

# New Directions in Quality Learning:

Positioning Adult Learning at  
the Head of the Curve

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# The Talk in Brief:

- 1. The New Quality Priorities:**  
From Reputation and Resources to How Students Benefit
- 2. The New Quality Priorities (cont.):**  
How Adult Learning Pointed the Way
- 3. These Reforms Face Headwinds**
- 4. Keeping Adult Programs at the Head of the Quality Curve**





# My Early and Continuing Interest in These Issues:

- Moving Directly from Graduate Study in History to “Competency” Programs for Working Adults
- And, via Winding Roads, to AAC&U and Now Lumina Foundation in Long-Term Work to “Make Excellence Inclusive”



# Making Excellence Inclusive –

Still a work in progress, and the necessary context for *all* work on Quality Learning

*More on This Later...*





# The New Quality Priorities:

From Reputation and Resources

to *How Students (Should) Benefit*



## Two Dominant Narratives on How Students Should Benefit:

- The Focus on **Completion** –  
With Credits As the Key Indicator
- The Focus on **Capability** –  
What Students Can Demonstrably  
Do With Their Learning





# The Good News

Today These Two Narratives are Coming Together In a New Framework for Quality Learning and Student Success:

## The New Quality Priorities

(These reforms are still “work-in-progress” ... and a cause *all* educators should embrace)



# The New Quality Learning Framework

## Overview

- Degrees defined in terms of Learning Outcomes (or competencies, proficiencies, etc.)
- Guided Learning Pathways – clearly linked to intended Learning Outcomes
- Learning by Doing – programs rich in Engaged or “Hands-On” Learning Experiences
- Real-world – a.k.a. Experiential – Learning
- Assessments that show what students can do with their knowledge





# **Additional Quality Reforms “In the Making”**

- Recognition that All Students – Not Just Some Students – Need and Deserve the Most Empowering Forms of Learning
- New blends of Liberal, Big Picture, and Applied (“Hands-On”) Learning. Moving beyond the binary opposition between “liberal arts” and “career-related” studies to a common sense recognition that narrow, blinkered learning is bad for all!



# **Additional Quality Reforms “In the Making”**

- Using New Tools – like e-Portfolio—to Help Students Take Ownership of Their Own Gains in Learning





# The New Quality Priorities:

How Adult Learning Programs Pointed the Way

A History Too Often Overlooked...



# The New Quality Priorities: Student Learning Outcomes

- **Degrees Defined in Terms of Learning Outcomes (Or Competencies, Proficiencies, etc) e.g., The Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) or the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes (See Handout for DQP)**
- Long Ago, Adult Learning Programs Paved The Way for Competency-Framed Learning--In Part as Good Practice, and In Part as a Strategy for Validating Students' Prior Learning In Relation to Degree Requirements
- Today, This Innovation Has Become the New Standard





# Learning Outcomes — Across-the Curriculum, First to Final Year

- Going Forward: The New Challenge is to Develop **SHARED** Ways of Documenting Students' Demonstrated Proficiency Levels – Much More on This Below.
- And, Equally Important, We Need to Help Our Publics See **Beyond the Major**. Quality Learning Means That Students Can Work Collaboratively Across Boundaries – Engaging and Using Diverse Perspectives; Applying Knowledge To New Challenges and New Settings. (**See Handout on DQP**).
- These **Cross-Cutting Learning Outcomes** Are Essential, Not Optional.



# The New Quality Priorities: Guided Learning Pathways

- **Guided Learning Pathways Designed to Foster Essential and Cross-Cutting Learning Outcomes**
- Complete College America has been a key driver in promoting **Guided Pathways to Completion**. This Reform is Needed But Insufficient....
- Adult Learning Programs Show **How Learning Outcomes Can and Should be Mapped** into Each Course or Learning Sequence (*See Handout on Curriculum Mapping*).





# The New Quality Priorities: Guided Pathways/Learning By Doing

- (As Adult Educators Have Long Known), **Assignments Are the Critical Key** to Students' Development of Learning Outcomes or Competencies. Absent Frequent Practice, Proficiency is Unlikely! Guided Learning Pathways Need Clarity About Where and How Students Practice Intended Learning Outcomes.



# The New Quality Priorities: Learning By Doing

- Assignments Don't Just Happen in Courses. Students' Real-World Experiences and Projects are an Important Site for Developing Proficiency. And, Of Course, **Adult Programs Have Been Long-Time Leaders** in Prizing, Describing, and Validating Learning from Experience.





# Learning By Doing

Today, Employers Are Urging This Kind of Real-World, Hands-On, Experiential Learning for **ALL Students**, Not Just Adult Students

*See Handout for Employer Views of Hands-on Learning*



# Learning By Doing

(cont.)

High Impact Practices (HIPs) – including Internships, Service Learning, Collaborative Inquiry Projects and Diversity Learning – Have Become New Priorities Across All Sectors in Postsecondary Education.

In Other Words, The Once Revolutionary Embrace of Experiential Learning By Adult Educators Now is the “New” Quality Learning Priority for All.





# The New Quality Priorities:

## Assessments That Show What Students Can Do With Their Learning

- The New Goal for Assessment Must Be to Move from Grades to Demonstrated Proficiency. Here, Too, Adult Learning Programs Paved the Way By Inventing **Student Portfolios** – Long Before There was any “E” to Add To Portfolios
- However, Assessment in Adult –And ALL--Learning Programs Has Largely Remained a “Cottage Industry,” With Widely Diverse Approaches Making Real Evidence Hard to Find



# A Promising Way Forward:

## The VALUE/Multi-State Collaborative

- **Students' Authentic Work** – Drawn from Assignments Completed for Grades and Credit
- **VALUE Rubrics** – Keyed to a Set of Learning Outcomes/or Competencies that Educators and Employers See as Essential
- **Trained Faculty Assessors** – Who Know How to Use the Rubrics With Integrity in “Blind” Scoring
- **A National Digital Platform** - Enabling Collaborative Assessments Across Institutional and State Boundaries

*To learn more about the validity and reliability of this approach, See On Solid Ground (2017), [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)*





# The VALUE Institute

Launching this year, The VALUE Institute will be a Learning Outcomes collaboration between Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research – the home for National Study of Student Engagement, or NSSE – and AAC&U's VALUE initiative.

“The Institute will provide the country's most comprehensive resource for direct and Indirect evidence of student learning in higher education.” The Institute also will help build **faculty capacity to use VALUE evidence to strengthen student learning and better support student success.** Connecting rubric-based assessments with E-Portfolios will be a priority.



# What VALUE Makes Possible

For the first time, higher education will be able to turn a spotlight on how – and how well – innovative practices are helping students—Adults and Traditional-Age Alike--develop Essential Learning Outcomes across various sites of learning: the workplace, the academy, and programs that emphasize real-world experience.





# What VALUE Makes Possible

(cont.)

We can also look at **commonly espoused and almost-never-assessed learning outcomes** such as Integrative Learning; especially **Integrative Learning** that Deliberately Blends Specialized or Career-Related Learning with the Big Picture and Contextual Learning Emphasized in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, and the Arts.

*See the Integrative Learning Rubric at [www.aacu.org/value](http://www.aacu.org/value)*



# The New Quality Priorities:

**Connecting** Liberal and Specialized Learning

Assessing Integrative Learning Across Disciplines—  
using Specific Assignments and Project as  
Evidence—Can Help Teach Students That They Are  
Expected to **Integrate and Apply** Their Broad  
Learning to Real Questions and Complex Problems.





# The New Quality Priorities:

## Connecting Liberal and Specialized Learning (cont.)

Today's students NEED that Big Picture Thinking to be truly ready for an economy super-charged by innovation.

And society (urgently) needs savvy citizens who can discern the Big Picture as well!



# Unsurprisingly, ALL These Reforms Face Headwinds

We Could Spend an Entire Conference On the Countervailing Forces That Are Pulling Educators Away from These Promising Efforts to Provide the Most Empowering Forms of Learning to All College Students, Especially “New Majority Students” – Older Learners, Learners from Underserved Communities, First Generation Students.





Today, However, I Want To Focus on One  
“Headwind” That We Ourselves Created – and  
That We, Working With Other Educators – Can  
Work to Change.

That Self-Inflicted “Headwind” is the Habit of  
Treating Programs for Adult Learners As Though  
They Were a Special Species of Higher Education  
– Necessarily Needing Their Own Separate  
Policies, Practices, Faculty, Budgets, and Quality  
Assurance Strategies.



Whatever the Argument For Separately Organized Adult Learning Programs in the Past, Today, **Postsecondary Educators Across the Country Are Moving to Adopt The Same Quality Priorities** That Adult Educators Pioneered.

Adult Educators Should **Celebrate This Development** – and Work to Make These New Quality Priorities a **Shared Endeavor** – A Common Commitment to Make Educational Excellence INCLUSIVE for *All* Our Students.





A **Common or Coalition Strategy** is the Best Strategy for Ensuring All Students' Demonstrated Achievement of Quality Learning Outcomes.

It's Also A Smart Strategy for a Time in Which Resources Are Scarce. Coalition Programs are More Likely to Survive and Prosper Than Programs That, By Self-Description and Design, are Intended to be Separate and Self-Directed.



In Sum, Adult Educators Helped Light the Way  
Toward a New Framework for Quality  
Learning that **Serves Learners Better** AND  
Which—**For That Reason**—Is Now Being  
Advanced Across All Parts of Higher Education,  
Broad Access and Elite Alike.





It's Much Too Early to Declare Victory. But It IS a Good Time for Adult Educators to Join Forces With All the Other Reform-Minded Educators Who Are Working Right Now to Make Students' Demonstrated Proficiency the New Standard for Quality in Twenty-First Century Higher Education.



# Keeping Adult Learning Programs at the Head of the Quality Curve

The New C-BEN “Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs” Provides **Excellent Guidelines** for Making Quality Learning the Standard for Competency-Based Education.

(See <http://www.cbenetwork.org/> Resource Library. )





BUT, These Quality Standards are By No Means “Particular” to a Separate Sector of Higher Education. Rather, They Point the Way Toward What It Means for ALL Educators to Take Learning Outcomes Seriously, Not Just as Vague Aspirations, But Rather as a Compass and a Roadmap for Students’ Own Demonstrated Achievement of High Quality Learning.



# The CBEN Quality Framework

- **Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation** (Learning Outcomes That All Students Will Achieve)
- **Clear, Measurable, Meaningful and Integrated Competences** (a.k.a., Learning Outcomes, etc.)
- **Coherent Program and Curriculum Design** (a.k.a. Guided Learning Pathways)
- **Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation** (c.f. The Value Institute)





# The CBEN Quality Framework

(cont.)

- **Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience** (Rich in Learning By Doing)
- **Collaborative Engagement with External Partners** (See Handout for Employers' Views on Quality)
- **Transparency of Student Learning** (c.f. VALUE)
- **Evidence-Driven Continuous Improvement** (Making Quality Learning a Shared Responsibility)



# Making Excellence Inclusive:

Every element in this C-BEN quality framework is just as applicable to “traditional” postsecondary programs and learners as to the adult learners that CBE typically serves. And yet, both for CBE and traditional higher education, **fully meeting these robust quality standards remains, beyond doubt, “work-in-progress.”**





# Making Excellence Inclusive

The Next Step in Making Excellence Inclusive is to Reach Agreement – Across Adult and “Traditional” Programs Alike – That High Education’s Quality Learning Outcomes Need to Include the Proficiencies and Intellectual Skills Sketched In the Degree Qualifications Profile (**See DQP Handout**) and/or in the VALUE Rubrics, Which Are Keyed to the Same Kinds of Learning Described In the DQP.



# Making Excellence Inclusive

**Most Adult Learning Programs Already Seek to Address These DQP/VALUE Learning Outcomes**

**And These Same Learning Outcomes Have Been Widely Adopted (with a variety of descriptions!) Across All Sectors of Postsecondary Education.**

Most of Our Publics Know Very Little About Any of This!

For Our Students' Best Interests – and for Higher Education's Best Interests as Well – It's Time to Join Forces Around A Shared Conception of Quality *And* Around Practices That Help Students Achieve Quality Learning.





**Adult Education Helped Invent The New  
Directions for Quality Learning.**

**Let's Work Now to Make Our Conception  
of Excellence INCLUSIVE, Not Exclusive.**

**High Quality Learning for Each  
and Every College Student  
Can Become Our Next Goal!**

For more, visit [www.carolgearyschneider.net](http://www.carolgearyschneider.net)

