



Cover Sheet

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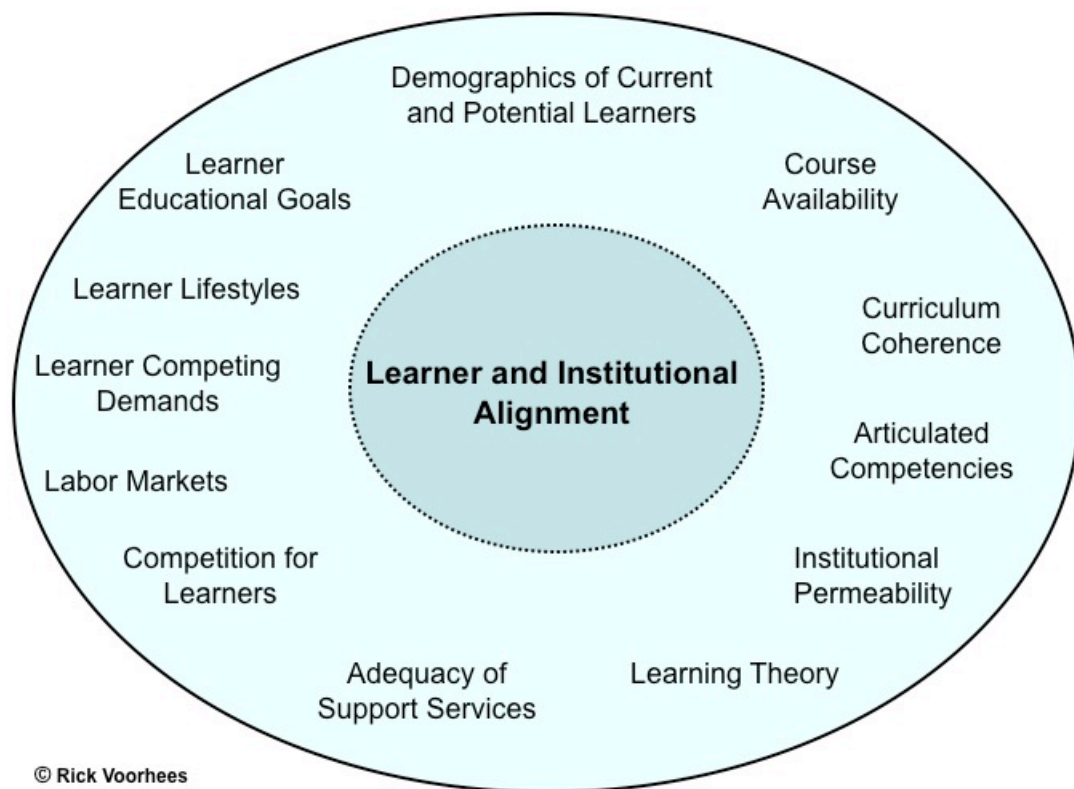
These tools represent many hours of hard work and we intend to develop more of them as a contribution to the higher education community. They have been left unprotected to serve as an example of the impact that open-source tools can have on higher education networks. Please take a minute to read the Creative Commons rules if you're uncertain about how open-source sharing can benefit you and your organization.

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Learner and Institutional Alignment

It is increasingly critical for colleges to explore the extent to which they are aligned with both current and prospective learners. Voorhees Group LLC has used the diagram in Figure 1 to determine which data are most critical in developing strategic alternatives for a college. It is drawn from our fieldwork with community colleges across the United States. The learner is placed in the middle of all institutional actions so as to systematically examine a range of factors that impact equilibrium or alignment. The purpose is to allow colleges to identify, develop and/or refine, implement, and evaluate current and proposed programs. It provides a framework for looking at the curriculum broadly as well as a mechanism for examining individual programs in depth.



The components of the model include:

- ✓ *Learner Objectives* are a starting place for learner/college alignment. What are the learner's reasons for enrolling in the college, a class, or a particular program? Are those objectives short-term or long-term? Are they fixed or are they changeable? Can the College use knowledge of learner objectives to add clarity to its efforts to demonstrate accountability?
- ✓ Understanding *Current and Potential Student Demographics* helps the College to serve current students and to anticipate the needs of future students.

- ✓ The match between *Curriculum Availability* and learners is critical to many decisions--especially those made by working adult students--about whether they will enroll for a given class or program. Availability applies to scheduling and format decisions made by College for learning experiences and classes.
- ✓ Learners will want to know and predict *Curriculum Coherence* to understand how their learning experiences will lead to other learning experiences and competencies.
- ✓ The College's ability to express its curriculum as *Articulated Competencies* is key to evaluation efforts as well as to recruiting students and potential business and industry partners.
- ✓ *Institutional Permeability* refers to the ease with which learners can navigate the institutional bureaucracy to gain admission, apply for financial aid, access academic advising, register for classes, and interact with officials. Institutional permeability also refers to the perceptions of the ease of interacting with the College carried by the community, potential business/industry partners, and prospective learners
- ✓ There is no single, correct *Learning Theory* that colleges can use to align their programs. Rather, questions need to be raised about which combination of learning theories among the several dozen that have been applied to college-level learning are most appropriate for the learners now served by the College and the objectives that they bring with them?
- ✓ What happens in the classroom is critical and so, too, are *Support Services*. The College already has a variety of support services. Best practice brings those services to the table early when designing, developing, and deploying new programs.
- ✓ *Competition for Learners* has never been stronger in higher education as learners have more options now than perhaps ever before. The College competes for traditional-aged learners chiefly from other public community colleges and for non-traditional aged students from private providers who are nimble and understand that for many learners, time is money.
- ✓ *Labor Markets* dictate the foundation for an effective array of programs, but may not always provide a failsafe means of starting or eliminating programs without substantial contact with the business and industry niche for which the program is intended. SIPI also can use its knowledge of labor markets to create program niches for its learners.
- ✓ Understanding the influence of family, job, and civic engagements that represent *Learner Competing Demands*, especially for community college students, can help design programs that build upon these realities so that they compliment, rather than detract from the learning experience.
- ✓ In a related vein, understanding the range of *Learner Lifestyles* and their influence on learning styles and preferences can pay dividends. One such example is the use of cell phones by learners from all income groups. This technology is often used hourly within self-defined communities or networks. How can those networks be used to promote interaction with the curriculum and success within programs?