



Programme Assessment Strategies  
Funded by the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme

# International Perspectives

Examples from outside  
the UK

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[www.pass.brad.ac.uk](http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk)



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# *International Perspectives*

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## **1 Introduction**

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The PASS project was set up to directly confront issues which concern every course/programme leader in HE: how to design and deliver an effective, efficient and sustainable assessment strategy which ensures that the main course/programme outcomes are satisfied. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, the PASS project has demonstrated that principles and techniques of Programme Focused Assessment (PFA) can both improve the quality of the student learning experience and resolve many of the problems which are currently associated with assessment in HE.

The project has focused on case studies from the UK; however, a number of potentially interesting examples from overseas have emerged through our explorations. This paper offers pointers to those examples so that readers can explore their potential further should they wish; we acknowledge that in some instances the information is sparse.

## **2 University College Maastricht (UCM), Maastricht University**

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<http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/>

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University College Maastricht (UCM) is a liberal arts department within the University of Maastricht, which is a problem-based learning university.

UCM has two semesters that last 20 weeks. One is in Fall, the other in Spring. Each semester is split into three periods

For example in Fall that means:

- September – October: period 1 (8 weeks) students study 2 courses (modules)
- November – December: period 2 (8 weeks) students study 2 further courses (modules)
- January: project period (4 weeks) students are put into groups to undertake a project intended to integrate and utilise the learning from the semester's four courses

In addition, UCM offers skills trainings in period 1 and 2. This is not common among the other departments.

The setup described above is generally used by several departments at Maastricht University. However, in one or two occasions this might be somewhat different (e.g. one department had 1 course per 4 weeks, which basically still comes down to having 2 courses in a period of 8 weeks).

### 3 Alverno College, Milwaukee, USA

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<http://depts.alverno.edu/ere>

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The assessment is administered midpoint in the college program at Alverno College. It has a two-fold purpose: to:

- 1) assess individual student learning for development and to
- 2) provide an opportunity for departments across the college to review the performance of students in each of their departments, and overall, across the college.

The assessment focuses on scientific reasoning, quantitative literacy, analysis and problem solving.

The instrument is designed to measure integration and transfer of student learning across courses (modules) and over time, in an outside-of-class assessment.

Marcia, a critical friend for the PASS project, gave an overview of the approach at the PASS Final Event; the slides<sup>1</sup> are available on the PASS web site.

### 4 Southern New Hampshire University – Integrated Competency-Based Model

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This model has been developed and implemented in the US at Southern New Hampshire University and is fully described in the book *Saving Higher Education, The Integrated, Competency-Based Three-Year Bachelor's Degree Program*, by Martin J. Bradley, Robert H. Seidman, and Steven R. Painchaud. The posting below was taken from Chapter 1, The Need for Change: Why some Institutions Will Embrace New Pathways to the Bachelor's Degree. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved. Published by Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint. 989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 [www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com) The competency-based integrated curriculum approach focuses on student learning outcomes, as opposed to what the authors call “seat time”, and the book cites research to show that it has achieved above-average student academic success.

The following summary of the model is an edited extract of a posting to the Tomorrow's Professor mailbase (<http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/cgi-bin/tomprof/posting.php?ID=1148>) posted on the 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, and reproduced with their permission:

The model employs an integrated, competency-based curriculum approach. A predetermined set of competencies are foundational to the students' educational experience. In addition to the set of competencies, the curriculum is redesigned and integrated wherever possible to maximize student learning opportunities throughout their entire educational experience. Teaching faculty that participate in the program receive an orientation outlining the curriculum design and are mindful of the program competencies, as well as accreditation standards and expectations. Utilizing a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/alverno.pdf>

collaborative approach, faculty members deliver courses over a period of six semesters. The content is configured in a way that facilitates collaboration by faculty across disciplines.

The competencies serve as guideposts for the content of all the academic experiences within the curriculum. Because the development of competencies occurs at varying levels of intensity throughout the three years, a key strategy is the use of master planning documents for each academic experience. For each of the educational experiences, an academic plan is developed that details the overarching strategy for addressing the competencies within the experience along with specific implementing activities that the faculty can employ. These academic plans are regularly reviewed and updated as part of an ongoing assessment of the program. The academic plans serve as the basis for the development of model syllabi that demonstrate the relationship between the academic requirements, assignments, and the competencies.

Each module that a student takes has an academic plan developed by faculty experts. These academic plans provide a strategic framework allowing faculty, administrators, accreditation organizations, and other interested parties to see how each of the courses in a given semester or year support the program-level competencies and learning outcomes.

Each semester concludes with an innovative week-long, credit-bearing "integrating experience." These experiences place students in academic work teams in which they are given challenging case-based problems related to their major. Teaching faculty hold special consulting hours to provide guidance and support to the student teams.

Integration of academic content throughout the three years is achieved in a number of ways, including program themes, joint assignments across modules and between various disciplines, end-of-semester integrating experiences, and experiential learning opportunities. During the last week of each of the first four semesters, students engage in a team-intensive activity exercising their newly acquired knowledge and skills to address real-world case studies. Each experience focuses on the competencies stressed during the semester and culminates with a formal presentation to the faculty and invited members from the internal university community as well as invited guests.

Designing and implementing an integrated, competency-based, or outcomes-focused, curriculum model requires faculty to collaborate and to be flexible in their pedagogical approaches. An integrated model requires that traditional courses be thought of in new ways, such as modules that are premised upon the principles of student knowledge acquisition and skill development. Further, an integrated curriculum is premised on a set of programmatic and school-based competencies. These competencies influence and in some cases drive the choices of content acquisition, delivery, and demonstration.

Building an integrated curriculum can by its very nature be labor-intensive and will likely meet with resistance at some institutions. On the other hand, creating an integrated curriculum can inspire faculty to collaborate and think of education in new ways, such as placing the student at the center of learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Tagg, 2003). Implementing an integrated curriculum also demands that administrators think in new ways regarding programmatic delivery needs such as classroom space, awarding of credit hours, and the coordination of the course registration processes. The curriculum redesign also requires the support of key institutional leaders in order for the curriculum to survive the academic governance process.

Changing the way we think about the design and delivery of the higher education experience demands that university leaders think in new ways. This means that modules will look different in an integrated curriculum than in a traditional three-credit, one-hour-and-15-minutes, twice-per-week course. For example, faculty may deem it educationally beneficial for students to spend more class time on a particular subject area. Thus the module might be delivered in a two-hour class that meets four days a week over seven weeks as opposed to the more typical two-day-a-week, one-hour-and-15-minute class that meets for fifteen weeks.

An integrated curriculum requires administrative leaders who are willing to break decades of traditional practices in order to create new value for their students. Providing the leadership to promote true innovation is no easy task. As Collins (2001) reminds us, "good is the enemy of great," and many institutional administrators are happy to be just "good enough".

One of the clear challenges facing university presidents and other senior leaders is to envision new ways in which to construct the college experience—ways that promote learning and create new value for their students. Successfully meeting this challenge requires a willingness to examine long-held assumptions regarding administrative practices such as credit hours and seat time. Instead, a new focus on learning, competency attainment, and demonstration should drive how we design and deliver the curriculum.

As the knowledge economy continues to rapidly expand, college graduates will need new skill sets in order to participate and successfully compete. Colleges and universities can and should play a central role in the preparation of citizens but only if the institutions have rethought the way that students acquire, tie together, and demonstrate new knowledge. Compartmentalized and silo-driven learning, so often redundant, is no longer meeting organizations' needs in today's global marketplace. The integrated, competency-based model offers a proven approach that answers the growing chorus of concerns being expressed by business leaders, government officials, students, their sponsors, and academicians. The learning process can and must change in ways that improve its effectiveness while offering a clear solution to the continued escalating tuition crisis.

#### 4.1 References

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Barr, R. B., & Tagg, J. (1995, November/December). From teaching to learning: A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change*, 13-25.

Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Keller, G. (2008). *Higher education and the new society*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

European Higher Education Area. (2011). About the Bologna Process. Retrieved from <http://ehea.info>

Gaston, P. (2010). *The challenge of Bologna*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Wildavsky, B. (2010). *The great brain race*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## 5 Quest University, Canada

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[http://www.questu.ca/academics/concentration\\_program/the\\_question.php](http://www.questu.ca/academics/concentration_program/the_question.php)

At the end of their Foundation Program, Quest undergraduates working with a faculty advisor submit their "Question": a two-page proposal describing a topic of special interest to them. The Question guides students' attention in a sustained and rigorous intellectual inquiry during the final 16 blocks. The proposal may take the form of a statement or a question or even a set of related questions. Students consequently have the opportunity - and the obligation - to shape their own education. As classes move through the program graduates will generate a "bank" of topics that can serve as examples and inspirations to the classes that follow. All Quest students are assigned academic advisors during their foundation years, but in preparation for the proposal, they may seek out a faculty mentor who is particularly suited to their project and who works with them in an ongoing conversation about it over the next four terms. Close work one-on-one between a student and his or her mentor is often the most demanding and rewarding aspect of an undergraduate education.

## 6 Ball State University, USA

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<http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/UndergraduateStudy/BeyondtheClassroom/ImmersiveLearning.aspx>

Ball State recruits interdisciplinary teams of students and engages community partners, to deliver a final product that enhances the community with a lasting impact. It calls this immersive learning and requires students to use learning in a tangible outcome that lives on and has utility beyond the duration of the experience itself. Students have created business plans, Web sites, documentaries, content and applications for emerging media, publications, and much more. Not only do they make a difference for a business or nonprofit organization, they can advance their career, making connections and showing employers they have [real-world experience](#). With immersive learning they prepare students to graduate with the critical thinking, global knowledge, and self-direction they need to compete in the marketplace. Through such transformative experiences, students should better understand societal issues in [global](#), [local](#), [economic](#), or [environmental](#) contexts.

## 7 Carnegie Foundation Integrative Learning Project

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<http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/ilp/>

Ten institutions in the US have worked on a range of projects to design integrative learning activities. Carnegie argues that fostering students' abilities to integrate learning--over time, across courses, and between academic, personal, and community life--is one of the most important goals and challenges of higher education. The undergraduate experience is often a fragmented landscape of general education, concentration, electives, co-curricular activities, and for many students "the real world" beyond campus. An emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates find ways to put the pieces together and develop habits of mind that will prepare them to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life. The projects sponsored by Carnegie are comprehensive programmes which last at least a year. They provide compelling

evidence that this type of learning needs to be spread out over time and assessed if they are to be successful.

## 8 University of Oklahoma, Price School of Business

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<http://www.e-digitaleditions.com/i/62201/50> “Integrated Business Experience” in BizEd (2003) pp 49-52

Since 1995, 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduates have been able to enrol in the Integrated Business Core (IBC), a one-semester programme in which they start and run their own business to put into practice the key business concepts that they have learnt, as well as developing group and inter-personal skills. The programme consists of the three courses: management, marketing and legal studies. The topics in these courses are sequenced to provide the students with the information they will need, at the times they will need it, to set up their businesses – but each course is assessed separately. The IBC is essentially a fourth course in which they have to devise a start-up company, get it running and make a profit – all in one semester. The 140 students are divided into 4 companies, and then in teams within those companies have to come up with a potential business idea for its company to pursue. By mid-semester, each company selects their best idea and then pitches it to local bankers, seeking a loan of up to \$5,000. Since 1995, no project has made a loss and profits have ranged between \$800 and \$53,000, averaging at about \$10-20,000.

## 9 The University of Sydney

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<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo/> “Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes principles and Practices within and Across Disciplines”

A key project that has expressed interest in the PASS project. The following is an abstract from the project’s web site:

The Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes project, funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) in 2011-2012 and undertaken by The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland and RMIT University will bring together the various stakeholder perspectives in Australia and internationally, around their shared need for student assessment in universities to deliver convincing evidence to relevant stakeholder groups of achievement of stated learning outcomes for graduates. The outcomes of this project will assist academics to design better assessment tasks and assure the quality of assessment judgements at the course and program level.

The study will use a highly consultative, appreciative inquiry approach that builds on previous projects on Graduate Attributes and continues the productive conversations initiated by the [ALTC Learning and Teaching Academic Standards](#) (LTAS) project and subsequent activity already taking place among disciplinary communities. It will incorporate insights from Australian and international research and practice on graduate attributes. The project will focus on identifying how assessment can provide convincing evidence of achievement of graduate learning outcomes and will explore the breadth and depth of assessment strategies and approaches to the assurance of assessment quality.