DQP
DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

The DQP and the Emphasis on Employability

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The current edition of the *Degree Qualifications Profile,* released by Lumina Foundation in 2014, recognizes that effective degree programs must prepare graduates for employment. Indeed, the DQP is meant to "respond directly to employers' concerns that graduates need better preparation for applying their learning to a wide array of problems and settings" (p. 50). In announcing the 2915 edition, Jamie Merisotis, president of Lumina, spoke of the importance of the path "from a degree to a career" (p. 2). Throughout, the DQP focuses on "sound preparedness for college, career, and life" (p. 9).

However, since 2015, three developments in particular have suggested that the next edition of the DQP, which is now being considered by two NILOA panels, should emphasize career preparedness even more explicitly.

- First, there has been unprecedented proliferation in the number and variety of non-degree credentials (NDCs) such as certificates, badges, and certifications. Programs offering such credentials promise direct paths to employment more expeditious (some may be earned in a couple of months) and less costly than earning a degree.
- Second, despite overwhelming evidence that degrees offer a distinct advantage in terms of employment and long-term success, the pandemic fueled interest in short-term non-degrees and even prompted some pundits and policy makers to question whether degrees are necessary. As Paul Fain wrote in *Inside Higher Ed* (27 August 2020), the "moment" of NDCs had arrived.
- Finally, the leadership of Quality Assurance Commons in defining essential elements of career preparedness has provided useful criteria for considering how programs regardless of discipline can prepare their students more effectively for employment.

How might the next iteration of the DQP draw more attention to career preparedness as an essential degree-level objective? There are opportunities to do so in every one of its elements. It will be the work of the NILOA review panels to consider revisions, but as one of the DQP authors I can suggest a few possibilities. (Two other authors of the DQP, Carol Geary Schneider and Peter Ewell, will publish their respective blogs on other issues in the July and August issues of the newsletter.)

- The summary of DQP "uses" (p. 8) could mention its value for aligning program requirements with employer expectations. Shortly after the release of the first ("beta") edition of the DQP, the North Dakota State College of Science used it "to determine how well [its] AAS degree aligned with employer expectations." As part of the process, "major employers of students were invited to . . . review the DQP and provide feedback" (p. 36). (It was positive.)

- The overview of "the value of the DQP" (p. 10) includes students, faculty members, and "the public." It should include employers as well. They have found the DQP helpful in understanding the priorities of academic programs, in developing criteria to guide hiring decisions, and in screening candidates for employment.

- The list of "guidelines for interpreting the proficiencies" could lead those seeking to make use of the DQP to find and clarify the correlations between the academic proficiencies defined there and documented employer expectations.

- The five "areas of learning" essential to any degree program (p. 12) are all germane to preparation for employment, but their importance as elements in career readiness can be spelled out more clearly. For instance, learning to collaborate with others in addressing "both conventional and unscripted problems" represents a critical "employability skill" that employers have repeatedly emphasized as a priority (p. 12). (See www.aacu.org/research)

- Similarly, the proficiencies themselves, organized within these areas in terms of the associate, bachelor's, and master's degree (irrespective of discipline), might include more explicit awareness of employment readiness. Three examples follow.

  - At the **associate degree** level, proficiencies expressing *Specialized Knowledge* might refer to appropriate employer expectations as well as to "the field of study" (p. 14). The second bullet in the list of three might be revised as follows: "Applies tools, techniques, and methods common to the field of study *and to related opportunities for employment* to selected questions or problems.

  - At the **bachelor's degree** level, proficiencies expressing *Intellectual Skills* might include the capability of assessing not only problems "within the chosen field of study and at least one other field" but ones typically presented by careers that the student may be considering.

  - At the **master's degree** level, proficiency in *Civic and Global Learning* may be demonstrated by the development of a proposal "addressing a global challenge in the field of study" (p. 19). Perhaps as an alternative students might choose to "address a challenge presented by a case study drawn from the student's career objectives."

As these few examples may suggest, the proficiencies defined by the DQP can easily accommodate more explicit attention to preparedness for employment. As all of the "areas of learning" invite such attention, there would appear to be no need for an additional category. But given the nay-sayers, there may be a need to reassert the unique value of the *degree* as opposed to credentials earned through short-term, highly concentrated programs. As Carol Geary Schneider has written, "The next edition [of the DQP] can show even more plainly why and how the combination of broad and specialized learning, consistently connected to career as well as civic applications, builds a 360-degree mindset that no short-term training program can match."

In sum, good degree programs lead to good jobs. The DQP should say that—clearly.

All quotations are from DQP, 2014.