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Principles for Designing a Curriculum to Develop and Assure Student Learning Outcomes

Romy Lawson

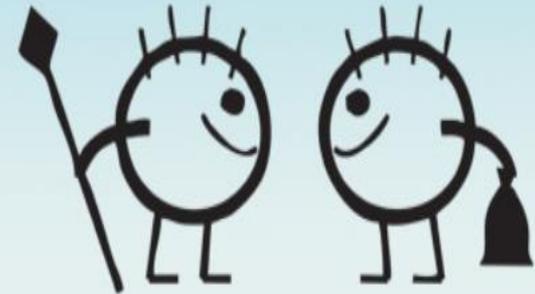
*University of Wollongong, NSW,
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Assuring Learning

OLT Strategic Priority Project: Hunters & Gatherers

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Hunters & Gatherers: Strategies for Curriculum Mapping and Data Collection for Assurance of Learning

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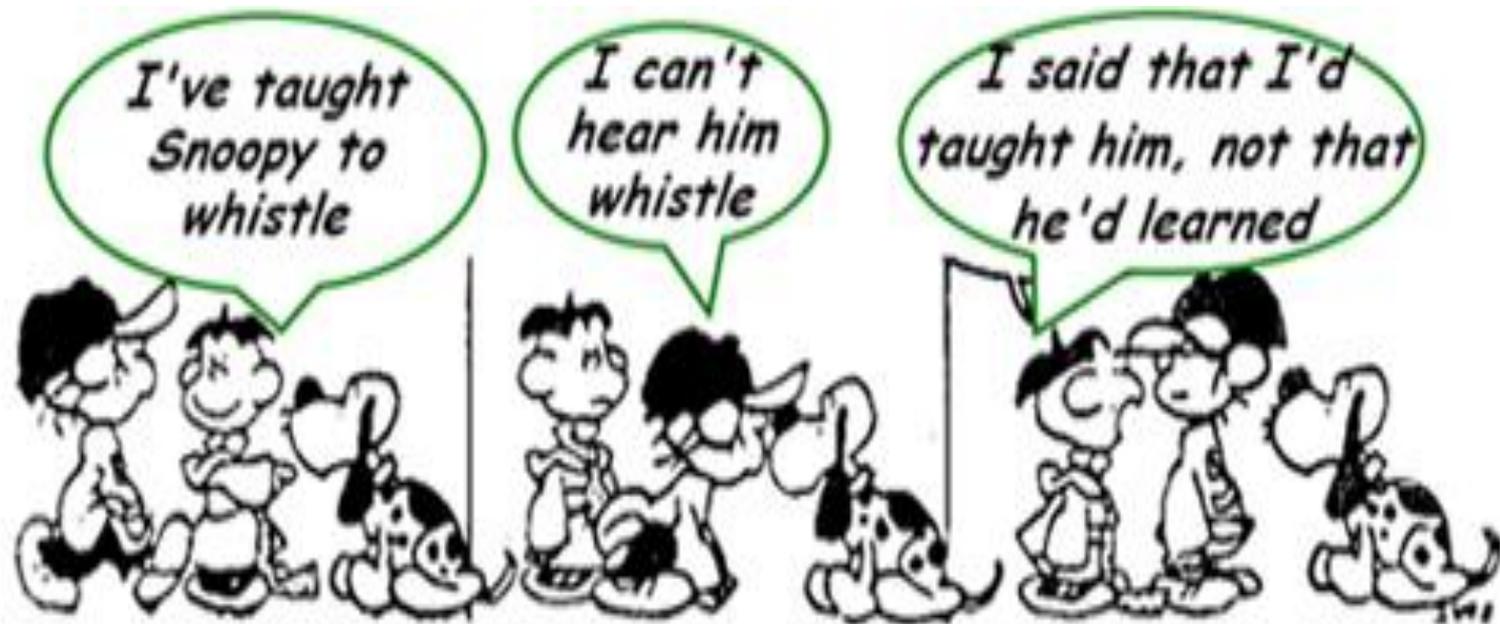
romy@uow.edu.au 

University of Wollongong
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Why are YOU here?

What do we mean by Assurance of Learning (AoL)?

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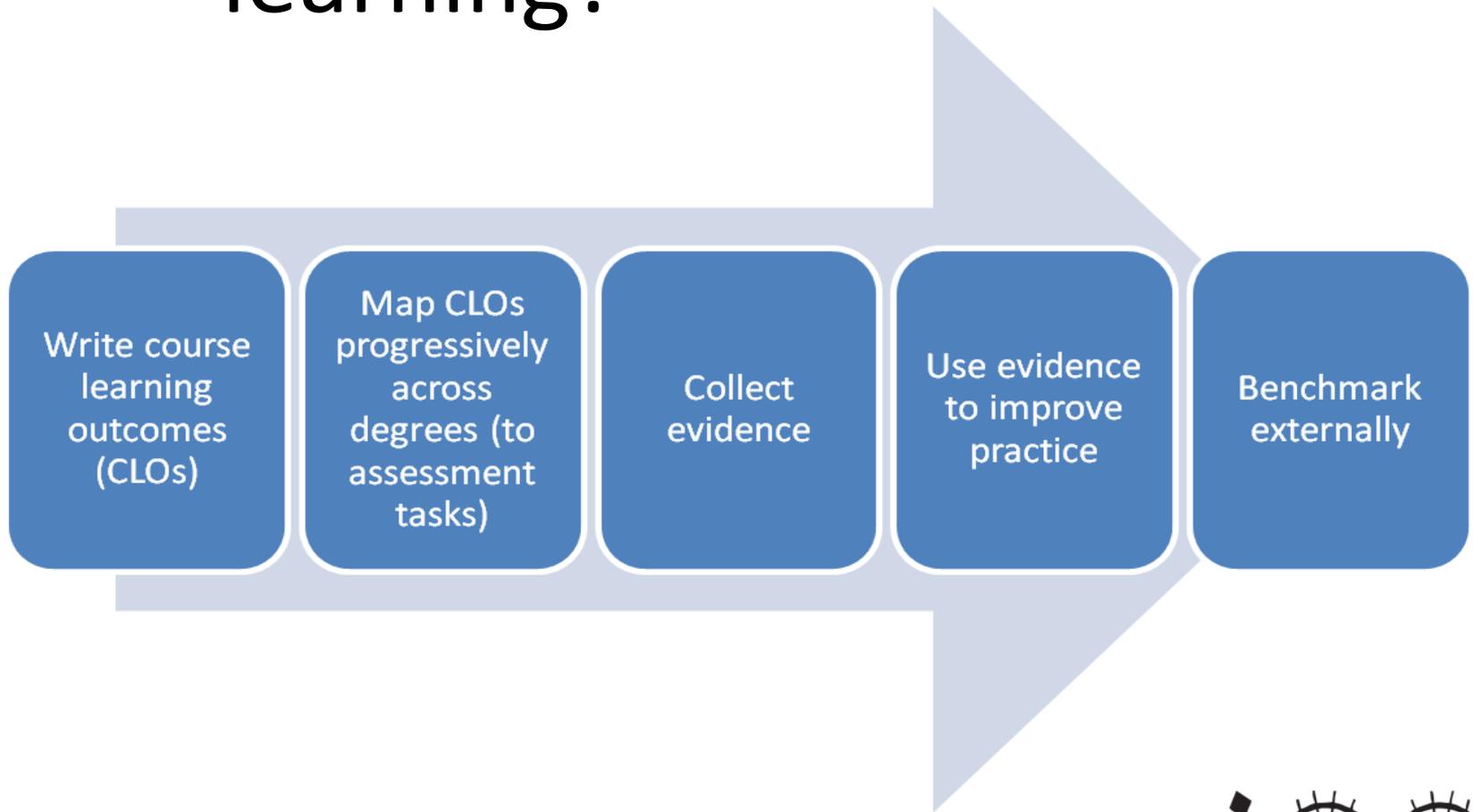
Why do we do it?

- Assurance of Learning Standards evaluate **how well the course accomplishes the educational aims** at the core of its activities.
- Measures of learning can **assure external constituents** such as potential students, trustees, public officials, supporters, and accreditors, that the organization meets its goals.
- Another important function for measures of learning is to **assist the school and faculty members to improve** courses and subjects.

Pedagogical Advantages of Process

- **Progression** – students will be introduced, and further developed in the graduate attributes before assessed for assurance
- **Clarity** – students will be able to see the links and development of graduate attributes through clearly stated learning objectives, and through the interactive use of assessment rubrics
- **Control** – due to progressive nature with explicit objectives students can take control of their learning through regular tutor feedback and self assessment

How do we assure learning?



The problem

- **Graduate attributes/course learning outcomes** are an orienting statement of education outcomes used to inform curriculum design and the provision of learning experiences at a university (Barrie, Hughes & Smith, 2009).
- While all Australian universities make such claims in policy and curriculum documentation, the **effective integration** of these into courses and therefore virtual or physical classroom has been somewhat intangible (Taylor et al., 2009), resulting in **students not fully engaging** with the expectations of degree programs.

Main Challenges

The main challenges identified were:

- **Staff Workload**

- “staff looked upon AoL as extra burden” (D)
- “time consuming, academic staff see it as imposition on their time” (B)

- **Staff Engagement**

- “challenge to get beyond that this is more than ticking box, it’s about improving student learning outcomes” (B)
- “it took me six years to get staff buy-in” (F)
- “we have achieved staff acceptance, not buy-in” (Q)
- “the ones that are really hung up on the content are the ones that the most difficulty accepting a different way of thinking about their course and their assessment” (O)



Main Challenges

- **Scale**
 - The size of the challenge to curriculum map and data collect over a number of programs in a faculty was seen to be daunting by a number of the respondents, especially those universities with large student populations, for example, universities with intakes of over 1000 students in undergraduate programs.
- **Technical**
 - All the universities wanted to have a streamlined, efficient system to assure learning but achieving this provided some technical problems.



The magic words . . .

- Holistic
- Integrated
- Collaborative
- Maintainable



The magic words . . .

- **Holistic** - a whole of program approach was important to ensure students' progress in a way that ensures graduate attributes can be introduced and then further developed before they are asked to demonstrate the standards expected in each graduate attribute on completion of their award.
- **Integrated** - in order for graduate attributes to be valued by academic teaching staff and students they had to be embedded into the curriculum, and linked to assessment.
- **Collaborative** - the process had to be developed in conjunction with the academic teaching staff in an inclusive rather than top down approach, so that staff engaged with, and recognized the importance of the process.
- **Maintainable** - any process that is implemented has to be sustainable to ensure it is not reliant on individuals or resources.

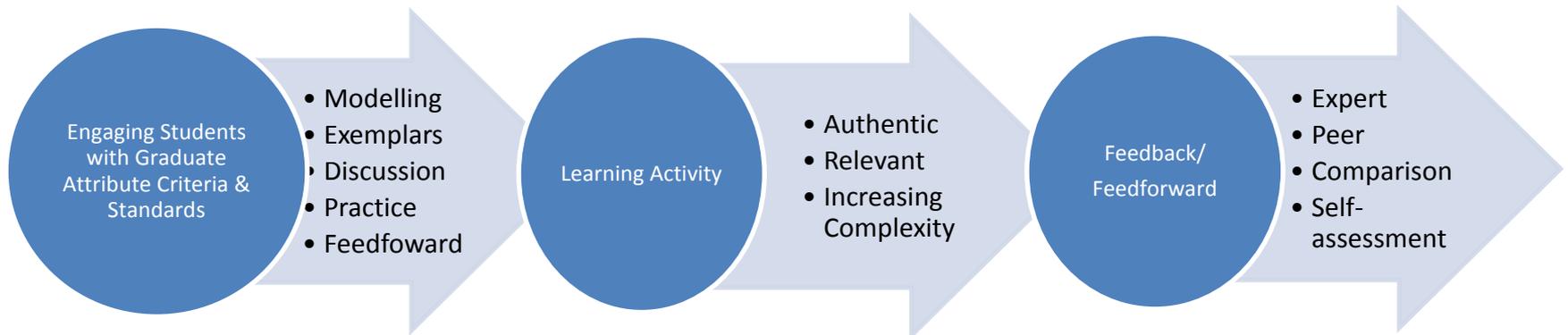


Principles for Design

- **Holistic:**
 - whole of course approach;
 - setting expectations;
 - creating rubrics;
 - calibrating understanding;
 - engaging students (whole of course)
- **Integrated:**
 - authentic, scaffolded assessment;
 - teaching activities;
 - embedded;
 - modeling & exemplars;
 - feedforward
- **Collaborative:**
 - vision
 - executive support
 - guiding team
 - training
 - reward and recognise
 - empowerment
 - communicate for buy-in

Whole of Course Approach

- The proposed whole of course approach model three parts to it:
 - Engaging students
 - Facilitating learning activities
 - Providing feedback/forward which then feeds into the engaging students for the next progressive task.



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 - **empowerment**
 - **communicate for buy-in**

Shared Understanding – What?

- A prime aspect of leading the change is the creation of a shared understanding, which is a precursor to a **shared commitment**.
- Shared understanding is defined as the stakeholders understanding each other's positions well enough to have an intelligent dialogue about their different interpretations, and to **exercise collective intelligence for necessary actions** (Conklin, 2006).

Shared Understanding – Why?

- Developing a shared understanding requires **robust conversation** in order to expose where understanding may be unclear.
- The three structural components that create shared understanding in an organisation are:
 - vision
 - mission
 - values
- These should be well defined and articulated, and authentic.
- Different organisations accomplish it differently, but the best way is to use the collective wisdom through **inclusive activities** (Wertsch, 1991).

Focus Group

- 4 universities recognised as demonstrating “good practice” in AoL
- 2 focus groups at each institution – “Leaders” and “Academics”

What did they say?

Process



Leaders

- Process
 - Continual improvement

It's about implementing strategies to try and improve

Academics

- Process
 - External requirement

... a number of different accrediting bodies - whether it's AQF, AACSB, professional bodies we're trying to do this all for everyone

Change



Leaders

- Change
 - Acceleration
 - Resistance

It is dynamic at the moment in the change in the way that professional bodies are behaving to universities.

I actually think the people that aren't into it at the moment probably never go into it. I mean there are always people who will never change

Academics

- Change
 - Fear
 - Need permission

So I didn't want to go and change things and possibly make it worse or [laughs] - I'd just have to change again.

Skills



Leaders

- Skills
 - Value
 - Student awareness

by making them more aware of the skills that they have developed and how there's been a system in place for this to happen and them being assured, I think it might give them more confidence entering the workforce knowing that at the beginning I couldn't do this but now [I'm looking at investing] what I've got

Academics

- Skills
 - Not my responsibility
 - How do I teach them?

The other thing is that teaching skills is a skill and we are not taught how to teach skills.

It's all very well to say I can sort of fumble my way through writing a lecture or presenting a tutorial or choosing a book for a course reading. But that's not the same as actually knowing a structured way how to develop some skills.

Learning & Teaching



Leaders

- Learning/Teaching
 - Improved quality
 - Better design

The whole goal is to provide a mechanism for continuous learning as well as quality assurance or an assurance of quality in education provision no matter which sector it's in.

before you get to teaching you will have thought about and planned into your curriculum design where you are going to place the teaching learning activity which give the students an opportunity to develop those themes

Academics

- Learning/Teaching
 - Improved quality
 - Better design

So I think the good side is that it forces us to continue to do quality teaching and quality planning for teaching and learning

I think there should be an opportunity to really understand the pedagogy behind teaching those actual skills

Assurance of Learning Impact



Leaders

- AOL
 - Improvement
 - New culture

moving some people beyond a silo approach. So it's an opportunity to get people on board but, at the same time, I think it depends on the culture of the school.

Academics

- AOL
 - Hard
 - Increased workload

there's only so many hours in the day and you get there and go, whilst I would like to pull back and redesign that whole subject.

Cultural Change

- Made up of **the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, attitudes, and behaviours shared by a group of people** (Heathfield, 2009).
- When an organisational culture is already established, people must unlearn the old values, assumptions, and behaviours before they can learn the new ones (Heathfield, 2009).
- Cultural change requires the input of others in decision-making (**participative leadership**). Participation and contributions helps group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process, and to the changes that result (Tannenbaum & Schmitt, 1958).

Cultural Change

- Kotter (2002) suggests the following key strategies to manage cultural change in the workplace:
 - Get the vision right
 - Executive support
 - Build a guiding team
 - Training
 - Reward and Recognise
 - Empowerment
 - Communicate for buy-in

Getting the Vision Right: Changing Institutional Values

- AoL is not an additional requirement for external process but a “**basic educational principle**” that all educators should undertake in order to strive for continuous development
- Requires **integration** of assurance processes into the normal work of academics, with ongoing **sustainability** of this without constant agitation

“My goal would be that it just happened as part of everyone’s natural thing and it was no fuss, seamlessly across the school.”

Executive Support: Strong senior management commitment and leadership demonstrating a constant and high level drive for staff engagement until AoL becomes an institutional norm

- Support of key individuals high up in the organisation, indicating **institutional support** for the approach
- At one Queensland University the continuous improvement agenda driven from the most senior leaders resulted in a rigorous annual unit reporting process, and evaluation of all units and teaching every semester.
- At another Business School, engagement began through getting approval for the process at the highest levels of the university, the executives, the dean, the deputy dean, associate deans, and heads of discipline groups. This then followed into a big drive to help build support amongst staff in discipline groups, preceded by this high level commitment to AoL.

Building a Guiding Team: Developing leadership and champions among unit and program level staff, to share practices and promote the benefits that come from engaging in the process

- Using **participative leadership** was an important element of successfully integrating AoL in institutions.

“... needing a distributed leadership model to be able to make it to work, so it doesn’t just rely on one person to be a champion. Let them sow a few seeds, and get a few other leaders around to help them spread it a bit further”.

- One example was an assurance of learning committee that drew on a representative from each of the disciplines involved. This served to not only have staff members responsible for interpreting the results, but to have key staff members enmeshed in the process. These leaders then fostered engagement through interaction with peers, as well as ensuring the process reflected the experiences of the staff involved.

Training - Providing professional development opportunities to discuss and resolve difficulties and tensions around AoL

- Participants emphasised the importance of setting up **workshops/professional development** as opposed to lectures, and setting up activities as **opportunities to develop skills as well as raise concerns**.
- At one school workshops were held **featuring staff that had implemented AoL** processes well within their programs/units; presenting the experience of someone who shared the perspective of staff was effective means of fostering support.
- One Business School established a Teaching and Learning Team of four teaching and learning consultants and learning designers. They provided **one-on-one support** to individual academics to explore and improve practice.
- **Key resources** created in order to improve staff engagement in AoL:
 - web based resources,
 - tools to support and streamline the AoL process,
 - development of generic rubrics for undergraduate and postgraduate learning goals,
 - inductions for new staff (including tutors and casual staff) and
 - sponsorship for staff to attend external AoL conferences.

Reward and Recognise - Demonstrating success and effectiveness by selling staff on the evidence that AoL makes a difference

- Selling staff on the usefulness and effectiveness of AoL was central to getting engagement, staff need to be able to directly see the benefits in order for them to be invested in the process.

“...what I’ll do now is I’ll take the behaviour changer and I’ll say let’s find someone doing this really well and then let’s promote it”.

- One university used an online program that made it possible for staff to engage with the AoL data directly. Presenting the data as a resource as well as the basis for change and decision-making was important for staff engagement.
- One fairly innovative measure was using program and unit coordinators who had done AoL well, and having them **present at seminars and engage in mentoring and peer support**. By recognising these staff, anxiety levels about the process were reduced amongst other academics.

Empowerment - Inclusive and making the process inclusive with academics collaborating in the development and implementation of the process

- One institution developed a mapping tool so that subject coordinators **collaborated** in not only the mapping of attributes across the program, but identifying and resolving issues around the distribution and gaps in the curriculum.
- At another School of Business, initial work on mapping was done through **workshops** where coordinators where using Post-it notes, they were asked to map out the distribution of the attributes across assessment tasks through a program, from which a number of gaps and overlaps were identified and discussed.

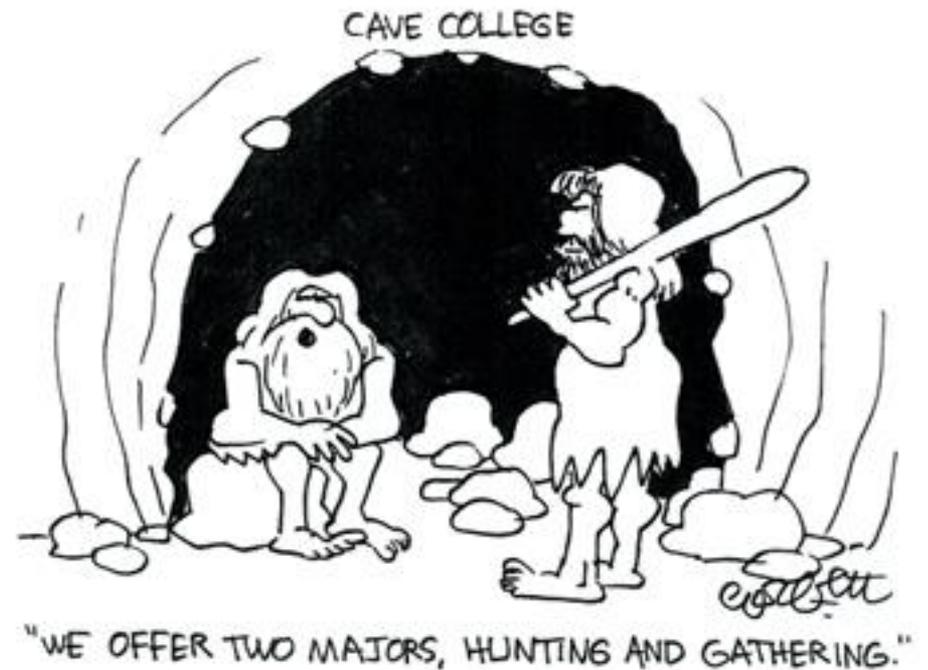
Communicate for Buy-in

- Communications about AoL went hand in hand with professional development activities.
- **Acknowledging** the degree of apprehension around AoL processes was important in order to make it less daunting.
- Important to provide reference material and regular **updates** on the AoL process
- Academics were also canvassed for their **feedback** on the AoL process.

Resources

- Website:
 - <http://assuringlearning.com/>

- [Leadership](#)



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