Assessment of master programs at a doctoral university

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The challenge

- "..... is about providing students with clear indications of what their paths through higher education look like, what levels of knowledge and skills will qualify them for degree awards, and what their degrees mean."

From The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction
Clifford Adelman. 2008. Institute for Higher Education Policy
http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/TheBolognaClub.pdf

Context of examples: Binghamton University-SUNY

Context of examples

- ~15,000, with ~3,000 graduate students
- Of graduate students:
  - 1/3 are international
  - ~ 50% from New York State
- Schools/colleges
  - Arts & Sciences, Community Affairs, Education, Engineering, Management, and Nursing
- 30 doctoral programs
- 40 master programs

Categories of master programs

- Individually accredited
- Embedded in doctoral program
- Stand-alone terminal degree

Examples "individually accredited"

- Music MM
- Social Work (MSW)
- Public Administration (MPA)
- Education (MSEd, MAT)
- Management (MBA and MS Accounting)
- Nursing (MS)

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Generically what accreditation requires*

- Clearly articulated goals, objectives, learning expectations
- Published objectives, requirements, sequence
- Appropriate program learning goals
- Evaluation designed and implemented
- Assessment of learning outcomes
- Reflection on assessment, action items identified, follow-up
- Available and effective student support services

- So accreditation = program assessment

*Example from Middle States Association

Individually accredited programs

- Expectation by deans that unit takes full ownership of obtaining & maintaining accreditation
- Unit appoints faculty coordinator
- OIR provides assistance
- Goal is
  - Passing "with flying colors"
  - Maximum years accreditation

Individually accredited programs

- Unit-appointed faculty coordinator organizes:
    - Collection of materials & data each year
    - Annual review by faculty, identifying action items & follow-up
    - Documentation of review & follow-up
    - Self-study report
    - Site visit
- OIR provides assistance
    - Surveys (faculty, students, alumni)
    - Design of assessment instruments
    - Collection & analysis of some data

Individually accredited programs

- Assessment process leads to faculty:
  - Reflecting on assessment results
  - Identifying action items
  - Implementing action items
  - Repeating the process = continual improvement

Individually accredited programs Example: Public Administration MPA

- Preparation resulted in overhaul of curriculum for focus on "community government"
- Preparation for next accreditation resulted in further refinement, with additional of "not-for-profit organizations" in curriculum
- Likewise, internships and research re-focused on these areas
- Result: more cohesive program

Embedded in doctoral program: examples

- Master is formal step in PhD program
  - English Literature, Anthropology
- Master may be step in PhD program
  - Biological Sciences, Engineering
- Master may be default if student leaves PhD program
  - Psychology, Chemistry

Embedded in doctoral program

- In each case, student is expected within two calendar years to:
  - Complete course work
  - Complete research project or thesis

Embedded in doctoral program

- Students required to have an advisor, meet with advisor, complete annual review, which is submitted to program
- Thesis is evidence of learning
  - Understanding foundational literature
  - Identifying and answering questions
  - Application of research methods
  - Communication skills

Assessment of embedded master occurs with assessment of the unit & its graduate programs

- ## Program's annual review of its students
  - ### Checklist, CV & outline of project

Assessment of embedded master occurs with assessment of the unit & its graduate programs

- Program's annual review of its students
- OIR's annual discussion with unit
  - Learning objective, outcome & reflection

Assessment of embedded master occurs with assessment of the unit & its graduate programs

- Program's annual review of its students
- OIR's annual discussion with unit
- Graduate School's annual meeting with unit representatives
  - Time-to-degree, attrition rate, surveys
    - Natl Assoc Graduate & Professional Students
    - Carnegie Initiative for Doctorate
    - Alumni

Assessment of embedded master occurs with assessment of the unit & its graduate programs

- Program's annual review of its students
- OIR's annual discussion with unit
- Graduate School's annual meeting with unit representatives
- Academic program review every 7 years
  - Data trends, plus placement data
  - Program's own recommendations
  - Results of reviewers' meetings

Embedded in doctoral program Example: Geology

- Transition from one-of-everything to niche research (i.e. sedimentary-geobio processes)

- Created alumni board from people in industry
  - Feedback about training
  - Insight into future job market

- Re-focused master program – 2 tracks
  - Industry focus maximizing placement
  - Focused or fast track to PhD program

Stand-alone terminal

- Master degree's terminal at Binghamton
  - Geography, Romance Languages, Theatre

Stand-alone terminal

- In each case, student is expected within two years to complete course work and research project or thesis
- Program's annual review of its students
- OIR's annual discussion with unit
- Graduate School's annual meeting with unit representatives
- Academic program review every 7 years

Stand-alone terminal programs: Challenges

- Don't have doctoral program driving expectations
- Don't have individualized accreditation for guidance
- Don't have support for these students, but curriculum hasn't been modified for completing 30+ credits in calendar year
- Arts & Sciences master programs need sufficient professionalizing elements
- Faculty don't have time to develop new framework

The ultimate challenge

- "….. is about providing students with clear indications of what their paths through higher education look like, what levels of knowledge and skills will qualify them for degree awards, and what their degrees mean."

From The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction
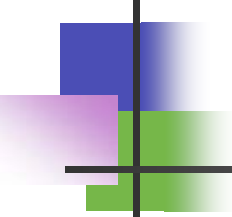Clifford Adelman. 2008. Institute for Higher Education Policy
http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/TheBolognaClub.pdf

Stand-alone terminal

- Potential solution
- European Union has standards for <u>demonstrated</u> mastery & competence for bachelor's & master's degrees
- Adapted European Union description for:
  - Admission = evidence of mastery & competence for bachelor's degree
  - Degree conferral = evidence of mastery & competence for master's degree

*A*pplicants are expected to provide evidence via application credentials and possibly interview and/or audition that they:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;
- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists and non-specialist audiences; and
- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to Under-take further study with a high degree of autonomy.

Rubric for admission

Sample	Not acceptable	Below average	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Examples of evidence
have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, *whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study*						Grades in advanced courses in major and related disciplines; senior seminar and/or honors thesis

REQUIREMENTS FOR MASTER DEGREE CONFERRAL

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;

- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;

- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments;

- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; and

- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

Rubric for degree conferral

Sample "master degree" rubric (e.g., semester-by-semester evaluation)	Not acceptable	Below average	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Examples of evidence
have demonstrated knowledge and understanding *that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with bachelor' s level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context*						Grades in graduate courses
can apply their knowledge and understanding, *and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to* their field of study						"portfolio-type" examples of work; internship work; capstone project or thesis

Pilot program

- Goal:
  - Faculty refine objectives & curriculum as needed to be aligned with global initiatives in graduate education
- Two programs are using this now
- Review with them annually
- Add more programs each year
  - Stand-alone terminal
  - Embedded in doctoral programs

Pilot program

- **Strategically…**
- **In 1-2 years, show results to Graduate Council for adoption of process university-wide for master programs without accreditation**

Pilot program for stand-alone master programs

- ## Sample rubrics for re-thinking master program
  - http://www2.binghamton.edu/grad-school/faculty-and-staff/documents-and-forms/Sample%20template%20for%20reviewing%20master%20program_11-16-10.pdf

Adapted from *European Union remodeling graduate degrees* – see page 18 in Clifford Adelman. 2008. *The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction*. Institute for Higher Education Policy. http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/TheBolognaClub.pdf

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