

TUNING AND DEGREE PROFILES: U.S. Projects in Departments, Universities, States, Regions, and Disciplinary Societies, 2009-Present

Daniel J. MCINERNEY*

In the early twenty-first century, higher education in the United States (as in most other parts of the globe) has been buffeted by a wide range of problems and demands. The calamitous recession of 2008-2010 expanded questions focused on public funding, tuition costs, student debt, campus expenditures, completion rates, and graduate unemployment. Technological innovations have forced an examination of methods for delivering education within, through, and outside institutional walls. Demographic and cultural changes have brought new populations and wider mobility to post-secondary systems. Critical social and political scrutiny has raised questions about access to, preparation for, transfer between, and equity in colleges and universities.

The subsequent calls for greater scrutiny, accountability, and assessment of higher education have inspired a wide range of initiatives in the academic world. One such program of reform that is widely-embraced, inclusive in its scope, and long-term in its focus is the “Tuning” project, originally conceived in the European Union and rapidly expanded to regions around the globe. At its heart, Tuning constructs an informing framework for higher education, clarifying the material students must know and the skills they need to acquire in order to move successfully through their chosen areas of study and on to further education, careers, and civic life. Tuning concentrates on the *quality* and *outcomes* of the learning that takes place in higher education. Participants in the project aim to improve courses, refine curricula, create meaningful pathways to degrees, and guide students in the strategies that will enable them to continue their learning.

There is no single model for the way Tuning or degree profiles should or must be realized. There are, indeed, core components of the projects that have been applied universally, from the European Union to Africa, Latin America, Russia, the U.S., Central Asia and other regions. But the precise steps that colleagues take toward the work vary considerably, reflecting the distinctive qualities of their disciplines, specific purposes of their institutions, the characteristics of their students, and the patterns of teaching and learning exhibited by educators.

From the project’s start in 2000, proponents of Tuning have recognized that the issues colleagues need to address are tremendously diverse and require sensitivity to the conditions of particular institutions and educational systems. In that spirit, the purpose of this paper is to offer an *example* of the ways in which educators in the U.S. have approached Tuning and degree profiles, considering the problems we addressed, the limitations we faced, and the possibilities we considered. The approaches adopted in the States have seemed appropriate to the particular circumstances of its varied campuses, diverse students, and decentralized oversight. Some of the suggestions offered in this article might be applicable to Japanese institutions. At the very least, I hope the discussion will help colleagues in Japan reflect carefully and critically on the distinctive conditions they face in higher education.

* Tuning USA Advisory Board Advisor, American Historical Association Tuning Project DQP/Tuning coach, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment Professor & Associate Head Department of History Utah State University Logan, Utah USA.

I open the discussion with a bit of background about my own work. I have been involved with the Tuning project since its introduction to the U.S. in 2009. The activity has greatly influenced more recent work on degree profiles. I have worked on Tuning at five different levels: within my own History Department at Utah State University; at the state level across eight public institutions in Utah; advising a national Tuning project within the major professional organization in my discipline, the American Historical Association; introducing Tuning in four other states and the middle region of the U.S.; and speaking with international audiences in Europe, Latin America, and Japan.

There is a saying in the U.S. that “politics is the art of the possible.” Reflecting personally on academic reform work at institutional, state, national, and global levels, it is clear that Tuning’s success also relies on what is possible: in the resources, the structures, the resilience, and the frame of mind with which academics approach key questions in higher education. I say this as someone who has been involved in academic reforms as an advocate and a guide rather than a theorist. My own experience does not rest in laying out the broad ideas behind Tuning but in trying to *implement* the projects with faculty and other colleagues.

This paper divides the discussion of Tuning in the U.S. into four parts:

1. the nature of Tuning – in the European Union and the U.S.;
2. defining a discipline core in a department, a state, and a professional society;
3. developing a degree program at Utah State University; and
4. the impact of Tuning on students, faculty, the university, and employers.

1. The Nature of Tuning – in the European Union and the U.S.

It is important to acknowledge that faculty at U.S. institutions have a very skeptical view of projects that assess and evaluate teaching, curricula, and students’ performance. U.S. faculty are commonly involved in different types of assessments and evaluations that examine the work, quality, and effectiveness of academic activities. The most important report is a periodic study of an entire university, called an “accreditation” review. One of nation’s regional accreditation commissions (approved by the federal government’s Department of Education) examines the quality of education at an entire institution ¹⁾. A department itself can also periodically undergo an “external” review managed by other faculty within the same discipline. And at times, an institution performs a “self-study” of its core, institutional curriculum.

Unfortunately, the procedures followed on individual campuses for such studies have often been narrow and restricted:

- much of the work is “top-down”: an institution’s central administration tells departments to take part in the review work and defines how the work will proceed;
- accreditation reviews often follow a single format; all disciplines respond to the same questions, assumptions, and procedures;
- the work is commonly conducted *within* an institution, paying little attention to those who are not part of the faculty or administration; and
- the results of the studies are rarely shared with faculty (unless the review reveals major problems that need to be fixed).

Faculty commonly view these activities as time-consuming, abstract, and separated from the actual,

day-to-day content of courses and meetings with students. Many describe the effort as “busy work”: activity that requires many hours of effort but appears to have little productive value. For example, most departmental colleagues at Utah State University assumed that Tuning was simply another form of cumbersome and useless review work. Initially, as the person charged with developing the project, I found myself doubting the practicality of the effort. I did not have much confidence in the initiative. However, the more patiently I listened to the premises of Tuning – and the less quickly I was willing to jump to conclusions – it became evident that Tuning offered a reasonable, thoughtful, and useful way to answer key questions about our educational work within disciplines (and also with degrees). The project makes seven major improvements in the process of review, assessment, and evaluation ²⁾:

- (1) Tuning places *faculty* in charge of review, assessment, and evaluation. Instead of the key academic officers of an institution defining the review, the instructional staff takes leadership and responsibility. Tuning starts with confidence in the ability of discipline experts to explain the nature and significance of their work.
- (2) Tuning rejects the idea that there is a single, uniform model of analysis for all areas of study. Instead, the process is *discipline-specific*. Tuning focuses on sets of understandings that are distinctive to particular fields of study (and to inter- or cross-disciplinary studies).
- (3) Tuning takes faculty outside of their own department or administrative unit. Faculty are expected to outline the outcomes for their field of study *in collaboration* with disciplinary colleagues at *other* institutions. In the State of Utah, that meant holding conversations with faculty from two-year, four-year, and research institutions. As a result, we created smoother transferability (as students move from one institution to another) and greater alignment of courses (as students proceed from two-year, associate’s degrees to bachelor’s and master’s degrees).
- (4) Tuning recognizes that many groups in society (identified as “stakeholders”) have a deep interest in the work and outcomes of higher education. The term includes students, alumni, administrators, employers, and policy makers. In Tuning, evaluations of higher education should not simply occur within the boundaries of the college or university; the process must include the views of a wide group of people in the community. The purpose is not to have others define a discipline for faculty members but to understand more clearly what those outside our institutions expect and value in higher education.
- (5) Because Tuning asks participants in the work to address the public at large, the project calls for descriptions of discipline work are clear and transparent. The discipline experts must make their statements understandable not only to the graduate *leaving* a program but also to the person *entering* a program. The “audience” is the broader public, not just the academic specialist. The Tuning work must help students (and their parents) understand the expectations, criteria, and prospects of higher education. The material must clarify how new students should prepare for college, what they should anticipate once they arrive at a university, and what they can expect to gain in terms of personal development, knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- (6) Rather than keeping the results of assessments locked away, Tuning requires that the findings are freely shared, widely discussed, and thoughtfully implemented.
- (7) Perhaps most important, Tuning asks *reasonable* questions of faculty in higher education. The central question that Tuning addresses is not easy to answer; but the question address the main focus of our

work in colleges and universities:

“When students complete a program of study in a discipline or field of study, what should they know, understand, and be able to do?”

To answer the question clearly and thoroughly, faculty need to reveal information about disciplines and learning that has too often remained concealed. In other words, Tuning asks colleagues to make the implicit explicit – to demystify our areas of research and teaching.

In other words, Tuning addresses key questions in higher education:

- How clearly do educators define the *learning* developed by their disciplines and degrees?
- How well do students (parents, employers, policymakers) understand these goals?
- *When* do students understand these issues? When they *complete* a program of study or when they *enter* a program of study?
- How well do educators clarify these objectives to secondary schools & other post-secondary institutions?

None of these issues are easy to answer. But the questions deal with the choices and decisions faculty members make every day. The work of Tuning is not abstract or irrelevant but central to the tasks we face as educators.

Tuning was introduced to academics in the U.S. in a 2008 study by education analyst Clifford Adelman (who has spoken on numerous occasions to audiences in Japanese higher education). Adelman reviewed reform measures in higher education that had been underway on the European continent for nearly a decade. He explained that the *economic* integration of European nations undertaken since the 1950s had come to be accompanied by an *educational* initiative that also aimed at greater continental unity. Adelman explained that this program, the Bologna Process, launched in 1999, was “the most far-reaching and ambitious reform of higher education ever undertaken.” He bluntly stated that “the core features of the Bologna Process have sufficient momentum to become the dominant global higher education model within the next two decades. We had better listen up.”³⁾

Adelman’s message was clear: the U.S. was falling behind in a global conversation about higher education; and it was failing its own citizens by not making higher education as responsive as possible to the needs of the day. He urged policy makers to consider what the U.S. could learn from the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process aimed to break down walls that divided European universities and rethink their approach to higher education in the twenty-first century. The project:

- created a European Higher Education Area (now with 49 member countries⁴⁾);
- designed degree programs that were understandable and comparable (in other words, degree programs that were structured, transparent, outcome-based, learner-centered, high quality, and widely recognized);
- outlined work on quality assurance;
- eased the movement of students and educators across institutions and nations;
- prepared students for multiple paths in further education, careers, civic life, and personal development; and
- focused on the societal relevance of education (tying study to democratic principles, economic development, equitable participation, and lifelong learning).⁵⁾

The implementation of Bologna emerged through a set of proposals from university faculty in 2000, in a process called “Tuning.” Tuning focused on designing, operating, and evaluating degree programs aligned with Bologna objectives.⁶⁾

When European colleagues talk about the project, they identify a guiding principle: “Tuning of educational structures and programmes on the basis of diversity and autonomy.” In other words, the Tuning process focuses on identifying “points of reference, convergence, and common understanding” about the competences and learning outcomes of different study areas. Tuning also seeks to develop reference points for common curricula at different degree levels. Its goal is to create *connections* among higher education institutions, not uniformity.

Tuning began with a handful of disciplines. Now it covers over 40 subject areas. Tuning began in scores of European nations; but now the process stretches around the globe with projects in Africa, Russia, Central Asia, Latin America, the U.S. – and Japan.

Tuning in the U.S. started in late 2008 – but not through the actions of national or state governments. The Lumina Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation supported the project to see what Tuning might offer U.S. higher education.⁷⁾ Starting small, the project gradually expanded:

- In an initial, 2009 conference, faculty from three states (Minnesota, Indiana, and Utah), six disciplines, and over twenty campuses began Tuning in the U.S.⁸⁾
- By 2010, the states of Kentucky and Texas joined Tuning (with 6 more disciplines).⁹⁾
- In 2011, a consortium of institutions (from the “Midwestern Higher Education Compact”) joined the Tuning group, expanding the project to Illinois and Missouri.¹⁰⁾
- In 2012, the Lumina Foundation experimented with Tuning by a disciplinary society rather than by states. Lumina selected the American Historical Association to lead the work. The history organization has created a team of 164 Tuning historians who currently work in over one hundred institutions across nearly forty states.¹¹⁾ Because of the success of the history professional society, Lumina then expanded Tuning in 2013 to another disciplinary organization, the National Communications Association.¹²⁾

In the U.S., Tuning has been largely a private endeavor rather than a public project; Tuning receives most of its financial support from private foundations rather than governments. The work is voluntary; faculty are not required to participate but instead, choose to engage in the project. The work is decentralized; Tuning does not operate through a central education agency but through different regions, states, and professional societies.¹³⁾ Tuning operates incrementally; the project has slowly developed in small stages across an increasing range of locations and fields. And colleagues in the U.S. have tried to integrate Tuning with several other academic reform projects that involve the nature of post-secondary degrees, the transfer of academic credit, the movement of students from two-year to four-year institutions, the design of general education programs, and the completion rate for post-secondary students.

That is the background story of Tuning in the European Union and the U.S. The following discussion examines how U.S. educators developed discipline cores and degree programs, focusing attention on the practice (rather than the theory) of Tuning.

2. Defining a Discipline Core in a Department, a State, and a Professional Society

Colleagues in the State of Utah have been fortunate that many of the approaches they used in departments, universities, and the state's system of higher education have also proved successful in larger national projects. The "local" level of Tuning work has proceeded in eight steps:¹⁴⁾

The first step, within the Utah State University History Department, was to let faculty express their doubts, frustrations, and suspicions. As department head, I was responsible for introducing Tuning to colleagues who, in early 2009, were much more concerned with the effects of the Great Recession and the fear that reduced budgets would result in the loss of jobs. It was a frightening time to evaluate our discipline. Faculty complained about past assessments, about our priorities in a collapsing economy, about their expanding workloads, and about their worst fears. One colleague suggested the following: "If they want us to assess our work, tell them we develop critical thinking. Then sign the form and hand it in." I laughed along with everyone else, but then added a comment: "Every discipline in the university will claim to develop critical thinking. To maintain our department, we should clarify what is *distinct* about our approach." From the start of our work, we had agreed on what is technically called one of the "generic competences" in higher education (critical thinking); but we needed to define our "specific competences."

As faculty talked about a range of problems, all agreed on a common concern: students were not prepared to pass the department's final, "capstone" course. All faculty teach the course in which majors must research, organize, and write a senior thesis (an original contribution to historical scholarship). No faculty member was pleased with the class. Most thought students were inadequately prepared for the intense demands of the course.

The complaint was functional as well as instructive. Why did students perform so poorly in the course? What skills did we expect them to master by the time they reached the class? In what previous courses could they learn the capabilities and understandings necessary for successful research? By looking at the endpoint of our degree program and by sharing common concerns, colleagues began a useful discussion of "*learning outcomes*," statements that outlined what our students should know, understand, and be able to do.

The discussions demonstrated the importance of listening to the concerns and skepticism of faculty -- and *not* simply assuming they would be initially supportive of the project. There is a phrase used in the U.S. to describe this stance: "Meet people where they are, not where you want them to be." I knew no colleague would be enthusiastic about Tuning. But I did not anticipate that their complaints would be so helpful in identifying solutions.

The second step in the History Department was to generate a *coherent* discussion about the goals of our discipline, the "outcomes" faculty try to achieve. It can be difficult for specialists in a discipline to begin this kind of conversation. In some fields, such as engineering and nursing, there are many core expectations and standards already established by the profession for quality assurance and licensure. But disciplines such as history have had no such standards and guidelines. In order to start a discussion, our department reviewed the lists of learning outcomes created by historians in the United Kingdom and Australia as part of their Tuning projects. In addition, colleagues looked at the literature on assessment from the leading professional society in our field, the American Historical Association. The materials gave faculty a useful set of starting points. Many more materials are available now including the Tuning website for the EU and a new academic journal

on Tuning.¹⁵⁾

The lesson the department learned was that it made little sense to approach the Tuning project on our own. It was much more helpful to consult the previous work of colleagues in our discipline, to consider their recommendations, and to determine what outcomes were most appropriate for our own institution and circumstances.

The third step in the department's Tuning work was to keep the number of learning outcomes limited. When colleagues began to compile the core features of our discipline, they soon had a list of over twenty points. It was important to narrow the list to a more manageable number because any outcome that the department listed would have to be "measured." European colleagues focused on three major categories of learning outcomes: historical knowledge, historical skills, and historical thinking. Working with this three-part structure, our faculty stated seven key outcomes that seemed appropriate *and* demonstrable. The department's statement was then forwarded to a state-wide meeting of historians on eight different campuses and, after some discussion and revisions, the larger group created a set of learning outcomes for all history departments in the state.¹⁶⁾

The fourth step in the project was to determine how faculty would introduce Tuning into their courses. I did not want to create opposition by immediately demanding major changes in the curriculum. Instead, it seemed best to begin with a series of small, unobtrusive steps:

- The department expected faculty to identify the learning outcomes for their courses on their syllabi.
- After attending a workshop on the creation of "rubrics" (a clear listing of criteria and expectations for the exercises students completed), I developed a series of the forms for my own courses and shared the results with others.¹⁷⁾
- The department then agreed to use a common evaluative rubric for all sections of the capstone class as a common way to review our students' senior theses.¹⁸⁾
- Colleagues then shared a sampling of the senior theses from three different sections of the course and compared their evaluations. The activity provided a measure of "inter-rater reliability."
- The department then agreed to revise its introductory survey courses in U.S. history for majors in three ways: assigning students intensive writing exercises; working with primary source documents; and introducing students to the history of histories (historiography).

The changes were "compulsory" but introduced slowly -- with clear explanations and with faculty feedback. Colleagues did accept small alterations. They were not forced to change most of their classes. Rather than *imposing* Tuning, it was more helpful to *model* the project in some key courses. The hope was that colleagues would come to understand that Tuning made sense, that it solved problems, and that it gave students a clearer idea of our discipline and goals.

The important lesson to take from these experiments is that advocates of Tuning should be patient with the work and build the project step by step. Tuning involves a major change in academic culture. Changing academic culture is somewhat like trying to turn an ocean liner. It will not happen quickly.

A fifth step in the Tuning process was to talk with the public about the discipline of history. In Tuning, it is important to listen to others about *their* sense of a discipline and what they hope degree programs can produce. Part of our work is to identify the "stakeholders" in higher education and understand what they value and expect. Colleagues were initially hesitant, thinking that many in the public might be extremely critical of the

“impracticalities” of higher education. For example, some studies with employers show that fewer than a third think universities do a good job preparing students for the global economy.¹⁹⁾ But our department learned something much more encouraging from its discussions throughout the state of Utah.

Working with Utah’s office of higher education, we surveyed faculty, students, and employers on questions about the skills and abilities that higher education ought to develop. We found that the competencies most valued by faculty were also the highest on the lists of students and employers. Utah’s grant also provided funding for professionally conducted “focus groups” with employers. These discussions allowed us to engage in some thoughtful conversations about employers’ experiences with our graduates.²⁰⁾ Again we found that faculty and employers had very similar goals in mind.²¹⁾ Through this work, we learned that there was considerable convergence between the qualities we value in higher education and the interests that others hold.²²⁾

The sixth activity was to collect information on what students gained from their course work. Some faculty relied on information from rubrics to understand the strengths and weaknesses of students. Some required students to create what are called “e-portfolios,” a group of documents that collects undergraduates’ key history projects along with their own reflections on the evaluations of their work.²³⁾ Some colleagues developed assignments closely aligned with the learning outcomes for a particular course.²⁴⁾ Many faculty worked carefully on the questions posed to students in “course evaluation” forms, framing their queries around the stated learning outcomes for a class.²⁵⁾ Some colleagues experimented with the “learning outcomes and assessment” features of a new, computerized, course management system purchased by the university.²⁶⁾ And the department developed an electronic “exit interview” form sent to our graduating seniors to learn if they were planning to go to graduate school, get a job in the private sector, or work in the public sector.²⁷⁾

There is an extensive debate in U.S. education concerning ways of “measuring” student achievement in learning. Most university faculty in the U.S. do not want to depend on the results of a national standardized exam for this information. We prefer to work with cumulative “capstone” (or “signature”) projects, with rigorously articulated assignments, and with information we can build from a variety of sources.²⁸⁾ The materials our department has used may be experimental, but they offer a varied collection of “metrics” focused on student achievement within actual classroom settings.

In 2010, faculty took *a seventh step* by reorganizing the curriculum in history. Students commonly took history courses in a varied and haphazard order. They could begin with introductory courses. They could begin by taking upper-level classes. There was no recommended sequence to the study of our subject. Tuning directed the department’s attention to the stages and processes of learning, leading faculty to consider how students could build their knowledge, thinking, and skills in a coherent manner.

In particular, Tuning focuses on “levels,” benchmarks of performance at various points in disciplinary study. One such point comes when students move from the general university curriculum into the upper division of a discipline. To “Tune” history, the department needed to clarify what students entering the major should know, understand, and be able to do. Faculty believed some core preparation was necessary before students pursued advanced study. In particular, colleagues discussed what courses in history *and in other disciplines* would likely help students succeed in the program.²⁹⁾ The result was the creation of a “pre-major.” Before students can enroll in an upper-division class on the U.S. Civil War or East Asian History, they must first lay a strong foundation for their work. Students begin by completing General Education courses the department has identified in other disciplines that create a strong preparation for historical study.³⁰⁾ Students

also take a series of survey courses in U.S., Western, and World history.³¹⁾ The pre-major does not require additional courses for a degree but, instead, outlines a more structured and sequenced series of courses, offering the students a stronger base of knowledge and skills that they will develop further in advanced courses for majors. The pre-major model developed in the History Department went on to become a model in the design of a degree profile for the university.

The eighth step taken by the department involved the way it communicated outcomes and expectations to students. One change was to revise the requirement sheet that the department had used for decades in advising. The existing form defined the discipline of history in terms of numerical requirements: the sheet stated the number of classes a major had to complete; the form prescribed the categories of required classes; it stated the credit hours student had to accumulate and the grade point average they needed to achieve. The sheet reduced the complexities of history to a matter of mathematics; if students attained the right numbers they received a diploma. The form was simply a guide to *graduation*. What the department needed was a guide to *learning*, a sheet that introduced the meaning of historical study and its applications.

The sheet still outlines necessary courses, grades, and credits but now includes three additions: the department's learning outcomes; an explanation of the department's particular requirements; and an introduction to the vocabulary students need in order to translate their discipline-specific work into the skills and competencies that resonate with employers.³²⁾

The second change was to meet with students through their history honor society. These organizations exist for most disciplines in the U.S., but faculty have made little use of the groups except for social events. Now, however, faculty members make several faculty presentations to the honor society, explaining the nature of the Tuning project, offering workshops on job interviews, and explaining the nature of graduate school for those who want to continue their education.

The material reviewed above outlines the approaches to Tuning adopted by one academic department. It is important to re-emphasize that this is an *example* of Tuning, not a *model*. The circumstances at other institutions will likely be different in terms of: an institution's stated purpose; its faculty specializations; the profile of its students; distinctive programs it may offer; the special resources the institution has at its disposal; evaluations of student work; and the programs offered for social and civic engagement with the community. Tuning not only "accommodates" these diverse features but enhances them. The process encourages each institution to celebrate and emphasize its distinctiveness. In other words, one's own institution should not simply announce, "Here is a coherent set of learning goals." The institution should also state, "Here are the ways our discipline or institution fosters that learning in distinctive ways."

The work in Utah State's History Department to create a discipline core carried over extensively into two other projects: the work of the **State of Utah** and the Tuning initiative in the **key disciplinary society** for the study of history.

In the state-wide Tuning project in Utah, the History and Physics Departments at Utah State University worked with colleagues from seven other public institutions of higher education to define a common set of competencies for all college students and core learning outcomes for their two disciplines.³³⁾

The group as a whole was diverse in its background and widely-separated by geography. One institution

offered two-year programs in academic and vocational fields. The other institutions offered a range of degrees from the bachelor's to the master's to the doctorate. Student populations on the different campuses differed widely in age, experience, and goals. And colleagues were separated from one another geographically (Utah is over half the size of Japan).³⁴⁾ One might think that faculty spread out over such a large area, in so many institutions, working at multiple degree levels, with very different students would have a difficult time trusting and communicating with one another.

That was not the case, in large part because of the policies of the state's key agency, the Utah System of Higher Education. The office has held annual conferences of faculty representatives from all institutions in "Majors' Meetings." In addition, for the past fifteen years, the state has brought faculty and administrators together in an annual session that explores an ever-changing question: "What is an Educated Person?"³⁵⁾

Of the original, 2009 national group of three states engaged in Tuning, Utah appeared to have enjoyed considerable success. The progress that Utah was able to make was due, in large measure, to the levels of familiarity, comfort, and confidence faculty had built with one another through previous state-wide work. State educators did not need time to introduce themselves to one another or to understand their different programs. They launched directly into their Tuning work. As a state, we learned that regular, face-to-face discussions among faculty built a strong base for reform initiatives. The costs of those conferences were not high but the benefits were exceptional, especially in forming a unified base for academic change. The simple, steady, interpersonal contact Utah faculty have experienced for many years has made a tremendous difference in the operation of a large-scale academic project.

Faculty in Utah's project were not surprised to observe the cordial, rigorous, and constructive tone of their meetings. In the history discipline, Utah State's department was the first to propose a set of learning outcomes. While the other seven history departments in the state were pleased that Utah State had taken the lead, colleagues still engaged in a careful and precise revision of the original proposals to fit the needs of all campuses. Physics faculty also enjoyed a thoughtful and professional discussion of their general and core competencies. The group quickly agreed to a unified set of outcomes in their field.³⁶⁾

The state office not only offered the two groups common meeting space and travel reimbursement. One of Utah's officers for academic affairs, Dr. Phyllis Safman, reported regularly from the many national educational organizations on which she serves. Safman, who is a faculty member at the University of Utah as well as an assistant commissioner for academic affairs, kept the groups well-informed of similar projects at work in multiple states. She also gave the group confidence in the progress – and advances – that colleagues had made through Tuning. Her work demonstrates the critical contributions administrators bring to build the success of large-scale academic initiatives through their thoughtful reflection, careful organization, clear communication, and steady encouragement.³⁷⁾

The Utah System of Higher Education provided another service to the Tuning faculty. The state allotted some of its grant from the Lumina Foundation to fund meetings between educators and employers. Initially, some faculty were wary of the discussions, fearing that the business interests of employers would contrast sharply with academic commitments. Over time, colleagues recognized the strong interest both communities held in clarifying and developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of students. Faculty were gratified to hear of the value employers associated with higher education. And employers were relieved to hear of the interest faculty held in the lives, careers, and prospects of their students after graduation.

In addition, the state office hired independent evaluators for the project. The evaluators stood apart from the faculty's strong, personal, and emotional commitments to their profession. They helped colleagues pose questions that the group had not considered. They offered useful contrasts to the works of other academic teams. And they created surveys and interviews with the Tuning group to identify common ideals, concerns, and problems. The evaluators contributed steady objectivity and skillful data-management to the work.³⁸⁾

The **American Historical Association's Tuning project** faced four distinctive issues:³⁹⁾

- (1) in no other region of the globe had a disciplinary organization worked on Tuning;
- (2) the society wanted to work across a wide a range of states and institutions;
- (3) history as a discipline in the U.S. has never operated under a standardized, certified, uniform, licensed, or regulated set of criteria and expectations; and
- (4) faculty in the U.S. are sensitive to the notion of history "standards" because, in the 1990s, a "National History Standards" project sparked fierce political debate across the nation with policymakers and political leaders.⁴⁰⁾

The AHA began its work remaining sensitive to the language it used to build and describe its project. The first commitment was to leave the word "standards" out of any discussion, recognizing the contentious nature of the term. In place of "standards," the organization states that its work articulates "the disciplinary core of historical study," a core that "describe[s] the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind that students develop in history courses and degree programs." The project takes care to note that the disciplinary core serves as "a reference point," not as a set of requirements or obligatory conditions. The association will not "certify" or de-certify a department based on its endorsement of the core. Instead, the AHA hopes the disciplinary core starts discussions within departments about the goals and objectives of a history program. In addition, the society assumes that departments will alter, refine, and modify the core in order to fit their distinctive character. The key objectives resonate with Tuning as a whole: (1) to encourage historians to clarify -- and demystify -- the informing goals and key skills developed in our discipline; and (2) to collaborate with stakeholders on "the essential nature of history . . . and the breadth of skills and knowledge" our students hold.⁴¹⁾

The organization has not only focused attention on concerns about "standards." A second major theme in the organization's work is to address directly the concerns and skepticism that some members have expressed about Tuning. Some members of the AHA object to what they see as the project's "instrumentalist" approach to the complexities of historical study; others fear that corporate concerns define the work; many worry that Tuning might encourage a reliance on standardized tests; and some express doubts about the intentions of the funding agency itself, the Lumina Foundation. Rather than trying to hide these debates, the professional society has responded to critics clearly and publicly. The AHA intentionally invited skeptics to join the Tuning group and voice their concerns. At the society's annual conference, Tuning opponents are given opportunities to speak to the membership as a whole. And the organization's monthly publication (distributed throughout the U.S.) has printed and distributed critics' arguments.⁴²⁾

A third major characteristic of the organization's approach to Tuning is displayed in the long process of constructing a disciplinary core, a task that took twenty-one months to complete. Work began in January 2012 with a dozen members of the initial "leadership group." The participants spent a weekend at an airport hotel identifying a wide variety of "competencies" associated with historical study. The many disconnected themes

they identified were then distributed to over sixty members of the history Tuning team across the U.S. Over many months – and several conferences – the Tuning members offered suggestions about forming a more coherent, inclusive, and acceptable statement. Through this open, lively, and friendly debate, the AHA moved away from the three-part division of learning outcomes built in Utah (with its focus on knowledge, thinking, and skills) and formed instead a richer and more complex outline of disciplinary objectives, organized in three levels. The society’s discipline core begins with a list of six “core competencies.” Each of the competencies is explored through a total of twenty-five “learning outcomes.” In addition, the discipline core provides historians with over twenty suggested exercises to demonstrate the core competencies.⁴³⁾

In the project’s three years of operation, the American Historical Society has maintained a commitment to open, democratic debate about Tuning. While it might appear the group’s tolerance for discussion would slow the pace of its work, its members have actually moved at an admirable pace to build Tuning projects on campuses where none had existed. They have done so largely on their own, without monetary support and sometimes in the face of administrative challenges. The Tuning group has maintained a vigorous, enthusiastic commitment to the work. In a relatively short amount of time, they have expanded Tuning in the U.S. far beyond the original designs of the project. What began with Tuning on campuses in seven states has expanded to projects in nearly forty states.

3. Developing a Degree Program

While creating a discipline core within the field of history, our work expanded to a second, more comprehensive level of academic reform. Tuning considers what students know, understand, and are able to do when they complete a program of study in a *discipline or field of study*. Take the same question and expand it: what should students know, understand, and be able to do when they complete a *degree*? In the standard, four-year, bachelor’s degree program in the United States, that means examining all the components of a diploma: general education courses, major courses, a minor area of study, electives, and possible internships. Instead of focusing on the class hours, grades, and requirements represented by a degree, the “Degree Qualifications Profile” examines a different issue: “What does the diploma represent in terms of a student’s learning and proficiencies?” The degree should not represent what we *expect* students to accomplish but, instead, what the student has actually *achieved* (what the student knows and what the student can do).

The Degree Qualifications Profile was first introduced in the U.S. in 2011. The project is similar to initiatives in other countries, usually called “qualifications frameworks.” The project in the States has tried to capture the distinctive characteristics of the U.S. post-secondary system. The work outlines five categories of proficiency for students to master *in different ways, at different degree levels*: specialized knowledge; broad and integrative knowledge; intellectual skills; applied and collaborative learning; and civic and global learning. The “design” of the project is expressed through a spider web of proficiencies.⁴⁴⁾

Over five hundred U.S. colleges and universities have tested the profile for a variety of purposes. Some use the profile to help ease student transfer; some find the profile helpful in reexamining their broad mission and curriculum; others contrast their existing learning outcomes to the degree profile’s to clarify gaps in their programs; other use the project to open conversations with employers.⁴⁵⁾

Faculty at Utah State University have used the “DQP” to expand the Tuning project *and* to reexamine the

institution's General Education program (first within one college and then in the university as a whole). Colleagues have seen how Tuning contributes to the degree profile, taking what we learned from *discipline*-based assessments and exploring similar questions about the degree as a whole. Tuning does not have to precede degree profile work. But the initiatives share similar properties. Both map pathways through programs of study; both focus on learning outcomes; both depend on faculty leadership and direction; both investigate what students know, understand, and are able to do when they complete a program at a particular degree level; the projects reflect distinctive qualities of different institutions; and they value clear, transparent explanations of outcomes.

Tuning contributes to work on the Degree Qualifications Profile in two other ways. First, Tuning *anticipates* some of the most challenging parts of the Degree Qualifications Profile. Tuning focuses on the discipline in which faculty hold advanced training *and* strong personal commitment. In this way, Tuning provides faculty with an immediate, familiar, and meaningful exploration of otherwise abstract questions concerning "outcomes," "competencies," and "proficiencies." Second, by clarifying the types of proficiencies a discipline contributes to higher education, Tuning also provides a clearer sense of skill sets that are limited or absent within a specific field of study.⁴⁶⁾

One example of this work occurred at the state level in a recent Tuning workshop with faculty from all public campuses in Utah. In separate disciplinary groups, colleagues explored a matrix from the degree profile authors.⁴⁷⁾ In a three-step process:

- each discipline considered the stated outcomes of their discipline core (and the course-based exercises in which students demonstrate proficiency);
- participants discussed how the vocabulary used in their own discipline core corresponded to the language and intentions of the degree profile; and
- colleagues identified areas of the *degree* matrix where their discipline addressed proficiencies at a high, medium, or low level, identifying strengths and gaps in our contributions.

A second example of the work with Tuning and the DQP occurred at Utah State University through a campus-wide discussion of the General Education curriculum.

One part of the work on the degree profile involved the university's eight colleges and forty-nine departments and programs. Only a small percentage of the University's disciplinary units have engaged in Tuning. Many colleges and departments – but not all -- contribute courses to General Education. Meetings across campus examined the curriculum from three perspectives:

- (1) Organizers asked departments and colleges a question about the "entry point" for a student who planned to major in their specializations: what level of understanding and ability did departments expect students should attain before starting advanced course work?
- (2) Organizers asked departments and colleges about their roles as "producers" and "consumers" of General Education. What courses did they contribute to the education of all students – and what were the learning outcomes for these classes? In addition, were there particular General Education courses from other departments that they recommended for their own majors? If so, what did they expect these courses to supply?
- (3) Representatives of departments and colleges examined the five proficiency areas in the Degree Qualifications Profile. They considered the following question: in which of the five categories did their own

courses make a strong contribution? In addition they considered a follow-up question: in which of the categories did their courses make a *limited* contribution? Organizers wanted different academic units in the university to explore their work from the perspective of the student: what contributions does a discipline make to the completion of the student's entire degree profile -- and what are the unavoidable gaps in a discipline's learning?

A second part of the work on the degree profile involved members of the General Education committee. They went to work mapping out the curriculum through which students explore different fields of study and a wide range of learning. Faculty worked in sections, each focused on a particular "breadth" or "depth" requirement. In each requirement area, the committee created a template stating reference points for the kinds of content and skills a course should develop. The General Education Committee now uses these templates to review new course proposals.⁴⁸⁾ The next step for the group is to examine *existing* Gen Ed courses and review which meet or fall short of expectations.

A third part of our work on the degree profile involved students. The goal was to make changes understandable to undergraduates:

- Borrowing from one of Utah State University's eight colleges, colleagues outlined "entry-to-exit pathways" that provide students with a coherent guide through the large number of General Education courses, grouping course selection according to different areas of academic interest.⁴⁹⁾
- A student assistant designed interactive visualizations of the degree profile to show learners in each major which proficiencies they develop toward a degree⁵⁰⁾; and
- New students are introduced to General Education and the degree profile through Utah State's orientation program (called "Connections"), a course that emphasizes the skills students need to become life-long, intentional learners and provides information that students can use to navigate the curriculum and attain the degree profile proficiencies.⁵¹⁾

Drawing on the skills and insights of its faculty, administrators, students, and advisors, Utah State University continues to shape a degree profile that integrates different academic reform projects, creates greater coherence in general education, defines clear paths for students to follow in their education, and focuses assessment less on individual courses and more on the completion of the degree proficiencies.⁵²⁾

4. Tuning's Impact: On Students, Faculty, the University, and Employers

What practical difference has Tuning made for faculty, students, the university, and employers?

FACULTY: It may strike readers as very curious that colleagues do not commonly describe their work by using the specific terminology linked to Tuning. When faculty members talk about their job responsibilities, they usually do not describe the activity as "Tuning." Neither do they use specific terms such as "learning outcomes," "metrics," "competencies," or "convergence." I believe this is part of the cultural complexity of Tuning, not a sign of its "failure." Those who participate are not necessarily comfortable with -- or accustomed to -- the more specialized vocabulary associated with the project.

But if the *words* colleagues use to discuss learning remain traditional, their *actions* display an emerging reconsideration of higher education. Faculty *practice* demonstrates a growing recognition of the shifts that Tuning embodies: from teacher-centered work to a student-centered experience, from a focus on seat time to a

focus on performance, from exclusive attention to content to greater concern with skills, and from an inward focus on the institution to an understanding of its accountability and connections to society.

- The project encourages a faculty member to contextualize his or her individual course within the department's full curriculum. In particular, colleagues have become more attentive to the ways in which assigned courses not only contribute a specialized body of knowledge but also examine general, disciplinary sets of skills that go beyond a particular subject area.
- The skills incorporated in a class serve as a type of instructional "scaffold." Like the structures used to create buildings, the department's course-based scaffolds provide a support system for students as they work through disciplinary projects that steadily grow more complex.
- Tuning encourages faculty to experiment continually with different subjects, new resources, innovative presentations, and different models of learning that go far beyond the traditional lecture. Tuning has turned the History Department into a pedagogical laboratory.
- Tuning has also given the department greater ability to respond skillfully and convincingly to regular academic reviews and to the questions that come from administrators unfamiliar with our discipline.
- In the department's most recent search for new faculty in two fields, applicants demonstrated considerable familiarity with (and curiosity about) the Tuning project and expressed sincere interest in contributing further to the work.

STUDENTS: At Utah State University (and most public, four-year universities in the U.S.), it is common for undergraduates to complete a bachelor's degree in four to six years. For that reason, faculty at Utah State are just beginning to see a cohort of students who have gone through the Tuning process. Several trends are becoming clear:

- The Tuning project has clarified for many (but not all) students that a degree means much more than the number of hours they spent in a classroom, the number of courses they took, the number of courses they passed, and the number of requirements they fulfilled. Instead of a *quantified* sense of their work, students have focused their attention more on the knowledge, thinking, and competencies they have mastered in their work. In this way, their attention turns from the "inputs" of higher education to its "outcomes."
- In terms of my personal encounters with students, I have observed a significant change in the conduct of office meetings with those who wish to discuss their course work. In the past, students who received a poor grade typically visited the office to complain about the severity of the evaluation (and, often, to argue that their university work had never been graded so low by any other professor). Applying Tuning practices, I began to use a rubric as an evaluation guide for these exercises, a statement of the expectations for student work (distributed *before* an exam or a paper assignment) that I divide into four to seven separate components.⁵³⁾ Now, students who receive a low grade do not simply protest the letter or number assigned to the work. Instead, they see on the rubric that specific components of their work were strong and other parts of the exercise were weak. They visit my office now to ask how to *improve* their work in particular areas. The discussions are well-defined, helpful, and actually enjoyable.
- Students are also developing a clearer vocabulary to explain their accomplishments in a Tuned program. As faculty clarify and reinforce the proficiencies of individual courses and the discipline's curriculum, students create a more meaningful and persuasive narrative of their educational experience. Colleagues

hear from students who have moved from undergraduate work to graduate school, private employment, or public employment. Tuning helps these students explain to different audiences the significance *and* the applicability of the knowledge, skills, and training that historical study developed.

- Finally, many History graduates are eager to return to the department to talk with students about the success they have enjoyed in both further education and in employment. These graduates are excited to share suggestions on how history majors should explain their academic work and apply their diverse disciplinary skills.⁵⁴⁾

UNIVERSITY: The clearest change that has occurred across Utah State University is reflected in the trust and confidence that central administration holds in the faculty. Both the Tuning and degree profile projects have demonstrated the capacity of faculty to work across disciplinary lines, to speak frankly about the strengths and limits of their fields, and to contribute to a more structured, sequenced curriculum for the entire campus.⁵⁵⁾

EMPLOYERS: Early surveys showed that employers were in broad agreement with faculty about the most important skills and competencies students should in higher education. In focus group discussions conducted with employers who often hire history graduates, colleagues gained several insights about student success:

- Libraries, museums, and archives emphasized their interest in graduates who expressed a strong *passion* for history, not simply a familiarity with the record of the past.
- Faculty learned how much employers of Utah State's graduates valued a student's *internship experience*, not simply their classroom or research experience.
- Employers want to see evidence of students' *collaborative, team efforts*, not simply their individual projects. Faculty need to clarify how students do, indeed, work together as they share resources, critique their fellow students' work, and suggest additional areas of inquiry in research projects.
- Finally, employers praised graduates who came to a job interview with a clear and compelling way of expressing the *proficiencies* they had mastered and applied, not simply the historical details they had memorized. The employers' comments provided greater clarity to the type of advising and mentoring faculty need to offer students.⁵⁶⁾

CONCLUSION:

Work on Tuning and degree profiles in U.S. states and across the nation has moved quite far since 2009. The progress made across the nation is quite encouraging. Of course, there remains much work ahead. One constant source of unease is to hear how some faculty in other parts of the U.S. talk about the project. Some discuss their work by saying that "Our state has *Tuned* higher education." In English, the past tense term "Tuned" suggests that the work has been accomplished. In Utah, the phrase we prefer is "Our state is *Tuning* higher education." By using the present participle, we mean that Tuning is a continuing process. Tuning launches colleagues on a course of on-going reform and constant re-examination.

U.S. educators are expanding Tuning to more disciplines. We are applying the lessons of Tuning to the creation of meaningful degree profiles. And we are trying to understand how our work in learning, curricula, and proficiencies can also help address problems of student debt, access to higher education, completion of de-

grees, and other serious concerns. There is nothing complete or final about the work. But, then again, the discoveries of our disciplines -- and the shifts within our societies -- are never complete or final. Historians know this particularly well; our entire field concerns itself with the complexities of change over time. Tuning is a useful process that allows us, as faculty and administrators, to sharpen our own knowledge and proficiencies in the work of creating new and evolving models of 21st-century learning appropriate to the complexities of our fields and the needs of our communities.⁵⁷⁾

ENDNOTES

- 1) For a useful introduction to the accreditation system in the U.S. see: New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Learning, "U.S. Regional Accreditation: An Overview," <https://cihe.neasc.org/about-accreditation/us-regional-accreditation-overview>

The regional accreditation bodies in the U.S. for higher education are: Middle States Commission on Higher Education; New England Association of Schools and Colleges (Commission on Institutions of Higher Education); North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (The Higher Learning Commission); Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Commission on Colleges); Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges; Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities).
- 2) One year before the U.S. introduction of the Tuning project, an article from the president of the American Historical Association also alerted colleagues to the importance of assessment. Professor Gabriel Spiegel of Johns Hopkins University wrote an essay entitled "A Triple 'A' Threat: Accountability, Assessment, Accreditation." Spiegel recognized the antipathy her colleagues felt towards academic reviews but emphasized four basic points:
 - (i) Assessments are not going away. Regular accreditation and external reviews *will* continue as the public carefully scrutinizes higher education to determine what it receives for its investment;
 - (ii) If *we* faculty do not engage in a thoughtful assessment of our discipline, who will? Do we want others – in our case, non-historians -- to define what our work is all about? That strategy will not work to our benefit;
 - (iii) Careful analysis of our programs is a smart, "pro-active" measure, one that helps us gain some control over a debate or problem; and
 - (iv) The central concerns of assessment rest at the very heart of our vocation as educators. Such reviews and reports involve a *systematic* effort to understand and improve student learning. Assessment is not removed from our work; it is central to our work. By the nature of our jobs, we should be concerned with what students bring to their studies, what they reflect on in their studies, and what they take from their studies.

Professor Spiegel persuaded many in the discipline that faculty have a responsibility to take assessments and evaluations seriously. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "A Triple 'A' Threat: Accountability, Assessment, Accreditation," *Perspectives on History* (March 2008), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2008/0803/0803pre1.cfm>
- 3) Clifford Adelman, *The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn from a Decade of European Reconstruction* (Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2008), v; <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501332.pdf>

In addition to Adelman's pathbreaking work, one of the most influential studies of the Bologna project and its relevance to U.S. higher education may be found in Paul L. Gaston, *The Challenge of Bologna: What United States Higher Education Has to Learn from Europe, and Why It Matters That We Learn It* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2010).
- 4) <http://www.ehea.info/members.aspx>
- 5) The European University Association provides a useful overview of the Bologna Project on the following website: <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/bologna-basics.aspx>
- 6) A rich body of material on Tuning in the European Union – with links to Tuning projects in other parts of the world – may

be found at the following website:

<http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

- 7) The Lumina Foundation is explicit about its informing goals for the Tuning project:

Educationally, the Lumina Foundation's "Goal 2025" aims at increasing the percentage of adults in the U.S. with quality higher education degrees from the present 38% to 60% by 2025. The Tuning project's creation of clear, transparent statements of requirements, outcomes, and opportunities will help more students reach their degree objectives.

Economically, Tuning's contributions to degree completion will help the U.S. meet its needs for a workforce of graduates with the understanding, skills, and competencies required for a 21st century, knowledge-based economy. That will translate into greater employment for graduates.

Socially, Lumina intends the Tuning project to open the doors of higher education to a broader range of citizens, especially first-generation students whose families have not received college diplomas, low income students whose degrees can serve as a ticket out of poverty, students of color who are still underrepresented on campuses, and older adults returning to higher education to complete degrees.

In civic terms, Lumina and other organizations want to be certain that higher education's learning outcomes place emphasis not only on advanced knowledge and private reward -- but also on principles of civic education, civic engagement, and the constructive contribution of graduates to the common good.

And **administratively**, Tuning USA aims at creating degrees that certify the knowledge, skills, and abilities graduates have acquired, not simply the credits and grades they have accumulated. Such clear and meaningful degrees will assist the transferability and mobility of students around the nation.

The Lumina Foundation is a tax-exempt private foundation formed for public purposes. Coincidentally, its own roots trace back to the starting point for Tuning; Lumina was also founded in 2000 -- as what is called a "conversion foundation." The USA Group, Inc. was the largest private guarantor and administrator of education loans in the U.S. USA Group sold most of its operating assets to Sallie Mae. The proceeds established the "USA Group Foundation" (with an endowment of \$770 million). In February 2001, The USA Group foundation was renamed the "Lumina Foundation for Education." See: <http://www.luminafoundation.org/about>

- 8) The following disciplines were brought into Tuning in the three pilot states: biology, chemistry, graphic arts, history, elementary education, and physics.

The foundations purposely selected states that were different in their systems and administrative styles of higher education. For example, Minnesota had many unionized campuses. Indiana had a number of well-established 4-year campuses but had only recently begun two-year institutions (granting an "associates" degree).

Utah was distinctive -- in ways that served the state quite well in the project. Utah is large geographically but small in terms of population (with 2.8 million people). The state has eight public institutions of higher learning. Most importantly, the state has regularly brought together faculty from all of its public institutions in face-to-face discussions on higher education. For fifteen years, Utah has held "majors' meetings" across thirty-seven disciplines. The state also brings faculty and administrators together for an annual conference that poses a recurring question: "What is an Educated Person?" The sessions coordinate General Education programs across the state, articulate courses within disciplines in terms of general content and course numbers, streamline student transfers among *all* institutions, and encourage faculty to know one another and recognize common interests across different campuses. In other words, Utah has a long record of promoting conversations within higher education circles, cooperating, recognizing the different "missions" of its eight institutions, and understanding the need to work together to coordinate curricula and facilitate the transfer of students. Those in post-secondary institutions already saw one another as part of a large community of "educators" rather than "competitors" or a hierarchical "rank" of faculty members.

But the state's educators had *not* yet accomplished three goals:

- (1) They did not have a coordinated body of goals and objectives, a base line of the knowledge, skills, and thinking that their

- programs of study and their degrees outlined;
- (2) They did not have a way of knowing if those goals had been achieved by students – apart from the grades students earned in classes and the courses they took; and
- (3) They did not engage in discussions with others in the community about the purposes and expectations of higher education.
- 9) The additional disciplines included: civil engineering, mechanical engineering, business, biology, nursing and social work. The extensive and informative reports from the Texas project may be found at the following web site:
<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=8FFC700A-D9F8-57C3-CD178199FADC8CD4>
- 10) The MHEC group expanded Tuning into the fields of psychology and marketing. For information on the MHEC Tuning project, see: <http://www.mhec.org/programs/tuning>
 MHEC has produced two informative booklets that explain the theory and practice of Tuning. See: *Midwestern Higher Education Compact, Transparent Pathways, Clear Outcomes: Using Disciplinary Tuning to Improve Teaching, Learning, and Student Success*, http://www.mhec.org/sites/mhec.org/files/2014march_tuningmonograph.pdf; and *Midwestern Higher Education Compact Cross-State Tuning Initiative, 2013 Tuning Report: Psychology and Marketing*, <http://www.mhec.org/sites/mhec.org/files/2013mhec-tuning-comp-sloschart.pdf>
- 11) For information on the work of the AHA Tuning Project, see:
<http://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/current-projects/tuning>
- 12) For the work of the NCA on Tuning, see: <http://www.natcom.org/tuningproject/>
- 13) Indeed, the U.S. does not have a national agency that manages higher education. The system is highly decentralized, a reflection of the informing political culture of the U.S.
- 14) Much literature on the Tuning process commonly describes five critical components of the project: defining the discipline core; mapping career pathways; consulting stakeholders; refining core competencies and learning outcomes, and implementing results. For example, see: Institute for Evidence-Based Change, *Tuning American Higher Education: The Process*, [2013], 5, <http://www.iebcnow.org/IEBCPublicFiles/iebc.public/e8/e86cc217-d67c-4de1-b618-77c6986e5537.pdf>
 By stating that Utah colleagues worked through eight steps, I do not mean to contradict or criticize the very helpful materials that have been published to guide our projects. We found that in our department – and in the State of Utah project – Tuning members investigated different elements of the project *simultaneously*, not in a fixed, step-by-step order. In our work, the most important consideration was one that colleagues in other states have *sometimes* reserved for last: actually *implementing* learning, curriculum, and assessment changes in existing courses with assigned faculty and registered students. Our project members were eager to launch concrete experiments in real, classroom settings and were not satisfied with abstract discussions of proposed changes.
- 15) Key pamphlets from the American Historical Association include: *Assessment in History: A Guide to Best Practices* (<https://secure.historians.org/members/services/cgi-bin/msascartdll.dll/productInfo?PRODUCTCD=pm322>); *Retrieving the Master's Degree from the Dustbin of History: A Report to the Members of the American Historical Association* (<http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/retrieving-the-masters-degree-from-the-dustbin-of-history>); *The History Major and Undergraduate Liberal Education: Report of the National History Center Working Group to the Teagle Foundation* (http://www.teaglefoundation.org/teagle/media/library/documents/learning/2008_nhc_whitepaper.pdf?ext=.pdf); *Liberal Learning and the History Major* (<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/divisions/teaching/liberal-learning-and-the-history-major>)
 U.K. learning outcomes, updated: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-consultation-history.pdf>
 Australian Tuning: http://ec.europa.eu/education/international-cooperation/documents/australia/tuning_en.pdf
 Tuning history in Australia:
http://disciplinestandards.pbworks.com/w/file/52684122/altc_standards_GEOGRAPHY_080211_v2.pdf

One of the most helpful U.S. guides was published after our project began: Institute for Evidence-Based Change, *Tuning American Higher Education* (see endnote 13)

A large number of useful resources are widely available now. A good group of starting points are the websites for Tuning projects around the world. The oldest of these sites, for “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe” also contains links to Tuning projects in Africa, Latin America, Russia, and Central Asia. See: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

The finest source for recent scholarship on the project may be found in a new academic journal, the *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*: <http://www.tuningjournal.org/index.php/tuning>

16) For learning outcomes in the undergraduate history program, State of Utah, see:

<http://history.usu.edu/htm/about/learning-outcomes>

17) The Association of American Colleges & Universities sponsored the workshop, drawing on the work the organization had done in its “VALUE” initiative ((Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education). The AAC&U makes its library of sixteen rubrics in different learning areas available to all educators. See:

<https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics>

18) For examples of the rubrics used, see: <http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/rubric%20fo%20survey%20course.pdf>

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/rubric%20for%20upper%20division.pdf>

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/senior%20capstone%20rubric.pdf>

19) Association of American Colleges & Universities and Hart Research Associates, *Raising the Bar: Employers’ Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn. A Survey Among Employers Conducted On Behalf Of: The Association Of American Colleges And Universities* (January 2010),

www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2009_EmployerSurvey.pdf

The Association of American Colleges & Universities provides a valuable website with links to a *series* of national surveys on employers, the economy, and higher education conducted from 2006-2015. See:

<https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research>. The AAC&U’s most recent report may be found on the URL listed above; for a direct link, see <https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research/2015-survey-results>

20) For a useful overview of “focus group” discussions, see:

http://assessment.aas.duke.edu/documents/How_to_Conduct_a_Focus_Group.pdf

21) See, Utah Tuning Project, “Report on Research with Employers of Graduates with History Majors” (2010),

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/EmployerFocusGroupReportonHistoryMajorsDec2010.pdf>

The Utah State History Department took one additional step. Its members sent an email request to graduates from the program. The letter began with a warm greeting -- and a promise that the department was not asking for monetary contributions. Instead, the department needed their opinions on how the curriculum performed as a program of study, what graduates valued in their experience, and where they wound up after completing their degree. (Incidentally, quite a number of people were so grateful for the letter, they actually *did* send us money for scholarships.)

22) For a survey of employment data conducted in the Utah State University History Department, see:

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Employment%20data.pdf>

23) The e-portfolio system has been widely adopted at the major two-year institution in Utah, Salt Lake Community College.

For information about this project, see: <https://www.slcc.edu/gened/eportfolio/index.aspx>

24) For examples, see: http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/Assessing_student_learning_web_site.pdf

25) The course evaluation system used at Utah State University and thousands of institutions across the U.S. is “IDEA”: Individual Development and Educational Assessment. For information on the methods and data collection used by this service, see: <http://ideaedu.org/>

26) Three of the most popular computer programs for course management in U.S. institutions are products called Blackboard, Canvas, and Moodle.

27) For results of the May 2014 survey, see: http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/Graduate_survey_May_2014.pdf

- 28) One of the key organizations devoted to assessment in the U.S., the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, has embarked on a new project focusing on the ways in which carefully designed, faculty-generated, peer reviewed assignments can contribute to a data-driven, evidence-based body of information to assess curriculum outcomes and institutional effectiveness. To monitor the progress of this project, see: <http://www.assignmentlibrary.org/>
- For a thoughtful discussion of shifts within the culture of assessment in the U.S., see: Peter T. Ewell, *The Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP): Implications for Assessment*, Occasional Paper #16 (Champaign, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2013), <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/documents/EwellDQPop1.pdf>
- 29) For a discussion of these broader designs in higher education curricula, see: Norman L. Jones, “‘Tuning’ the Disciplines,” *Liberal Education* 98:4, Fall 2012, <http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-fa12/jones.cfm>
- 30) The General Education courses recommended to potential history majors are all at the introductory level and represent a variety of disciplinary fields: Cultural Anthropology; Biological Anthropology; World Archaeology; Understanding Literature; Natural Resources and Society; World Regional Geography; Human Geography; Introduction to Folklore; Introduction to Philosophy; Practical Logic; Deductive Logic; United States Government and Politics; Introduction to Political Theory; Introduction to Religious Studies; Introductory Sociology.
- 31) Students select from the following history survey courses: one course in pre-modern history (Introduction to Islamic Civilization; Foundations of Western Civilization: Ancient and Medieval; or Cultural and Economic Exchange in the Pre-Nineteenth Century World); one course in modern history (Foundations of Western Civilization: Modern; or The Modern World); and one course in U.S. History (United States to 1877; or United States 1877-Present).
- 32) To view the revised information sheets, see: http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/History_Advising/Fall14-Sp15.pdf
- Statement of transferable history skills: “Historical study develops one’s ability to: investigate problems, identify reliable sources, analyze information, contextualize complex questions, and communicate conclusions in a clear and thoughtful manner.”
- 33) Reports from the Utah Tuning Project may be found at the following website: <http://utahtuning.weebly.com/>
- 34) Utah covers a land area of 82,170 square miles; Japan covers 145,856 square miles. Of course, there is a significant difference in the population that lives in the two areas. Utah has a population of 2,900,872, less than 1/5th of Japan’s 126,757,591 total.
- 35) For information on the work of the Utah System of Education, see: <http://higheredutah.org/>
- For a report on the 2014 Majors’ Meetings, see: <http://higheredutah.org/2014-utah-majors-meeting/>
- For a summary of the 2014 “What is an Educated Person?” conference, see: <http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/SummaryEduPersWorkshop103020141.pdf>
- 36) Information about the physics Tuning team – and other work in the Utah project – may be seen at the following site: <http://utahtuning.weebly.com/>
- 37) <http://www.wiche.edu/passport/states/ut>
- 38) To view the evaluators’ reports, see: <http://utahtuning.weebly.com/>
- 39) The American Historical Association, founded in 1884, has over 14,000 members.
- For an overview of the organization’s history, see: <http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/brief-history-of-the-aha>
- For a thorough, scholarly study of the “professionalization” of the history discipline in the U.S., see: Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 40) Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Antoinette Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).
- 41) <http://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/current-projects/tuning/history-discipline-core>
- 42) See, for example, the exchange between the executive director of the AHA, James Grossman, and a member of the organi-

- zation, Christopher Doyle: James Grossman, “Tuning in the History Major,” *Perspectives on History* (April 2012), <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2012/tuning-in-to-the-history-major>; Christopher Doyle, “On Historians, Tuning, and Markets,” *Perspectives on History* (September 2012), <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2012/letter-to-the-editor-on-historians-tuning-and-markets>; James Grossman, “Response to On Historians, Tuning, and Markets,” *Perspectives on History* (September 2012), <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2012/letter-to-the-editor-response-to-on-historians-tuning-and-markets>
- 43) Anne Hyde, “AHA History Tuning Project: History Discipline Core” (September 2013), <http://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/current-projects/tuning/history-discipline-core>
- 44) Cliff Adelman, Peter Ewell, Paul Gaston, and Carol Geary Schneider, *The Degree Qualifications Profile: A Learning-Centered Framework for What College Graduates Should Know and Be Able to Do to Earn the Associate, Bachelor’s or Master’s Degree* (Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation, 2014), <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/dqp.pdf>
The DQP “spider web” design appears on pages 24-25.
- 45) *Ibid.*, 8.
- 46) The *Degree Qualifications Profile* has, since its first release in 2011, recognized the affinities between the DQP and Tuning. The second version of the DQP (released in January 2014) outlined the connections more clearly. The latest iteration of the *Degree Qualifications Profile* from October 2014 (cited above in endnote 44), has subtly emphasized the critical links between the two projects to a greater degree. In particular, the most recent version opens with a new foreword from Jamie P. Merisotis, President and CEO of the sponsoring Lumina Foundation. His comments clarify the key role that the DQP and Tuning have played in the past -- and need to expand in the future:
“[The DQP’s] specific, well-articulated learning outcomes have made educational pathways more clear and concrete for students at all types of institutions. Paired with the complementary, discipline-specific process of Tuning, the DQP has engaged faculty members in the vital work of improving courses and shaping programs of study at scores of institutions. . . . Now it’s time to change the national discussion — to scale up use of the DQP and Tuning and apply them broadly as tools to help build a learning-based, student-centered system.” (Adelman, et al., *Degree Qualifications Profile*, 2, <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/dqp.pdf>)
See also endnote 57 below.
- 47) *Ibid.*, 22-23.
- 48) For examples of these rubrics and learning outcomes, see:
http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/designation_criteria.cfm
American Institutions:
http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-American%20Institutions.pdf
Creative Arts:
http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Creative%20Arts.pdf
Humanities:
http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Humanities.pdf
Life Sciences:
http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Life%20Sciences.pdf
Physical Sciences:
http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Physical%20Scien

ces.pdf

Social Sciences:

http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Social%20Sciences.pdf

Communication Intensive Courses:

http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Communication%20Intensive.pdf

Quantitative Intensive courses:

http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/doc/USU%20General%20Education-Quantitative%20Intensive.pdf

49) For an example of “pathways” in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, see:

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/PathwaysBrochure.pdf>

50) To view the student-designed spiderweb, see:

http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/student_designed_DQP_spiderwebs.pdf

51) For information on “Connections,” see: <http://www.usu.edu/connections/>

For additional material designed to introduce General Education to students, see:

http://www.usu.edu/epc/subcommittees/general_education/citizen_scholar/

52) For a recent overview of the work at Utah State University (written by two of the project’s key leaders), see: Norm Jones and Harrison Kleiner, “Professors Should Define Student Success,” *Inside Higher Ed* (March 27, 2015),

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/03/27/faculty-members-should-drive-efforts-measure-student-learning-essay>

53) See endnote 16.

54) *Prospective* students who visit Utah State University’s History Department with their parents are impressed to hear that the faculty focuses attention on both the intellectual development of our majors as well as the ways they can apply their historical learning to a variety of fields. Colleagues recognize that most history majors do not become historians; graduates from the program eventually work in other fields. Tuning helps faculty explain to potential students why historical competencies can be transferred to so many different areas of endeavor.

55) For an example of the cooperative efforts of faculty across colleges and disciplines, see the new “Breadth/Depth Course Designation Criteria” developed for Utah State’s General Education program. The “criteria links” listed on the web page were not drawn up by the institution’s central administration. Instead, teams of faculty volunteered to work on the project and conducted discussions among themselves to identify the core reference points that needed to be covered in the General Education program. See: http://www.usu.edu/provost/academic_programs/geduc_univstud/designation_criteria.cfm

56) For the results of surveys with employers, see two reports:

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/EmployerFocusGroupReportonHistoryMajorsDec2010.pdf>, and

<http://history.usu.edu/files/uploads/Assessment/EmployerFocusGroupReportonHistoryTeachingMajorsMay2011.pdf>

For additional information on focus group discussions with employers, see: Daniel J. McInerney, “Tuning History in Utah: Winning Friends and Influencing Policy Makers,”

Perspectives on History (April 2014),

<http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2014/tuning-history-in-utah>

57) In closing remarks for a recent paper focused on developing a language-oriented approach to meaningful learning outcome statements, Clifford Adelman, Senior Associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, made an impassioned appeal to U.S. professional associations and higher education associations, urging these bodies to advocate far more forcefully for broader engagement in the Tuning process:

“[W]hat do we need from our formal professional and quality assurance bodies to drive us along toward this more productive end? From professional associations: Tuning. Everybody has to do it, whether they have specialized accreditors

glaring over their shoulders or not. And Tuning that goes far beyond discipline/field profile statements to specific sought-for student learning outcomes. What does it mean to complete a degree program in Allied Health? in Linguistics? in Anthropology? in Economics? in Geology? in Statistics? Tuning USA may have started some out on the path, but we don't see as much of it as we should. How do we begin to push? The American Council of Learned Societies, for example, could easily hold organizational convocations to articulate the Tuning process and shape discipline action groups to take it up. ACLS is not alone. The task can also fall to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Academy of Engineering, and, through these umbrella organizations to the hundreds of disciplinary associations in the U.S. alone. Such endeavors would cast a new color on the historical purpose of learned societies in promoting disciplines, for "promoting" would come to mean the inclusion of learning outcomes for both students and practitioners. Embracing organizations have big voices. We haven't heard from them yet on this playing field because we have not made the effort."

Clifford Adelman, *To Imagine a Verb: The Language and Syntax of Learning Outcomes*

Statements, Occasional Paper #24 (Champaign, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2015), 21,

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/documents/Occasional_Paper_24.pdf