DQP
DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

The US Tuning Pilots

Minnesota, Indiana and Utah were the first three states to engage in Tuning. Their methodology, though similar in many ways to both later states Texas and Kentucky, was also different. All three pilot states sent representatives to a kickoff meeting in Chicago hosted by Lumina. Each group then retreated to its own state to work through the process.

In all three of the pilot Tuning states, there had been interest in making transfer more transparent to students, parents and the public and to align curricula within majors and across institutions so that students could transfer from one institution to another within the state without losing credits or having to repeat coursework. There was the caveat to the Tuning process however: that there should be no loss of individuality in the way a faculty member approached teaching the course.

The following disciplines were tuned in the three pilot states: Biology, Chemistry, Graphic Arts, History, Elementary Education, and Physics. The first wave of tuning in Texas involved all permutations of mechanical engineering; the second wave is engaged in tuning all of the Bio Medical Engineering/science areas: Biology, Chemistry, Biomedical Engineering, and Chemical Engineering. Kentucky is working with five disciplines that have not been tuned before except for one: Biology, Business, Elementary Education, Nursing and Social Work.

Of the three pilot states, Minnesota was/is the only union state and one of its chief findings about the process is that it that there was not enough time to work with all the stakeholders. This may have been because the time line was a bit shorter for the first group but it may also reflect the reality that when there are more stakeholders, as is the case in a union state, planners need to allow for more time to make sure that everyone is comfortable with the process and that whatever agreements need to be created are done before the process begins.

Transfer from two year to four year schools in Minnesota had previously resulted in students losing credits. The Minnesota Legislature had passed laws to make the transfer of credits easier across the segments by creating the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. This collective group of institutions worked jointly with the University of Minnesota to develop the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) which has eliminated most transfer issues in the lower division General Education core. However, alignment in the majors is still not advanced and it was in the interest of getting better alignment in the

majors that brought Minnesota into the Tuning process. "The state of Minnesota was interested in testing whether enabling faculty to meet and work through the Tuning process could enable greater alignment of the core while preserving the unique aspects of the degree requirements that are part of the strength of American higher education."[1]

The most potent finding in Minnesota was that the Tuning process brought faculty together by discipline from across the varied higher education institutions and that these faculty found that there was the critical, common ground in the discipline which led to increased trust among the faculty that transfer students were prepared to do work at the transfer institution. It has helped the state with articulation issues in these disciplines for the same reasons.

Indiana's findings also iterated the positive attributes of having conversations across the spectrum of higher education institutions in the state. Equally important, in terms of lessons learned, was the conversation around disciplines that had learning outcomes and competencies spelled out in a variety of ways. For example: the Chemistry faculty adopted the requirements of the American Chemical Society and used those requirements as a base to create their competencies for the discipline and to emphasize the scaffolding nature of the competencies in the study of the discipline.

History, which is not guided by a strong accrediting or professional group, relied heavily on work that had already been done by Indiana faculty at one of the higher education institutions.[2] Elementary Education, a discipline which has many state and professional standards to meet legally before the degree may be awarded, had a difficult time developing anything beyond what was already mandated.

In Indiana, the Tuning work was seen as building on the 2008 Strategic Plan by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education that specifically called for "ever-improving quality and accountability, particularly in the arena of learning outcomes, and for international benchmarking."[3] Additionally, the Commission had called for participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) because the VSA included emphasis on articulating Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).[4] The Tuning USA initiative appeared to complement the VSA process.

Utah, with a long history of having majors meetings, having already defined general education among the eight higher education institutions in Utah, felt that the Tuning process of aligning degree outcomes would complement and extend the work already done in the state.

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Initial Expansion

In the late spring of 2009, Texas began to tune the disciplines of Civil and Mechanical engineering. In fall, 2010, Kentucky became the fifth state to tune in the US, taking on the disciplines of Business, Biology, Elementary Education, Nursing and Social Work. In spring 2010, Texas finished its tuning of Civil and Mechanical engineering and began to tune Biomedical and Industrial Engineering, as well as Biology and Chemistry.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) initiated that state's Tuning initiative and has been the lead agency in coordinating the Tuning work. Texas decided to tune the discipline of engineering and began that process with a set of more discrete engineering areas. The large group was convened and their first meeting with each other began with an overview of Tuning and then breakouts by sub-disciplines. The breakouts were to allow the smaller groups to get to know one another and establish ground rules for how the subgroups would work. The THECB scheduled four face-to-face meetings over a period of a year. All subsequent work was handled using telecommunications. Participants at the initial meeting were provided with cameras that hooked to their computers (if their computer did not have a camera built in) to facilitate meetings held virtually.

Kentucky has used a different combination of face-to-face and telecommunications approaches for the Tuning work. Like Texas, Kentucky did a large state-wide kickoff with leadership for the event provided by the Senior Associate for Academic Affairs at the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. Kentucky leaders chose to have the discipline groups meet face-to-face once a month over a period of five months. In the interim, groups communicated with each other via the web and used Blackboard to post work.

In all of the states, there has been support and encouragement from either the governor's office and/or the legislature. Additionally, the chancellors/provosts and deans at respective higher education institutions have been supportive of the work. It is important to have the support of these groups to ensure that the work will have sustainability once complete.

What is interesting to note is the process of Tuning, regardless of where, has as its foremost outcome faculty building a greater sense of trust with each other extending beyond their own institutions. This trust has potential to assure that Tuning will continue as an ongoing process and it opens up the possibilities of additional cross institutional work. This sense of trust is not only amongst faculty from across disciplines and institutions but within institutions with deans and administrative staff as well. In an

interview with one dean, it was posited that the trust built as a result of the Tuning process has made other institutional processes easier to negotiate with faculty.

References

1. The Minnesota Office of Higher Education Final Report, Grant Number 6142 Tuning Project, p. 3.

2. Tuning USA Final Report: The 2009 Indiana Pilot, Revised June, 2010. p. 10

3. Tuning USA Final Report: The 2009 Indiana Pilot, Revised June, 2010, p. 6.

4. Ibid, p. 7.