

CAN WE AVOID A CHECKLIST MENTALITY?

Accreditation and outcomes – do they help you teach better? Are the processes meaningful or a waste of time? Do they improve community and technical college education? Is there a checklist mentality out there? Faculty share their views.



FACTC FOCUS



2001

CHECKLISTS

Ron Crawford, Peninsula College

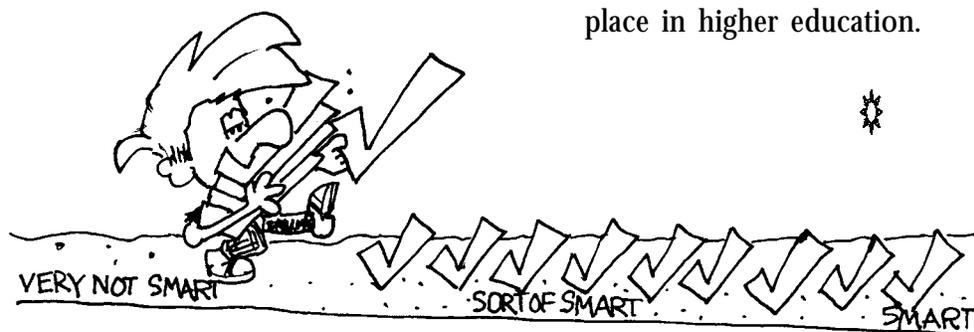
The checklist mentality that permeates education today would have us believe that, in some way, educational competencies can be taught and then simply marked off as we would mark off some milestone passed. Much of the effort that goes into educational “assessment” techniques is based upon this simplistic model of learning. The reality is much different.

I remember a guest lecturer who spoke to the physics classes when I was an undergraduate at Whitman College. He was a well-known physicist from a prestigious graduate university. In the aftermath of an afternoon seminar, in response to some of my questions, he led me to the college library, and we walked the stacks while he pulled book after book off the shelves and added each to the growing pile in my arms—far more than I could possibly read or master. I remember confessing my frustration that I did not understand physics as well as I should.

“Well—look at it this way. You get some mechanics in the first term of an

introductory class. You learn a little bit. Then you take a semester of mechanics at the 300 level when you are a junior. When you get to graduate school, you take another semester of mechanics at the 500 level. And then you probably also take a more advanced course in Relativistic Mechanics. After a while, you understand mechanics pretty well—well enough so that you finally know everything they were trying to teach you in that first freshman course. Nobody ever gets it all the first time around—except maybe a few of the people who wrote those books you are holding.”

Those words of wisdom have remained with me throughout my teaching career. “Nobody ever gets it all the first time around...” If we had no better way of differentiating higher education from learning how to bake a cake, those words seem to me to be sufficient. Our reach should ever try to exceed our grasp. If we could write down a list of behavioral objectives that a student would have to reach in order to display a certain level of mastery of critical thinking “skills,” for example, we would at the same time be excluding whatever we did NOT write down. And we would be reducing an incredibly complex system of thought processes into a series of steps that might very well work when trying to teach someone how to bake a cake—but would have no place in higher education.



Maximum Benefit

Eugene Pistorese

Adjunct Instructor of English, Clark College



From my view at the back of the bus with all of the other adjunct private contractors, I view the accreditation process with significantly less terror than full-time faculty and administrators do. Part of my perspective is based on my knowledge that no matter what anyone says, I am not a shareholder in any institution at which I work, so I don't need to become alarmed at the process. The other part of my perspective comes from my regard for the state's need to guarantee that institutions and government meet their various fiduciary responsibilities to the taxpaying and studying public. My blasé attitude extends to performance outcomes in that they are a necessary evil and the reinventing-of-the-wheel trick du jour.

As I think further about outcomes, I can see that they are based on a significant and important assumption: teachers need to be deliberate in what they do so that students will get the maximum benefit from the teaching act. We need to intend for something specific to happen, and outcomes are one way to make sure that we are, in fact, intentional in our actions—at

the institutional level at least. The difficulty with outcomes, as is true of any attempt to standardize the teaching task, is that they tend to become an end unto themselves. As schools become so deliberate about their outcomes that these schools demand that their teachers explain on course syllabi and in assignment handouts how each of the tasks students do measures some specific set of outcomes, the tool starts ruling the process rather than aiding the process. As teachers, we need to be concerned about taking our outcomes too seriously; when we begin to see the outcomes as the product rather than a part of the methodology, we will find ourselves missing our goal—educated (or skilled) thinkers and practitioners of the various disciplines we teach. We need only look at the K-12 system to see the flaw in becoming ruled by the outcomes. That system seems at times to put so much effort into making sure that the students perform the outcome tasks that it sometimes forgets to make sure that they can read, write, and compute at the end also.



You Want Me to Teach X-ray Technology Without Film?

By Theresa Anderson, Dental Assisting Instructor at Bellingham Technical College

My first teaching job was at an unaccredited private proprietary technical school. I was hired on a Friday afternoon to teach 6 contact hours a day beginning the following Monday. The subject was dental radiology. I arrived that Monday with eager anticipation on how I was going to pass on to the students my radiographic skills; the only trouble was, the department had no x-ray film available. It took me three months of begging and pleading before the x-ray film was finally available to my students, by that time some of them had actually graduated from the program without ever taking a real x-ray. And that was just the beginning of an arsenal of experience that taught me there is value in the accreditation process.

I have now worked five years for a state technical college which has applied for and received the Northwest Accreditation Fully Accredited Status and in a program that is accredited by the American Dental Association. The processes were difficult, time intensive, and at times, frustrating. But given my past experience, I still believe in the accountability accreditation brings: periodic equipment updates, library funding, technology updates, acceptable standards and practices in the areas of financial aid, student services, graduate employability, and credit transfer po-

tential. Accreditation is a quality mark for the college and program

“Institutional effectiveness” and the whole outcomes issue creates mountains of work. Tracking statistics on past graduate hires, current employer’s opinions, and graduate’s skill level is difficult and time consuming. However, what is the alternative? My son’s eighth grade English Teacher had no course outcomes, no assessment methods to assure student’s abilities, and no accountability. The ending result: my son lost a whole year of English and writing skills that he has spent the following years working hard to make up. The class was warm and fuzzy, but it lacked direction, purpose, and effectiveness.

Perhaps that is the gift accreditation brings: direction, purpose and effectiveness. The process forces us to look to where we want to be, what we need to teach, and how effective the methods are that we are currently using. God knows we are all too busy as faculty. Yet, I do believe in “first things first.” If we know where we are headed, have the tools to get there, and take a compass reading every so often, we can be assured we are still making progress towards the given destination: a quality education for our students and developing qualified workers for the community.



On Outcomes, Inspiration, and a Reflection of Purdy's 1973 "Community Colleges: Helping Teachers Teach Better"¹

by Elaynne Rousso, Bellevue Community College

Last August our instructional unit received a memo from the Chair, providing notice that our course learning outcomes would be due in October. The Chair understands the value of outcomes-based education. However, the college administration was pushing at breakneck speed, perhaps stimulated by accreditation pressures and the impending retirement of an involved administrator. The rush was on, and so was the pressure—without the process that people truly need to integrate this framework into their practice (i.e., proper faculty development opportunities around the broader framework and specific uses of designing outcomes and conducting assessment).

This Fall quarter, I've been pondering how the outcomes mandate is being received at my college, wondering whether it will succeed, or if it is more likely to backfire. My colleagues have reinforced these concerns. Many describe the approach as "heavy-handed." Many do not respond well to administrative edicts, especially those that are

not delivered with a clear rationale and connection to teaching practice. Many have also been complaining about the "bureaucratic exercise." All of these feelings are well founded: the faculty, overall, have little to no understanding of the potential benefits of outcomes for teaching and learning..

I was reading Purdy, originally written in 1973, during the frenzy of this college-wide effort, and in the midst of my ruminations about the nature of its institutionalization. Allow me to abridge the abridged version ☺:

Helping teachers improve their skills is becoming an increasingly complex task . . . In-service is too often based on a "we-they" approach: "we," the administrations . . . are telling "you," the faculty, what "you" should do to improve instruction. Rarely have faculty been given an opportunity to define their problems and find solutions. . . .

I completed an in-depth study of the faculty members at a community college that revealed Personal friendships . . . provided support and ideas for experimentation in teaching approaches. Fac-

Continued

¹ (the abridged version by Leslie Purdy in DeZure, Deborah. *Learning from Change*. Stylus from Publishing, Sterling, Virginia, 2000)



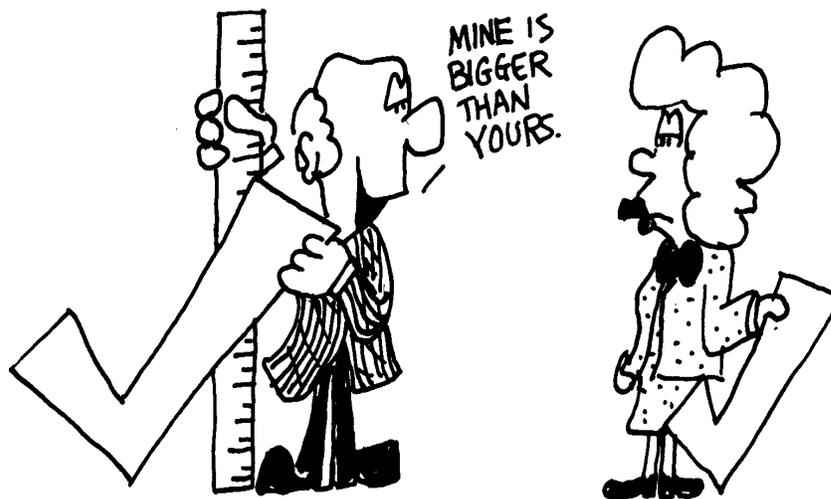
“On Outcomes, Inspiration . . .” Continued

ulty would often ignore information on innovative practices presented at an orientation session or workshop unless a colleague had tried the new machine or technique and gave a personal recommendation.

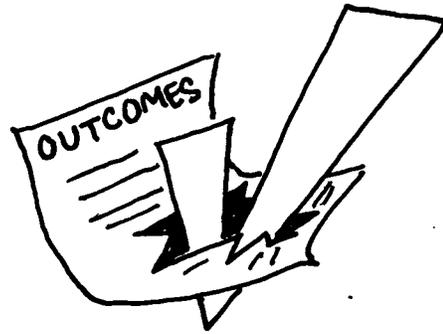
Thus, the college that would generate change would do well to provide opportunities for frequent interaction among teachers who are willing to experiment with new ideas These instructors will both challenge and support each other as well as be models or stimuli for others . . .

These lessons are clear and we have known them *for decades*. Faculty development must closely parallel any goals regarding change and development. In order for us to embrace outcomes assessment, accreditation is a fine motivator and administrative support and encouragement are necessary. However, accreditors won't be fooled by an effort that produces mostly paper and files. The most effective change in higher education transpires person to person, from “bottom-up,” and is inspired only by the inspired.

*“When an organizational mentality is imposed on a problem that requires movement sensibilities,
the result is often despair.”
Parker Palmer*



The Fruit Police and the Teenage Girl



By Steve Quinn, Olympic College

Accreditation and outcomes may not be the subject of a new series on Fox this fall, but I think the network is missing something. The drama certainly has a familiar ring to it.

We know the characters. Administration is played by Buck, lone enforcer of some distant law, like a California Agricultural Inspection Station Officer. Faculty is played by Lola, every boy's first girlfriend. Buck takes his duty very seriously. Lola is master of the all time most aggravating answer to everything: "Well if you don't know then I won't tell you."

We know the story. Lola is in the drivers' seat (sorry administrators, but it's true). Buck waves her to a stop and taps on her window (is that a gun in his holster, or a laser-sighted hole punch?).

"Afternoon, ma'am. Are you carrying any homegrown curriculum?"

"Why, sir, I can't believe you would even ask."

"Nothing personal, ma'am, but do you teach anything for which you cannot prove the relevance?"

"What kind of girl do you think I am, officer?"

"Just answer the question, please. Do your students always know what you are trying

Continued



“Fruit Police” Continued

to teach them?”

“Well if you don’t know, mister, then I am not going to tell you.”

“I’m going to have to take a look in that briefcase.”

Tune in next week when Lola will say, “If you want to see my outcomes, Officer Buck, you’ll have to show me your gun.”

It is a tale of the thinly veiled threats, ridiculous assumptions, and lack of trust that define a truly immature relationship. Ah, young love. What is to be done? I haven’t a clue, but I was so concerned about where this may be going that I wrote to Ginger at “Advice for the Lovelorn.” I have included her reply below.

Dear Marriage Made in Hollywood,

“Staying together for the children” is never a good excuse for a bad relationship, so I will give it to you straight. You have some weeding to do.

Buck –

Don’t get hung up on authority and procedure and the habit of professional mistrust. The rows don’t all have to be straight. The purpose of all of this is not to prove that you can safeguard society from evil infestation but to demystify and celebrate excellent instruction. The unhappiest gardeners are the ones who can list their pesticides more easily than their flowers. Lose the badge and the gun.

Lola –

You have tenure and academic freedom already; don’t pretend that that what goes on in the classroom is somehow subject to sanctuary or confidentiality as well. The only rose that blooms in secret is actually a mushroom (and it is full of fertilizer). Pretending to be mysterious and powerful won’t get you invited to the prom.

Sincerely,
Ginger’s Garden Corner

P.S. For a second opinion try Greg at “Advice for the Lovelorn.”

Tired melodrama or the start of something beautiful? Well if you don’t know...ask Lola.



A Personal Response to the Accreditation Process

By Lady Macbeth, Glamis Castle, Scotland

Although a formal reply to the visiting committee will be forthcoming from the worthy thane my husband, I am pleased that the members have requested a woman's more intimate reflections. (Not that I subscribe, mind you, to notions of a *fair sex* for though I have given suck and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me, I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums and dash'd the brains out . . .)

Excuse me—how I too readily do parenthesize! The habit, I opine, derives from the frequency in our institution of the cognate vice of soliloquy. Macbeth exemplifies the tendency, and one can't gainsay the accreditor's note that his thought shakes so that function is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is but what is not.

So—to the matter at hand. The visitation happened to occur at a most busy time at Glamis. I had been occupied with our own local outcomes assessment (a pleasant seat, the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself) while simultaneously preparing a slumber party for our king, the gentle Duncan. If it's not one thing, it's thirty-three; isn't that ever the way for the professional? Meetings, meetings, reports,

reports. I recognize their utility yet sometimes ask, with our good colleague Banquo, have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner?

Fortunately, the weird sisters came well equipped for their task, and I, no less than everyone else at Glamis, appreciate the difficulty of the long hover through the fog they made to get here. They assembled their cauldron outside upon the heath and got right to business—eye of newt, toe of frog, wool of bat, tongue of dog, and all the rest. Some would call that a “checklist mentality,” but I say a newt's a newt and a bat's a bat, and the castle or institution that isn't equal to a little punctilio when it comes to mixings in the vat is probably not ready for a full-dress inspection in matters weightier.

If I were to fault the sisters in any one small regard, it would be in pronunciation: it's not *glah-miss*, it's *glahms*—rhymes with mom's (which is how I think of it: “Welcome to Glamis, You're home at Mom's.”).

But their suggestions were to the point, excellent. It's time to expand. A thane who isn't expanding is contracting. Glamis—art; Cawdor—shalt be; King—hereafter. Now that's what I call a clear strategic plan. *Continued*



A Personal Response to the Accreditation Process -- continued

And if it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly. That's how we benefit from outside scrutiny: the accreditation process drives us on, screws our courage to the sticking-point, makes us mindful of challenge. Glamis Castle—a community

castle, a castle community—has welcomed the opportunity to envision the future through the weird sisters. As my husband likes to say, "Come what come may, time and the hour runs through the roughest day."

by Rich Baldasty, Spokane Falls Community College



And Where The Hell Is Socrates When It Comes To Assessment?



Mark Doerr, Spokane Falls Community College

Socrates is sitting on a stump when a representative of the council approaches.

Analretentious: Hey, Socrates. We've been going over our documents and we found out you don't have a syllabus.

Socrates: Analretentious! Greetings. You must know the value of the syllabus which is good. You can enlighten me because I have to say, I don't see the point in them.

Analretentious: Ah, you're one of those "creative" faculty who like to make up their lessons "on the go". I hate to stunt your "creativity", but I have to have a syllabus in writing by Monday. I'm the committee chair.

Socrates: You seem to know a great deal about my teachings even though you were never a student, never even sat in on a discourse. Tell me, then, what it is I am doing wrong?

Analretentious: For one thing, you haven't submitted a syllabus. Do you have a syllabus in writing?

Socrates: I have nothing in writing. I let Plato do that. This syllabus must be a most important part of teaching, but I'm not clear exactly why. Could you please help me because I am most ignorant in these matters.

Analretentious: I'll say. Here's the deal. The accreditation team is coming soon and they need not only your syllabus, but an outcomes report. I bet you've never even done a Calo. The team is anxious to get them done.

Socrates: Are you privy to the musings and discussions the members of this team use in coming to their conclusions?

Analretentious: Everybody knows that. It's all in that document we sent out, "How To Plan For Accreditation."

Continued

“Socrates and Assessment” – Continued

Socrates: Then share with me your wisdom Analretentious. I'm eager to understand how this will improve my teaching.

Analretentious: Okay, it goes like this. If you do an outcomes study of your teaching then you'll know whether or not your students are learning what you want them to learn. That means of course filling out your Calo reports which, of course, you haven't done.

Socrates: You must be the one I've heard who knows so much about learning. Tell me, Analretentious, what is the secret to learning?

Analretentious: Well, it has to be innovative. That's one problem with you, Socrates. You're not innovative.

Socrates: Why is it so important to be innovative?

Analretentious: Because new ideas are important. We can't get anywhere if we're stuck with old ideas.

Socrates: I don't quite understand what you mean by the phrase, "can't get anywhere." It's probably just me, but it seems rather vague.

Analretentious: Progress man, we have to make progress and we can't make progress without new ideas.

Socrates: So all new ideas are good?

Analretentious: Well, they're fresh, and that's exciting.

Socrates: What if ideas are like roads and we come to an intersection where perhaps a dozen roads meet? Do we then choose the road to travel by judging which road is the newest?

Analretentious: That's what I would do. I'm always using new ideas and techniques in my classroom. That's why I was teacher of the year. See, I'm in charge of making sure teachers like you fill out their forms. That's better than just teaching.

Socrates: But, I'm still unclear about this road business. What if several roads look like they were built about the same time? How would you judge which road to take then?

Analretentious: It might be kind of hard to figure out which road is newest. I suppose you could call in some experts, have them do a study then write it up, submit it to the committee who could look it over and then vote on it.

Socrates: Why have a vote? I don't understand.

Analretentious: So everyone has a stake in the outcome.

Socrates: So if the road you chose led off of a cliff, at least it wouldn't be your fault. Is that it? Everyone would bear responsibility.

Analretentious: That's ridiculous. Why would anyone build a road that ends up going off a cliff?

Socrates: I often wonder that myself.

ACCREDITATION, OUTCOMES, AND BUREAUTERRORISM

The Incursion of Big Brother in Higher Education

Tony Wilson, Highline Community College

I believe in accreditation. We can readily believe in it on two levels: first, it is the self-governing collegial academic mechanism for quality assurance. As such, it can be well worth the effort—a rigorous, paper-intensive, and, finally, invigorating process.

Second, we can believe in accreditation as the process by which we can determine who can play in the sandbox. While this approach to controlling the market makes for a dark end-run around a truly competitive model, such exclusivity affords us the chance to do our kind of quality control. And, since our more important outcomes are not those which can be measured, it is important that our quality-control mechanisms reflect what is important.

Some regional associations seem to conduct research and openly publish in areas of their activity and concerns. That, too, would be supportable.

However, activities of accreditation bodies lately seem bent on three related thrusts (“thrusts” being more Clintonesque than “targets”) that are clearly destructive. First is their insistence on some kind of statement and measurement of outcomes. No one worth his salt as a teacher thinks that what is most worth doing in education is measurable. Worthwhile education sets people free, and you cannot measure freedom.

Second, while the accreditation agencies have always wanted huge amounts of paper-

work, they now sift through that paperwork looking for certain buzzwords that to them indicate compliance with particular educational philosophies. Think “skills assessment,” “outcomes,” and “critical thinking.” Professors are expected to recite these buzzwords on cue much like salutes in the military or loyalty oaths in the McCarthy era.

Third, the accreditation agencies ride roughshod over any workable form of collegial governance. Self-governing academic activity is seen as invalid unless it can be documented as being under administrative, nonacademic control. Think post-tenure reviews and administrative appointments to, and on, tenure committees.

Worthy education brings together the student and the teacher, who both connect within the discipline through which the student learns freedom. The recent thrusts toward outcomes and management control in education subvert the process in favor of the needs of corporate interests, Big Brother, and Big Brother’s management-oriented surrogates. Such is the clout of accreditation that the bogeyman result of these thrusts is a sort of Dilbertized, paperwork-intensive bureauterrorism. We need to bring our accreditation agencies back into the collegial mode lest we become mere training institutions for life in corporate cubicles.





FACTC Focus is a publication of:

FACULTY ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES with the purpose of presenting diverse views on faculty issues. The opinions presented herein are not necessarily the view of FACTC, its officers or representatives.

Elayne Rousso, FACTC President
@ Bellevue Community College
3000 Landerholm Circle S.E., D110
Bellevue, WA 98007
(425) 564-5143
e-mail: erousso@bcc.ctc.edu

The FACTC home page is on the State Board (SBCTC) site:

<http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/College/college.htm>

See SBCTC and FACTC calendar of events at the following site:

<http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Resource/rescal.htm>

FACTC officers:

President: Elayne Rousso, Bellevue Community College
Vice-president: Randy Nelson, South Seattle Community College
Treasurer: Larry Woodruff, Lower Columbia Community College.
Secretary: Phyllis Villeneuve, South Puget Sound Community College

Editor of this issue of FACTC Focus: Mark Doerr, Spokane Falls Community College, who also did the artwork.