

The MAPPING Primer: Tools for Reconstructing the College Curriculum

Second Edition

Abstract

by

Ruth E. Stiehl

“We fill our college catalogs with a litany of courses—often disconnected, modularized units of learning—taught by faculty who rarely talk to each other. The student’s experience has often been one of registering for the required courses, passing each course separately, and ending with a transcript that shows each individual part has been completed successfully...What’s wrong with this picture?”

*From The MAPPING Primer
Stiehl and Lewchuk*

Background

More than a decade ago, a little blue book called *The OUTCOMES Primer: Reconstructing the College Curriculum* was one of the first publications written to reduce the confusion that surrounded the idea of student learning outcomes (SLOs) and assessment within the concept of a learning college. Now brown instead of blue and in its third edition, this first *Primer* continues to provide a framework for post-twentieth century college curriculum design. It continues to inform the work we do with colleges across the country around student learning outcomes and assessment.

Once faculty are clear about how today’s student learning outcomes differ from “old school objectives”, the real and continuing challenge is to find ways to get faculty engaged in aligning courses with the intended SLOs. *The MAPPING Primer 2e: Tools for Reconstructing the College Curriculum* (2012) is designed to do just that.

The curriculum planning tools in this second book have been designed to help faculty see the connections between classroom learning and life roles, between course outcomes and program outcomes, between course assessment and capstone assessment, between basic skills, general education and program learning outcomes. In essence, these three tools have the power to help us integrate learning experiences in ways we have rarely seen.

Drawing Connections

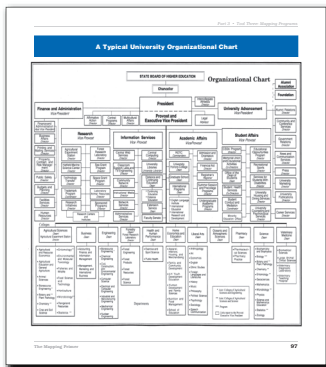
Pick up any college catalog and you will see a litany of courses—modularized units of learning, taught by faculty who rarely talk to each other. Students register for what is required, choosing seemingly disconnected electives, completing the individual requirements for each course, passing each separately and accumulating sufficient credits to merit a certificate or degree.

Teaching toward significant learning outcomes requires something quite different. It requires that we build a sense of connection between courses (learning experiences) and take on a sense of collective responsibility for assessment (standards) and student success. This is what we often describe as thinking systemically about learning.

Through our many years of experience working with colleges on student learning outcomes and assessment, we have discovered unique ways to help faculty think systemically. One of our tools

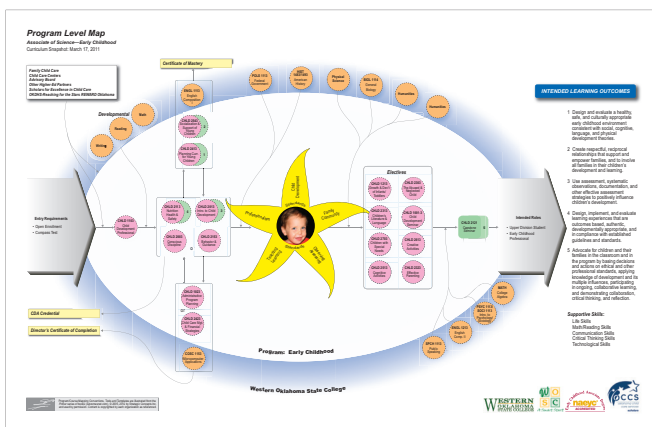
requires that faculty draw a map of their program, visually depicting how learning progresses. Using a set of visual conventions from *The MAPPING Primer 2e* they construct the student's whole experience, entry to outcome.

This kind of program mapping is quite a departure from the hierarchical flow charts we are more accustomed to seeing. Take, for example, the way we traditionally draw pictures of our organizations—a series of hierarchical boxes establishing solid boundaries and separation of duties. Here is a recent organization chart for the university where I spent most of my career. It doesn't look much like a dynamical learning organization, does it? In fact, if you look closely enough you will find that faculty and students don't even exist.

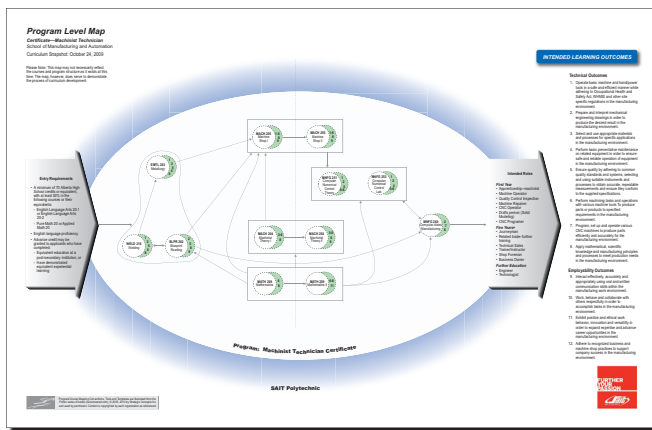


We need not lock ourselves into this kind of old thinking. We can draw pictures that better depict the organic nature of things: the flow of energy and resources, the dynamical connections that are inherent in a true learning community. Creating a new dynamical image can give us new insights and change our perception of how things really work. Sometimes it is as simple as drawing circles instead of squares, permeable lines instead of solid lines and embedded layers rather than isolated parts. See the results for yourself.

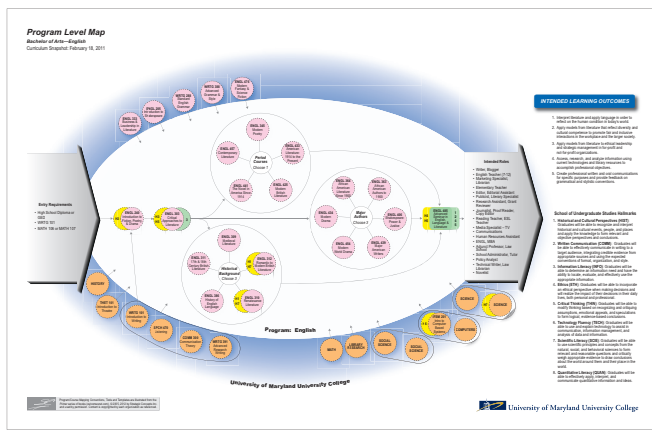
Faculty teams created the following three program maps around a sheet of butcher paper using round post-it notes. Each map utilizes the basic conventions for mapping programs illustrated in *The MAPPING Primer 2e*. In each case, you are looking at what we call third generation maps—maps that have emerged through several butcher paper versions.



Early Childhood



Machinist Technician



English

In addition to these sample maps, *The MAPPING Primer 2e* includes an accompanying CD which contains many more examples from selected colleges and universities across the US and Canada.

Talking With Each Other—A Collective Responsibility

Margaret Wheatley said it best in her book *Turning to One Another* (2002) when she wrote “...all change, even very large and powerful change, begins when a few people start talking with one another about something they care about, ... (they) we rediscover a sense of unity. We remember we are part of a greater whole. And as an added joy, we also discover our collective wisdom. We suddenly see how wise we can be together.”

This thought explains the surprise we feel each time we watch faculty use these tools. Faculties become acutely aware of the collective nature of their responsibility for student learning outcomes and assessment standards. And once the conversation begins, it is almost impossible to stop. Shared insights generate a multitude of questions around entry requirements, course sequencing, course alignment with intended learning outcomes, assessment strategies, basic skill needs, themes, capstone experiences and capstone assessment. It’s enough to fill the faculty meeting agenda for months to come.

Curriculum Development is a Conversation, Not a Technology

Writing *The MAPPING Primer 2e* has reminded us once again that the development of student learning outcomes and the alignment of courses with those outcomes is essentially an interactive process in which all members of a learning community participate. Conversational tools, such

as those described in *The MAPPING Primer*, are our only means of generating a sense of collective responsibility for learning outcomes. When a college purchases a technological system for the purpose of curriculum development, it should be used to document the conversation, never to replace it.

Reference

Wheatley, Margaret J. (2002). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ruth Stiehl is Professor Emeritus, Oregon State University and President, The Learning Organization. She is co-author with Les Lewchuk of *The Outcomes Primer: Reconstructing the College Curriculum* (3rd ed., 2008), *The Mapping Primer: Tools for Reconstructing the College Curriculum* (2nd ed., 2012) and *The Assessment Primer: Creating a Flow of Learning Evidence* (2008). Dr. Stiehl lives and works in Corvallis, Oregon.