It can be helpful to visualize the DQP in terms of a spider web: a structured, interconnected series of levels (or capture spirals) 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 to indicate the extent of learning required to reach each level: the associate degree, the bachelor’s degree, and the master’s.

The shape of the spider web — its boundaries, slopes and distances between learning points — is determined, in practice, as the institution adopts and articulates its version of the DQP. That is what is meant by flexibility as opposed to standardization.

Once the points are fixed, a “core” of learning appears — the combination of proficiencies from each of the five areas of learning that collectively define the requirements for a specific degree at a specific institution. These cores of learning expand progressively outward as students extend their knowledge — a growth predictable and transparent to all concerned, the antithesis of standardization. In fact, though certain core proficiencies are expected in all programs, the range of course content can vary widely — by institution, by field of study, even by individual class section.

3 degrees
5 areas of learning
3 types of institutions

To illustrate the DQP’s ability to accommodate institutional and program flexibility, three types of institutions are plotted on the spider web. Though the bachelor’s degree requirements for all three institutions fully encompass the five core areas of DQP learning, it is clear that each institution also has discrete areas of emphasis and focus for its students.

Institution A is a mid-sized, private institution that emphasizes cooperative programs. It values the opportunities presented by mid-level bachelor’s degree programs. As a former technology institute, it is focused on producing engineers, though it has recently developed a holistic approach to education.

Institution B is a large, public, land-grant research institution that has served as the economic driver for its region for more than a century. In the past, the focus has been on agriculture and applied research, but it has recently focused on mentoring and preparation for life after higher education.

Institution C is a large, regional institution with a geographically diverse student body and significant off-campus delivery. This institution has only recently adopted the framework. Its core programs are based on a comprehensive, blended approach to education and preparation for the workforce, with courses taught by faculty with substantial workplace experience in their field of study.