

Track 1: Innovation and Critical Learning in Business & Education

Demonstrating Knowledge Enrichment and Skill Development: Tracking Learning Outcomes via a Documentation of Learning (DOL)

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Students in undergraduate and graduate business programs tend to become fixated on following the rules and using algorithms sanctioned by their professors. Such behaviour is propagated and even rewarded by the educational institutions charged with developing the requisite business skills to support the emergence of new business endeavours and the sustainability of current business entities. A lesson learned from the current economic strife is that many of the decisions made by graduates of such programs tended to be rather suboptimal. Clearly, there are some shortcomings in the previously projected set of learning objectives. It is time for business educators to take another look at what is being presented to students who hope to become future business leaders. It is also critical that educators do not become fixated on the content of what is presented but also pay close attention to the outcomes of our processes, and to the processes themselves.

As business schools adjust to refined referent points for what needs to be taught and how it should best be learned, the authors of this article challenge business educators to 1) target specific learning outcomes and 2) reinforce learning by holding students accountable for documenting what they have learned. A key element to learning that endures is that some reflective attention is paid to the experience by the learner. This reflective activity with foundation and reinforcement in works of Dewey (1964), Kolb (1984), Pennebaker (1990), and Dunlap (2006), is integrated in a specific final individual assignment for business students, the Documentation of Learning (DOL).

This article provides the results of preliminary investigative inquiry into the use of the DOL to substantiate learning across targeted learning outcomes as used at several US business schools. Student compilations of DOLs across both undergraduate and graduate courses are compared. Correlations are drawn between successful DOLs and success across the targeted learning outcomes. Contrasts are presented between learner success in courses that did or did not require knowledge tracking assignments as a precursor to the DOLs. Several conclusions are drawn that support the introduction of both knowledge tracking and DOLs in the curriculum mix at business schools.

As business schools enhance their offerings to include development opportunities in areas of leadership, problem solving, and social responsibility, the purposeful implementation of knowledge tracking and DOLs can support such enhancement. Such tracking and reflective components should be woven into the natural fabric of any professional school curriculum. This article encourages educators to develop a curriculum plan that incorporates such tools to improve and sustain lifelong learning skills necessary to lead our organizations into the future.

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