

Stakeholder Summary

Faculty buy-in necessary for success in outcomes-based education

There is growing interest in outcomes-based education (OBE) initiatives that define, teach and assess learning outcomes. But getting faculty on board and changing their attitudes toward outcomes-based processes is important to the successful adoption of learning outcomes in Ontario's postsecondary institutions, according to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

Project Description

Outcomes-Based Education Initiatives in Ontario Postsecondary Education: Case Studies profiles seven OBE initiatives at Ontario's colleges and universities and sheds light on how these initiatives have been implemented, factors that have contributed to their success, as well as the challenges. Using a case study approach, the project reviewed five institutional-level initiatives, one faculty-level initiative and one program-level initiative. Each was either a best practice, represented a distinct aspect of how OBE could be implemented across the Ontario system, or was located in the arts and sciences disciplines.

While the seven cases examined involve different levels of learning outcomes – some are project-based outcomes, others are course-level outcomes – they are all integrated into pre-existing activities such as program development and review or curriculum mapping and renewal. Each initiative has well developed outcomes and clearly articulated how the learning outcomes were to be achieved. Only two cases involved the assessment of learning outcomes, suggesting that assessment is only at the early stages in Ontario. The current focus is on defining learning outcomes and developing strategies to ensure that students achieve those outcomes.

Findings

Having strong leadership and the support of teaching and learning centres are important factors in the successful adoption of OBE initiatives. With the help of an associate dean who championed learning outcomes, one university created an outcome-oriented policy that required all arts and social sciences faculty to include student learning outcomes on course outlines. Similarly, the teaching and learning centre at one college played an integral part in providing guidance and support during a program review process, and engaging faculty in conversations about learning outcomes.

Faculty buy-in proved to be a significant challenge to the implementation of OBE initiatives as many outcomes-based processes such as curriculum mapping and program review require a significant time commitment. The report also suggests that some faculty do not see the value of an outcomes-based approach to teaching, or they prioritize content instruction over skill development.

Outcomes-Based Education Initiatives in Ontario Postsecondary Education: Case Studies is written by Qin Liu from the University of Toronto.