
Harding University Quality Initiative

As Harding University began its analysis of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), input was collected separately for two specific purposes: general feedback regarding the DQP outcomes for Lumina, and feedback specific to how the DQP outcomes are reflected in the programs at Harding University.

Part 1 of this report provides an overview of how we chose to approach this project, including goals, the process, revisions to the process, stakeholders, and findings. Part 2 emphasizes the most important findings, while Part 3 consists of specific recommendations to Lumina.

Part 1: Goals and Results

Original Project and its Goals

Concurrent with the implementation of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) initiative, Harding University was undertaking major revisions to our program review criteria. We therefore decided to use the DQP in a broad and systematic way to ascertain meaningful information regarding our degree programs and how programs compared to the DQP. Using a custom template developed in-house, we gathered data on thirty-two different bachelor and master degree programs. Every college (except the College of Pharmacy which only offers a professional doctoral degree) participated in mapping selected degree programs against the DQP. Some mapped several degrees, including those at both the bachelor and master levels.

Our process took place over a span of nearly two years, from August of 2011 to May of 2013. During the 2011 fall semester, members of the Provost Council worked closely with our deans to develop a plan for the collection and evaluation of our data. Provost Council members presented the project, including its purpose and goals, to various departments and colleges, demonstrated the data collection tool, and answered questions and addressed concerns.

From October of 2011 through May of 2012, program curricula were mapped against the DQP matrix and concurrently, general feedback was provided about the DQP. Deans, department chairs, and faculty were involved in this endeavor. That summer was spent organizing the data.

In the 2012 fall semester, a number of focus groups were held to give stakeholders the opportunity to identify themes that emerged from the data. The collected comments from the mapping exercise were shared with deans, chairs, and several key standing faculty committees.

Preliminary reports were developed that articulated emergent themes as well as consensus or disagreement with individual DQP outcomes. In October of 2012 the Provost Council presented the findings to a subcommittee of our Board of Trustees.

Soon thereafter, we decided to collect additional data on those outcomes that appeared to elicit the *least* internal consensus. An online survey was developed using simplified language to articulate the selected outcomes. Over 1,300 responses were received, and both the objective (Likert scale) responses and the open-ended responses provided a rich source of additional data that further focused and reaffirmed our responses for numerous outcomes.

We worked collaboratively with our Alumni Office in the distribution of the electronic survey, which was sent to students, alumni, parents, faculty, employees, administrators, trustees, and staff. Taking into account those who participated in the curriculum mapping and on-site focus groups, we had over 1,500 stakeholders provide input to this project.

Lumina Feedback: Our goal in providing feedback regarding the DQP itself was to ensure that Harding University had a voice in shaping the DQP document. Our template included a section where stakeholders could provide information regarding the adequacy of the DQP as a descriptive document. The collection of data was at a very granular level, with feedback obtained for all DQP components in each category.

Programmatic Feedback: From an institutional perspective, we had several goals. One was to compare current degree outcomes with those listed in the DQP as a way of either validating program quality or identifying gaps within a program's scope. We also wanted, at the program and college level, to foster discussions regarding the rationale for matches and discrepancies between the DQP and our degree programs. Finally, our hope was that each program would be able to use the data to identify areas where they could aim for improvement as part of their five-year Academic Planning and Program Review (APPR). Multiple discussions, both in formal venues and informally, occurred at the department, college, and university level.

Changes to the project

Harding University made two substantive changes to the original DQP project.

The first change was the development of a sixth category to address the emphasis of our mission across the curriculum. Using our mission statement and input from a number of stakeholders, we crafted six outcomes under the category *Spiritual Formation*. While we were initially pleased to have the opportunity to develop this category, we soon discovered that our mission could not be rendered as a proverbial "silo" and still retain its meaning. As will be noted below, the importance of an integrated mission is one of our major findings.

As noted earlier, the second change was the development and distribution of an online survey to seek input from a wider audience. While we had planned for the various departments and colleges to seek feedback from their external constituencies, this was logistically problematic. It became apparent that a single online survey, using simplified language to focus on key issues identified through initial departmental and college input, was a more efficient means to collect information from a wider audience. As will be noted below, the feedback from this survey provided robust and meaningful data from a wide array of stakeholders.

Results and accomplishments

Impact on other endeavors

The timing of the Lumina/DQP exercise proved to be extremely helpful. We had recently completed a liberal arts curriculum mapping to identify in every department the courses that addressed each component of the liberal arts curriculum, and our College of Bible and Ministry had recently completed an extensive mapping of their curriculum as they revised their outcomes and integrated them into a new curriculum. Familiarity with these mapping processes was a great help to faculty as they maneuvered through the DQP using similar tools.

The timing of the Lumina project also coincided with the revamping of the General Studies major. Faculty members on this subcommittee were also working on the curriculum mapping project. The curriculum mapping efforts initiated a conversation about the shortcomings of the assessment plan in the current General Studies degree, facilitating a revamp of the degree that will lead to the production of more meaningful assessment measures.

The project also coincided with our efforts in reworking our program review process. The discussions about the Lumina documents and the findings of the mapping project will add to and, in some cases, redirect the discussion of the Academic Planning and Program Review (APPR) reports. Notably, the “vocabulary” of the discussions around program outcomes will be significantly affected by the DQP work.

As our work on the Lumina DQP project dovetailed with these efforts, it added depth and breadth to the discussions as they related to assessment, curriculum development, program review, degree quality, and evaluation. This new perspective enriched our ongoing discussions.

Findings

- 1. We know our mission well.** A number of individuals noted that faculty members were well-versed in the nuances of our mission, and this helped drive many of the comments made regarding Harding’s programs and the Lumina framework.

2. **Our mission cannot be disaggregated to fit the DQP template.** Our deans and faculty expressed the belief that the parsing of student outcomes into five (in our case, six) separate categories forced compartmentalization of outcomes that were meant to be integrated. This was especially true with regard to our mission--attempting to address *Spiritual Formation* as a stand-alone category in the Lumina exercise helped our faculty and deans to reaffirm the importance of the integration of this component across the curriculum. Our survey results confirmed the importance of the integration of faith, learning, and living in both shaping and maintaining a Christian worldview. This issue is discussed in depth in Part 2 of this report.
3. **We know our Liberal Arts curriculum well.** Four years ago, we conducted a university-wide curriculum mapping project to identify how well our liberal arts outcomes were integrated into our non-core courses. That exercise apparently helped many faculty members to become more familiar with our liberal arts requirements, as a number of individuals commented on how that exercise helped in the completion of the Lumina exercise.
4. **The DQP expectation of mastery in a “second academic field” is problematic.** Many of the DQP outcomes require the student to be functional in “more than one language” or “a second academic field.” Such requirements do not account for considerations of time and funding, as well as the political reality of policymakers demanding shorter paths to bachelor degree completion.
5. **There is broad agreement regarding the importance of every Harding graduate successfully completing a capstone course (or experience) in his/her major area of study.** The emphasis of the DQP on providing a capstone experience in every program is echoed in our practice. Our survey results also showed strong support for capstone experiences.
6. **Degree quality was confirmed or gaps were identified.** While most programs found that their current expectations for students met or exceeded the DQP outcomes, others were able to identify gaps and are using this knowledge to reevaluate and modify their curriculum.
7. **The updated foundation being laid by the curriculum revision in the College of Bible and Ministry needs to be more widely shared.** The DQP discussion raised the issue of the newly revised curriculum being implemented by the College of Bible and Ministry. Since specific courses from this college are required for all students, representatives from other programs expressed a desire to be more fully informed about the changes to

the Bible curriculum to ensure that they are building upon this newly revised foundation.

8. **Service-learning or volunteerism cannot and should not be forced.** To assume that every discipline must engage its students in civic learning makes the category seem contrived when such actions must come from the heart. Genuine civic engagement is an action that arises from a disposition of servanthood.
9. **We need to add a capstone assessment component for our General Studies majors.** In the course of working with the DQP, we realized that we needed to develop meaningful capstone assessments for those students who graduate with a General Studies major to ensure degree quality.
10. **Modifications to our program review process will be enriched by the conversations started by the DQP.** As noted earlier, we are creating new criteria and a new process for our Academic Planning and Program Review (APPR). The Lumina DQP exercise has enriched the discussions at the college and departmental levels regarding program quality. At the university level, we have recognized the need to ensure that all program outcomes are embedded in appropriate course syllabi, a move that will more explicitly link outcomes and assessment, as well as explicitly ensure the coverage of all program outcomes.
11. **The complexity and redundancy of the DQP must be addressed.** Frustration regarding redundancy and duplication of outcomes among and within DQP categories triggered some negative attitudes among our faculty. Furthermore, outcomes that inherently contain such an excessive number of objectives are not measurable. In this era of assessment, outcome specificity is required to ensure reliability and validity. When we simplified the outcomes for our online survey by changing the language and reducing the outcomes to core components, the responses we received were more meaningful, more focused, and more detailed than those received while using the original DQP language.

Impact on the institution

In addition to the findings noted previously, we can report an increase in the level of trust among deans, chairs, and faculty, as well as a university-wide awareness of our upcoming regional accreditation visit.

Trust. Harding has recently completed a lengthy process whereby we have worked with stakeholders to develop a policy regarding the federal credit hour definition pursuant to 34 CFR §600 and §668. The frustration of being held to a top-down mandate was universally voiced.

Unfortunately, our introduction to the Lumina project came on the heels of this federal initiative, and many faculty members initially viewed Lumina as yet another top-down mandate.

The Provost Council worked hard to communicate that the Lumina exercise was not a “given” which stakeholders were expected to “rubber stamp.” Instead, we clarified that faculty were to approach the project with brutal honesty, as it was a work in progress for which Harding had been invited to provide feedback. We explained the importance of having a voice at the table to provide such feedback, as few institutions had been given this opportunity.

The communication breakthrough came after a conference call with HLC staff in October of 2011. The Provost Council asked point-blank whether our feedback would be meaningful and received a resounding yes. Reporting this back to our faculty changed their attitudes regarding the Lumina exercise. Subsequent discussions and feedback felt more like a team effort, as opposed to a feeling of hesitance and subtle push-back. A team-oriented approach emerged that treated honest feedback to the DQP as a shared goal. Stakeholders now were convinced that their input was truly valued, and that the administration was fully supporting their efforts.

Awareness. We have undergone considerable growth since our last accreditation visit, so the timing of the Lumina project was a great vehicle for reminding our campus community that we were approaching our decennial accreditation visit. Furthermore, the concurrent implementation of new Academic Planning and Program Review (APPR) criteria helped to bookend the Lumina exercise with a pragmatic application for each program.

People involved

The original curriculum mapping project involved faculty from every college and department on campus. Every dean and chair was involved in the curriculum mapping project and they were encouraged to involve their entire faculty in the project. Our three university-level academic advisory committees also provided a venue for feedback and discussion.

To implement the online survey, we worked collaboratively with our Office of Alumni Affairs, which coordinates multiple electronic distribution lists. The survey was sent to thousands of constituents, including trustees, faculty, staff, parents, employers, and students, and we received over 1,300 responses.

Taking into account both the mapping exercise and the survey, we had 100 percent participation among the Provost Council, Deans, Chairs, and Program Directors, as well as over 60 percent participation from our faculty. Including those who participated in the mapping exercise and those who responded to the survey, over 1,500 stakeholders participate in this project.

Resources used

We created a data collection tool that was similar to one used in the university-wide mapping of our liberal arts outcomes, as well as an online survey.

A new Academic Planning and Program Review (APPR) template had been under development concurrently with the DQP project, and elements of the DQP, along with faculty feedback, helped to shape portions of that new template.

More information: More detailed information can be found in our full report, “Degree Quality Profile Report for 32 Harding Programs,” a 64-page document available upon request.

Part 2: Most Important Finding

The most important finding, mentioned briefly in earlier parts of this report, is really not a finding at all. It is a reaffirmation that Harding University is a mission-driven educational organization. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

The establishment of a sixth category with which to address our mission, while initially welcomed as a part of the DQP exercise, soon received pushback as we began the mapping phase of the project. One dean stated: *Our motto is the integration of faith, living, and learning. This exercise felt more like the dis-integration of faith, living, and learning.* According to a faculty member: *Spiritual formation needs to be a horizontal component, not a vertical one. We have failed if our students see dispositions and values merely as add-ons.*

To see how strongly this sentiment was held by other stakeholders, we addressed it in our online survey in two ways: the first addressed the *development* of a Christian worldview and the second addressed the *maintenance* of a Christian worldview. In hindsight, we should have also addressed (as a prequel to the other questions) the *presence* of a Christian worldview, which is the underlying assumption.

There was strong agreement (average 84 percent) among all of our stakeholders regarding the importance of Harding’s commitment to integrate faith, learning, and living. However, it was the richness of the open-ended responses that strongly provided validation for the integration of our mission. Examples include:

Faculty member: *Having attended other institutions, I appreciate the value of integrating spirituality with learning. Indeed, this is THE central aspect of Harding that makes me want to stay here.*

Parents: *It is impossible to place a monetary value on the tremendous impact Harding University has had on our family. My children have been strengthened by the values of faith and Christian living/service gained at Harding University.*

Student: *Demonstrations of faith are evident in all areas of life at Harding. This greatly eased my transition from parental control at home to self-control on my own by continuing the stress on moral values that began in my home.*

Alumnus: *Harding did a priceless job at integrating faith, learning and living. All that I learned in and out of the class room at Harding has been priceless to me. I owe who I am personally, professionally, and spiritually to Harding.*

In addition to support for the integration of mission, we saw the emergence of another significant theme that indicated the “how and why.” Many respondents indicated that the “integration of faith, learning, and living” is best operationalized and exemplified by the caring nature of Harding’s faculty and staff. While we were aware of this anecdotally, the fact that it was explicitly expressed by numerous respondents in the absence of any prompt helped to confirm what we believed instinctively. For example, statements from alumni were punctuated with memories of the influential nature of faculty and staff—influences that are felt to this day. Such comments include:

I appreciated the faith/life integration of my professors. I especially appreciated the approachability of the professors.

It was awesome to have professors who wanted to help me in not only pursuing a degree but who wanted to be involved in my life and the molding of who I was to become professionally and spiritually. Several professors took a personal interest in me, and they still mentor me to this day.

As I look back on my time at Harding, I can recall specific professors whose instruction and example deeply influenced my faith and my current worldview towards a critical, scholarly kind of Christianity that asks questions and admits how little we may/do know about the answers to many significant theological questions. These professors taught me to live in a way that is open-minded and valuing of other points of view. I feel that my current worldview was indeed formed at Harding.

The integration of faith, learning and living has built a foundation for me to evaluate my personal and work opportunities in light of how I can serve God with my talents, education and opportunities. My professors stressed that while my education may provide opportunities for financial success, it is a tool for serving others and enriching my relationship with God.

An assortment of student comments reveal that some of them presently feel this same sense of caring, which indicates that such feelings and beliefs are not just the hindsight of alumni:

Harding has certainly been a safe haven throughout my undergraduate experience. I realize and don't fail to appreciate that the student-teacher relationships are a rarity in today's day and age. It is amazing to pray in class, to have your mentors ask how you are instead of viewing their job as a means to a salary.

One of the strongest ways that Harding promoted Christianity to me was through the example that my professors were. Being able to see real people live out their faith through the areas that I studied was an invaluable part of my education that I will never forget.

Having Christian professors who live their faith and encourage students to belief is key.

The faculty and staff at Harding have been most influential on me. They have treated me like their own child as they have taught me academics in the classroom and life outside the classroom. Many of them know me as well as my own parents, and I think I can say that one on this campus saved my life.

The Lumina DQP exercise validated our commitment to integrating our mission and highlighted the profoundly important influence of our faculty and staff

Part 3: Recommendations to Lumina

This university-wide initiative that involved over 1,500 stakeholders started a robust and meaningful conversation on our campus. However, we have come to the realization that, among many others, there are two major concerns which need to be addressed by the Lumina writers: a macro need based on minimum standardized expectations for accountability purposes as well as a micro need for institution-specific expectations that provide flexibility and integration of mission.

Therefore, we propose that Lumina create a two-tiered system of student learning outcomes that includes:

1. A core of minimum degree expectations that are standard/common to all institutions; and
2. An additional menu of expectations (created from disaggregated and edited DQP outcomes that have been modified to fit the *Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions/Attitudes* model) from which a pre-determined number of outcomes would be selected and modified by each institution so that the outcomes are unique to each institution's mission.

Other, more specific recommendations gleaned from our curricular mapping and survey results include the following:

Issue 1: The DQP fails to integrate an institution’s mission: As noted earlier in this report, our stakeholders were resistant to placing our mission into a “silo” as just one more DQP category. The importance of the integration of faith, learning, and living was seen as too fundamental to be isolated as an appendage or treated as an item on a checklist.

Related to this was the sentiment that the Lumina framework presented too much of a “cookie cutter” or “off the rack” approach to education, when in fact each university has a mission that is unique. While the possibility of a federal mandate may eventually require a standardized reporting system, it is our belief that a better measure would be to hold institutions accountable for programmatic alignment with their mission.

Recommendation: An institution’s mission needs to be like an umbrella: a horizontal component within which all other components fall, not a vertical, “silo-like” component. We have failed if our students see our mission merely as an add-on or an item on a list to be checked.

Issue 2: DQP outcomes were redundant, overstuffed, and not easily measurable: Comments from respondents included concerns that the outcome categories contained too much overlap and that addressing student outcomes in this way felt “strained and awkward.” Recurrent themes included frustration regarding redundancy and duplication of outcomes among and within categories. Furthermore, outcomes that inherently contain such an excessive number of objectives and descriptors are not easily measurable. In this era of assessment, outcome specificity is required to ensure reliability and validity.

Recommendation: It was generally agreed that a more integrated approach could be attained by adopting the KSA/KSD model (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes/Dispositions), using only those three categories to capture expectations and student learning outcomes.

Issue 3: The DQP outcomes lacked developmental differentiation: Much of the feedback we received indicated the desire for a more robust differentiation for the wording of outcomes at the AA, BA, and MA levels. “I didn’t see a clear delineation of the maturing process,” stated one respondent. “There was not much of a difference between bachelor and masters-level expectations.” Similar comments indicated that the outcomes were not nuanced enough, as well as the desire for the outcomes to show more of a progression over time. Our deans and faculty generally believed that the only place where they could demonstrate the differences between and among BA and MA programs was in the relative sophistication of the assignments that were

given as program examples. As a result, respondents found it difficult to provide discrete, helpful information.

Recommendation: Suggestions for improvement included streamlining the stated expectations and using specific verbs reserved for specific levels, along the lines of Bloom’s taxonomy. Furthermore, operational definitions of each verb would have been helpful.

Issue 4: The outcomes contained unstated assumptions regarding two-year programs: Our faculty members expressed a concern that there appeared to be an underlying assumption in the Lumina framework that any student who attends a two-year institution is expected to follow on to a four-year institution for his/her terminal degree. In fact, many two-year institutions have their own terminal degrees or certifications. This was not clear in the framework, leading our team members to believe that it would be better for two-year institutions to be measured by a framework specific to their mission.

Recommendation: A degree framework that is more attuned to the unique mission of two-year institutions might serve those institutions better.

Issue 5: The category “Civic Learning” is inherently problematic: Four separate themes related to this outcome emerged from our data:

1. It appears that the Lumina framework assumes that *all* disciplines will engage their students in civic learning. According to our stakeholders it is a fallacy to believe that this is possible, and roughly two-thirds of faculty respondents indicated that this outcome could not be integrated within their field of study. To assume that every discipline engages its students in civic learning makes the category seem contrived and removes the element of student choice regarding volunteerism. Stakeholder comments included:

This is not typically covered in any of our mathematics courses.

This is not something necessary for exercise science graduates.

This outcome is more suited for majors with a stronger public policy bent, such as history, political science, sociology and business.

2. Genuine civic engagement should not be an item on a checklist, but rather is an action that arises from a disposition of servanthood:

Service should be something that is done out of a love for others and for God - not to satisfy an academic requirement.

Making it a program requirement removes the true spirit of the activity, and as such, is not really service in the Christian sense, but rather checking off the requirements for a course. Make it part of the culture, not a requirement. Service shouldn't be forced, rather an outpouring of the heart.

Making a person do something is not going to make them service oriented. This aspect of their lives will have to come from something deeper than an academic requirement (emphasis in the original).

A Liberal Arts University graduate recognizes that one's level of civic involvement is a personal decision. Students are being trained to do this for the rest of their lives, not just in college.

3. A culture of service already pervades our institution. Harding provides numerous opportunities for active civic engagement on a regular basis. There are multiple opportunities announced during daily chapel, collaboration with the community in Harding's annual Day of Caring, and university-wide participation in service projects through "Bisons for Christ." At Harding, the notion of "Spring Break" does not conjure up opportunities for partying, but rather, opportunities for mission work.
4. There was an expectation of political activism apparent throughout the category, raising the question of what type of activism may be deemed appropriate and who might be making such a judgment. The majority of our stakeholders agree that education should be about knowledge, skill attainment, and appropriate application, not civic or political activism.

The strong social agenda in the Lumina template is difficult to ignore. Many learning outcomes were concerned with spurring students public advocacy concerning political and cultural issues rather than engaging the student in acquiring the knowledge, skills and dispositions of their academic discipline.

Some of these learning outcomes read as an attempt at 'nationalizing' higher education goals and outcomes rather than providing an academic framework.

There appears to be a strong underlying social agenda tone in the wording of the document itself.

Recommendation: Remove all language that expects or requires activism.

Issue 6: It is unrealistic to require every graduate to attain full mastery of a foreign language.

While the DQP format inherently worked against integration of skills and content, it explicitly incorporated expectations requiring mastery of a foreign language at an extremely high level. While respect was shown for those who chose to acquire a foreign language, our stakeholders also endorsed the approach which requires six

credit hours in Global Literacy. The Global Literacy requirement can be met in two ways: by studying a foreign language, or by successfully completing specific courses that focus on awareness of and engagement with diverse cultures. While both points of view were expressed in stakeholder comments, it should be noted that there was **no** support for the attainment of advanced and technical foreign language expertise as required by the DQP at the undergraduate level.

There are over a billion Christians in the world, but only 750 million English speakers. It seems necessary to learn a second language... "Go into all the world!"

I loved my global literacy classes; they helped form more rounded world views and helped me gain better perspective on my own life. [This was] vital to my education.

To be of influence in the world, we need to be able to communicate in the languages of the world. I believe a second language should be a part of the curriculum beginning at K-12.

On a related note, stakeholders concurrently expressed a significant degree of support for the programs we offer at our international locations. Typical comments included:

Our best instrument for global literacy is through our international programs. The best thing we could do to improve the global literacy of our students would be to make it easier and more affordable for every student who graduates from Harding to have an international experience.

[Participating in] international programs was one of the best things I did during my time at Harding. I don't think a foreign language requirement would accomplish much for students who don't have the goal or desire to use a foreign language in the future.

There is nothing like actually living in another culture, eating the food, speaking the language, interacting with the people. No amount of classroom study can even come close to real-life experience. Travel really does broaden the mind and take the focus off of a U.S. centered frame of mind.

Issue 7: It is unrealistic to require mastery of a second discipline/area of study. While the DQP format inherently worked against integration of skills and content, it explicitly incorporated expectations requiring mastery of an additional discipline. While there are many reasons to challenge this proposed expectation, the most pragmatic are time and money. Adding expertise in an additional degree program runs counter to political and financial realities. Policymakers are calling for shorter paths to bachelor

degree completion, and the public is balking at any cost increases. Our survey results confirmed this view. Typical comments included:

This would also require students to take additional credit hours, therefore spending more money.

Consideration should be given to the financial limitations that many students have. Many struggle just to pay the tuition.

If such a requirement is made, then opportunities to accomplish this must not add to the student's financial obligation.

And, as mentioned earlier, our stakeholders endorsed spiritual formation in lieu of an explicitly academic “second field of study.”

Recommendation: Eliminate requirements for a second language and second discipline and focus instead on the quality of the major area of study. Higher education should not be “an inch deep and a mile wide.”

Lumina/DQP Summary

Our curriculum mapping exercise had deans, department chairs, and faculty evaluate every DQP outcome. This detailed information can be found in “Degree Quality Profile Report for the Lumina Foundation,” a 28-page document available upon request.

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