Questions & Answers with Project Leaders and Participants

DARLENE MILLER, PRESIDENT, WORKFORCE EDUCATION COUNCIL

Q: What is your best hope for the implementation of this Resource Guide and the other pieces of the skill standards project?

When the skill standards project started three years ago, I don't think anyone expected the outcomes that have been achieved. The Resource Guide is a culmination of hours of work translating the skill standards into an assessment tool to be used to improve teaching and learning. The Guide is just that, a tool. Its purpose is to assist faculty and administrators in assessing the knowledge, skills and abilities of community college teachers. It is not meant to be used as an evaluative device. Its true purpose is to serve as a resource to faculty as they plan their own professional development. And the Guide gives faculty the means by which to communicate to those outside of the system how they take accountability and their own professional development seriously.

JIM CRABBE, WASHINGTON STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

Q: Beneath and behind the complexity of the project, what do you see as its core concepts or driving forces? What part does the Resource Guide play in all this?

The improvement of professional-technical instruction and the use of industry defined skill standards are at the heart of all workforce initiatives spearheaded by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). This Resource Guide is pivotal in it's importance to the ability of our system to ascertain where professional-technical faculty are on the continuum of their mastery of the skill sets their "industry" has described as essential to faculty success in the classroom and college setting.

The mutually agreed assessment of competency mastery, made possible by this Resource Guide, is the first step in the substantive improvement of professional technical instruction. The identified skill standards for professional-technical college instructors, coupled with the Resource Guide, will definitely provide the tools our system needs to insure continuous quality improvement in professional-technical instruction.

WILLIAM S. MOORE, WASHINGTON STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

Q: From your perspective, what does this project have to offer and where does it go from here? What is its relationship with the work you have been doing in learning outcomes and assessment?

I know from conversations with a number of faculty around the system that the notion of "standards," especially as applied to college instructors, is a bit unsettling to say the least. But used appropriately I think standards and the resources derived from them can be powerful tools for creating the rich culture of learning we'd like to provide for our students and for ourselves as lifelong learners. In my view there are at least three significant elements that make this present work qualify as "appropriate" and powerful tools for your consideration:

- The emphasis on feedback and diagnosis, or what I would call "assessment as learning" rather than assessment as something separate from and in addition to learning;

- The central role that notions of evidence and judgment play in the material provided to instructors, allowing individuals maximum flexibility in clarifying criteria and providing documentation;

- The effort to be as context-specific as possible rather than generic in terms of the way instructors are able to define and respond to the resource materials in the Guide.

These key principles are very much in keeping with the spirit of the Washington assessment initiative, and I think the many educators around the state who have been involved in this process should be commended for their commitment to maintaining a learner-centered approach (with the "learner" in question now being an instructor rather than a student). Having said that, I do offer one caveat: as this work moves forward and becomes available for wider use, it is extremely important to keep the core purposes and principles in mind and not reify the particular tools involved. This involves not just vigilance on the part of project leaders but the ownership of and engagement in this work by all of you who have a vested interest in improving your own skills in meeting the evolving challenges of being college instructors. The human capital represented by the faculty of Washington two-year colleges is by far the greatest resource our system has, and I believe this Guide can help sustain and nurture that resource in significant ways over the coming years.

NORMA W. GOLDSTEIN, DEAN OF HUMANITIES, SHORELINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Q: You have personally done a lot of work on the skill standards project. What parts of the conversation are most important to keep going? What is going to be easier now that this work has been done, and what challenges remain? What piece does the Resource Guide have or play in all of this?

By identifying the skill standards for professional-technical college instructors, Washington State has taken the lead in articulating the skills and abilities required by the 21st century's workforce and educational system. Part of that process requires that we have an accessible assessment system that supports the level of quality and standardization required to maintain the high level of teaching desired in higher education. This Resource Guide is designed to offer instructors and their institutions the very best ways to provide instructors with a systematic plan for professional development and improvement that will later translate into more successful teaching and learning. Based on the identified standards, the Resource Guide promotes a flexible system so that instructors and their supervisors can have those very necessary conversations about excellence in the classroom or laboratory or shop.

This Resource Guide invites opportunities for discussion, self-evaluation and administrative review to be done sensitively and sensibly in a collaborative spirit between teachers and administrators. The process allows for the wide variation of new and experienced professional-technical faculty in their various disciplines. It is hoped that Washington State colleges will adopt the processes outlined in the Resource Guide. Professional-technical college instructors identified their skill standards. Let's hope that this Guide provides them with the assessment strategies they will need to assess their own development.

Executive Summary
Steve Quinn, Project Director, Olympic College

THE VIEW FROM THE LOCOMOTIVE

My principle role throughout the development of this Resource Guide has been as a professional-technical instructor. Certainly I have worn other hats, but the head that wore them was that of a teacher.

In other skill standards projects with which I have been involved, the teacher's role has been limited to that of facilitator, helping to bring the voice of industry to education and the voice of learning to business. From the beginning this set of skill standards for instructors promised to be something unique, perhaps even unsettling. Here the instructors serve as the project's source, its subject, and its primary audience. In early sessions the analogy was often repeated: we are laying the track while also driving the train (some added "while surveying the route and servicing the locomotive," but any analogy can be taken too far).

Four years later, however, I am convinced that what is attempted here is not that unusual. Every day teachers demand relevance and empower success in their courses and from their students. We describe outcomes and offer multiple paths, providing resources and guiding the meaningful assessment and application of skills and abilities. What is different is that here we are doing these things for ourselves, for our own professional assessment and growth. If this is unsettling it is perhaps for the same reasons parallel processes in the classroom have had that effect on our students.

Many good students have felt a bit unsettled in recent years by the shift toward providing skill standards and learning outcomes as a framework for their education. Students well-schooled in "doing what the teacher wants" can be initially threatened or confused by a class that abandons traditional paradigms and explicitly guides, rewards, and expects relevant learning. For these same students, the learners of today, anxiety often turns into excitement as they begin to understand the power and flexibility of outcomes-based, learner-centered education.

It is no different for instructors, who serve as role models for all learners. It has been thirty years since the framework that guides the professional development of instructors has been formally examined. Anxiety is natural, but we also know from more than a decade of classroom experience that the change will be worth it: skill standards will offer a resilient safety net for professional practice while learning outcomes promote focus and responsible innovation.

It is to help with this unsettling process that this Resource Guide has been produced. It is written in response to questions asked by those already unsettled, questions like: What will it feel like when these standards are implemented? How will the skill standards be used? How will their use affect the way we teach and manage programs? Who are these standards really for? The Guide is also here to use those same questions to provoke the unsettling of others, not by providing answers but by offering a framework and a forum within which their discussion can continue. Notes and drafts of many of the sections of the Guide date back several years, and the form in which they are presented here is a reflection of the directions and patterns followed by the conversations that shaped them.

Where is this train going? The general direction is known. We are moving away from measuring achievement and knowledge by inference or rote and toward the direct assessment of skills

and abilities. We are moving away from formal, incremental evaluation toward continuous improvement and self-assessment. The tools and strategies offered in the Resource Guide are designed to be compatible with these trends. How they are to be used is less clear. Will they be references for the certification of professional-technical instructors? Perhaps. But there is also the possibility of an administrator assessment tool, based on a modified Critical Skills Inventory, and elements of the Resource Guide have been suggested and applied for institutional assessment, post-tenure review, and the orientation and training of academic faculty. What may be most unsettling for learners, or professionals, in environments of outcomes-based learning and standards-based certification is the realization that we are not passengers on this train; we are its engineers.

THE VIEW FROM THE CABOOSE

The intended outcome of the Resource Guide project was to create and disseminate an example of a method and its associated tools and instructions for use in assessing teacher certification candidates' skills and abilities as they relate to identified skill standards for professional-technical college Instructors. These resources are offered for use by and with teachers during their initial and continuing certification periods to assess, guide, and support the development of the skills and abilities described by the Skill Standards.

The guidelines for the development of the Resource Guide were that the included resources will:
1.   Be easy to use and understand;
2.   Be useful for the assessment of prior skills and abilities and for the direction and assessment of continuing professional development;
3.   Be outcomes-oriented and evidence-based, using the existing skill standards as a point of reference;
4.   Provide a framework of self-assessment and reflective practice;
5.   Encourage and allow for the inclusion of multiple measures and perspectives;
6.   Allow flexibility to accommodate program, institution, and evolutionary needs, priorities, and resources;
7.   Align with revised Washington Administrative Code certification guidelines;
8.   Directly support student learning and program effectiveness;
9.   Allow for revision of the assessment resources without extensive revision of the curriculum guide, the skill standards, or the Washington Administrative Code with which they interrelate;
10. Provide a credible foundation for transfer among and across institutions.

I am certainly grateful to the official leaders of this project through all its phases for their patience, vision, and support. They belong, however, to a larger group of unofficial but not unrecognized leaders in innovation, passion, and professionalism in the classrooms, labs, and offices of higher education. Just as the unsettling questions of these educators have formed the framework for this project, their continuing hard work and integrity have been its inspiration.

An Overview of Professional Development, Assessment and Certification Resources

Washington Administrative Code (WAC)

WAC section 131-16 defines certification guidelines for faculty and administrators in professional-technical programs. Initial and standard certification processes are described.

Skill Standards for Professional-Technical College Instructors

Educator standards described as ten critical work functions and their associated key activities; performance indicators to guide assessment; technical and preparatory knowledge and descriptive scenarios to support training and skill development.

Resource Guide for Professional Development and Assessment

Sample Assessment Tools and Strategies:
Examples of screening and diagnostic assessment tools to support and guide certification and professional development, with suggested flowcharts and scenarios.

Implementation Resources:
An overview of assessment strategies and tools using the Skill Standards and Curriculum Guide, including examples of standards-based learning outcomes for the assessment of skills and descriptions of novice, skilled, and master levels of instructor performance for use during assessment and professional development activities.

Skill Standards Curriculum Guide for Professional-Technical College Instructors

Professional Development Courses:
Course descriptions and learning resources designed to support skill development. Courses are based on published Skill Standards, and include assessment information. Many courses are available on-line.

Comprehensive Skill Standards Inventory:
Also included in the Resource Guide, this tool supports job-specific assessment and prioritization of instructor skills for professional development.

Standard-Specific Self-Assessment Tools:
Detailed inventories are included for many of the skill standards, using published performance indicators to guide self-assessment and planning.

*For More information or to order copies of these resources visit **www.wa-skills.com***

Introduction to the Resource Guide

The Resource Guide contains two main groups and types of materials. The first is a set of tools and materials offered as examples to help instructors and administrators unfamiliar with the new Skill Standards and Curriculum Guide begin to apply these resources to the assessment, development, and certification of the skills that describe the professional educator. These materials are found in Section II of the Guide. The second group of materials, in Section III, includes resources designed to guide, explain, or expand on possible applications and modifications of the tools in Section II.

Elements within each section are intended to be used in any selection or sequence. Three elements form the essential core of the materials included here: the Critical Skills Inventory and the Comprehensive Skill Standards Inventory in Section II and the introduction of the standards-based learning outcomes for professional development in Section III.

The Critical Skills Inventory is based on a set of performance indicators distilled from across all the Skill Standards areas and focused on skills critical for all instructors: the abilities to provide student instruction, supervise learning environments and implement curriculum, outcomes, and assessments. This inventory is meant to be generally applicable and relatively essential, and as such to provide an easy starting place and common theme for the assessment process.

The Comprehensive Skill Standards Inventory is also generally applicable, but precisely because it is not distilled at all. This tool provides a format for the review of all the skill areas described in the Skill Standards for Professional-Technical College Instructors as they apply to a specific job or work setting. The dialogue between the Critical Skills Inventory and the Comprehensive Skill Standards Inventory forms the basic dynamic of this Resource Guide.

The learning outcomes are critical for two reasons. First, because learning outcomes are essential mediators between any standards-based assessment and the development of the skills being assessed. Second, because the learning outcomes themselves are used as the organizational scheme for the assessment tools in Section II, and questions raised by that first encounter may be answered here.

The Resource Guide arose in response to the questions, "What might the implementation of the skill standards and associated curriculum look like, and how can these resources be used by instructors to plan and document their professional development?" The Guide does not offer a set of answers, but rather multiple ways to turn such questions into discussions and opportunities for collaborative growth.