



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 27

*A core product of the
Employability Skills
Forum, National
Business and
Education Centre*

Program
College

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Name of Program
Mount Royal College's
College-Wide
Learning Outcomes
Initiative

Skills Developed
Academic
Personal Management
Teamwork

Assessing and developing community college and university transfer students' employability skills

MOUNT ROYAL COLLEGE'S COLLEGE-WIDE LEARNING OUTCOMES INITIATIVE PHASE 2

Building on Teaching Strengths and Empowering Postsecondary learners

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1999

Mount Royal College is empowering postsecondary learners and building on faculty teaching strengths by integrating institution wide employability skills and development objectives into all of its courses and programs by the year 2005. This is congruent with the college mission statement. The College is committed to supporting faculty skill and knowledge in developing teaching/learning choices.

Overview

Summary of Phase 1

In a previous study in this series (see Case Study 9). I profiled Phase 1 of Mount Royal College's College-Wide Learning Outcomes Initiative, which is a systematic strategy to prepare College graduates for lifelong learning and equip them with the employability skills they will need to succeed in the 21st century workplace.

That study focused on how and why in 1997–98 the College went about identifying institution-wide learning outcomes to better position itself to serve its community of learners, which includes many university transfer students.

Mount Royal College has articulated its commitment to serving its community of learners in its vision and mission statements. Mount Royal Vision 2005 document contains the College's mission statement and outlines its strategic priorities. Employability skills development lies at the heart of the mission statement: they are the link that connects the College's commitment to meeting students' and the community's changing needs for "personal, intellectual and social education" with the College's mandate to provide applied education and training to meet changing market needs. The College's vision highlights the view that what is good for individual development also strengthens the community and drives Canada's economy.

To achieve its vision and mission, the College provides support to faculty and students. Indeed, part of the College's purpose in focusing on its vision and mission and implementing its teaching and learning outcomes through a strategic plan is to strengthen the partnership between students, faculty and administration.

On the students' side, the College offers a wide range of occupational programs, including four-year applied degrees, two-year diplomas and one-year

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post-diploma certificates. The applied degree programs include mandatory work terms, which are operated like co-op programs.

Moreover, Mount Royal College's Career Services office uses the Conference board's Employability Skills Profile in a variety of ways to help students prepare for postgraduation employment. Career Services teaches students how to think strategically about preparing themselves to enter the workforce. It also encourages students to identify their current skills and to augment these with others that employers look for.

The College's learning outcomes initiative will ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop transferable skills essential to continuous learning and workplace success before graduating. These skills, expressed as "Learning Outcomes" were approved in principle by Mount Royal College's Academic Council in April 1999. They are:

- Thinking Skills
- Communication
- Information Retrieval and Evaluation
- Ethical Reasoning
- Computer Literacy
- Group Effectiveness

Phase 2: 1998–99 and Beyond

Phase 2 of Mount Royal's College-Wide Learning Outcomes Initiative focuses on providing support to faculty, who will help students to acquire—systematically, progressively and successively—the skills they need for continuous learning and workplace success. This has involved:

1. Further clarifying what the six learning outcomes the College has embraced actually look like in practice
2. Drafting a strategic plan to promote awareness and knowledge of identified learning outcomes among students, full-time and part-time faculty; identify, develop and disseminate print, technology based and other materials to assist faculty and students in teaching, learning and assessing outcomes; develop strategies to foster interdisciplinary and

interdisciplinary communication in developing and implementing learning outcomes; and piloting and evaluating implementation strategies

3. Producing a *Faculty Information Package* which includes a literature review of the common rationale for adopting outcome-based teaching and learning models at postsecondary institutions across North America, including arguments about how employing these models may improve student learning
4. Producing a workbook, *The Bridge to College Wide Learning Outcomes—How to Create a Course Outline with Learning Outcomes*, to help faculty create course outlines with learning outcomes by articulating course-level learning outcomes, reflecting on students' learning needs, and matching appropriate college-wide learning outcomes to their course content.

Groups served

- All students
- All faculty

Objectives

- ✓ Build on teaching strength at the College to move from a teacher-centred model to a learner-centred model—focusing on a balanced approach to development of transferable skills and coverage of academic content
- ✓ Promote teaching-learning strategies associated in research studies with deep learning and development of transferable skills
- ✓ Empower students with the skills and knowledge they need to manage their own learning and achieve professional success
- ✓ Encourage students to be more independent, taking charge of, and being accountable for, their entire education—employability skills development is a cumulative process that takes place over the course of an entire education—within the context of providing a structured learning environment

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We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

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- ✓ Encourage faculty to be explicit about the knowledge and skill outcomes of their courses and what outcomes individual course activities are designed to achieve
- ✓ Promote performance-based assessment of students, and use of assessment as a learning experience for students and faculty
- ✓ Create better opportunities for teachers to teach and learners to learn

Activities

Spelling Out What College-Wide Learning Outcomes Look Like

Outcomes Teams at Mount Royal College are in the process of articulating the various components of what each of the College's selected learning outcomes looks like in practice. To give readers an example of what the College has done in this area; I have selected details from the "Group Effectiveness" outcome. The College has defined group effectiveness as the "ability to work respectfully with others and to see multiple sides of an issue, to understand that the group has the ability to create more than a single individual, and to ... work towards a common goal or purpose." Students can demonstrate their group effectiveness in a variety of ways. In particular, they can:

Demonstrate personal effectiveness by:

- Being open, empathetic, and trusting
- Being flexible and willing to adjust
- Being assertive, not aggressive or defensive
- Having knowledge of group processes
- Demonstrating respect/awareness of biases and assumptions
- Dealing effectively with emotional stresses

Communicate effectively in a group setting by:

- Giving and receiving feedback appropriately
- Listening actively

- Responding respectfully to diverse opinions
- Expressing ideas clearly and pertinently
- Inviting other group members to participate

Demonstrate personal accountability for the success of the group by:

- Articulating benefits and outcomes of group activity
- Exhibiting commitment to group goals
- Modifying personal behaviours to improve contribution to the group
- Demonstrating willingness and ability to assess others and self

Apply/implement group process skills in diverse settings by:

- Participating in establishment of group goals, tasks, rules, roles, and strategies
- Recognizing and adopting implicit and explicit roles within the group (including leadership)
- Recognizing and complying with implicit and explicit group rules and norms
- Building relationships to support group effectiveness (team building)
- Analyzing and adapting to the dynamics of any group

Sharing Effective Strategies for Teaching and Learning Outcomes Across the College and Across Disciplines

Outcome teams—which are cross-disciplinary—are publishing teaching tips for the various college-wide outcomes and disseminating these to their colleagues.

For example, the Thinking Skills outcome team recently distributed a list of strategies faculty might use to promote critical thinking and problem solving in courses across the curriculum. In addition, the Thinking Skills team, in collaboration with the college's professional development committee, is sponsoring a number of workshops and events related

Requiring instructors to assess learning outcomes encourages them to reflect on the relevance of course content (the things they would like to see their students retain) and how they can teach it to stimulate retention.

to the teaching of thinking at Mount Royal College.

Further, print and technology-mediated resources are being developed to assist students in the development of college-wide outcomes, and faculty in their assessment. To illustrate, all undergraduate students are required to take an English composition course and a resource is being developed to assist Faculty and Students with the fundamentals of writing and composition and how to assess it. This:

- makes students accountable for their prior learning in English composition
- helps students transfer and further develop their writing skills in discipline specific courses
- encourages instructors to be comfortable with teaching and assessing and providing students with feedback on their writing skills in every course they teach (not just English courses)

Developing Innovative Assessment Strategies

Requiring instructors to assess learning outcomes encourages them to reflect on the relevance of course content (the things they would like to see their students retain) and how they can teach it to stimulate retention.

Noteworthy examples from Mount Royal's Centre for Health Studies and the Department of Physical Education and Recreation Studies involve:

- Organizing students into triads to perform therapist, patient or observer roles so that they both operate themselves and scrutinize each other; employing multiple scenarios (first assessing a knee injured playing basketball, then a knee hurt playing football); employing multiple examiners (self, peer, instructor, external); performing such assessments frequently
- Building on previous learning—e.g., in clinical courses practising skills learned as much as 2 years previously
- Videotaping students performing physical (triage) assessments and

having students review their videotaped performance and submit reflective self-assessments along with their tapes

Resources required

To finance its curriculum renewal initiative, Mount Royal College will be spending approximately \$600,000 over four years on teaching release time, site visits, conferences, retreats and training, programming and desktop publishing, administrative support and photocopying and supplies.

Career Services has also reallocated personnel resources and dedicated desktop and print budgets to this initiative.

Achievements/Outcomes

Process

- Drafting of Faculty Curriculum Group Strategic Plan in August 1999
- Production of modules for faculty Outcomes-Based Course Outline Workbook in June 1999
- Approval in principle by Mount Royal College Academic Council in April 1999 for College-Wide Learning Outcomes
- Production of Faculty Information Package on Curriculum Renewal Initiative in January 1999
- Establishment of communication mechanisms including newsletter, website, and full-faculty or departmental forums

People

- 6 college-wide outcome teams have grown in the past year and are further honing definitions of outcomes and performance indicators and moving beyond definitions and components to sharing tips for teaching and assessing particular learning outcomes across the College and across disciplines
- College's professional development committee has designated 1999/2000 the "year of thinking" and PD events this academic year will relate to

Videotaping students performing physical (triage) assessments and having students review their videotaped performance and submit reflective self-assessments along with their tapes helps students achieve College learning outcomes.

▶ *Mount Royal's innovation lies in its approach to enhancing collaboration between and among students, faculty and administration within the College.*

▶ *Mount Royal faculty have considerable strengths in teaching for the learner and this needs to be acknowledged and recognized.*

▶ *Helping students make connections between and among courses within their programs using knowledge and skills gained as their organizing principles is essential.*

- teaching and assessing thinking skills
- Individual instructors are starting to post course outlines incorporating outcomes on websites
- A number of career programs would like to move head aggressively and implement outcomes
- All future curriculum submissions must be accompanied by a graduate profile and program/course outcomes

Benefits

Students

- ✓ Become active learners and take charge of their education and skills development in college and out
- ✓ Identify their skill strengths and challenges
- ✓ Clarify their goals and gain awareness of the skills they can build to reach their education and employment potential
- ✓ Develop their employability skills

Faculty

- ✓ Receive guidance relating to integrating learning outcomes and teaching and assessing to desired skill and knowledge outcomes
- ✓ See how students' learning is reinforced by receiving timely and continuous feedback and having and using skills and knowledge
- ✓ Help students make skill and knowledge connections
- ✓ Collaborate across program and curricula lines

Innovation

Mount Royal's innovation lies in its approach to enhancing collaboration between and among students, faculty and administration within the College. Better communication will help students, faculty and administration to work together more effectively to combine teaching excellence with a co-ordinated approach to life, career and workplace preparation.

Keys to Success

People

- ✓ Giving credit where credit is due—Mount Royal faculty have considerable strengths in teaching for the learner and this needs to be acknowledged and recognized
- ✓ Helping students make connections between and among courses within their programs using knowledge and skills gained as their organizing principles
- ✓ Encouraging faculty across programs and curricula to talk to each other about what they want their students to be able to do after they take their course and how they are going to assess their students' performance and how each faculty member can contribute individually and as a teaching team to student success

Process

- ✓ Developing a suite of user-friendly tools to help faculty incorporate learning outcomes in their courses and assess their students' progress towards, and achievement of, those outcomes
- ✓ Meeting faculty concerns that college-wide learning outcomes are the "flavour of the month" and will pass by showing faculty what the initiative means to, and impacts on, them, how it creates better opportunities for teachers to teach and learners to learn
- ✓ Stop conceiving of courses as islands unto themselves but as parts of a whole education that links all of the skills and knowledge learned in different courses into a coherent whole
- ✓ Ensuring that assessment of learning outcomes builds in sensitivity to faculty needs concerning their workload and meets students' need for early and continuous feedback to optimize their performance over time

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*Our grateful thanks
to our interviewees
and others who
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Maureen Mitchell
Dexter Nelson
Jim Zimmer*

Greatest challenge

People

- ✓ Helping faculty become comfortable with reflecting on their own personal teaching and assessing practices
- ✓ Allaying faculty fears that outcomes based education interferes with academic freedom—what they teach and how they teach it—by offering faculty choices and support to find resources to help them reflect on and refine their already good teaching practices to enhance students’ skills
- ✓ Addressing faculty concerns over workload— there is more work involved in teaching and assessing to outcomes (performance based assessment) than grading a multiple choice exam.
- ✓ Addressing faculty concerns that assessment results may come back and be harmful to individual faculty members when the purpose of performance based assessment is really to provide timely and constructive feedback to enhance student learning and help faculty be better instructors

- ✓ Addressing concerns of faculty who are concerned about content coverage and how teaching and assessing for transferable skills may compromise it
- ✓ Helping faculty become comfortable with taking risks to enhance teaching and learning

Process

- ✓ Developing a matrix or grid showing where students are getting which skills, how they are being assessed, at what level and how their skills are being developed over the course of a given program
- ✓ In the hiring of new faculty, recruiting individuals willing to teach in an outcomes-based curriculum model, and committed to developing transferable skills across the curriculum
- ✓ Doing baseline research at the College to see how faculty are already using outcomes and how that is consistent with the College’s initiative and with the demand from all stakeholder groups (parents, students, governments) for a transparent teaching and learning process that provides value for money, imparts knowledge and develops students’ transferable skills

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NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Understanding Employability Skills (Apr. 99)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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