



## Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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MAIN OFFICE  
One Ashburton Place, Room 1401  
Boston, MA 02108  
TEL (617) 994-6950  
WEB [www.mass.edu](http://www.mass.edu)

OFFICE of STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE  
75 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148  
TEL (617) 391-6070  
WEB [www.mass.edu/osfa](http://www.mass.edu/osfa)

Carlos E. Santiago  
*Commissioner*  
Chris Gabrieli  
*Board Chairman*

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** AMCOA Team

**FROM:** Bob Awkward, Director of Learning Outcomes Assessment

**CC:** P. Marshall, Deputy Commissioner of Academic Affairs & Student Success

**DATE:** January 30, 2018

**SUBJECT:** MassTransfer Implementation Guidelines

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#### Background

As you may recall, at the last Amcoa Team meeting on November 30, we discussed the need to provide guidance to assessment leaders across the state to help them to implement the learning outcomes developed for foundational courses and distributed to the Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) in mid-September. Subsequently, these learning outcomes were to be distributed to deans and department chairs for implementation. The intent of these learning outcomes is to reduce barriers to students being able to transfer from a two year to a four year institution, and to ensure that when a student transfers, they are prepared to move to the next level in their studies. These core learning outcomes ensure that students receive the same foundational content whether they begin at a community college, state university or a UMass campus.

#### Problem Statement

The concern is that if this work does not get to the deans and department chairs, then it will not be implemented or it will be implemented haphazardly. Inconsistent implementation will potentially undermine the rationale for doing the work of identifying foundational courses, mapping them, and developing common learning outcomes.

## **Process**

In order to have a detailed discussion about the barriers and opportunities for implementation of the MassTransfer Pathways Learning Outcomes already completed for the following disciplines: Biology, Chemistry (General and Organic), Economics, History (4 of 6 courses), Political Science, Sociology, and Psychology (2 of 8 courses), a sub-committee of Amcoa was convened comprised of Rita Jones-Hyde (Massasoit Community College), Mark Nicholas (Framingham State University), Sarah Strout (Worcester State University), and Laura Uerling (Roxbury Community College). We met on January 11, 2018 and developed the following ideas for action by all institutional assessment leaders across the state.

## **Suggested Implementation Actions**

First, we need to ascertain if the learning outcomes have been distributed to deans and department chairs. We know they were sent to the CAOs. Some knew they had been distributed, others were unsure.

1. For community colleges and UMass campuses, assessment leaders should canvas the relevant department chairs to: a) determine if they received the learning outcomes; b) if they did, have they implemented them; c) if they received them, but didn't implement them, why haven't they done so, i.e., what barriers preclude them from doing so; and d) what are their plans to implement the outcomes.
2. For state universities, assessment leaders should talk with their CAO to discern what happened upon the CAOs receipt of the learning outcomes. Due to Work-to-Rule, there is a concern that this initiative cannot be pushed too hard since it involves working at the course level versus program and institutional levels in a complex environment.

For any institution in which they have implemented the learning outcomes, it would be worth learning how the implementation went.

- Did it help to facilitate useful departmental discussions about curriculum?
- Did it create difficult conversations and how did they overcome them?
- Were there many changes required given that discipline-specific faculty syllabi were used as the genesis from which the system-wide outcomes were developed and vetted by discipline-specific faculty?

For any institution where the department chairs received the learning outcomes and have not yet implemented them, meet and develop a strategy about how to implement them within their departments. I am also a resource available to help with any departmental implementation as the overall leader of this specific initiative.

Second, I will re-send the learning outcomes and the list of faculty who served as discipline-specific faculty segment leaders, which will be useful to know when talking with department chairs. FYI, I sent a similar package to the faculty segment leaders in October 2017 so that they knew the learning outcomes had been distributed statewide, and so they could help to implement them on their campuses given their personal involvement.

Third, I have requested that Pat Marshall discuss this initiative with the community college and state university CAOs at their monthly meetings. In addition, it is recommended that Pat should remind the CAOs that these recommendations were developed by discipline-specific faculty for use by their colleagues, and how important this initiative is for addressing our ongoing equity concerns and for serving all students; especially underserved students.

Finally, I will aggregate the data collected by assessment leaders in order to develop a statewide picture of the degree of implementation that has occurred or is occurring. All of this information will be helpful now that I am working on the next round of disciplines as follows: Business Administration, Communication & Media Studies, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, English, History (2 of 6), and Psychology (6 of 8 which are already completed!).

Thank you for being part of this important work!

Attachments: Learning Outcomes by Discipline  
Faculty Segment Leaders by Discipline