

The main aim of this session is to explore mechanisms to support a whole of degree approach to curriculum design that will allow assurance of learning. In order to achieve this, three key elements of curriculum design (degree level learning outcomes; learning activities; assessment tasks) have been considered in a constructively aligned manner. This whole of degree design is a change of mind set for many academics. Common practice has been to develop a set of subjects (units of study/modules) that cover all the necessary areas and a degree is awarded once sufficient subjects are passed by the student. Whole of degree design removes the silo effect of developing subjects in isolation to work with teaching teams to develop an integrated and scaffolded approach to the curriculum, where subjects relate and build on each other in a progressive way allowing students to see how each element of the course relates to the overall degree level learning outcomes.

Assessment drives learning and so ensuring that assessment is a main factor when using this whole of degree approach is essential. Assessment tasks must be authentic assessment tasks that are designed in a scaffolded manner. Assessments are often developed within individual subjects and not developed collectively across whole degrees. In this way they are retrofitted to meet degree level learning outcomes rather than being designed specifically. A whole of degree approach prompts the teaching team to work together to identify suitable tasks for degree level learning outcomes. Teams are asked to identify where/how the degree level learning outcomes would be demonstrated in the real world, they then use these authentic tasks as the basis for designing assessments that can be administered under the university system (considering workload, assessment policies, moderation, academic integrity, and so on). Once a set of assessment tasks are developed for each degree level learning outcome they are examined to see how they can be scaffolded so students have opportunities to develop skills and knowledge as they progress through their degree, making sure the tasks increase in complexity over time. Once this scaffolding is in place then these assessments get mapped to suitable subjects and adapted to meet the subject context.

To complement this whole of course assessment design, guidance is provided for both academics and students in the form of whole of degree rubrics. These rubrics are developed by the teaching team; identifying criteria for each degree level learning outcome along with expected standards for different stages of the degree. These are then used to achieve calibration of what is expected of students in a social constructivist manner, augmented by exemplars to model these expectations. The whole of degree rubric is then used as the foundation for developing individual task rubrics incorporating degree level learning outcome criteria and any additional criteria specific to the task. With this whole of degree understanding students can then be marked not only on their progress for an individual piece of work but in relation to the whole degree standards.

BIO

Romy Lawson is the Director of Learning, Teaching & Curriculum at the University of Wollongong. She has been actively involved in teaching and learning development in higher education for over twenty years in both the UK and Australia. Her research has focused on constructive alignment; the effect of different assessment on student learning; and leadership strategies for curriculum renewal.

In 2010 she led a National OLT Strategic Priority Project - Hunters & Gatherers: Strategies for Curriculum Mapping and Data Collection for Assurance of Learning. In 2013 was made a National Teaching Fellow by the Australian Government for her work in Curriculum design for assuring learning.