

INTRODUCTION

Initiating Institutional Change in the Transfer Context

AAC&U launched Quality Collaboratives (QC): Assessing and Reporting Degree Qualifications Profile Competencies in the Context of Transfer in 2011 as a three-year project that engaged educational, assessment, and policy leaders in student learning outcomes assessment and transfer pathways. With funding from Lumina Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the QC project was organized through AAC&U's current signature initiative, Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), which champions a twenty-first-century liberal education for all college students. During the project, two- and four-year transfer partner institutions within nine states—each already engaged, prior to the start of the project, in learning outcomes assessment work—beta tested different ways to assess proficiencies articulated in Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP). The DQP, now in its second version, benchmarks “what degree recipients should know and be able to do”¹ at the associate's, bachelor's, and master's degree levels, and offers scaffolded learning expectations to guide paths between and among transfer partners (see page 30, below).

This publication features campus work from twenty institutions involved in QC—campuses with collaborative relationships that worked together as two- and four-year “QC dyads.” The ten participating campus dyads hailed from California, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Utah, Wisconsin, and Virginia (two other states—North Dakota and Oregon—participated in the project at the state system level). Project participants in these dyads saw already-established working relationships between their institutions gain strength as they connected faculty teaching and learning practices with assessment of authentic student work, interacted with senior academic leaders supporting the work, and engaged with policies related to student learning and success in the context of transfer. Campuses entered the QC project in various ways, including through state- or system-wide initiatives, in response to institutional strategic plans, in support of general education reform projects, and with the goal of refining transfer processes. Each dyad

1 Cliff Adelman, Peter Ewell, Paul Gaston, and Carol Geary Schneider, *The Degree Qualifications Profile* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation, 2014), 3.

approached transfer student success through various means and with a different campus and state culture serving as a backdrop.

This publication is anchored by a flowchart, laid out on pages 4 and 5, that reflects lessons learned from the campus-based work in which the QC dyads engaged. The flowchart is meant to serve as a guide for campus practitioners seeking to initiate transfer-based change efforts on their campuses. The reader can follow the columns in the flowchart from left to right, starting with three major points of consideration when **initiating a new project** on campus, as gleaned from QC: (1) set a **collaborative tone** early in the process, (2) proactively coordinate and **connect multiple initiatives**, and (3) **maximize engagement** based on assessment and collaborative capacity. These consideration points are augmented by a set of suggestions for conducting an environmental scan, prior to the project, to strengthen the work on campus. The reader can follow each of the three points down their respective columns to three **outcomes** from the QC project: (1) increased levels of **respect and trust among colleagues**; (2) **sustainable, scalable projects** embedded in and connected to institutional goals and other related initiatives; and (3) increased understanding and new avenues to extend project work more broadly, **engaging larger groups of stakeholders**.

In between these points of consideration and project outcomes are key action steps taken by the various QC campus partners to implement assessment in the transfer context. These action steps reflect a culminating list of collective lessons learned throughout the QC project. For instance, QC campus team leaders learned that assignment design, assessment, and student learning were some of the best entry points for faculty engaged in the professional development workshops embedded in the project. Rather than introducing the DQP right away, dyad leaders learned that it was best to start with what matters most to faculty—student success—and integrate the DQP at a later stage of the project.

Each action step (eleven in total) correlates with a case study in the following pages. (In one instance, a dyad’s case study addresses two action steps, and readers will find that the case studies generally speak to more than one action step.) Written by QC dyad leaders, who are listed as contacts in this publication, these case studies represent campus change efforts that unfolded over the course of the three-year project. Longer versions of these case studies reside on AAC&U’s website at www.aacu.org/qc/casestudies.

AAC&U is currently compiling and uploading resources from different multicampus projects. These resources are available by theme under the “Browse Resources” section on our homepage. Curated

resources from the QC project and its Faculty Collaboratives project demonstrate lessons learned and offer tools in support of campus change efforts nationwide. The Faculty Collaboratives project supports a national network of faculty and administrative leaders engaged in progressive efforts for student learning, retention, and success. We hope this publication, along with a companion publication that is intended for campus practitioners working on assessment issues,² is a useful addition to these resources as well as a helpful tool for practitioners seeking to initiate institutional change within the transfer context.

² Gary R. Brown and Terrel L. Rhodes, *Assessment Practices for Advancing Transfer Student Success: Collaborating for Educational Change* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2015).