

Session 4-1

Assessing the Degree Qualifications Profile for Quality Assurance in American Higher Education Accreditation

Tim Gallimore

Ph.D., Vice President, Higher Learning Commission*

Abstract

A cohort of 23 American colleges and universities accredited by the Higher Learning Commission is testing the proposed Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) to develop a new approach to accrediting higher education institutions focusing on quality assurance through innovation for improvement in learning outcomes. This paper focuses on the collaboration model being used by the stakeholders in American higher education to develop, test, and implement the proposed national qualifications framework. The research explores how testing, revising, and integrating a national qualifications framework into accreditation might serve as a quality assurance mechanism to benefit students, graduates and the society at large. The participant observation analytical approach was used to conduct the research for documenting and analyzing the performance of the collaborative model and to assess the policy and practical components of linking the national qualifications framework to the system of accreditation to improve higher education quality. Results of the study suggest that there will be great difficulty in obtaining acceptance of a national qualifications framework and even more difficulty in linking any common learning expectations or degree standards to the regional accreditation system that is the primary mechanism for quality assurance in American higher education. Overlooking the importance of an institution's mission and unique identity to its existence and to assessment of its quality and performance highlights a major flaw in the DQP and limits its potential to serve as a national framework or in a significant role for regional accreditation of institutions.

* The opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent the official position of the Higher Learning Commission.

Introduction

America's fondness for independence has produced a higher education system that is known for its diversity and variety of institutions. It is also a system with no central planning and no uniformed requirements for outcomes or quality. The higher education accreditation system in America is under pressure from the federal government and the public to assure the academic quality of the nation's colleges and universities.¹ President Barak Obama issued the latest high profile call for reform during his State of the Union address in February 2013. The public and legislative demand for outcomes-based accountability is driven by a need to protect consumers and to justify taxpayer subsidies to higher education.²

The demands for increased accountability and improved quality assurance have also placed pressure on accreditors to provide better information and greater transparency in the peer-review process that underpins accreditation. President Obama has called for change in the present system of accreditation or establishment of a "new, alternative system of accreditation" that would provide federal student aid "based on performance and results."³ Accreditors have seized this moment of concern over accountability to challenge educational institutions to also meet accreditors' quality assurance demands as they attempt to hold themselves accountable to the public for the proficiency of their graduates.

The need for change in the accreditation system is even more critical because of the federal government policy agenda that is shared by prominent education foundations to dramatically increase the percentage of Americans who hold postsecondary credentials. Some argue that America's future depends on reaching the national goal to increase educational attainment while ensuring quality. The goal has

¹ The national quality assurance system for colleges and universities is based on six regional accreditation organizations that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to affirm the ability of higher education institutions to deliver appropriate instruction leading to credible academic degrees and certificates. Specialized programmatic accreditors also provide disciplinary quality assurance nationwide.

² The 2012 federal budget for education included \$167 billion in grants, loans, and work-study assistance to help nearly 16 million students and their families pay for college. "Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Summary — February 14, 2011," U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget12/summary/edlite-section1.html>.

³ See Page 5 of "The President's Plan for a Strong Middle Class and a Strong America," White House, Feb. 12, 2013, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/.../sotu_2013_blueprint_embargo.pdf.

been identified, “but the real work will involve a reorientation of how higher-education quality is measured and defined.”⁴

Against this historical context of independence and the expectation to educate more Americans quickly, the Lumina Foundation for Education launched its Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) outlining a shared definition of educational quality that focuses on student learning outcomes.⁵ The DQP is likely to become the national qualifications framework for the United States. At least that is the expressed goal of the Lumina Foundation that is trying to develop a new system of credentialing in the country.⁶

Lumina describes the DQP as the response to a fundamental shift in defining and assuring educational quality that will give meaning and relevance to American college degrees. This shared definition of quality is the start of a framework for clearly defining learning outcomes. Building on the research of educational policy organizations and the efforts of universities in three states to conduct tuning in the disciplines,⁷ Lumina commissioned higher education researchers and policy experts to draft the qualifications framework that it calls a profile.

The DQP outlines competencies in integrative knowledge, specialized knowledge, critical thinking and other intellectual skills, applied learning, and civic learning that describes what college graduates should know and be able to do. The drafters of the profile use a spider’s web to describe the degree framework as a “structured and interconnected series of ladders that simultaneously build on and support one another. The web is strung among five anchor lines, each line representing one of the basic areas of learning. Along each line, three points are fixed

⁴ Kevin Carey, “Fixing Financial Aid,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 4, 2013, http://chronicle.com/article/Fixing-Financial-Aid/137593/?cid=wb&utm_source=wb&utm_medium=en.

⁵ See: http://www.luminafoundation.org/tag/degree_profile/.

⁶ Remarks by Marcus Kolb, Chief Strategy Officer for the Lumina Foundation, at the HLC Pathways Demonstration Project Meeting, February 27, 2013.

⁷ In the Tuning process, each discipline (e.g., business, history, mathematics) establishes reference points and templates for writing statements of concrete learning outcomes—knowledge, the application of acquired knowledge, reasoning capacities, and skills—that qualify students to receive degrees in their chosen fields. For each learning outcome, faculty in the discipline can establish performance criteria or definitions of what a student must demonstrate to attain that outcome. See, Clifford Adelman, “Learning Accountability from Bologna: A Higher Education Policy Primer,” *Institute for Higher Education Policy Issues Brief*, July 2008.

to indicate the extent of learning required to reach each rung on the ladder: the associate degree, the bachelor's degree and the master's."⁸

Realizing the need for external validation of the learning outcomes and to encourage higher education institutions to adopt the framework to define the competence of their graduates, Lumina gave grants to refine and shape the proposed framework.⁹ With those grants, the DQP is being tested by faculty-led teams at more than 100 institutions in 30 states representing every sector of American nonprofit higher education. The goal of the Lumina project is to forge a truly shared definition of quality in higher education.

A cohort of 23 colleges and universities accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is testing the proposed DQP to develop a new approach to accrediting higher education institutions focusing on quality assurance through innovation for improvement in learning outcomes.¹⁰ The 23 pioneer institutions are part of a larger pilot project by the HLC to transform its system of accreditation.¹¹

⁸ See:

<http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/topics/2011-01-25-degreeprofile.html#sthash.Ro99JGDH.dpuf>.

⁹ The Lumina Foundation gave grants to several higher education organizations and to two of the nation's six regional accreditors. The grants ranged from \$425,000 up to \$2.2 million. The Higher Learning Commission received a \$425,000 grant to explore the applicability and usefulness of the Degree Profile through its new Open Pathway model for reaffirmation of accreditation.

¹⁰ See Appendix I for a complete list of the participating colleges and universities.

¹¹ In February 2012, the Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission adopted a new system for accrediting more than 1,100 institutions in its 19 state region of operation. The system is based on separating the compliance portion of the quality assurance evaluation of each institution from the advancement or quality improvement component. The goal of the new approach is to allow institutions that operate optimally under the Commission's accreditation criteria and standards to focus on undertaking substantial quality improvement initiatives that are assessed as part of each institution's 10-year evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation. Under the Commission's "Pathways" accreditation model, institutions are assigned to one of three paths to reaffirmation: the standard pathway, the open pathway, or the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) pathway. Twenty of the institutions that are part of the DQP pilot project are in the open pathway. Their testing, application, and critique of the qualifications profile using a subset of their degree programs constitutes the substantial quality initiative required under the new accreditation system. In addition to instituting the Pathways model, the Commission implemented more specific and rigorous evaluation criteria for the new accreditation system that went into effect on January 1, 2013.

These institutions represent 15 of the 19 states in the Commission's region. Of the participating institutions, nine are two-year community or technical colleges. The others represent the diverse membership of the Commission and include both private and public institutions ranging from baccalaureate liberal arts colleges, small and large masters-level institutions, and doctoral and research universities.

Methodology

Data for this study comes from analysis of the collaboration model being used by the stakeholders in the HLC pilot project to develop, test, and implement the proposed national qualifications framework. The HLC plans to use the outcome of the pilot project to assess whether it is possible to integrate a national qualifications framework into its regional accreditation regime as a quality assurance mechanism to benefit students, graduates and the society at large. The participant observation analytical approach was used to conduct the research. As the HLC representative to some of the institutions participating in the DQP pilot project, I observed the collaborative activities, interviewed the participants and stakeholders, and analyzed the processes and reports associated with the project.

Research data also comes from interviews with Lumina Foundation personnel and the drafters of the DQP. Data about the performance of the collaborative model also comes from debriefing HLC staff managing the project. What follows is a summary of the responses obtained from participants testing the DQP, lessons learned, suggested modifications to the framework, as well as an assessment of the collaborative model for testing and vetting the DQP. The concluding section discusses the policy and practical implications of linking the qualifications framework to the system of accreditation to improve higher education quality.

DQP Pilot Project Activities

The HLC cohort is testing the DQP in areas related to their institutional initiatives and academic programs. The most common projects at the institutions involve mapping and comparing their current learning outcomes to the DQP learning outcomes/competencies as a means for a gap analysis and improvement of the defined outcomes. The gap analyses are being used for alligning the institutions' learning outcomes with the DQP and/or to generate a new profile specific to the institutions' mission focus and academic degrees.¹²

Others are testing the DQP on progressive learning across and between associate, baccalaureate, and master's degrees to see how the pedagogy, curricula, and learning

¹² See Appendix II for an example of an institution-specific degree profile that was developed in the context of the HLC Pilot Project testing the DQP.

from one degree aligns with and leads to the next degree level, or is built upon the previous degree. Some are linking learning across the curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular college experiences to assess their contributions to formation of the DQP competencies. Yet others are developing assessment plans and methodologies to tie all areas of the DQP to assessment of selected academic disciplines and general education requirements. The following is a summary of the components of the DQP that the cohort institutions tested as their quality initiative in the accreditation pilot project:

Mapping and Alignment of Learning Outcomes with the DQP Competencies

- Develop a matrix for categorization and evaluation of the DQP competencies;
- Assess the alignment of DQP competencies with institutional learning outcomes to identify gaps;
- Use the alignment and gap analysis for program review and revision of curricular;
- Adjust curricula and course learning outcomes based on the reviews and analyses of the DQP;
- Merge the DQP outcomes with existing learning outcomes for adoption as college-wide learning outcomes;

Focus on Evaluating Specific Aspects/Learning Areas of the DQP

- Specialized Knowledge and Civic Learning as primary aspects of the college's mission;
- Testing the Civic Engagement DQP standards;
- Focus on the degree to which Broad Integrative Knowledge is acquired and demonstrated in both curricular and co-curricular experiences
- Compare student learning outcomes in capstone courses in each major with *DQP* benchmarks for Applied Learning;

Focus on Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes/Competencies

- Assess current degree framework and the extent to which students meet the standards expressed via our own outcomes and, by extension, the DQP;
- Evaluate the DQP and the institution's learning outcomes via a college-wide assessment mechanism that validates the rigor and relevance of both;
- Explore adequacy of the institution's assessment strategy for the DQP area of learning in Broad Integrative Knowledge;
- Develop/implement/evaluate assessment processes for the DQP outcomes;
- Create, and oversee authentic assessment processes;

Focus on Co-curricular/Extra-curricular Contributions to Learning/Competence

Assess contributions of academic curricular and co-curricular experiences to learning outcomes;

Develop student learning outcomes for co- and extra-curricular activities;

Examine how the residential and extra-curricular programs complement the curriculum;

Focus on Views of Specific Stakeholders in the Higher Education Process/System

Collect reflections, reactions, and feedback from faculty and staff about the extent to which the DQP captures their expectations and desires for student learning as it progresses from the associates, through the bachelors, and then through the master's levels of education;

Provide student perspective regarding the language used within the DQP;

Gather selected student perception of achievement of outcomes in selected majors;

Determine what skills employers desire in graduates/identify workplace competencies;

Evaluate the relevance of the DQP to our community;

Focus on Specific Degree Level/Type of Institution

Examine DQP as it relates to the associate degree and to career and technical education;

Engage in a comparison with other liberal arts institutions testing the DQP;

Compare own vision of liberal arts education to proficiencies for baccalaureate degrees in DQP;

Test/Distinguish Competencies at Different Degree Levels in the DQP

Develop a degree profile for each of the institution's degrees (at the baccalaureate and master's levels) with the intent of defining the meaning of the undergraduate and graduate degrees;

Assess the level and extent of learning outcome achievement at the baccalaureate and master's levels;

Provide empirical evidence of student learning across the associates, bachelors, and master's levels and focusing on Specialized Knowledge and the Applied Learning competencies;

Modify or Implement Components of the DQP Model

Add to DQP statements in a sixth category based on accomplishment of the university mission;

Provide opportunity to practice and develop the competencies required to realize those outcomes in the culminating experience of the degree programs;

Promote Conversation and Collaboration

In a category by itself is the stated project goal of one institution that planned use the DQP to facilitate “campus conversations to promote collaboration, curriculum reform, and building assessment culture.” The institution’s project is ongoing and results are not yet available but its focus on collaboration is pertinent for this study of the HLC pilot project.

The Collaboration Model

The American experiment with a qualifications framework is based on partnership among private philanthropic organizations led by the Lumina Foundation, higher education research and policy organizations, regional accreditors, higher education professional associations, higher education institutions, assessment organizations, employers, and students. Because of an historical tradition of academic freedom, distrust of government control, and fierce insistence on independence and individual choice, those controlling the American higher education system are forced to pursue a collaborative approach if there is to be any possibility for major reform in the system. And the DQP represents the potential for such reform.

The American professorate and its administrative counterpart are know for their reluctance, if not outright resistance to change in academia. Even the drafters of the DQP have acknowledged this cultural artifact of academia as a significant barrier to change.¹³ Faculty often cite academic freedom in defense of their reluctance to disclose the effectiveness of classroom teaching methods, the standards they use to evaluate their students and the learning outcomes or competencies that students gain from traditional lectures and exams administered behind closed doors. Administrators often hide behind the wall of insufficient budgets, intrusive compliance reporting to government agencies, and the burden of accreditation requirements to avoid making

¹³ The first reaction of American college and university leaders to “calls for systemic cultural and operational changes” has been “to hunker down and hold fast to familiar ways of understanding and behaving.” See: Peter Ewell, “The Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment,” (Occasional Paper No.16), Urbana, IL: University for Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, (January, 2013,) P. 4. <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/occasionalpapersixteen.htm>.

major change at academic institutions. Loss of opportunities and the waste of innovative ideas have been the results of these entrenched positions against systemic change and improvement. Cajoling in the quest for consensus appears to be the only viable option to achieve change.

Accreditation in the United States is also based on voluntary submission to peer evaluation guided by the criteria and standards promulgated by private non-profit associations of colleges and universities. Higher education institutions thus engage in self-regulation where acceptable operations and outcomes are determined by group consensus about professionalism and responsibility.

Withdrawal of accreditation and exclusion from the fraternity of peers are the only meaningful sanctions that exist in the volunteer system of accountability and quality assessment. Institutions can still continue to operate despite substandard performance and non-compliance with accreditation standards and criteria. They will however face market pressures and loss of enrollment from students who are concerned with their employment prospects, matriculation to further study, or ability to use their financial subsidy from the state or federal government. Despite the tradition of individualism and voluntary participation, the accreditation system works on collaboration to define standards and to collectively banish the non-compliant from the fold.

The Lumina approach of using demonstration grants to introduce the DQP into the American higher education system was the start of the collaboration model that underlies the HLC pilot project. The HLC established an electronic collaboration network to facilitate conversations among the cohort participants, across DQP initiatives, and to share findings and best practices with higher education institutions in the other accreditation regions that are also testing the DQP.¹⁴

The primary collaboration project activities included:

Attending organizing meetings;

Participating in webinars and forums/workshops;

Posting comments and documents on the collaboration network's electronic portal;

Disseminating project feedback reports; and

Discussing the results of interviews and surveys with the project participants.

The culminating collaborative exercise for the demonstration project was participation of the cohort in a "Think Tank." This was a progressive conversation about the results of mail and telephone surveys about and the collective lessons

¹⁴ See portal at website address:

http://collaborate.hlcommission.org/dqp/index.php?option=com_dashboard&view=dashboard&Itemid=435.

learned by the cohort from all of the project activities. The outcome of the think tank exercise is to inform the individual project reports of each institution and for the HLC to provide feedback to the Lumina Foundation and to the DQP authors about changes that should be made to the profile/qualifications framework.

DQP Project Collaboration Partners

Name of Partner/Entity

Type of Partner

Activities

23 Institutions Accredited by HLC (See complete listing in Appendix I)	Higher Education Institution	Test, adapt and implement components of the DQP
Lumina Foundation for Education	Philanthropic Non-profit Educational Organization	Set national agenda for higher education outcomes, quality and credentialing; fund drafting of the DQP and HEI participation in the pilot project; convene participants; collect participant feedback; revise DQP; publicize and promote acceptance of DQP
The Teagle Foundation	Philanthropic Non-profit Educational Organization	Provide financial support for project
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) --	Higher Education Association	Host DQP collaboration website; track all DQP initiatives; design and conduct performance-based assessment approaches
Higher Learning Commission	Regional Accreditor	Manage all activities and reporting for HLC Pathways DQP Pilot Project
Western Association of Schools	Regional	Collaborate with HLC and

and Colleges	Accreditor	DQP Pilot Cohort Institutions
Council of Independent Colleges	Higher Education Association	Collaborate with HLC and DQP Pilot Cohort Institutions
Association for General and Liberal Studies	Higher Education Association	Collaborate with HLC and DQP Pilot Cohort Institutions

Follow up activities for the project will include each participant preparing a report about the impact that the DQP had at the institutions; making presentations at the HLC Annual Conference; writing a Quality Initiative Report for reaffirmation of the institution's accreditation by the HLC; preparing a final project report of findings for the Lumina Foundation; preparing a report to HLC about the potential use of the DQP for regional accreditation; and attending a final debriefing on the Pathways DQP Pilot Project.

Findings

The collaboration model worked well for the main goal of the pilot project—getting feedback from the institutions about the strengths and limitations of the draft degree profile. It is still too early in the study to get the participants' assessment of how useful the DQP might be to assure quality in the context of regional accreditation. The greatest success of the DQP pilot project and its focus on collaboration has been the conversations that it has generated on the campuses of the cohort institutions. Many project participants report that the DQP facilitated discussions about teaching and learning and increased the priority among faculty and administrators for assessing what students are learning in their classrooms.

Engagement of faculty in assessment is interpreted as success. Convincing faculty to perform systematic and rigorous assessment is rare. Success is determined by getting faculty buy-in to do assessment. Participants did this through a collaborative or integrative planning process that is inclusive of institution stakeholders. The focus is on those who are cajoled into supporting the process and on the committee structures developed to have conversations about assessment and to devise plans to do assessment. The reluctance to do assessment may be due to overemphasis on academic freedom and individual autonomy as basic tenets of faculty role and of academic life generally. Consensus is viewed as antithetical to a life of liberal thought and scholarly inquiry. The subtext is that faculty own the curriculum--and by extension the institution--and do not want to be told what to do.

The quest to be collaborative and to reach consensus does not work well in a national context of individualism and absolutism about academic freedom.¹⁵ The insistence on maintaining institutional uniqueness appeared to limit participants' willingness to even consider that a common standard of academic competence and quality can be articulated, never mind universally adopted. The institutions were willing to take part in the DQP project as an experiment but they expressed no agreement to follow a common schema for defining and assessing the expected outcomes of the higher education system.

The narrow focus on collaboration, for collaboration's sake, put blinders on the participants to the larger issues in higher education and to the goal of the draft qualifications framework. The participants were engaged in specific tasks to evaluate and implement the DQP at their individual institutions. That was their project goal and it may have caused them to overlook the larger purpose of assessing whether the DQP could be adapted to serve as a national framework to define education quality and academic attainment.

Only three of the 23 institutions in the cohort engaged in project activities that tested the main purpose of the DQP: identifying competencies that students should attain at each degree level offered by American colleges and universities. And even those projects focused on how the institutions could develop their own specific degree profile rather than adapt their academic requirements to fit into the proposed national qualifications framework.

Fear and bias impacted the institutions' assessment of the DQP and its potential as a tool for assessing the quality of the entire higher education system and for its deployment in regional accreditation. Participants were adamant in their feedback through surveys, interviews and dialog at group meetings that the DQP not become a government-mandated national minimum standard for higher education quality. To some extent the collaboration model employed for the study allowed the institutions to reinforce their opposition to any form of government intervention or control of the higher education system. This opposition is based largely on unfounded fear and on political ideology that characterizes government as the enemy of individual freedom.

The overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from the feedback of participants in the pilot project is that there is no "one size fits all" model that can be developed to account for the uniqueness and performance of the thousands of accredited institutions in the United States. The collaboration approach also provided safety in numbers for the institutions to insist on slowing down the DQP refinement process

¹⁵ The president of one participating institution reported that faculty often use "academic freedom" to hide their own lack of pedagogical competence and to resist systemic change that can lead to quality improvement.

and any potential early implementation of a national framework. This “go slow” conclusion and recommendation of the cohort is indicative of the bias against change that the higher education system has historically exhibited.

Institutional mission will impede the adoption of the DQP, or any other national qualifications framework. American universities and faculty love their specialness and unique mission focus. This detracts from accepting common learning expectations of graduates at each degree level. Based on the feedback from the pilot project cohort, American higher education institutions are unlikely to abandon their specific mission focus or unique identity to embrace the DQP.

Mission specificity may also prohibit adoption of a common assessment system to evaluate the competencies/learning outcomes of a qualifications framework delineating attainment at the various degree levels regardless of the institution students attend. American higher education institutions have been reluctant to systematically assess institution-wide learning outcomes and individual faculty are even more reluctant to explain how they assess student performance—and by extension their own performance.

Discussion/Conclusion

The Lumina Foundation will use the results of the HLC pilot project and results of the DQP testing being done in other accreditation regions and with other grantees to develop a revised version of the qualifications framework. The project participants have already identified some significant shortcomings in the DQP. First and foremost among these shortcomings is the fact that the theoretical underpinnings of the qualifications framework is missing. The drafters assumed that they did not need to provide the educational philosophy and pedagogical theory that they used to develop the DQP. As a result, intellectual leadership is missing and effective advocacy has been limited among the stakeholders—faculty—who most need to be convinced of the value of a national framework given their perceived success to date without one.

A national conversation is also required to establish the need for a national degree qualifications framework. Furthermore, adoption of the DQP, or any other conception of a qualifications framework, must be placed in the broader context of higher education reform. The piecemeal approach that is now being followed will stymie progress and will surely prevent the revolutionary change that politicians and public alike argue is needed in the higher education system in order to reach the national economic and social goals.

Participants in the pilot project reported that the spider web conception of the DQP framework is not an accurate model for describing how American institutions of higher education conceive of themselves and how they behave. Especially inadequate

is the plan for institutions to add a sixth branch to the spider web to account for outcomes associated with their unique mission or a specific academic focus. Mission differentiation is central to the diverse education system and critical to each institution. Any national framework must put mission at the center--at the bull's eye—of the schema and build out from there if it has any chance at all of gaining widespread acceptance.

The DQP does not account for the contribution of the affective domain of learning to higher education competencies. Assessment, quality improvement and accreditation do not include the affective domain of learning although the DQP and many of the institution-specific frameworks call for students to develop interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets—all competencies that implicate the social and emotional aspects of learning and human development. The DQP learning outcomes for civic engagement, citizenship, and the embrace of democratic ideals and respect for diversity come immediately to mind.

Another concern about the DQP is getting the potential national qualifications framework to work together with programmatic accreditation. American colleges and universities often seek accreditation of specific degree programs like nursing, engineering and business that is independent of the institution-wide accreditation granted by the regional accreditation organizations. One institution in the HLC pilot project struggled to integrate the learning outcomes required for programmatic accreditation into the institution-specific degree profile that it developed by analyzing the DQP. The DQP needs to be revised to account for the impact of programmatic accreditation on any implementation of the national framework.

Another major hurdle in the path of adopting a national qualifications framework is the development of assessment tools to measure mastery of the competencies and learning outcomes defined by the DQP. Many institutions still rely on course-level assessments only. There are multiple problems in relying on faculty grading of course assignments as assessment of competencies that are embedded in courses only—rampant grade inflation being the main problem. Individual faculty assessments do not allow for a uniformed determination of the proficiency or mastery of competencies that is required to establish the meaning of degrees at the various levels. The lack of consistency and rigor in individual faculty grading impacts the accuracy of measuring expected learning outcomes/competencies and ultimately the quality of degrees awarded to candidates. Lumina plans to facilitate, but not fund, development and access to assessment tools to measure the DQP competencies.

Lumina plans to revise the DQP based on feedback from all the projects that it funded to evaluate the profile. The revision will include users guides for students and employers explaining the DQP in language that will be make the learning

expectations more easily understood by these audiences. Lumina also plans to produce a profile for certificates and another for doctoral degrees. The foundation is considering the Australian qualifications framework as a model for building an American system with multiple entry points to the higher education pathway of continuing learning and credentialing.

Lumina's overall goal is to move away from credit hours, or seat time in class, to a system of demonstrating mastery of competencies as the measure of quality in American higher education. Lumina officials view the DQP as a bridge to transition the credentialing system from credits to competencies. "If we can make such competencies clear for many different types of degrees and design useful competency-based assessments--implemented widely--we can help ensure the high quality and consistency of degrees... *high standards without standardization.*"¹⁶ This goal too faces an uphill battle given the resistance of colleges and universities to major reform.

Further research and analysis is needed into the role of federal financing in higher education and its impact on the potential for accreditation reform, quality measurements, and the move to include competencies provided by experiences and entities other than traditional colleges and universities in the system of certifying educational attainment. At present, the public outcry for accountability under the emerging agenda for higher education reform is conflating education cost and education quality as America struggles to develop a qualifications framework that will define quality in the context of accreditation. The danger stems from the gatekeeper role that regional accreditors play in granting higher education institutions access to financial aid dollars. These entities with the power over distribution of federal financial aid appear to have become a de facto "ministry of education" in the United States.

¹⁶ Gary Brown, "What Can Competency-Based Assessment and Degree Qualification Mean for the National Degree Completion Agenda?" *Campus Technology*, 07/18/12, <http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2012/07/18/Competency-Based-Assessment-and-Degree-Qualification.aspx?Page=2>. Brown is Associate Vice Provost for Academic Excellence at Portland State University and a Senior Fellow with Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Appendix I

Institutions in the HLC Pathways Pilot Project Testing the Degree Qualifications Profile

Name of Institution	Highest Degree	Headcount/ Enrollment	Location	Type/ Affiliation
Alexandria Technical and Community College	Associate	2770	Alexandria, Minnesota	Public
Central New Mexico Community College	Associate	29180	Albuquerque, New Mexico	Public
Central Wyoming College	Associate	2316	Riverton, Wyoming	Public
Cochise College	Associate	4912	Douglas, Arizona	Public
Harding University	Doctorate	7056	Searcy, Arkansas	Religious/ Churches of Christ
Hastings College	Masters	1240	Hastings, Nebraska	Religious/ Presbyterian
Henry Ford Community College	Associate	17650	Dearborn, Michigan	Public
Illinois College	Bachelors	956	Jacksonville, Illinois	Private/ Presbyterian
Kansas City Kansas Community College	Associate	7555	Kansas City, Kansas	Public
Macalester College	Bachelors	2005	St Paul, Minnesota	Private/ Presbyterian
Marian University	Masters	2550	Indianapolis, Indiana	Religious/ Catholic
Marshall University	Doctorate	13966	Huntington, West Virginia	Public
Miami University	Doctorate	23240	Oxford, Ohio	Public
New Mexico Jr. College	Associate	4111	Hobbs, New Mexico	Public
Nicolet Area Technical College	Associate	1344	Rhineland, Wisconsin	Public
North Dakota St. College of Science	Associate	3127	Whapeton, North Dakota	Public
North Dakota State University	Doctorate	14399	Fargo, North Dakota	Public/ Land Grant
Otterbein University	Masters	2997	Westerville, Ohio	Private/ Methodist
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College	Masters	1441	St. Mary of the Woods, Indiana	Religious/ Catholic

Saint Mary's College	Bachelors	1510	Notre Dame, IN	Religious/ Catholic
University of Chicago	Doctorate	14979	Chicago, IL	Private
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater	Masters	11629	Whitewater, WI	Public
Westminster College	Bachelors	1102	Fulton, MO	Private/ Presbyterian

<u>Highest Degree Offered</u>	<u>Student Enrollment/Headcount</u>	<u>Institution Type/Control</u>
Associate: 9	Less than 2,500: 8	Public: 13
Baccalaureate: 4	2,501 – 5,000: 6	Private Not-for-Profit: 5
Masters: 5	5,001 – 10,000: 2	Religious: 5
Doctorate: 5	More than 10,000: 7	Land Grant Mission: 1

Appendix II
Degree Profile for Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, Indiana/USA

