Using the Common Core to Map General Education:

The First Step
What is Curriculum Mapping?

A visual way to:

• Track how program learning outcomes are developed across an entire curriculum
• Identify the relationship between courses students take and a program’s learning outcomes
• Quickly check a program for balance and coverage
What is Curriculum Mapping?

A way to:

• Shift focus from "what’s delivered" to "what students learn"
• Discover gaps in the curriculum
• Identify
  – Bottlenecks
  – Mission-critical courses
  – Over-burdened courses
  – Under-utilized courses
What is a Curriculum Map Used For?

- Internal assessment
- External assessment and the accreditation process
- Improving communication about the curriculum among faculty
- Identifying courses for revision
The History of Curriculum Mapping

• Began in the 1970s with the work of Fenwick W. English on public school curricula.

• English wanted to understand the relationship between the stated goals of a curriculum, the material presented to students, and evidence of learning.

• English recommended that relationships should be quantified in terms of time spent, activities covered, staff involved, etc.
Visualizing Curriculum Mapping

- A curriculum map visually documents the intersection of a program’s mission, its learning outcomes, and course-level assignment, instruments and other high-stakes artifacts.
Basic Curriculum Mapping with Pathways

• General Education at the City University is based on courses identified as supporting the Common Core
• The Common Core is divided into the Required Core and the Flexible Core
• In the Required Core, students take courses that address learning outcomes specific to English Composition, Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and Life and Physical Sciences
• Required Core courses have 16 discrete Student Learning Outcomes, 11 of which should be taught once and 5 of which should be taught twice.
Basic Curriculum Mapping with Pathways

• The Flexible Core is slightly more complex

• In the Flexible Core, students take six courses in five “buckets” that address learning outcomes specific to World Cultures and Global Issues, the US Experience in its Diversity, Creative Expression, the Individual and Society, and the Scientific World

• The Flexible Core has 3 shared and 27 discrete Student Learning Outcomes
Basic Curriculum Mapping with Pathways

• As part of the Pathways process, colleges proposed courses for inclusion in specific “buckets” and documented the Student Learning Outcomes each course addressed.

• Although implementation at each college was unique, it was always hoped that each college would have an idea of what General Education was supposed to accomplish.

• For example, a goal for General Education might be for students to have the opportunity to experience all 46 Student Learning Outcomes.

• A basic Curriculum Map can be quickly created to see if this is the case.
Creating a Curriculum Map

• Each course approved for inclusion in the Common Core will have a sample syllabus and a submission form that identifies Student Learning Outcomes.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

In the text boxes explain the course assignments and activities that will address the learning outcomes

Individual and Society

* 1. Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.

In each module, students are expected to read and critically discuss the primary text, required journal articles, opinion pieces and editorials, and view specified audio and video files as required by the instructor. Often these course readings present different points of view on an ethical issue. In Discussion Board Forums and Formal Essays (described in more detail below and in the syllabus appendix) students must gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view to complete the requirements of the assignments.

* 2. Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.

Short answer reflection question assignments are designed to gauge progress in acquiring critical thinking skills by allowing the student to briefly explain, identify, and apply the principles under investigation. In addition, Formal Essays (described in more detail below and in the syllabus appendix) require students to evaluate arguments in order to take and defend a position. Last, the Capstone ePortfolio Essay tracks the development of the students’ thinking as he/she works through one of the moral problems covered in the course, tracking his/her progress from “pre-philosophical reflection” early in the course to more sophisticated philosophical analysis at the course conclusion. In the capstone essay, students engage in reflective inquiry into the study of bioethics by analyzing, reconstructing, and critiquing a complex argument on a contemporary issue.

* 3. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.

Each course module has an associated Formal Essay that requires students to gather and evaluate evidence and arguments from primary and secondary sources in order to create their own well-reasoned written argument about an ethical issue. The general instructions for each essay are as follows: In a well-reasoned essay of at least 750 words, take a position on the issue, and defend a thesis in support of that position. The essay evidences...
Creating a Curriculum Map

• Student Learning Outcomes can then be marked on a grid showing course-by-course coverage
### Flexible Core Area D Individual and Society

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**Learning Outcomes**

1. Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
2. Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.
3. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.
4. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between the individual and society, including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, history, journalism, philosophy, political science, psychology, public affairs, religion, and sociology.
5. Examine how an individual’s place in society affects experiences, values, or choices.
7. Articulate ethical uses of data and other information resources to respond to problems and questions.
8. Identify and engage with local, national, or global trends or ideologies, and analyze their impact on individual or collective decision-making.
What Can We Learn?

- This grid tells us that of the six courses that the example college included in the Individual and Society “bucket”, only two courses have assignments that ask students to “identify and engage with local, national, or global trends or ideologies, and analyze their impact on individual or collective decision-making.”
- It’s up to the college to determine whether this is a problem.
What Can We Learn?

- This grid also tells us that most courses only ask students to address 2 SLOs other than the first 3 SLOs (which concern research and writing) and the fourth SLO (which introduces an academic discipline). One course, however, addresses all of the SLOs. This might indicate that this course is too demanding or does not cover material in enough depth.
- It’s up to the college to determine whether this is a problem.
What Can We Learn?

• A curriculum map does not provide an answer. It does, however, allow us to ask better questions.

• For example:
  – Should we create a new course that asks students to identify and engage with global trends?
  – If a student only takes one course from this bucket, he or she can “avoid” most of the SLOs... is this a good thing? Are our students doing this?
  – Should we assess our class on Critical Thinking to ensure that students are not required to do an excessive amount of work or ensure that SLOs are covered appropriately?
  – The way to answer these types of questions is through a variety of different course-level assessment exercises
What Can We Learn?

• A grid that maps SLOs with courses could be used to prepare for more complex assessments
• For example:
  – A college might want to learn if students are learning enough about ethical issues in research. A curriculum map would instantly show faculty and administrators which courses addressed D7 (ethical uses of data and other information resources).
  – After the courses have have identified, the Flexible Core Submission Forms could be used to locate the individual assignments that assess the SLO in each course.
  – The SLO could then be assessed program-wide.
Creating a Curriculum Map

- The data from a course grid can also be visualized as a bar chart.
Number of General Education Courses Addressing Pathways Flexible Core SLOs

Pathways Flexible Core SLOs

Number of Courses

CUNY Office of Undergraduate Studies
• The example college never teaches SLO B7 (US/international relations) or C7 (creative skills). Students have few opportunities to encounter SLOs in US in its Diversity.
• It’s up to the college how to address these areas.
What Can We Learn?

• At the CUNY School of Professional Studies, this particular bar chart led to a change during course development

• A new course was being created on Labor in the US

• Based on this curriculum map, an assignment on the impact of international treaties on US labor was added to the course

• After passing through faculty governance, the new course was then submitted for review to the Common Core Curriculum Review Committee, where it was passed and has since become part of SPS’s General Education curriculum
The Next Step

• A basic grid or chart can be very useful, but it is not the be-all and end-all of curriculum mapping

• It might be useful to track how many low-stakes activities address a particular SLO across many courses

• It might be useful to track which courses offer extremely high-stakes assignments addressing specific SLOs

• Curriculum mapping can become quite complex, but in turn, might yield extremely useful data