

Piloting A Personalized Learning Model for Chemical Engineering Graduate Education – Lessons Learned from Creating a Chemical Engineering Body of Knowledge

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Susan Fullerton is an Associate Professor, Bicentennial Board of Visitors Faculty Fellow, and Vice Chair for Graduate Education in the Department of Chemical and Petroleum Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh. She earned her Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering at Penn State in 2009, and joined the Department of Electrical Engineering at the University of Notre Dame as a Research Assistant Professor. In 2015 she established the Nanoionics and Electronics Lab at Pitt as an Assistant Professor, and was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure in 2020. Fullerton's work has been recognized by an NSF CAREER award, an Alfred P. Sloan Fellowship, a Marion Milligan Mason award for women in the chemical sciences from AAAS, and a Ralph E. Powe Jr. Faculty Award from ORAU. For her teaching, Fullerton was awarded the 2018 James Pommersheim Award for Excellence in Teaching in Chemical Engineering at Pitt. For more information: <http://fullertonlab.pitt.edu/>



Piloting A Personalized Learning Model for Chemical Engineering Graduate Education –

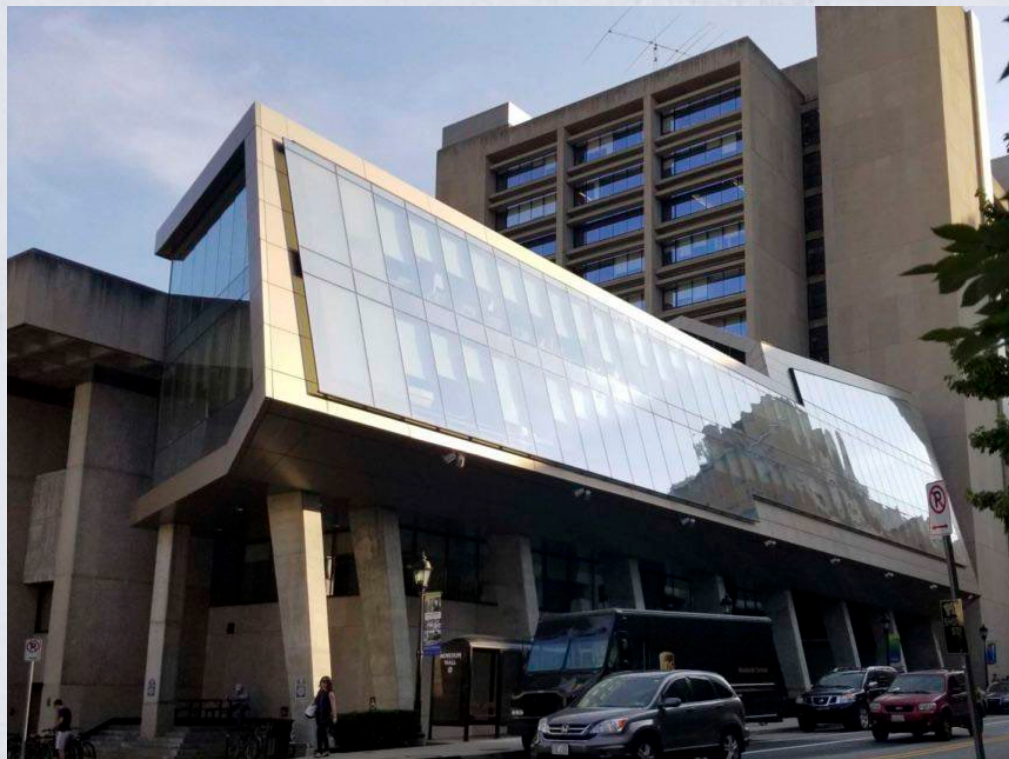
Lessons Learned from Creating a Chemical Engineering Body of Knowledge

April Dukes | Mary Besterfield-Sacre | Susan Fullerton | Goetz Vesper

University of Pittsburgh
Swanson School of Engineering

Overview

- Need for innovation in graduate STEM education
- Personalized Learning Model
 - Developing the Body of Knowledge
 - Concept Mapping of Learning Objectives
 - Modularization of Core Courses
- The New Curriculum
- Implications and Takeaways
- Next steps





Need for Innovation in Graduate Education and STEM Training

- Current graduate STEM education does not fully address the diverse needs of graduate students, especially at a time when cultivating diverse talent is crucial.
 - Primarily designed to produce research results and publications
 - Essential skills like communication, teamwork in diverse settings, mentoring, networking, and leadership are needed in the workforce
- To remain relevant in the evolving landscape of science, engineering, and society, graduate STEM education requires significant cultural transformation.



Need for Innovation in Graduate Education and STEM Training

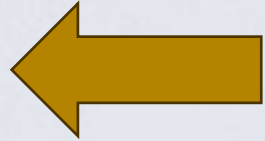
- Our research project explores the impact of Personalized Learning Models (PLM) on the development and training of CHE graduate students.
 - Customized Learning Paths
 - Individual Development Paths
 - Modular Coursework
 - Student-Centered Approach
 - Continuous Assessment and Feedback



Overall Research Goals

- **Goal 1:**

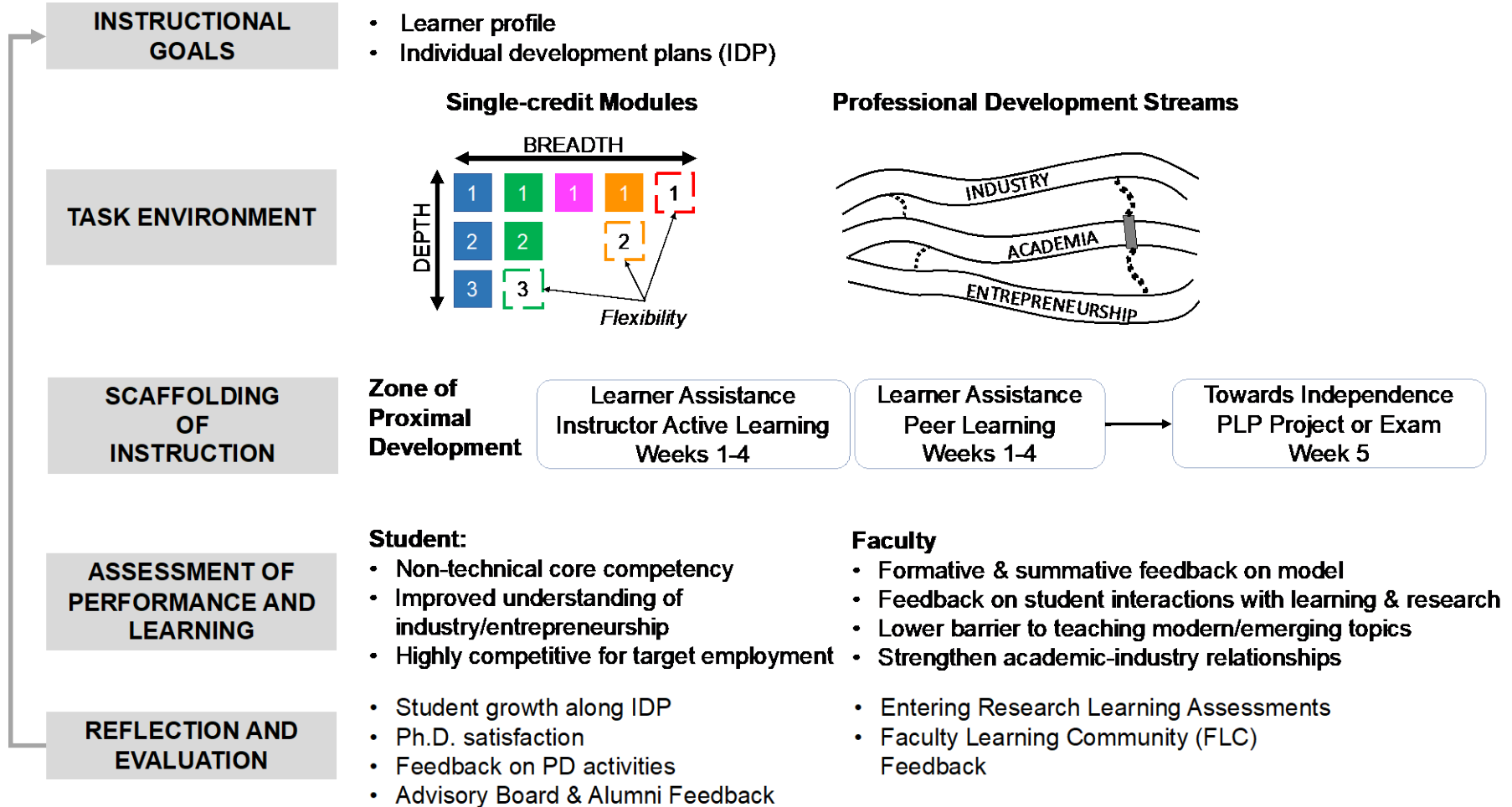
- Create a personalized learning model (PLM) for graduate STEM education that is inclusive and incorporates professional training



- **Goal 2:**

- Generate the knowledge and examine the potential to extend the PLM from one STEM context to another

A Personalized Learning Model (PLM) for STEM Graduate Education



Diversity, Inclusivity, and our PLM

- IDPs are a student-centered tool for academic and career development planning. (*Instructional Goals*)
- Increased choice in courses and professional development stream activities respects diverse interests and career paths. (*Task Environment*)
- *Scaffolding of instruction* supports students who have different starting points in their academic preparation, background, and experience.
- Graduate student feedback is collected and utilized to support the program in the *assessment, reflection, and evaluation*.



Body of Knowledge



University of
Pittsburgh.



Demographic Data – Subject Matter Experts

Role on the NSF IGE grant

OPTION	FREQUENCY	%
Junior Advisory Board	8	33.33 %
Technical Advisory Board	7	29.17 %
Faculty Member	6	25.00 %
Educational Advisory Board	2	8.33 %
Other	1	4.17 %
Total	24	

Type of organization

OPTION	FREQUENCY	%
Academia	11	45.83 %
For Profit	10	41.67 %
Non-Governmental Organization	1	4.17 %
Governmental Organization	1	4.17 %
Other	1	4.17 %
Total	24	

Job focus

OPTION	FREQUENCY	%
Client Service	1	3.13 %
Administration	2	6.25 %
Operations	7	21.88 %
Research and Development	16	50.00 %
Other	6	18.75 %
Total	32	

Disciplinary background

OPTION	FREQUENCY	%
Chemical engineering	21	84.00 %
Chemistry	1	4.00 %
Other engineering	2	8.00 %
Other	1	4.00 %
Total	25	

Terminal degree

OPTION	FREQUENCY	%
BS/BA	6	25.00 %
MS	5	20.83 %
PhD	13	54.17 %
Other Professional Degree	0	0.00 %
Total	24	



Body of Knowledge Process

- Collected and refined learning objectives (LOs) for five graduate chemical engineering courses covering six topics:
 - Thermodynamics, Kinetics and Reactor Design, Transport Phenomena, Mathematical Methods, Ethics, and Safety
- These updated LOs were inputted into GroupWisdom™.
- Our subject matter experts (SMEs) read through the LOs and individually added LOs in the brainstorming phase.



96 statements collected

[More info >](#)

FINISH

1 FOCUS PROMPT :

Please review the list of learning outcomes across the six topics of graduate chemical engineering education: Thermodynamics, Kinetics and Reactor Design, Transport Phenomena, Mathematical Methods, Ethics, and Safety. Add any additional learning outcomes that you feel are not represented.

Add Ideas 1

Type to add an idea

(0/250 characters left)

ADD STATEMENT

Collected statements: 1

Refresh list

Search

Transport: Write out the constitutive equations for momentum, thermal energy and mass transport. Be able to explain each term.

Transport: Split PDEs into two or more ODEs and solve via separation of variables

Transport: Specify and apply boundary conditions

Transport: Solve PDEs and visualize numerical results in Matlab

Transport: Solve and physically interpret simple steady-state conduction, diffusion, and fluid flow problems in rectangular, cylindrical, and spherical geometries, with and without zero-order and first-order generation/loss using shell (i.e., integral) balances.



Body of Knowledge Process

- Collected and refined learning objectives (LOs) for five graduate chemical engineering courses covering six topics:
 - Thermodynamics, Kinetics and Reactor Design, Transport Phenomena, Mathematical Methods, Ethics, and Safety
- These updated LOs were inputted into GroupWisdom™.
- Our subject matter experts (SMEs) read through the LOs and individually added LOs in the brainstorming phase.
- Most added LOs were non-curricular skills or specialized topics.



Body of Knowledge Process

- The SMEs individually grouped the curricular LOs for these six topics into different categories: ***undergraduate, graduate, specialized, and unknown.***

Cards



0 of 96 statements sorted

[More info >](#)

FINISH

FOCUS PROMPT:

Please review the list of learning outcomes across the six topics of graduate chemical engineering education: Thermodynamics, Kinetics and Reactor Design, Transport Phenomena, Mathematical Methods, Ethics, and Safety. Add any additional learning outcomes that you feel are not represented.

Expand All

Collapse All

*Drag and drop cards to
create piles*

82 Kinetics/ReactorDesign: Differentiate between molecular, Knudsen, and single-file diffusion regimes when given a set of unlabeled cartoon schematics [less](#)

43 Math Methods: Solve nonlinear first order ODEs by exact differentials.

95 Ethics: Compare and contrast basic ethical theories (e.g. moral absolutism vs. relativism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics) [less](#)

70 Math Methods: Apply Bessel function to solve various chemical engineering problems

12 Transport: Develop a model for a defined chemical engineering transport problem involving at least two modes of transport that can be solved using the base package of COMSOL. Transport models can include steady-state, unsteady transport processes, irregular



Body of Knowledge Process

- The SMEs individually grouped the curricular LOs for these six topics into three levels: *undergraduate, graduate, specialized, and unknown*.
- The SMEs then individually rated the importance of each LO based on their own experiences within their career/jobs.



0 of 96 statements rated

[More info >](#)

FINISH

FOCUS PROMPT:

Please review the list of learning outcomes across the six topics of graduate chemical engineering education: Thermodynamics, Kinetics and Reactor Design, Transport Phenomena, Mathematical Methods, Ethics, and Safety. Add any additional learning outcomes that you feel are not represented.

Page 1 of 1

Statements 1 to 96

On this page:

All (96)

Unrated (96)

Rated (0)

- 1 Math Methods: Dissect the long-term dynamical responses of arbitrarily complex, first order, ordinary differential equations using flow analysis.

1
☐

Not at all important

2
☐

Slightly important

3
☐

Moderately important

4
☐

Very important

5
☐

Extremely important

- 2 Transport: Reason how developing (unsteady) or developed (steady state) temperature or concentration profiles interact with developing or developed velocity profiles

1
☐

Not at all important

2
☐

Slightly important

3
☐

Moderately important

4
☐

Very important

5
☐

Extremely important



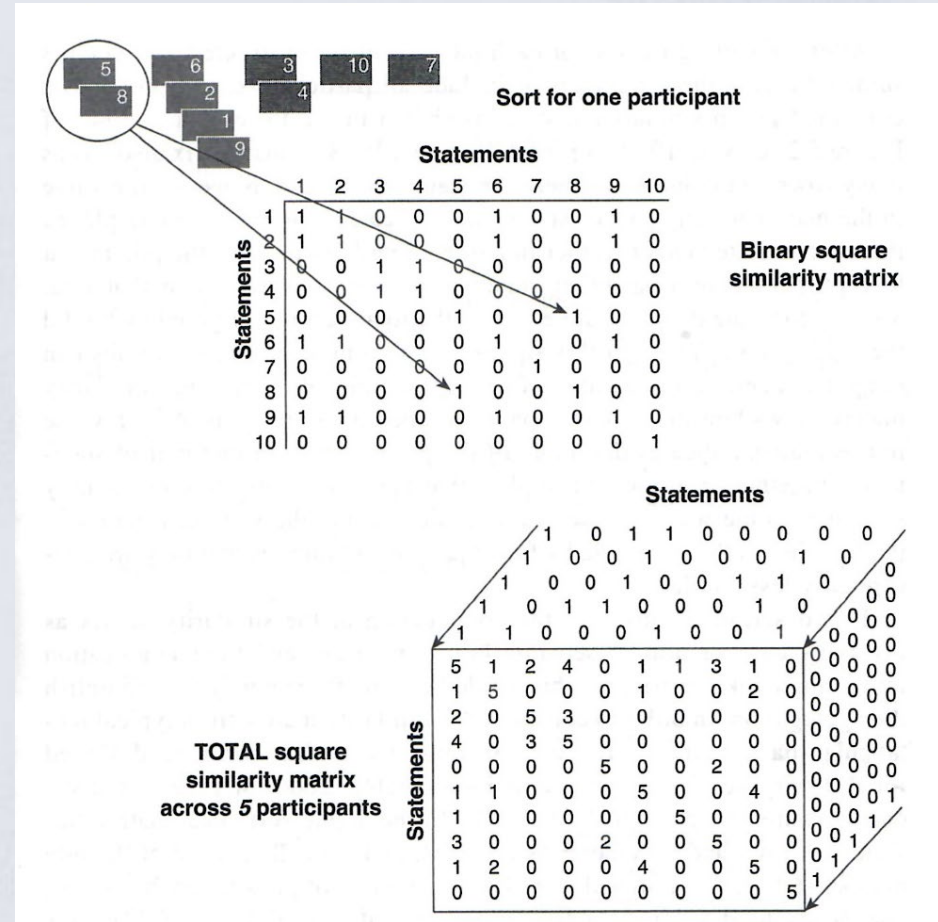
Body of Knowledge Process

- The SMEs individually grouped the curricular LOs for these six topics into three levels: *undergraduate, graduate, specialized, and unknown*.
- The SMEs then individually rated the importance of each LO based on their own experiences within their career/jobs.
- The researchers then analyzed grouping similarities between all SMEs.

Analysis

Similarity Matrix

Frequency of how many times LOs were sorted together



Analysis

Multidimensional scaling

Outcomes frequently sorted closer together are plotted together, and outcomes frequently sorted differently are plotted further from each other.

Result is an X, Y map of the points

Stress value (akin to reliability) is low indicating that the similarity matrix is well represented in two dimensions.

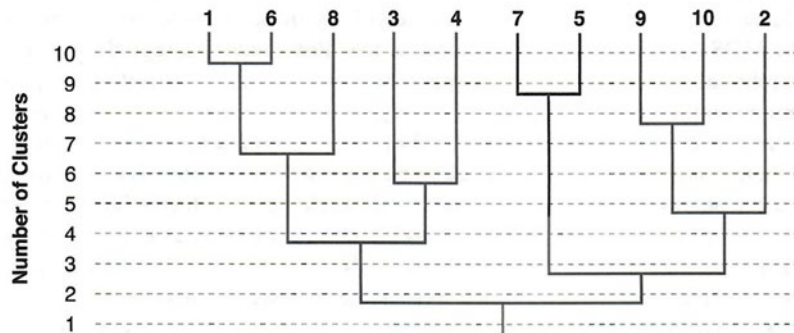
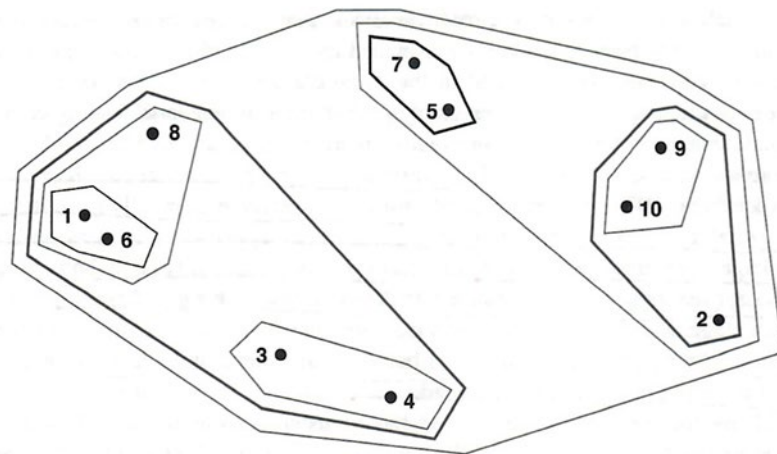


Analysis

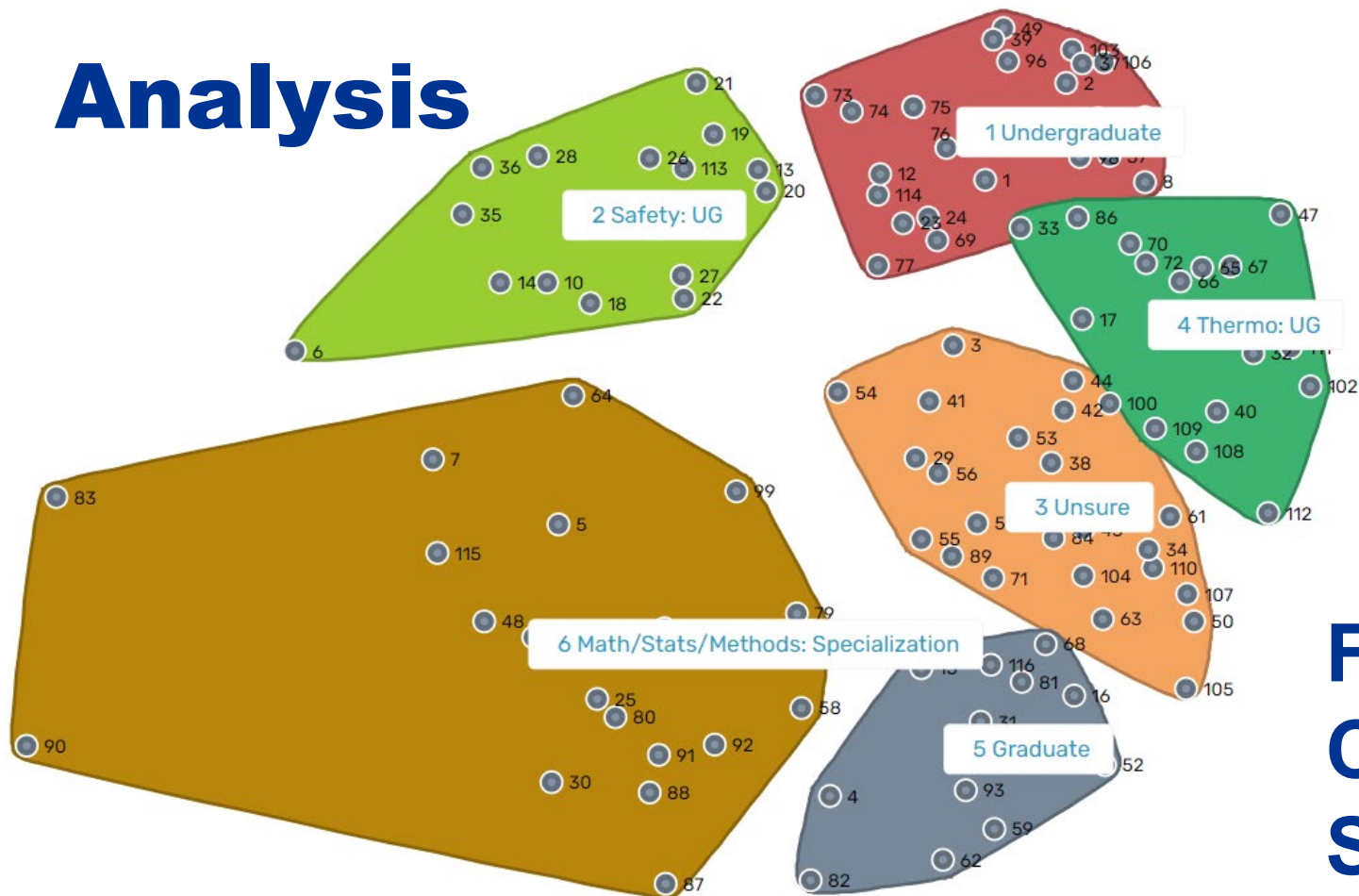
Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

Groups outcomes on the point map into clusters that aggregate to reflect similar concepts

Takes the XY coordinate matrix and produces a tree structure of all cluster solutions from one giant cluster to multiple clusters that don't overlap.



Analysis



Final Cluster Solution



How do we get from the cluster solution to learning objectives for undergraduate, graduate, and specialized modules?



Conducted a Second Organization According to Course (e.g., Transport)

Sorted Learning Objectives Within Each Level According to Their Averaged Rated Importance

[illegible][illegible]

Proposed Modularization - Thermo

Undergraduate		Graduate	Specialized	Not Sure
72	Thermo: Calculate changes in thermodynamic properties using the first and second laws of thermodynamics in conjunction with equations of state or departure functions	71 Thermo: Calculate chemical compositions in reaction equilibria involving multiple independent reactions in nonideal systems	64 Thermo: Create computer codes in Python or a similar language to solve problems such as computing changes in thermodynamic properties, phase equilibria, etc.	68 Thermo: Calculate thermodynamic properties of ideal gas polyatomic molecules using statistical mechanics
33	Thermo: Read quantitatively and interpret two- and three-species phase diagrams in mixtures involves solids, liquids, gases, compounds/alloys, and critical phenomena	29 Thermo: Calculate electrolyte equilibrium, e.g. acid base equilibrium, partitioning of ions between phases, charge distribution near surfaces	58 Thermo: Solve the Schrodinger equation and calculate the eigenfunctions for the following model systems: particle-in-a-box, harmonic oscillator, and rigid rotor	31 Thermo: Analyze basics of interfacial thermodynamics (e.g. adsorption equilibrium, Gibbs dividing surface, interfacial excess, Gibbs Thompson equation) and self assembly (e.g. micellar equilibrium)
69	Thermo: Calculate pure fluid and mixture phase equilibria	61 Thermo: Describe how intermolecular potentials give rise to non-ideal fluid and solid behavior		Thermo: Establish precise logical structure of classical, nonmolecular Gibbsian thermo and its key appln to pure 16 & mixture property relations and equilibrium & stability; link to molecular origins of thermochemical & substance properties (stat mech).
67	Thermo: Compare and contrast the origins and limitations of various equations of state	63 Thermo: Define the purpose of a partition function and give examples of how it is used		Thermo: Describe how statistical mechanics can be used 60 to compute thermophysical properties of macroscopic systems
70	Thermo: Calculate phase equilibria using activity coefficient models			59 Thermo: Identify partition functions for different ensembles
32	Thermo: Calculate basics of electrochemical equilibrium, e.g. Nernst equation			62 Thermo: Derive the Gibbsian functions and the Gibbs-Duhem equation using Legendre transforms
65	Thermo: Compute property changes on mixing using partial molar properties			
66	Thermo: Compute fluid properties from two and three parameter corresponding states			

Each column sorted from highest outcome rating to lowest outcome rating

5 Average Rating Value 4.11 to 4.60

4 Average Rating Value 3.63 to 4.11

3 Average Rating Value 3.14 to 3.63

2 Average Rating Value 2.65 to 3.14

1 Average Rating Value 2.17 to 2.65

Proposed Modularization - Safety

Undergraduate

- ★ 75 Safety: Judge the hazards of a substance from its safety data sheet.
- ★ 9 Safety: Recognize personal, process, & community safety
- ★ 76 Safety: Identify and select the personal protective equipment (gloves, eyewear) suitable for a specific substance or operation.
- ★ 77 Safety: Assess the safety of a laboratory operation.
- ★ 74 Safety: Perform common lab activities safely, e.g. using needles and syringes, replacing a gas cylinder and regulator, removing gloves safely.
- 73 Safety: Recall key facts about the safety system of the University. For example, the phone number for campus police; the names of individuals to contact within the department, school, and university in case of safety-related questions; basic rules of storing chemicals.
- 12 Safety: introduction to the Elements of OSHA's Process Safety Management and EPA's Risk Management Program

Not Sure

- Safety: Establish a basic knowledge of plant process control concepts, risk assessments, safety audits, and quality management systems.
- 20 Safety: Review major codes / regulations that chemical engineers students might encounter across a variety of industries.
- 19 Safety: Prepare safety documents: PHA (Process Hazard analysis), LOPA (Layers of protection analysis), MRA (machine risk assessment), MOC (management of change).
- 28 Safety: Explain the basic processes in fault tree analysis.
- 35 Safety: Identify components of a fault tree.

Each column sorted from highest outcome rating to lowest outcome rating

5 Average Rating Value 4.11 to 4.60

4 Average Rating Value 3.63 to 4.11

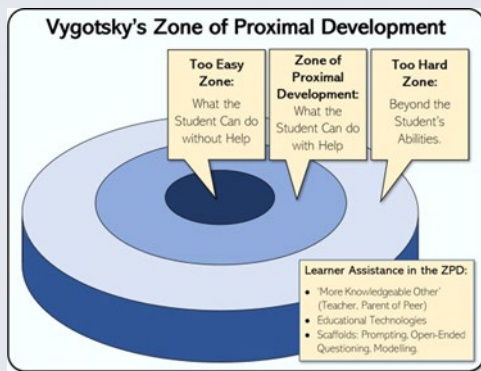
3 Average Rating Value 3.14 to 3.63

2 Average Rating Value 2.65 to 3.14

1 Average Rating Value 2.17 to 2.65

Implications and Takeaways

- Most LO's, especially the “important” ones, were sorted as Undergraduate Level



Eun B. (2017). The zone of proximal development as an overarching concept: A framework for synthesizing Vygotsky's theories. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(1), 18-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1421941>

- In our BOK, the graduate core curriculum indicated that the mastery of undergraduate learning is essential for CHE graduate students.



Implications and Takeaways

- BOK brainstorming generated many non-CHE learning objectives.
 - Approximately half were specialized knowledge sets (Life Cycle Analysis, programming, Process Control, Renewable Energy)
 - The other half make up “soft” skillsets: communication, project management, interpersonal skills, and business/finance
- Many can be addressed in the Professional Development streams, and others will need to be reinforced in core and elective courses.



Implications and Takeaways

- Consider both pedagogy (active learning and project-based learning) and curriculum at same time when modularizing.



Implications and Takeaways

- Intentional design of all core courses and professional streams are needed to support the learning graduate students need to develop mastery in the BOK.



Next Steps

- Analyze Student data for Modularized Thermo Class (Spring 2025)
- Refine Modularization Process
- Modularize Transport, Kinetics, and Math courses
- Continue implementation of Goal 2





The Project Team



**Susan Fullerton -
PI**



Götz Vesper – co-PI



**Mary Besterfield-
Sacre co-PI**



Bob Parker



April Dukes



**Sachin
Velankar**



Chris Wilmer



**James
McKone**



Questions



**Forge
Ahead.**

Single credit modules provide personalization, while maintaining strong ChE fundamentals

		(a) Current Schedule				(b) Modular Schedule, Student 1				(c) Modular Schedule, Student 2				
FALL SEMESTER		Transport	Kinetics	Math	Safety & Ethics	Transport	Thermo	Kinetics	Issues in ChE	Transport	Thermo	Kinetics	Issues in ChE	Elective
	Sept					Transport 1	Thermo 1	Kinetics 1	Program-ming	Transport 1	Tested out	Kinetics 1	Program-ming	3 Credit Elective (Pitt or CMU)
	Oct					Transport 2	Thermo 2	Kinetics 2	Ethics	Transport 2	Thermo 2	Kinetics 2	Ethics	
	Nov/Dec					Transport 3	Thermo 3	Issues in IP	Health & safety	Transport 3		Issues in IP	Health & safety	
SPRING SEMESTER		Thermo	Elective	Research		Elective	Elective	Research		Elective	Elective	Research		
	Jan/Feb					Electro-chemistry 1	Machine learning 1			Electro-chemistry 1	3 Credit Elective (Pitt or CMU)			
	March					Electro-chemistry 2	Machine learning 2			Electro-chemistry 2				
	April					Bio-materials	Process Intensifica-tion			Process Intensifica-tion				

