both instances, curriculum alignment is especially important in the higher education process in which all professors who represent all the disciplines have a system for formally evaluating not only course content but academic objectives for the manifestation of student learning outcomes. In all cases, there should be flexibility, fluidity, and freedom for the faculty to deliver the instruction from the curriculum that recognizes their independence but supports cognitive continuity.

## 2. CLASSROOM OUTCOMES TO WORKPLACE OBJECTIVES

As recently observed by Barry Schwartz in “Intellectual Virtues” for *The Chronicle Review* (6-26-15),

It has always been taken as self-evident that higher education is good for students and society at large, and that American colleges and universities are doing an excellent job of providing it. No more. Commentators, politicians, and parents are expressing serious doubts, about whether colleges are teaching what they should be teaching and about whether they are teaching it well.

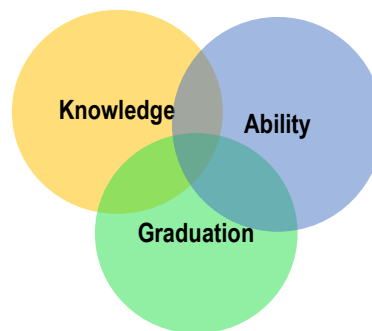


Teaching students from an aligned curriculum, through creative pedagogy, with student learning outcomes grounded in academic disciplines leads to careers in all sectors. This synergy adds unique value to the higher education experience and improves persistence toward degree completion. Leaders in business, government, technology, education, commerce, and other sectors typically agree that today's higher education needs to produce "outcomes-empowered" graduates with bold ingenuity, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship for our economy to survive and thrive in today's global competitive classrooms, communities, workplace, and marketplace. These leaders would also probably agree that creativity, entrepreneurship, innovation, or ingenuity is embarked upon and grounded in pioneering thoughts. These thoughts can be ignited from the

aligned curriculum and stimulated through teaching with learning outcomes.

In today's challenging and complex society where and when learned outcomes must be part of habitual orientation for intellectual decision making in everyday living, students from all stations, spaces, and stages should plan ahead for the manifested application of the outcomes, the organization of the outcomes within their career portfolios, and reflective evaluation of the outcomes in their daily activities on the job, at home, in the global community. Thus, learning outcomes become more than a milestone of the college experience and continue as a part of a lifelong learning commitment. This is especially true for students who seek ongoing intellectual growth, proactive positioning for the marketplace, and continued lifelong learning for cognitive sustainability. Lifelong leveraging of focus on student learning outcomes can serve as navigating axis between the two areas of creativity and data decision making in the workplace.

In *THE BRAIN: The Ultimate Guide* (2015), it is suggested that "intelligence and creativity are linked to how fast your brain works and your own unique neural connects." After all, daily student development from learning outcomes (personal, academic, career) should be a lifelong commitment that illuminates from challenges in all human lives; not just a singular experience, activity, or exercise. We are convinced that the methods, taxonomies, and premises offered in FACILITATE can be taught by faculty and learned by students at a time when our students must meet the new global demands for forward-thinking, data-driven, prescriptive, diagnostic, and proactive decision-making from the curriculum.

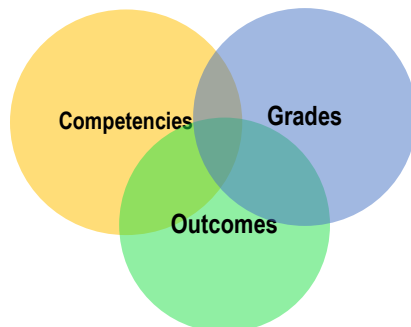


This can be a rewarding, enlightening, and creative exercise for the mind. Indeed, FACILITATE is a creative journey for students, as they also develop much needed skills for graduate or professional school. The consistent application of probing, delving, and investigating that is fundamental to psychology teaching and training serves as a catalytic driving force throughout the curriculum. Campus-based methodologies are then created for seeking answers to help solve the challenges of social justice for the voiceless, inequality of the underrepresented, imbalance between the haves and have nots, inequity between the advantaged and disadvantaged, and other areas between marginalization and disparity. These methodologies also help resolve other elements of the behavioral science and psychology that require investigative, scientific, exploratory, diagnostic, evidenced based and data-driven decision-making. This process of inquiry — combined with higher education's commitment to empower purposeful agents of change — fall and fit within the unique, distinctive, and profound mission of higher education. Given the paradoxes of pedagogy that are often volatile and vulnerable as a result of addressing issues for the voiceless, the journey toward learning outcomes from the mission will yield returns on instructional delivery.

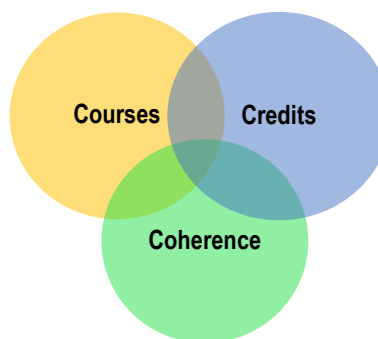
### 3. ACADEMIC STEWARDSHIP FOR SHEPHERDING ACCREDITATION

Working with decentralized and centralized academic leaders at the college or the university, faculty share the responsibility of being stewards of the curriculum and shepherds of the knowledge that is manifested from the curriculum from student learning outcomes. In response to the accreditation components of WASC/WSCUC, relative to meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees, it is explicitly stated that,

...all degrees — undergraduate and graduate — awarded by the institution are clearly defined in terms of entry-level requirements and levels of student achievement necessary for graduation that represent more than simply an accumulation of courses or credits. This institution has both a coherent philosophy, expressive of its mission, which guides the meaning of its degrees and processes that ensure the quality and integrity of its degrees.



In all cases, evidence will be provided to accreditors to document that all degrees awarded at the college or university have succinctly defined specific requirements upon entry and designated specific levels of achievement that are fundamental for graduation. This academic journey for all college or university students is represented in a clearly defined curriculum that outlines the academic expectations for receiving credit and support toward persistence of the degree. Once the process of FACILITATE is in place, the curriculum will be aligned with the freedom and flexibility described above and document the extent to which and how all courses, credits, and classroom experiences work together in a coherent way to guide instructional delivery and enhance student learning outcomes. Colleges and universities must embed a clear and succinct philosophy in its mission statement as related to the professional training, development, and advancement of students enrolled in psychology and psychology-related disciplines. The meaning of degrees should be historically documented from its origins in a commitment to human diversity, community service, and continued program innovation with rigor, relevance, and responsiveness to the market. Toward this end, the chief academic officer should advocate and reference, to support evidence, the use of “demonstrables and deliverables” in classroom instruction. “Demonstrables” can be conceptualized as academic performance benchmarks or milestones evidenced from writing assignments, groups work, examinations, quizzes, simulations, academic debates, academic fieldwork, role-playing, literature reviews, interviews, and other signature assignments. “Deliverables” can be conceptualized as academic performance outcomes, which could include, but are not limited to, skill set, disposition, attitude, ability, competency, knowledge, behavior, or other cognition.



Given licensure implications and accreditation impact for degrees at many colleges and universities, these demonstrables and deliverables are crucial to secure student competence in highly sensitive areas of psychology before they graduate, and in preparation for professional licensure.

The Latin verb form of curriculum is *curro*, which means “a path to run in small steps.” The sequential steps toward accreditation and licensure may appear to be small in this regard, but the influence from the instructional delivery by the faculty has profound impact between the students and the faculty with the curriculum serving as the academic axis. Demonstrables should provide culminating evidence to pedagogical movements toward reaching the deliverable or end goal — that is, the initially planned and

targeted student learning outcome. The required accreditation reports must document and provide evidence that the courses, credits, and grades awarded at the institution are a result of all elements contributing to the whole of the student learning experience. Evidence will be provided that these learning experiences are structured, sequenced, and delivered in ways and strategies so that students can not only learn outcomes from the classroom but apply the learning outcomes in the workplace. This process included many initiatives to diagnose problems or challenges that have surfaced because of curriculum alignment. Perhaps the most prevailing challenge facing many institutions, under the umbrella of modern analytics and informatics, is the challenge of signature assignment consistency within courses, disciplines, and programs, and the extent to which the alignment fosters “CORE,” meaning Culture of Results and Evidence at all colleges and universities.

