# Improving Learning Outcome Statements: Using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy as a Base Map

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## It's All about the Students . . .

and ensuring that their participation in a **high-impact learning experience** in CCE will prepare them for careers as **community engagement professionals** or for success in graduate degree programs that emphasize **publicly engaged scholarship**.
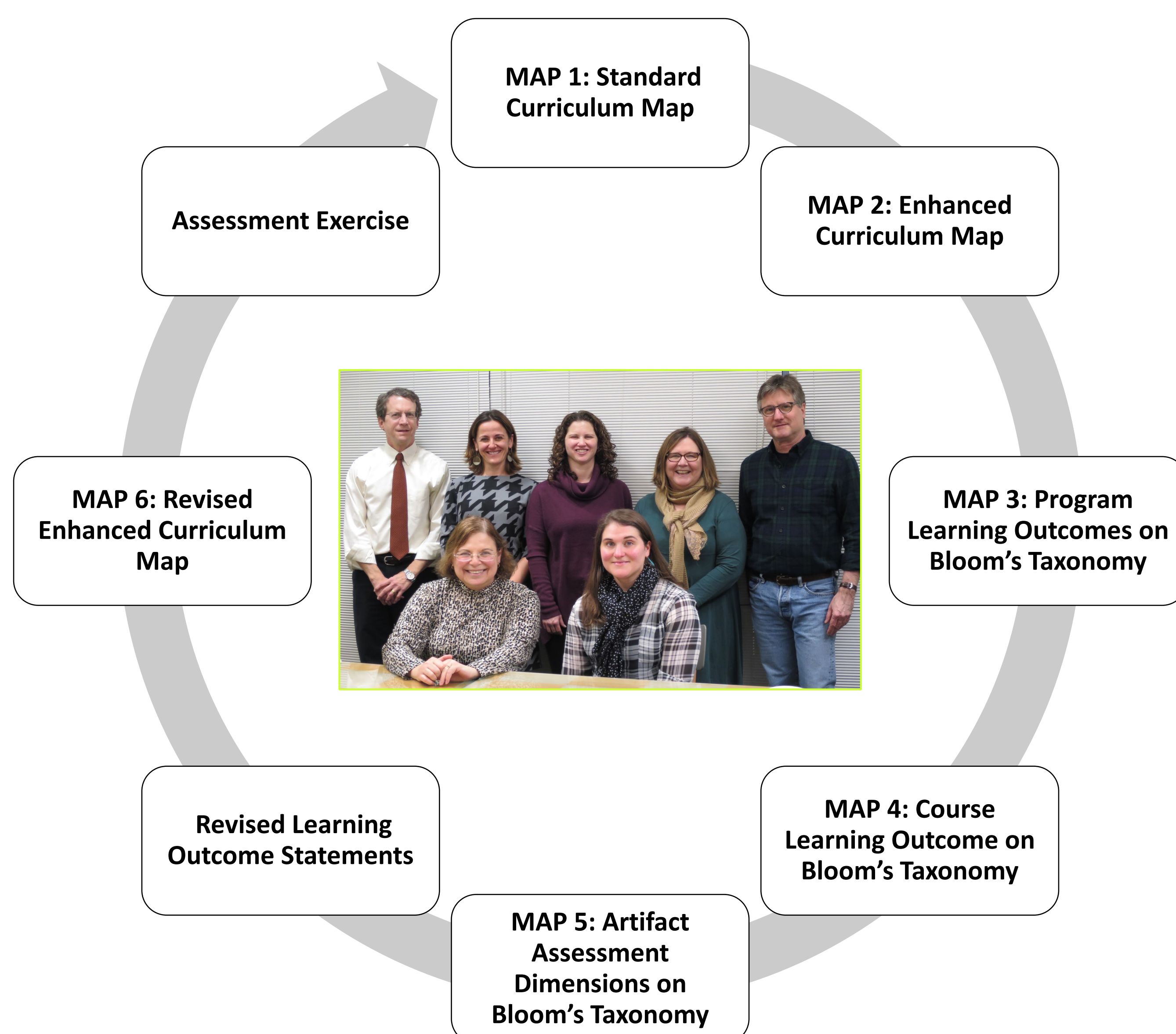
## The Challenge

We never anticipated that the 2016 CCE **program learning outcome statements (PLOSs)** would be featured so prominently in the online Syracuse University undergraduate program catalog starting in 2017. We also did not realize how difficult PLOSs would be to assess and change. After three assessment cycles, we have learned that **wording matters.** Furthermore, **buy-in matters**. PLOSs serve as advertising, inspiration for student performance, and a framework for cohesive instruction and course innovation.

## Finding Better Words . . .

means having collective conversations about our program and courses. CCE's engagement strategy draws on social science research techniques in textual analysis and concept mapping. It starts with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment's required program curriculum map and enhances it with information about **course learning objective statements (CLOSs).** Do PLOSs and CLOSs "fit?" The strategy then uses a standard protocol for writing learning objectives/outcomes based on Iowa State University's interactive model of **Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Goals** (Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, N.d.). The Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Model can also serve as a **"base map"** for better understanding how CCE instructors have emphasized specific knowledge and cognitive process dimensions in their syllabi and course assignments. Our strategy, therefore, is to have PLOS conversations by **interpreting a set of maps that reflect the language students see in their syllabi and assignment rubrics.**

## The Strategy:



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### MAP 1

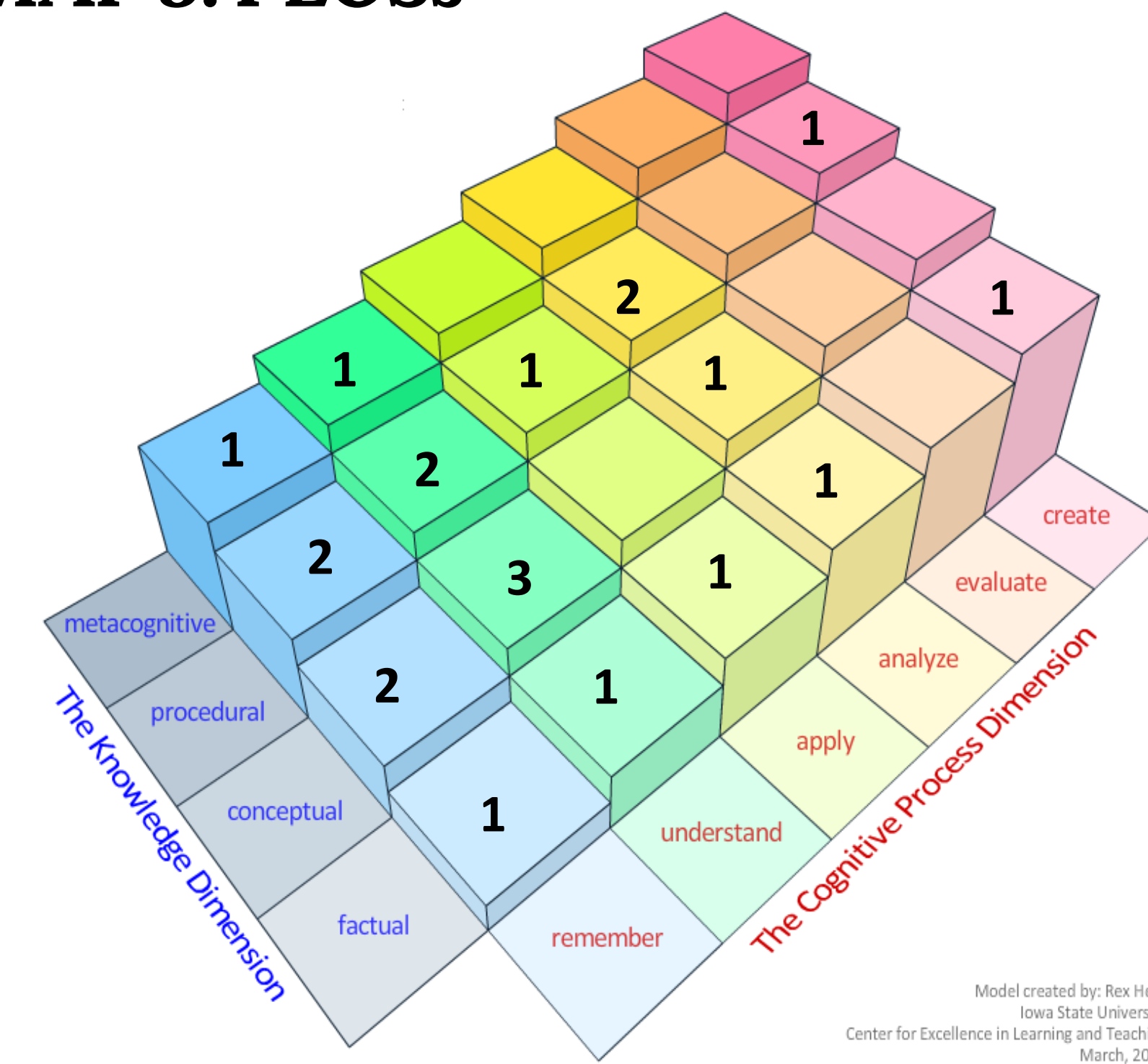| Standard Curriculum Map for Upper Division CCE Courses on File with IEA<br>Rating: * = introduced; ** = practiced/reinforced; *** = fully realized | MAX 301: Ethics, Citizenship and Justice | MAX 310: Community Placement | MAX 302: Research Seminar in Civic Engagement | MAX 401: Action Plan Workshop |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| #1: Characterize different theoretical and practical approaches to historical and contemporary questions of citizenship and civic engagement. | ** | * | *** | *** |
| #2: Discover how research in the social sciences shapes policy making at the local, national and international level | | * | *** | *** |
| #3: Identify the range of governmental and non-profit actors in the city of Syracuse and surrounding region relevant to the student's interests. | | * | | *** |
| #4: Explain, both orally and in writing, complex theories and practices regarding questions of citizenship and civic life. | ** | ** | *** | *** |
| #5: Apply disciplinary knowledge and social science methodology to an original research project on a civic, political, or global issue, resulting in a concrete intervention. | | | ** | *** |

### MAP 2

| Enhanced Curriculum Map for Upper Division CCE Courses<br>Mapping of Course Learning Objectives Statements included in Recent Syllabi | MAX 301: Ethics, Citizenship and Justice | MAX 310: Community Placement | MAX 302: Research Seminar in Civic Engagement | MAX 401: Action Plan Workshop |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| #1: Characterize different theoretical and practical approaches to historical and contemporary questions of citizenship and civic engagement. | **<br>6/7 objectives<br>Good fit | *<br>6/9 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>Absent from Syllabi | ***<br>Absent from Syllabi |
| #2: Discover how research in the social sciences shapes policy making at the local, national and international level | ()<br>3/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | *<br>2/9 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>4/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>1/10 objectives<br>Loose fit |
| #3: Identify the range of governmental and non-profit actors in the city of Syracuse and surrounding region relevant to the student's interests. | | *<br>4/9 objectives<br>Workable fit | ***<br>Absent from Syllabi | ***<br>2/10 objectives<br>Loose fit |
| #4: Explain, both orally and in writing, complex theories and practices regarding questions of citizenship and civic life. | **<br>7/7 objectives<br>Redundant to #1 | **<br>5/9 objectives<br>Redundant to #1 | ***<br>3/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>Absent from Syllabi |
| #5: Apply disciplinary knowledge and social science methodology to an original research project on a civic, political, or global issue, resulting in a concrete intervention. | ()<br>1/7 objectives<br>Workable fit | *<br>1/9 objectives<br>Loose fit | **<br>4/7 objectives<br>Good fit | ***<br>7/10 objectives<br>Workable fit |

**Map #1** presents CCE's original PLOSs on file with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment. **Map #2** correlates every Course Learning Objective Statement (CLOS) listed in CCE upper division course syllabi with the PLOSs and presents an evaluation of how easy or difficult it was to find a "fit." Map #2 reveals:
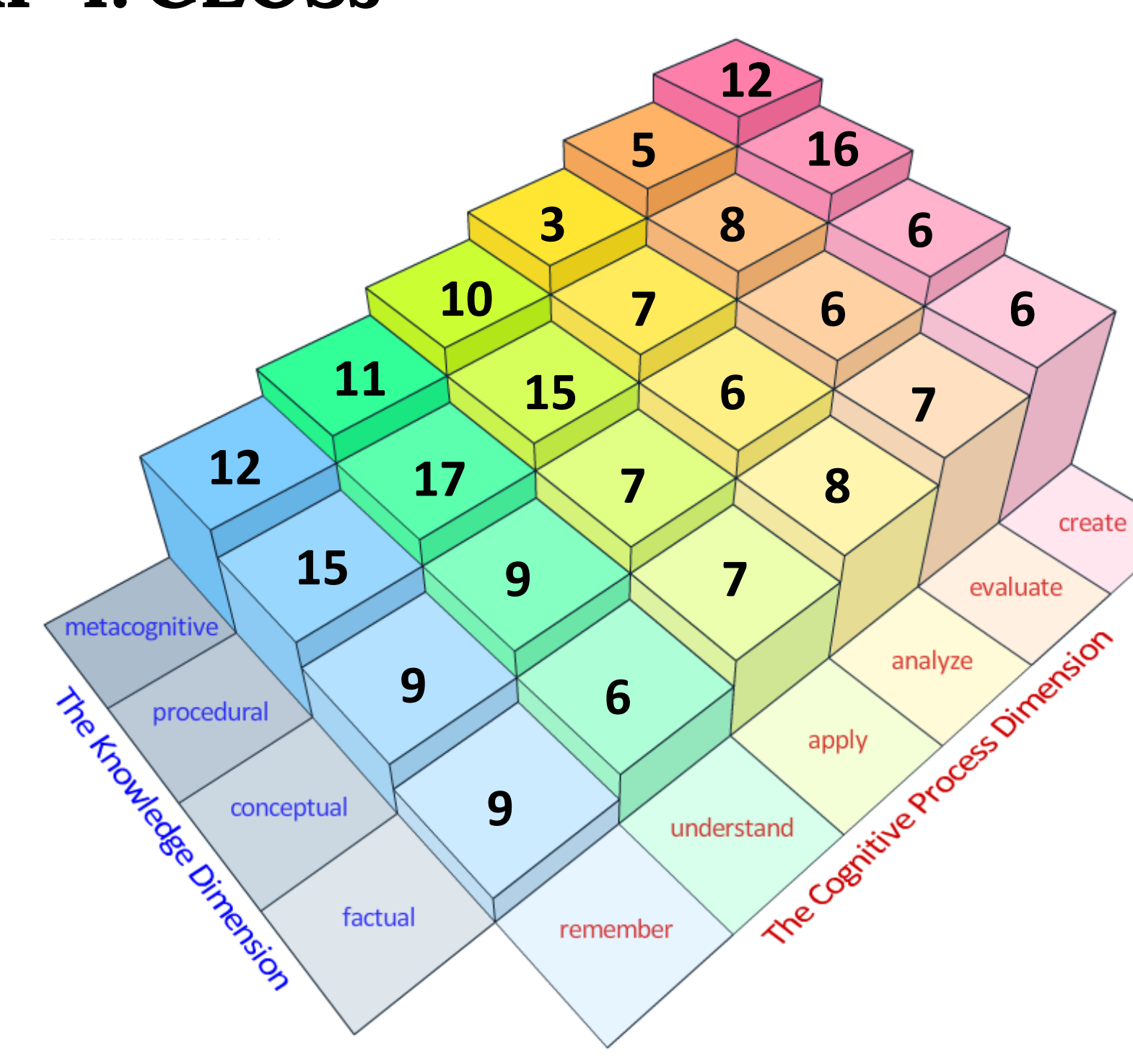1) specific cases of **non-alignment** between what faculty believe students **will accomplish in the program** and what course syllabi say students **will do in courses**;
2) nearly **complete redundancy** between PLOS#1 and #4; and
3) **absence of syllabus emphasis** on PLOS #3 as stated.

When the CCE Faculty Advisory board next meets we will move to drop PLOS #4 and create a reworded PLOS#3 that better reflects the role that local knowledge and understandings of civic agency play within publicly engaged scholarship. To start that conversation, we will present the following map analysis of the language used in CLOSs and in the Artifact Assessment Dimensions (AADs). We have mapped this language using **Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Goals** (Anderson, Krathwol and Bloom, 2001) as a framework for a base map. This version of the base map comes from the Iowa State University Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching's website.
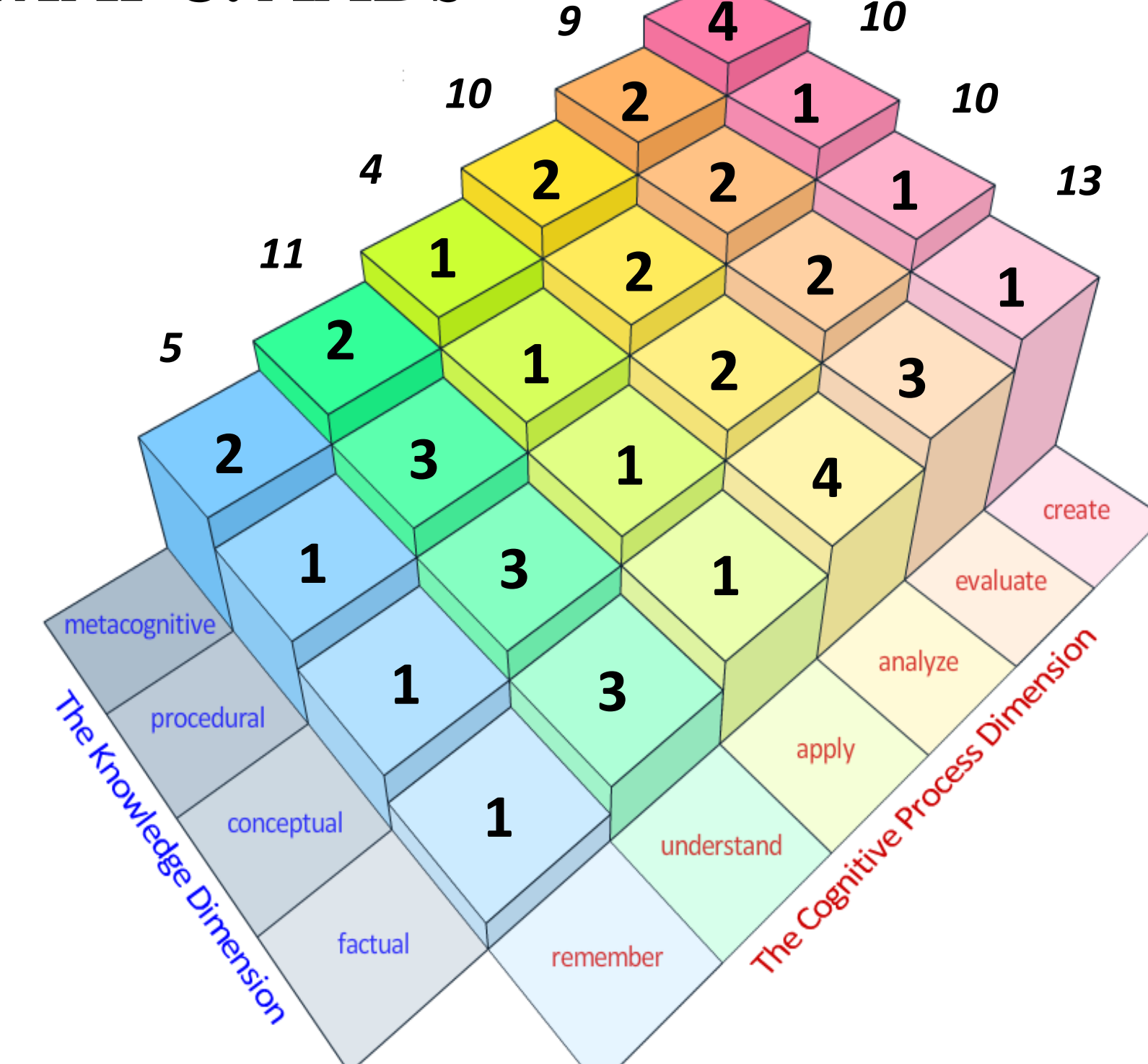
### MAP 3: PLOSs



### MAP 4: CLOSs



**Map #3** is a frequency count of PLOSs as they correlate to Bloom's Cognitive Process and Knowledge Dimensions. For example, a learning outcome or objective that asks a student to memorize factual information will map into the bottom cell in this grid. Given the complexity of the language used, several of CCE's PLOSs mapped onto multiple cells. **The overall frequency count shows that CCE's PLOSs emphasize low complexity in cognitive processing and limited engagement with metacognitive knowledge.** This does not reflect what actually happens in CCE and underscores the weaknesses in the current PLOSs. **Map #4** is a frequency count of CLOSs. It shows that learning takes places within CCE courses across both dimensions. **CCE's syllabi clearly emphasize the importance of metacognitive thinking (reflection and mindfulness) and procedural thinking, as well as evaluation and creation.** This further supports the idea that the CCE PLOSs need to be revised.

### MAP 5: AADs



### Focus on Program Learning Outcome Statement #3

**Map 5** correlates Artifact Assessment Dimensions (AADs) developed for the assessment of **PLOS#3** for MAX 310, the course in which major elements of PLOS#3 are introduced. PLOS#3 states that CCE students should know the community where they are working, including the identities of important agents who contribute to civic life. The PLOS also hints at the sustained community engagement experience that occurs within CCE over three years of the student's program of study.

The AADs associated with PLOS#3 were identified through a rubric development protocol that identifies and builds upon the instructor's original intentions for creating individual course assignments (Stevens & Levi, 2013). The resulting map reflects the importance of **metacognitive and factual knowledge** in MAX 310 assignments, as well as the development of the ability to: 1) **understand, analyze, and evaluate** factual information about communities, 2) **know concepts** associated with civic life, 3) **engage with procedures** for doing community based work, and 4) **do self-reflection** to avoid the performance of "mindless" or "shallow" community service. These are AAC&U and Campus Compact best practice standards, although those organizations word these standards in different ways.

Based on these findings, a rephrased PLOS#3 should help students understand that CCE is not a program that promotes "noblesse oblige" engagement, "poverty tourism" or "extractive colonization" of the community. The statement should also be flexible enough to accommodate practice, reinforcement, and full realization in MAX 302 and 401, the follow-on courses to MAX 310.

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## On Our Way to Improved Learning Objective and Outcome Statements

This process helped us understand both our current PLOSs and CLOSs, their interrelationships, and their limitations. The Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Model encourages more faculty reflection and conversation about elemental cognitive and knowledge dimensions that are, or should be, built into the CCE learning experience.

## MAP 6: Suggested Wording and How it Maps

| Revised Enhanced Curriculum Map for Upper Division CCE Courses<br>Proposed Replacements for PLOS#3 and Subtraction of PLOS#4 to be discussed by CCE Faculty Advisory Board | MAX 301: Ethics, Citizenship and Justice | MAX 310: Community Placement | MAX 302: Research Seminar in Civic Engagement | MAX 401: Action Plan Workshop |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| #1: Characterize different theoretical and practical approaches to historical and contemporary questions of citizenship and civic engagement. | **<br>6/7 objectives<br>Good fit | *<br>6/9 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>Absent from Syllabi | ***<br>Absent from Syllabi |
| #2: Discover how research in the social sciences shapes policy making at the local, national and international level | ()<br>3/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | *<br>2/9 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>4/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>1/10 objectives<br>Loose fit |
| #3: Identify the range of governmental and non-profit actors in the city of Syracuse and surrounding region relevant to the student's interests.<br>#3: Identify, analyze, and evaluate facts and values associated with communities and organizations where the student's publicly engaged scholarship occurs or will occur. | *<br>4/7 objectives<br>Workable fit | *<br>4/9 objectives<br>Workable fit | ***<br>4/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>9/10 objectives<br>Good fit |
| #4: Explain, both orally and in writing, complex theories and practices regarding questions of citizenship and civic life.<br>#4: Demonstrate strategic awareness of how communities and civil society organizations can collaborate with the student on publicly engaged scholarship and advise the student on possible career paths. | | *<br>5/9 objectives<br>Workable fit | **<br>3/7 objectives<br>Loose fit | ***<br>7/10 objectives<br>Good fit |
| #5: Apply disciplinary knowledge and social science methodology to an original research project on a civic, political, or global issue, resulting in a concrete intervention. | ()<br>1/7 objectives<br>Workable fit | *<br>1/9 objectives<br>Loose fit | **<br>4/7 objectives<br>Good fit | ***<br>7/10 objectives<br>Workable fit |

**Map 6** suggests that the reworded PLOS#3 and new PLOS#4 correspond more effectively with CCE CLOSs in all upper-division courses. This gives us a starting place for having conversations about syllabus and course assignment design, including the wording to use when articulating learning objectives and assignment goals below the program level.

## Next Steps

1. Repeat this mapping and conversation process for the other three CCE PLOSs.

2. Bring course assignments, syllabus descriptions, and PLOSs into greater alignment to enhance program coherence and legibility to students.

3. Create a map of assessment **outcomes** data using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy as a way to understand how strengths and weaknesses in CCE student achievement correlate with cognitive process and knowledge dimensions emphasized in the program.

4. Use this mapping and engagement process to understand better the framing language adopted for the Syracuse University Shared Competencies and explore how this framing language might be co-creatively implemented across campus.

## References

Anderson, L.W.; Krathwol, D. R., Bloom, B.S. (2001) A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: a revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. New York: Longman

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Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2013). Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning (2nd ed.). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing

## Acknowledgements