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Executive Summary

In 2015, the XQ Super School Project* challenged people across the country to join together to reimagine high school education. Nearly 700 teams of educators, students, and community members drafted ideas for innovative public high schools, with the opportunity to receive a \$10 million grant that would help their vision become a reality.

Inspired by the XQ design competition, **Envisioning the Graduate of the Future** (March 8 to April 5, 2018) was an experiment in rapidly producing a compelling, open, online learning experience. This massive open online course (MOOC) featured schools at various stages of developing their vision of a high school graduate, including Washington Leadership Academy (a member of the cohort of XQ schools), Shrewsbury Public Schools (a suburban public school district), and Community Charter School of Cambridge (an urban charter school). Over 2,000 educators and others from across the United States and 100+ countries registered for a collaborative and exploratory design process to develop a **graduate profile**, a shareable document that conveys what a community and/or school believes a high school graduate should know and be able to do.

“I learned that as advocates in the evolution of education, I am not alone. That is a huge impact. This course has shown me not only am I not alone in my thoughts but others are fighting just as hard to fix the system.”

Around 400 participants engaged in our community forums, and 95 learners met the requirements to earn a verified certificate (reporting completion of 60% or more of the coursework and verifying their identity). This is approximately 5% of all registrants, higher than our typical percentage of completion. XQ generously offered to fund the purchase of a verified certificate for learners who met the requirements, and we suspect that the free certificate offer played an important role in increasing the percentage of certificates received. The people directly enrolled in the course are only a fraction of the educators and community members engaged by this work; our most dedicated learners take new skills and practices directly back into their community to inspire others to participate in the process of envisioning the graduate of the future. Later in this report, we'll share how one learner who has talked with over 150 community members during her graduate profile work.

Our course emphasized the importance of engaging a diversity of perspectives, and our activities and assignments asked learners to reflect with their colleagues, students and members of their community about key characteristics high school graduates will need to face our rapidly changing world. Learners heard from educators, students, community members, MIT professors, and each other about the ways the world is changing and how schools could adapt to meet those changes.

“This course was exactly what our school needed to reinforce our desire to create a new and relevant graduation profile.”

This course was designed for broader impact beyond just those who enrolled. We know that our audience of educators is extremely busy. Many people visit our courses for a quick hit of inspiration, while some dig deeper to find materials to use and share within their communities, and a dedicated few complete our entire course and earn certificates. Our courses are built with this funnel in mind, so we ensure that people who just visit early course content have an immersion in the key ideas of the course.

We provided support for learners to take the class in **learning circles**, where registered learners from the same context meet in person to discuss course content. At least one of these learning circles acted as a launching pad for a school-wide graduate profile process:

“Moving forward, my colleagues that have also participated in this course and I are hopeful that we can bring aspects of this process to the school’s administration, and ultimately to our full faculty and staff. We plan to meet with members of the senior administration this spring in order to put together a presentation or workshop to share our work from this course in a faculty meeting.”

In another example of in-person collaboration, Alex Campbell from the Bartleby Program at Elizabethton High School, a member of the cohort of XQ schools, invited his high school sociology class to take the course with him. His students watched videos and worked collaboratively on activities and assignments. The class also worked with adults in the community to refine the graduate profile, including the president of a credit union, a college student, and a school board member.

The life cycle of these learning materials is only just beginning. We have started to experiment with some of the course material in face-to-face workshops; instructor Justin Reich piloted materials at conferences and workshops with educators in California, school leaders in Vermont, and academic technologists in Massachusetts. In the months ahead, we’ll generate additional learning experiences based on these Creative Commons materials. The process of developing graduate profiles can be a powerful step in helping schools on a path towards innovation, and we’re excited to make these ideas more widely accessible.

A GRADUATE PROFILE HELPS ANSWER...

By the Numbers

2,155

PARTICIPANTS
ENROLLED

40

MEDIAN AGE

406

FORUM USERS

1,983

TOTAL POSTS

Location of US participants working in K-12 Schools

**This map is based on course entrance survey submissions from 247 participants.*

Educators came from
117 unique schools in
39 countries

47% Participants in
K-12 School

7% in College or
University

7% in Non-profit or NGO

26% in Other

Note: The numbers above reflect data gathered from survey respondents.

Representation from at least 4 schools from the cohort of XQ Schools

- Bartleby Program at Elizabethton High School
- Brooklyn Lab Charter School
- Crosstown High
- Washington Leadership Academy

GENDER BREAKDOWN

51.8% Male

47.5% Female

0.7% Other

Course Overview

Welcome and Course Overview

Learners are introduced to the concept of a graduate profile through video and the course's instructional comic: "[What is a Graduate Profile?](#)" They introduce themselves in the course forums and learn about course logistics.

Part 1: Reflecting on the Purpose of High School

Learners hear multiple perspectives on the purpose of high school. Educators from Washington Leadership Academy (Washington D.C.), an XQ School, share how they leverage conversations about expectations for high school graduates. People from across the Shrewsbury Public Schools (Shrewsbury, MA) community share how they engaged multiple perspectives during their process of developing a graduate profile.

Part 2: Focusing on the Graduate Profile Process

Learners dive into developing the first drafts of their graduate profile and iterating based on feedback. Educators at the Community Charter School of Cambridge (Cambridge, MA) share how they use their vision of a graduate to make changes in the classroom. They also learn more about Shrewsbury Public School's graduate profile process.

Research and Measuring Impact

The goal of our research was to better understand our learners’ motivations, backgrounds, and experiences in the course, as well as the impact our course may have had on their mindsets and practices. We used a variety of methods to collect data on participants, including pre- and post-course surveys. From the participants who completed the pre-course survey, we chose 10 participants to interview during the course and then six weeks after the course ended. We plan to administer a follow-up survey in the fall to learners who completed the course.

At the beginning of the course, we asked participants to assess their ability to perform a variety of tasks involved in creating a graduate profile such as “organize colleagues to create a shared vision of high school graduates” and “engage stakeholders, like students and community members, in thinking about what high school graduates should know and be able to do.” We found that participants significantly improved in their self-assessed ability to conduct tasks related to creating and implementing a graduate profile.

Actions participants reported taking as a result of the course

Learner Stories

From our interviews, we have compiled three case stories of educators who completed Envisioning the Graduate of the Future. Each case tells a unique story about the potential for educators to use the course and the graduate profile concept to transform their school. One unifying theme for all three learners was their desire to reimagine the high school experience and create change in their local school environment. They saw the graduate profile process as a way to push for broader school-wide changes such as rethinking how to integrate technology or pushing for more student-centered instruction. Two learners even took action within their schools, encouraging others to make immediate changes that will benefit students. These learners also found that other course participants were a valuable resource to help them brainstorm ideas and expand their thinking. Although these learners still face obstacles in creating long-term change, they are hopeful that their graduate profiles will aid them as they start making school-wide change.

Disrupting a Stagnant School Culture

Through XQ and Envisioning the Graduate of the Future, this learner was able to connect with educators beyond her school, inspiring her to reimagine what high school might look like beyond just “going through the motions.”

“Danielle” is a high school English teacher at a large, ethnically diverse public school in the southern United States. Danielle describes her school as a traditional high school where administrators place a heavy emphasis on performance on standardized tests. Teachers, she says, have limited autonomy, especially in tested grades where teachers are often required to use scripted lessons.

Danielle has a very different image of what high school should be like for students than what she sees in her school. She observes, **“In my experience, we view students as test scores and demographics but rarely consider their social and emotional needs.”** Her passion for thinking about different ways to support students in high school led her to watch XQ Super School Live and sign up for text alerts from XQ. It was from those text-alerts that she found out about Envisioning the Graduate of the Future.

Danielle felt that the course would help her organize her thinking about how her school could better support students make the transition from high school to college and career and inspire her to stay in teaching. In her introductory post in the forums, she wrote, “We are all simply going through the motions to the detriment of the young adults entering college and the workforce. I often consider leaving the area and the profession altogether. Rather than offering an exit plan, however, **this course seems to offer solutions.**”

In Envisioning the Graduate of the Future, Danielle was able to connect with and learn from the experiences of educators in other schools. She found that many other teachers were facing similar challenges in their schools. “It makes me feel better that we’re not the only district bogged down by testing and district guidelines, state guidelines, and things like that.”

Danielle also found inspiration from and made personal connections with other course participants. In one instance, she reached out to a fellow course participant, an administrator at a charter school, for advice on how to work with school administrators. The course participant “was kind of able to give me some ideas about how to work with administrators, rather than work against them.”

Danielle has already shared her graduate profile draft that she created for the course with the administrators at her school, and is planning a new course to assist students with transitioning from high school to college and career. She also convinced school administrators to let her teach one less course next year so she can spend more time providing extra support to students to make sure they stay on track.

Teachers Organizing for School Improvement

For this learner, the course was a way to help bring together teachers from across her school to create a school-wide graduate profile.

“Amy” is a technology integration specialist at a large independently-run school in New England. The school is trying to move toward more student-centered instruction, and teachers are encouraged by the administration to integrate competency-based education and performance assessments into their classrooms.

Amy was drawn to Envisioning the Graduate of the Future because she wanted to make sure that teachers were being thoughtful about how they used technology. She decided to reach out to other teachers at her school to form a learning circle. Amy feels that **taking the course with other people at her school “gives us a chance to bring in perspectives from different places.”**

Amy says she especially learned a lot from one of her colleagues in her learning circle who works with students who are in an alternative high school program. Talking about those students challenged some of her assumptions about her school and raised new questions. “Did the schools fail them in some way, so that they, now, have to do an alternative program? And **would a graduate profile have helped if we could have caught some of these things early?**”

Amy and her learning circle have continued to meet regularly to work on the graduate profile and plan to present their final version to administrators by the beginning of next school year.

Creating School-Wide Change

This learner found that a graduate profile can be a useful tool for encouraging teachers to use more innovative instruction with students.

“Alexis” is a high school teacher and curriculum specialist at a Catholic school in Hawaii. Her school is undergoing the execution of a new strategic plan to make instruction more student-centered and competency-based. Part of the challenge Alexis has faced is that teachers have “extreme autonomy” in their instruction, and there is no existing system in place to ensure that instruction is aligned with the mission of the school. “We are three years into a five year strategic plan and we are not at 100% - even at 20% adoption.”

Having previously worked on developing graduate profiles, Alexis knew that graduates profiles can effectively help everyone in the school align their thinking. When she found out about Envisioning the Graduate of the Future, **she organized a learning circle for the administrators at her school so they could develop a new graduate profile that fit with their current strategic plan.** Throughout the process, Alexis included teachers in the process of creating a new graduate profile for the school, “We’ve posted our graduate profile in the faculty lounge and we’ve asked for feedback... We shared all of the XQ resources with faculty. One of the things we did was the ‘my student will be able to’ assignment with every single member of the faculty.”

For Alexis, one of the most important parts of the course was soliciting feedback from a diverse set of community stakeholders about the graduate profile. She estimates that **she’s already spoken to 150 members of the community, and that these conversations have shaped what is included in the graduate profile.**

Currently, Alexis is working to integrate the characteristics listed in the school’s graduate profile into classroom instruction. She and the rest of her learning circle are leading a three-day workshop for teachers to design projects for students that incorporate the various characteristics included in the graduate profile.

Alexis and her learning circle are also currently working on expanding the graduate profile to also make profiles for faculty and administrators. She says, **“that profile process is really good for us... because we’re now using it to create common language across the entire school.** In how we talk about things, how we interact with each other, how we look at the characteristics of what we want in people we work with and work around.”

Certificates

Each learner comes to the course with their own set of goals, resources, circumstances, and commitments. Learners have different expectations of what they would like to accomplish in the course, which may or may not include course completion or certification. We know that the course can still have a great impact on learners who do not complete the course or earn a certificate.

266 learners signed up for the verified certificate track for the course and 95 learners (36%) met the requirements to earn a verified certificate. 49% of learners who earned a certificate said the opportunity to earn a free certificate was “very” or “extremely” important to their completion of the course. We are grateful for XQ’s generosity in paying for our learners’ certificates, and we know that our learners were grateful for the opportunity as well.

“I wasn’t going to [pursue a certificate], but when I saw that it was free, I was like, ‘Well, heck yeah.’ And then, that actually motivated me to go in there and do everything, because I don’t wanna waste that money, even though it wasn’t mine.”

“[The certificate] will hopefully give a little bit more weight behind when we do present something here we can say, ‘Look, we went through this course,’ and, of course, attached to MIT [it] has that status symbol as well.”

Typically, we expect roughly 2% of registrants to earn certificates in our courses because we teach to a busy population. In this course, about 5% of all registrants earned a certificate. We suspect that the free certificate offer played an important role in that.

Learning Circles

Before the course started, we invited learners to ask colleagues in their school or community to join them to take the course in a learning circle. A **learning circle** is a facilitated group of registered learners who meet in person during the course. By working on the course with colleagues, learners are able to ground course content in their specific context. We provided learners with a Facilitator's Guide that included resources and suggestions for organizing and managing a learning circle.

It's difficult to know exactly how many learners were involved in learning circles or how many learning circles there were. In the post course survey, we asked learners to report if they were a member or a facilitator of a learning circle. Of 109 respondents,

- **30%** learners responded **Yes** to **Are you a member of a learning circle? (Mark yes if you are also a facilitator.)**
- **18%** learners responded **Yes** to **Are you a facilitator of a learning circle?**

We know that participants valued taking this course in groups:

“Since my learning circle included both teachers and leadership, it was very rich to see the different perspectives and try to find some common ground. As leadership, it was very important for me to notice how much teachers worry about citizenship and students becoming contributing members of society.”

We also see that participants were ready to turn their learning circles into groups for taking action:

“This was a fantastic exercise to go through with my learning circle. We serve a network of schools, and I thought it would be an amazing thing to help facilitate with individual schools--to facilitate a vision for their graduates and how that impacts their school in tangible ways (instruction, culture, supports, workforce experiences, etc.)”

“I am working with my colleagues to develop this profile, and we have a meeting on April 25. I have read through all of the resources and jotted down features they suggested. I also scoured through notes from brainstorming sessions with my colleagues on two occasions.”

Participant Work

We designed activity and assignment work to progressively build towards a comprehensive graduate profile, and to encourage learners to explore course ideas with people outside of the course, expanding the impact that the course has into our participants' communities. In Part 1 of the course, learners began to explore what they and others in their context believe to be the purpose of high school and expectations for high school graduates. In Part 2, they developed the first and second drafts of their graduate profile, sharing with their classmates and others offline for feedback. In this section, we share select participant work.

Activity: Brainstorm Characteristics

We asked participants to brainstorm what features or qualities they thought should characterize the graduates of their schools and communities by responding to a series of prompts. Here are four characteristics commonly found in participants' brainstorming.

My graduate will be (a)...

Assignment: Talk with a Stakeholder

Learners spoke with CEOs, IT specialists, business school professors, bus drivers, parents of high school students, college professors, high school, college, and elementary students and teachers, and more!

Conversation with high school and middle school instructional coach:

"I resonate with a lot of what my stakeholder had to say. As a former educator in the public school system, I do see the discrepancy between what students should have under their belts when they graduate and what they actually do leave with. I have also felt the pressure of what I should teach because of both state and federal laws and regulations. While I'm not necessarily surprised by anything she had to say, I am sort of surprised that we still haven't figured this out for our students."

Conversation with 3 seniors in high school:

"What struck me was the emphasis they placed on school helping them to become successful social beings... I had imagined they would place a bit more emphasis on exam results. They do talk about those; but in a slightly jaundiced way as if they realise they are an imperfect way of judging their accomplishments."

Conversation with waitress/bartender:

"My interviewee shared how she felt the purpose of high school was to go to college. She had enrolled in college twice but [dropped] out both times and is currently working as a waitress and bartender. In many ways she feels like she's failed because she hasn't "lived up" to the dominant cultural expectations of her school and her parents... I felt sad her sense of agency and worth were affected so deeply by her not achieving a prescribed definition of postsecondary success."

Assignment: Develop Second Draft

In this assignment, learners created a relatively polished draft of their graduate profile that was meant to be shared among their school and community. They also generated an action plan, containing steps for how they would continue the graduate profile process after the course ended. Looking over the second drafts, we noticed that **Communication** was by far the most included characteristic on graduate profiles. Learners also frequently listed **Collaboration/Teamwork**, and then **Critical Thinking** and **Self-Determination**. Here are a few examples excerpted from learners' second graduate profile drafts.

Math/English Proficiency

Appropriate level of math / english proficiency (min 11th gr level). Algebra II
Financial literacy defined as basic consumer economics (financial management/ planning, budgeting, insurance)

ENGAGED COMMUNICATOR

I am fluent in oral and written communication in multiple contexts

I listen and seek to connect with others

Self- Advocacy

Graduates will be informed citizens able to advocate for rights, opportunities, supports and services for not only themselves, but for their community.

“Culturally Competent - Our graduates will recognize that every culture and every individual has the potential to make unique and valuable contributions to develop stronger global systems... They will identify and challenge their own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs, and will be committed to communicating at the cultural interface.”

Critical thinking: Now that I have figured out what I need to know, reached out for help, and put value into that help, do I know how to critically asses this new information?

Sample Action Plan Steps

- “Work with my learning circle to refine a final, collectively-generated draft.”
- “At a leadership meeting, introduce the concept of creating a graduate profile, which will certainly be new to them. Share our learning circle draft and explain what we aim to do with the development of this profile and how much the whole school can contribute and be impacted by it.”
- “Create a ‘Graduate Profile Committee’ to develop the final draft after compiling all the data gathered in the process.”
- “Work with all grade levels to develop an understanding of what the characteristics in the profile look like at each grade level; in other words, what can elementary and middle school teachers do to help develop these characteristics in their students.”

Course Team Reflections

- As learners began to reflect on what they hoped graduates should know and be able to do, a few learners realized that they were creating a list of characteristics, skills and knowledge that were important for adults to have, too. One learner framed their second graduate profile draft around the idea that we should have the same expectations for teachers that we do of students. In creating this course, we hadn't considered this idea, and in future iterations we may emphasize this broader notion of community aspirations.
- In previous courses, we were hesitant about asking learners to do assignment work that required them to do work with others in their offline context such as interviewing or getting feedback on their work. We were concerned that some students might find the requirement to engage with others during the working day to be too onerous for an online class. In this course, both activities and major assignments asked learners to engage with others offline (Activity: Considering the Purpose of High School, Assignment: Talk with a Stakeholder, and Activity: Share and Reflect on Feedback). Learners who were able to were not only willing to do this work, but they also found it valuable for their own learning and reflection. We will still design courses so that learners who are not able to engage with others offline have a rewarding learning experience. However, we're excited by the possibilities of assignments that ask learners to get started with work in their communities.
- This course introduced the concept of a graduate profile using an instructional comic, "What is a Graduate Profile?" Of the 47 learners who responded to a survey about the comic, 96% found the comic "useful for conveying introductory concepts" and would "like to see more instructional comics in the future." Our team is always interested in innovative and engaging instruction, and we look forward to trying new things in the future.

Future Work

Building on the strengths of our work this year, we have identified **two major goals** for future work:

1. We want to **offer learning experiences with multiple entry points and opportunities for engagement**, in different formats and at differing commitment levels. We will pursue a variegated approach to developing online learning environments--new MOOCs, reboots of previously run MOOCs, blended learning experiences, and new modes of learning, including experiments like workshops adapted from course content.
2. We want to use our large-scale learning environments to **bring educators from across the country, and the world, into the movement for school innovation**. This includes featuring the creative work happening inside schools, so that innovative educators can realize they're not alone and everyone can get inspired to make real changes that truly affect the lives of students.

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