Designing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) to Improve Instruction

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What Brings You Here?

- Are you a faculty member, classified staff, researcher, administrator, or a trustee?

- Do you have any specific questions you are hoping that we answer?

SLO Session Outcomes

- Identify sources of faculty resistance to authentically engage in SLO assessment

- Define the use of SLOs as: a common tool used to gather evidence of student learning for the purposes of planning and improvement.

- Identify opportunities for faculty and staff to recognize the value of outcome assessment in what they do as educators.

- Develop skills to encourage faculty and staff to authentically engage in SLO Assessment

Before 2002

- There were no SLOs required for colleges accredited by ACCJC

- Most colleges used objectives to measure different content that students were expected to learn

- Degrees and certificates were granted based on students earning credit for courses

2002 Standards

- Colleges are required to develop SLOs for courses, degrees and certificates, general education, support services, and the college

- The goal of adding SLOs to the standards was to improve student learning and to ensure that student learning was at the center of college planning and resource allocation

Implementation of SLOs

- All colleges began to add SLOs to courses, degrees and certificates, and general education

- SLOs were new and many colleges were unsure how they differed from objectives

- There was a push to quickly implement SLOs to ensure compliance with accreditation standards

- SLOs quickly became a tool to hold colleges accountable instead of being a tool for colleges to improve the way they serve students

Peter Ewell

Since its beginnings in the early 1980s, the assessment of student learning has always harbored a contradiction: is its principle purpose to **improve teaching and learning** or to **satisfy the demands of external stakeholders**?

Peter Ewell is President Emeritus of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), a research and development center founded to improve the management effectiveness of colleges and universities.

The Compliance Issue

- Colleges want to remain accredited.

- Many of the SLOs were added onto existing curriculum

- Faculty collected assessment data and that data was collected and sent to the institutional research offices

- Assessment data may be included in program review and planning, but the data may not have been useful

- Colleges were able to meet in letter of the standards, but SLOs were having little impact on student learning

- **Are SLOs valuable? Can SLOs really be used to improve student learning?**

How College's [Successfully] Change

- Incorrect assumptions
  - Initiatives and programs lead to successful change
- Successful change requires
  - Understanding the change process itself
  - Understanding political, social, cultural values of institutions

- What are the core social and cultural values at your college?
- What initiatives and programs has your college embraced?

Adrianna Kezar
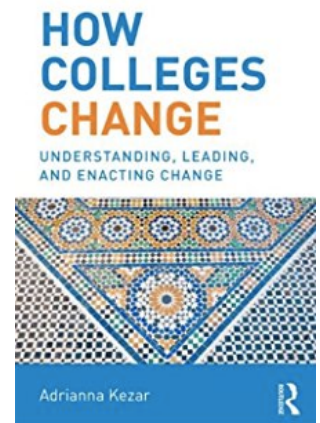
SLOs at your college:
Rebrand, Reboot, and Re-establish Value

Three opportunities (we see) to impact change

1. Re-establish SLOs as connecting teaching to learning - because that's what matters to educators

2. Re-establish SLOs as valuable to educational initiatives and programs that matter (professional development, resource requests, student services and support, equity, pathways)

3. SLOs as part of curriculum

Re-establish SLOs as connecting teaching to learning - because that's what matters to educators

- "Transparent" teaching helps students understand why they received an assignment, what they are expected to do, and how they will be evaluated."

- Particularly beneficial to

  - Underrepresented students

  - First generation students

Mary-Ann Winkelmes
"Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve
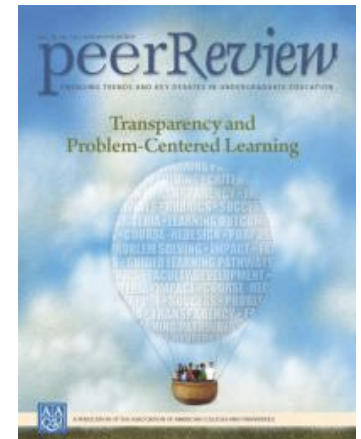Students' Learning." Liberal Education 99, 2 (Spring 2013).

Re-establish SLOs as valuable to educational initiatives and programs that matter

More "transparent" courses increased students'…
- **Academic confidence [success predictors]**
- **Sense of belonging [success predictors]**
- Skills valued most by employers

- Students' sense of academic confidence in particular field, school, and sense of belonging increased for students in courses where they perceived to be more transparent.

Mary Ann Winkelmes
"Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning"
Winter/Spring 2016

Tranparency Results slides

Some TILT survey questions

36. In this course, I knew the purpose of each assignment.
37. Each assignment included a section that explained how the assignment was related to the objectives of the course.
38. My instructor identified a specific learning goal for each assignment.

Mary Ann Winkelmes
"Transparency in Teaching: Faculty Share Data and Improve Students' Learning"
Winter/Spring 2016

Tranparency Results slides
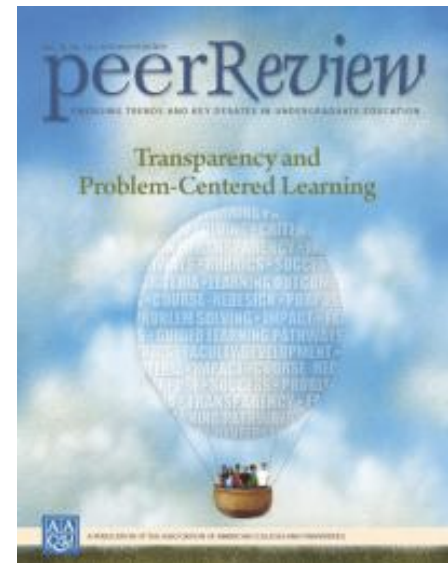
Re-establish SLOs as valuable to educational initiatives and programs that matter

- Connecting SLOs to…

  - Professional Development

  - Equity

  - Student services and support

  - Guided pathways

SLOs: A Curricular Matter

ACCJC mandates that institutions maintain

- "officially approved and current course outlines of record that include student learning outcomes" (ACCJC Standard IIA3).

ASCCC – Outcomes: A Curricular Matter

"…there is an interwoven relationship between the

- discrete skills and content students should learn (**course objectives**),
- how proficiency in those objectives will be evaluated (**methods of evaluation**),
- and the measurable skills and abilities that students are able to demonstrate subsequent to completing the course (**Student Learning Outcomes**).
- Furthermore, the objectives and outcomes must have a clear relationship to the subject or content."

"The Course Outline of Record:
A Curriculum Reference Guide Revisited"

Outcomes: A Curricular Matter

- Integrate outcomes into the process of curriculum

- SLO Rubric (3-page handout)

  - Primarily a developmental tool

  - Secondarily, an evaluative tool for curriculum creation and review

SLOs: Rebrand, Reboot, and Re-establish Value

SLOs – Bring it back to basics
- Acknowledge and redirect unproductive debates
  - SLOs are an educational fad
  - objectives vs. outcomes
  - grades vs. outcomes

Instruction
1. What are the valuable things students learn to do in your course?
2. How do you know if your students are learning what you're teaching?

SLOs: Rebrand, Reboot, and Re-establish Value

Student Services and Support

1. What do you do to help students succeed?

2. What do you want students to know and be able to do by the end of your session, meeting, etc?

3. How do you know when if your students are learning what you're teaching?

Role-playing Scenarios:

1. Acknowledge and hear challenges, fears, frustrations, workload, etc. facing faculty

2. Redirect conversation to the basics

    a. What are the valuable things students learn to do in your course?

    b. Relate course outcomes to institutional outcomes

    c. How do you know if your students are learning what you're teaching?

SLOs at your college:
Rebrand, Reboot, and Re-establish Value

- Validate challenges facing faculty
- Distinguish Outcome Assessment as Central to What we do – rather than new work, new initiative
- Invite ~~buy-in~~ ownership of student learning by
  - Establish culture of trust
  - Help faculty/staff see themselves as agents of improving student learning
  - Encourage innovation and acknowledge success
  - Outcome assessment having a permanent place in professional development
  - Invite campus-wide reflection on what works and why

SLO Dimensions of Quality	High Quality	Acceptable Quality	Insufficent Quality
I. Formulates outcome description clearly	Clear outcome formula.	Missing one or more formula components.	No discernable formula.
A. Provide a specific scenario+action verb=SLO	Given a welding blueprint, identify the welds to be used.		
B. What do students need to know or be able to do?+ "in order to"+ why students need to know=SLO	Design an experiment in order to test a chemical hypothesis or theory.		
C. Students will + [action verb/action verb phrase goes here] + [description of the product to be generated/performance to be accomplished/thing to be done] + as exhibited by or on [name the assessment activity specifically here] + with a score/achievement level of [provide the acceptable indicator of successful demonstration].	Students will interpret blueprints to weld together three pieces of metal on the Welding Repair Project with a score of 80% on higher on the Welding Rubric.		
II. Measurable Action Verbs	Action verbs are clear and observable, easy to measure, such as "identify" or "analyze." Clearly indicates how outcome achievement will be measured: how will specific knowledge and/or skills that are essential for students to attain in the course be quantified.	Action verbs are clear and observable but may present challenges for measurement, such as "describe and demonstrate." Provides some indication of how outcome achievement will be measured: how will specific knowledge and/or skills that are essential for students to attain in the course be quantified.	Action verbs depict vague states of mind that are difficult to observe or measure, such as "appreciate" or "understand." Does not indicate how outcome achievement will be measured.

III. Outcome description. A description of what students will be able to do at the end of the course.	Appropriately identifies and thoroughly describes an important and meaningful learning outcome that communicate what students will be able to do at the end of the course. "Explain accounting concepts as they apply to the creation of financial statements."	Generally identifies and describes a learning outcome that communicate what students will be able to do at the end of the course. "Explain accounting concepts and principles."	Identifies and describes a learning outcome that is vague, trivial, or unessential. "Explain important concepts and principles."
IV. Appropriate Rigor. Students are challenged in a way that is suitable for the course level.	Outcome suggests a high level of rigor.	Outcome suggest a sufficient level of rigor.	Outcome suggests a low level of rigor.
V. Coherent. Outcome aligns with identified methods of instruction and evaluation. Course outcome should clearly relate to readings, activities, assignments, and exams that are covered in the present course.	Outcome reflects a significant level of currciular coherence: supported by methods of instruction that lead to outcome achievement.	Outcome reflects an acceptable level of curricular coherence: supported by methods of instruction that lead to outcome achievement.	Outcome reflects curricular incoherence: methods of instruction do not align with outcome.
VI. Focused. The degree to which the outcome provides focussed direction for instruction.	Outcome strongly provides focus for instruction, aligning with course objectives.	Outcome provides general direction for instruction - partially aligning with course objectives.	Outcome does not provide focus or direction for instruction - does not align to course objectives.

VII. Meaningful Assessment. Is outcome assessed through engaging learning situations throughout the course such as through projects, demonstrations or performance assessments? Note: Learning Outcomes are not intended to be assessed only one time (e.g., at the end of a unit) or through selected response assessment, but rather through authentic tasks.	Outcome is assessed with rich and meaningful assessment practices.	Outcome is assessed.	Outcome is not assessessed.
VIII. Realistic. Ensures that the learning outcome is feasible for the instructor to teach. While the learning outcome should be ambitious, it must also be achievable.	Strong likelihood outcome is achievable over the course of the semester.	Probable that outcome is achievable over the course of the semester.	Unrealistic that outcome is achievable over the course of the semetser.
IX. Student-centric. SLOs should be written in language that students are able to understand.	Outcome language is straightforward and transparent resulting in student understanding.	Outcome language is clear but could be improved for greater student understanding.	Outcome language is confusing and difficult for students to understand.
X. Program Alignment. A well-written outcome relates specifically to a program and to how the program's faculty envisions student learning.	Course outcome demonstrates exceptional alignment to the program outcomes.	Course outcome demonstrates acceptable alignment to program outcomes.	Course outcome is not aligned or misaligned to program outcomes.

Rubric creation informed by:

NILOA. (2017). Learning Outcomes Assessment. Retrieved from National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment: http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/SLOSresources.html

NICEA.org (2017). Rubrric for Rating the Quality of Student Learning Objectives. http://www.nciea.org/wp-content/uploads/2_Rubric-for-Rating-the-Quality-of-SLOs-3-31-13.pdf

Ashby, S. (n.d.). *Writing Student Learning Outcomes.* Pulaski Technical College. North Little Rock: Pulaski Technical College.

Scenario #1

A faculty member insists that grades are a sufficient method for assessing student learning.

Scenario #2

A well respected and influential union member refuses to participate in outcome assessment activities claiming it violates academic freedom.

Scenario #3

Your college just completed a successful accreditation cycle. A month later, your department continues with their regularly scheduled assessment activities. An instructor states that they didn't complete their scheduled outcome assessment because they didn't think it was necessary since the accreditors reaffirmed their accreditation status.