

# National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

June 2016

## DQP Case Study: McKendree University

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McKendree University, a small, private university in Lebanon, Illinois, is the oldest college in Illinois, opening in 1828, and the oldest college in the United States with continuous ties to the United Methodist Church. Founded as Lebanon Seminary, then McKendree College, it officially became McKendree University in July 2007. McKendree offers 48 majors, four graduate programs, and one doctorate program for just over 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students. With an average class size of 14, student learning is at the forefront of McKendree's mission. They have attained national recognition from Colleges of Distinction as a "College of Distinction" and from U.S. News and World Report as one of America's best colleges. McKendree has two additional campuses in Louisville and Radcliff, Kentucky, as well as a center at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. They also offer online degrees and an accelerated instruction program geared towards adult learners.

The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) selected McKendree University as a case study site for its use of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) to refine their Diverse Perspectives outcome, as well as their innovative crosswalk of the DQP's five areas of learning with McKendree's seven student learning outcomes, the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Division II Life in the Balance key attributes.<sup>1</sup> McKendree was also a participant in the [Council of Independent Colleges \(CIC\) Consortium on DQP](#) work. McKendree's work with the DQP shows the ways in which the DQP can strengthen local initiatives, as well as the importance of faculty engagement in assessment.

NILOA visited McKendree in October 2015, meeting with their Provost, Associate Dean for Institutional Effectiveness, Assessment Committee members, and student government. A handbook was provided, including documents on McKendree's Assessment 2.0 (described below), McKendree's student learning outcomes curricular map with general education courses and High-Impact Practices, and the Student Learning, Assessment, and Teaching Effectiveness (SLATE) diversity rubric.

The SLATE committee was formed when the assessment, general education and faculty development committees decided to merge into one committee. The SLATE committee's responsibilities include overseeing the assessment activities of Assessment 2.0 and developing and planning teaching workshops.

**The Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) presents outcomes for three levels of degrees (Associate, Baccalaureate, and Master's), and five broad categories of proficiencies: Specialized Knowledge, Broad and Integrative Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, Applied and Collaborative Learning, and Civic and Global Learning.**

To learn more about the DQP and institutions working with it see:  
<http://www.degreeprofile.org>

<sup>1</sup> McKendree decided to include the NCAA attributes because of the NCAA's attention to student learning. McKendree's Associate Dean for Institutional Effectiveness was also a member of the university's NCAA committee when similarities were noticed between the NCAA attributes and McKendree's student learning outcomes.

## Institutional Context

McKendree University's mission consists of four shared components: Responsible Citizenship, Engagement, Academic Excellence, and Lifelong Learning, also known as REAL. McKendree's seven learning outcomes stem directly from their mission and the components of REAL addressing: Diverse Perspectives, Personal and Social Responsibility, Effective Communication, Inquiry and Problem Solving, and Discipline-Specific Competence (see Figure 1).

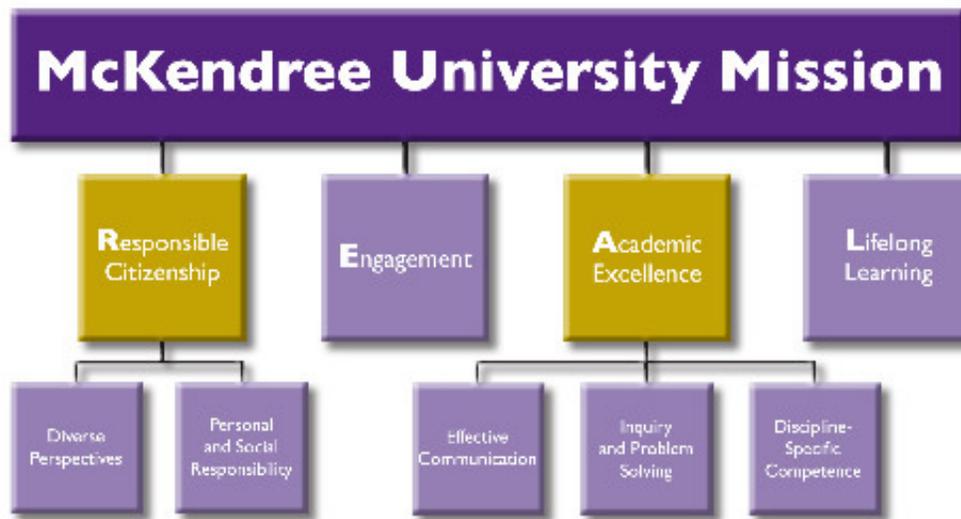


Figure 1. McKendree University Student Learning Outcomes

Identifying the seven outcomes was the first step in McKendree's Assessment 2.0 process. Launched in 2010, 2.0 is a seven-year assessment initiative to revise and implement student learning outcomes for undergraduates (see <https://www.mckendree.edu/offices/provost/assessment/>), as well as to develop assessment tools. For each outcome, there is one year of planning and development through the SLATE committee, and then university-wide implementation the next year. The assessment plan is implemented concurrently while the next outcome is under planning and development by a different subcommittee (see Figure 2).

When McKendree began re-envisioning their student learning outcomes as part of Assessment 2.0, their idea to focus on one outcome per year stemmed from the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) Assessment Workshop. It was not possible to tackle all seven learning outcomes simultaneously when they wanted to revise, develop, and implement a plan of assessment tools for each learning outcome. Assessment 2.0 allows McKendree to take a deep dive on one outcome year-by-year, providing faculty and staff (and students) with the opportunity to become fully engrossed in each outcome and build consensus and shared understanding.

McKendree's Associate Dean for Institutional Effectiveness, Assessment Coordinator, and SLATE committee intentionally chose the order of the outcomes. For example, they started with Engagement because the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was approaching, aiming to reform the learning outcome and increase their students' engagement before the survey was distributed. In 2013-2014, they chose Effective Communication because it coincided with the planned restructuring of their writing center. McKendree intentionally timed their outcomes to bring initiatives together and build on work already underway.

Year	Planning and Development	Implementation
2010-2011	Engagement  ENGAGEMENT	
2011-2012	Personal and Social Responsibility  RESPONSIBILITY	Engagement  ENGAGEMENT
2012-2013	Diverse Perspectives  DIVERSITY	Personal and Social Responsibility  RESPONSIBILITY
2013-2014	Effective Communication  COMMUNICATION	Diverse Perspectives  DIVERSITY
2014-2015	Inquiry and Problem Solving  INQUIRY	Effective Communication  COMMUNICATION
2015-2016	Lifelong Learning  LIFELONG LEARNING	Inquiry and Problem Solving  INQUIRY
2016-2017	New Outcome or Repeat Cycle  ENGAGEMENT	Lifelong Learning  LIFELONG LEARNING

Figure 2. McKendree University Assessment 2.0 Timeline

### Student-Focused

McKendree University students know the institution’s mission and learning outcomes; faculty and administrators have made it a priority. Learning outcomes are engrained in McKendree students’ minds. A framed picture with the mission statement and REAL is hanging in every office and classroom, and the outcomes are mentioned everywhere from President and Provost speeches to brown bag lunches, teaching workshops, student activities, and other major university events. Students know what outcome is being developed each year; the university termed it the “Year Of” the specific learning outcome, including designing icons for each. When students are asked if they know what REAL stands for, they do not hesitate to say, “Yes.” While meeting with McKendree’s student government as part of the development of this case study, students said the professors take the time to discuss the learning outcomes and what is expected of them, signaling the importance of the culture of assessment McKendree has created on campus. One student said, “...the professors really emphasize making sure that you’re not cramming, cramming, cramming and then taking a test and forgetting everything. They want to make sure that you’re actually fundamentally understanding information and how to apply it later on.”

Students at McKendree have also been given hands-on experience in articulating and defining what they have been learning through the inclusion of two subsequent student governments crosswalking McKendree's SLO's with the DQP's five areas of learning. The students were given handouts of each and then queried to match McKendree's outcomes within the DQP. Most students chose more than one DQP area of learning for each McKendree SLO because they thought their own courses incorporated many of the DQP proficiencies. The exercise provided administrators with the voice of students regarding their perceived alignment of various learning outcomes.

In addition to making student learning outcomes explicit and visible to students and involving them in sense-making around those outcomes, assessment results are shared with students. Although faculty meet in a "Closing the Loop" workshop that occurs after students have left for the summer, during the year McKendree offers brown bag lunches, guest speakers, and an assessment report on the shared drive (to which students have access), as well as on their website, to communicate with students about the results.

## Faculty Driven

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Assessment at McKendree is faculty-driven; faculty constitute the assessment process and assessment is part of McKendree's culture. On separate occasions, faculty mentioned to the interviewers that the process would not thrive if it was directed from the top-down. Administrators stated that while they might have chosen different learning outcomes themselves, they knew the process had to be faculty-driven to succeed.

Over fifty percent of McKendree's faculty have been on SLATE and/or a learning outcome subcommittee. Each subcommittee has a two-year term (one for the development year and one for the implementation year). Being on a committee is prestigious and competitive; faculty must apply and only seven members (including at least one staff) are allowed on each. The committees also have strict timelines (see <https://www.mckendree.edu/offices/provost/assessment/current-assessment-activities.php>) for what must be achieved by a certain month.

Regarding professional development, McKendree plans three workshops, similar to mini-conferences, each year for faculty and staff and each include an assessment aspect. Their "Closing the Loop" workshop is in May of each year, where the SLATE committees share and discuss the data from that year's "Year Of" learning outcome. Faculty and administrators agree, however, that they need to get better at the next action steps after analyzing and reviewing data.

McKendree's assessment work has changed some faculty's teaching practices. Departments have implemented rubrics, and students often see the same rubric across different disciplines. Faculty reported that, based on reviewing student work through the embedded rubrics, students are meeting the performance indicators. Faculty are also ensuring that curriculum is aligning and becoming more intentional in designing assignments. The administration provides support—financially as well as holding faculty accountable—of this work, and faculty recognize and appreciate that.

## Initial Exploration of the DQP through the Council of Independent Colleges Consortium and McKendree's Crosswalk

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Initial exploration of the DQP began through McKendree's involvement in the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC)/DQP Consortium in 2012. While McKendree had already begun work on Assessment 2.0, involvement in the CIC/DQP Consortium allowed them to strengthen and improve their efforts for ensuring the academic quality of degrees offered.

The [CIC/DQP Consortium](#), funded by Lumina Foundation, was a network of 25 institutions selected to work together and find ways in which the DQP could develop new, or advance existing, on-campus initiatives

to improve academic programs. Part of the requirements for the application process was that an institution's proposed project had to focus on the quality of an existing plan or initiative and that the work had to fit within the two-year timeline of CIC/DQP Consortium project –McKendree's Assessment 2.0 fit both requirements.

Once McKendree was selected as a participant, it was grouped into a cluster of other selected institutions focusing on campus assessment issues. Due to the timing of the CIC/DQP Consortium, McKendree's work for the Consortium centered on the Diverse Perspectives outcome and the appreciation of diversity within their [Assessment 2.0 timeline](#). The planning and development for Diverse Perspectives began in the 2012 academic year with the implementation the following academic year in 2013. Their goals during the CIC/DQP Consortium were to “use the DQP to further articulate the construct and develop measurable performance indicators, identify assessment tools to measure student mastery of the outcome, and to develop a plan for promoting faculty and student understanding of the diversity outcomes.”

To begin their work, faculty from the SLATE committee for the Diverse Perspectives outcome used the DQP to help further refine the diversity outcome. The DQP prompted the SLATE committee to change the language of the expected outcome from “Appreciation of Diversity” to “Diverse Perspectives.” This change reflects a realization that “Appreciation of Diversity” might be challenging, not only to define as an outcome, but also to measure. Because the DQP emphasizes clear learning outcomes, revising the language of the outcome to be “Diverse Perspectives” allowed the SLATE committee to focus on clarifying what it means for students to take diverse perspectives instead of simply appreciating diversity. The SLATE committee then identified cross-cultural courses within their general education coursework that would help students meet and demonstrate engagement with diverse perspectives. Since the work of Assessment 2.0 is a campus-wide initiative and faculty-driven, professional development workshops for faculty members were also established to help complement the diverse perspectives outcome.

After the initial revision of the language for the diversity outcome, McKendree's work in the CIC/DQP Consortium allowed them to develop the crosswalk (see Figure 3). The SLATE committee constructed a crosswalk to:

- explore the relationship between the learning proficiencies of each initiative they were involved in (DQP, LEAP, NCAA) against McKendree's SLOs.
- to align the outcomes of the various initiatives in order to further refine their institutional SLOs and identify a unifying language between the initiatives with their own SLOs.

The DQP gave McKendree validity when they started the crosswalk work because they recognized that many of their SLOs were similar to the DQP proficiencies in the five areas of learning. This recognition of similar outcomes and proficiencies between their SLOs and the DQP provided great motivation for the SLATE committee to continue their progress of work within the Assessment 2.0 initiative. The process of refining language within their SLOs while developing the crosswalk helped the SLATE committee to work collaboratively on engaging with the DQP.

The SLATE committee then used the DQP and the crosswalk to develop a diversity rubric which was embedded in each cross-cultural general education course. The [rubric](#) includes indicators such as awareness of culture, open-mindedness, interactions with individuals from different cultures, use of resources from different cultures, awareness of the way that media influences worldviews, and language awareness. It also assesses whether a student has been exposed to, engaged with, or has embraced the indicators in a cross-cultural course.

When the two-year timeframe of the CIC/DQP Consortium ended and McKendree compiled data from the various assessment measures and performance indicators throughout the two years of planning and

implementing for the Diverse Perspectives outcomes, they reported that students were more engaged and embraced diversity through cross-cultural coursework and co-curricular experiences. The SLATE subcommittee set a goal of having 80% of students scoring “engaged” or above based on the indicators in the diversity rubric for the cross-cultural courses, and the goal was met in the 2014 spring semester. In addition, the SLATE committee decided in 2013 that an embedded rubric will be assigned to each cross-cultural course going forward to gauge students’ exposure, engagement, and embracement of diversity. For co-curricular activities, the SLATE committee developed a question to add to the Senior Exit Survey (administered each year to graduating students) that lets students rate the co-curricular experiences at McKendree on valuing those from different backgrounds. While the committee’s mean scoring goal was not met, students did report that co-curricular experiences such as guest speakers, service learning and internships (other co-curricular activities for Year of Diversity can be found here: <https://www.mckendree.edu/offices/multicultural/diverse-perspectives.php>) did help them value those from different backgrounds.

McKendree University Student Learning Outcomes	Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) Areas of Learning	AAC & U LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes	NCAA Life in the Balance Key Attributes
Appreciation of Diversity	Engaging Diverse Perspectives	Intercultural Knowledge and Competence	Sportsmanship
Personal, Social, Ethical, and Civic Responsibility	Civic Learning	Personal and Social Responsibility Civic Knowledge and Engagement Ethical Reasoning and Action	Service
Engagement			Passion
Effective Communication	Communication Fluency	Written and Oral Communication Critical and Creative Thinking	Learning
Inquiry and Problem Solving	Analytic Inquiry Quantitative Fluency	Inquiry and Analysis Quantitative Literacy Teamwork and Problem Solving Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World	Resourcefulness
Discipline Specific Competence	Use of Information Resources Specialized Knowledge	Information Literacy	Learning
Lifelong Learning	Broad, Integrative Knowledge Applied Learning	Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning Integrative and Applied Learning	Balance

Figure 3. McKendree University’s Crosswalk

McKendree’s involvement with the CIC/DQP Consortium allowed them to take the lessons learned from working with the DQP, such as being able to better communicate desired learning outcomes and create coherent learning experiences for all students, and apply them campus-wide. With the structure of Assessment 2.0 already in place, work in the CIC/DQP Consortium offered a deeper look at evaluating student learning and another way to strengthen undergraduate education. What they discovered and what has worked extremely well at McKendree is communication and commitment. Members of the SLATE committee and faculty across campus are committed because they have reached a shared understanding of institutional SLOs. In turn, the

outcomes are communicated to students on a regular basis—not only when it is the specific “Year Of,” but through inclusion of the mission statement in every classroom, learning outcomes in syllabi and consistent and constant messaging.

## A Focus on the Capstone Course

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While McKendree’s CIC/DQP Consortium work was productive and successful in defining the Diverse Perspectives outcome, that work also identified other areas where the academic quality of degrees could be improved. These included the addition of capstone courses in every academic program, with some programs being further along in the process than others. Before their work with the DQP, not every program had a capstone course, but the DQP helped to identify areas where there might be gaps in student learning that a capstone course could fill. It also led to more professional development for faculty in relation to capstone coursework and experiences.

The SLATE committee at McKendree University believes the buy-in and engagement of the faculty to improve student learning helped with the expansion of the capstone courses in every program. The DQP “stimulated their thinking about High-Impact Practices including capstone experiences” and the SLATE committee believes they were able to convey the importance of capstone courses to faculty because it was not a top-down approach. Instead, because the nature of Assessment 2.0 is faculty-driven and collaborative, the SLATE committee acted as colleagues to faculty across campus in emphasizing the significance of capstone courses as a culmination to undergraduate education. As a result of the faculty-driven approach, SLATE has seen an increase in faculty members talking about how they can improve the curriculum.

Related to the inclusion of capstone courses in every program was an increase among faculty to begin developing signature assignments and rubrics. Signature assignments are assignments structured to provide evidence of students meeting desired learning outcomes. They require students to demonstrate mastery of more than one learning outcome and can be embedded throughout the curriculum to help students apply knowledge to “real-world” applications (AAC&U, n. d.). Rubrics assist students in seeing what the expected outcomes are for an assignment, and they have been introduced in many courses at McKendree, including the diversity rubric mentioned earlier developed for courses during the Year of Diversity.

## Final Thoughts

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McKendree University believes assessment is done to better the institution, not for compliance purposes, and serves as an example of the power of faculty-driven assessment at an institution-level that aligns well with documented principles of assessment practice (Kuh, et al, 2015; NILOA, 2016). Without the level of buy-in and engagement of the faculty to join the SLATE committee, the effort would not be collaborative across campus. When planning to introduce Assessment 2.0, the Associate Dean and the Provost knew that in order for the initiative to be successful, faculty ownership was imperative.

While McKendree engaged with the DQP, what drives McKendree’s assessment efforts is the understanding of the value of student learning outcomes. McKendree was already thoughtful in having an approach to assessment such as Assessment 2.0, which engagement with the DQP validated. The administration believes the DQP is a useful tool for identifying valuable student learning outcomes, but they recognize the challenge in developing indicators and measurements for assessing those outcomes. What they appreciated through the experience of engaging with the DQP were the conversations about supporting students’ educational experiences and what can be done to improve student learning. At McKendree, with most of the faculty being familiar with the DQP and with the Assessment 2.0 initiative, the conversations progressed at a faster rate because of the institution’s strong drive to strengthen student learning outcomes. Also, because the administration gave the faculty control, and engaging with the DQP fostered conversations amongst faculty,

changes made such as revising the diversity outcome, developing the diversity rubric, and incorporating other activities for the Diverse Perspectives outcome were done as a collaborative effort instead of changes ordered by the administration. Administrators believe the “McKendree spirit” of their institution-wide commitment is central to assessment efforts both now and in the future, and using the DQP as a framework for a student-centered approach to learning creates intentional pathways for students to progress through their educational experience.

Additionally, while they have not yet come to the end of Assessment 2.0 and measured the effectiveness of the full seven-year initiative, the administration is already aware of challenges encountered. Though previous SLATE committees developed assessment tools for the first four learning outcomes, not all of the faculty are using the assessment tools. Also, some of the assessment tools the faculty developed to collect campus-wide data require technology that McKendree does not yet currently have. For example, a rubric developed and used by the faculty to assess students’ written communication skills does not have a centralized reporting system to collect data across courses. Other challenges include some faculty and departments that could be better at mapping their curriculum and using collected data to implement changes and improvements, but McKendree is still able to move forward.

Once Assessment 2.0 concludes, McKendree will continue to revise their learning outcomes. Their next steps include revising the university’s general education requirements to align with their student learning outcomes.

## Takeaways for Practice

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- While the administration must support (both financially and mentally) the use of the DQP and assessment practices, having faculty driving it is essential to its success.
- Connecting existing initiatives to build work and pull it all together may serve better than viewing the DQP as an add-on.
- The DQP can be used to more clearly articulate learning outcomes and decide upon assessment tools to measure student mastery of the outcomes.
- The DQP can be a valuable tool in bringing together faculty and administrators for campus-wide discussions on improving student learning outcomes, and the collaboration it fosters can be a foundation for building a successful institution-wide project.
- Involving students to build a culture of evidence with assessment as a key component can make the practice more meaningful and accountable.

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## About NILOA

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- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008.
- NILOA is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.
- One of the co-principal NILOA investigators, George Kuh, founded the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).
- The other co-principal investigator for NILOA, Stanley Ikenberry, was president of the University of Illinois from 1979 to 1995 and of the American Council of Education from 1996 to 2001.

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