Student Learning Outcomes Faculty Manual

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Here are some steps that will help you develop an assessment plan for a course:

**First, check your SLOs:**

- **How many are there?** If there are more than three, they likely aren’t true SLOs – they may be objectives that were just moved into the SLO area. You should revise them into SLOs before creating an assessment plan.

- **Are the SLOs overarching (“big picture” learning for the course) or are they smaller objectives (things learned in just one chapter, for instance)?** If they are not overarching, you should revise the SLOs before creating an assessment plan.

- **Is the student learning described in the SLO observable and measurable?** If not, you should revise the SLOs to make them observable and measureable before creating an assessment plan.

**Next, decide on an appropriate assessment tool. Consider:**

- **What is the SLO asking the students to do?**
  - Identify a fact?
  - Perform a skill?
  - Analyze a complex phenomenon?
  - Solve a problem?
  - Explain a concept?
  - Create a learning product?
  - Prepare a performance?
  - Apply skills or knowledge to real-world situations?
  - Evaluate options and select appropriate resources or tools?

- **What types of assignments or activities will allow students to demonstrate the SLO (see Appendix C for more information about choosing an assessment tool)?**
  - What tool will you select?
    - Objective exams?
    - Essay exams?
    - Out-of-class formal essays?
    - Skill demonstrations?
    - Surveys?
    - Portfolios?
    - Performances?
    - Oral Presentations?
Developing Assessment Plans for Courses

- What criteria will you use to measure success or failure to meet the SLO?
  - Rubric (see Appendix E for tips on how to develop a rubric)?
  - Raw score?

- What are the expected results? (How many students do you expect to successfully meet the SLO?)

Then, decide how and when you will do the assessment:

- How often will you assess this course?
  - Will it be on a three-year cycle? A four-year cycle? Other?
  - Are there similar courses that could be grouped together?
  - Which semester will you begin assessing this course?
  - If you make changes, when will you reassess to see the effects?

- Will you assess all students and sections or will you use sampling?
  - If you are sampling, how many students/sections will be involved?
  - How will you decide which students/sections to involve?

- What do you need to do to prepare?
  - Do you need to set up meetings for faculty teaching the course?
  - Do you need to create a departmental test or rubric?
  - How will you distribute materials?
  - Do you need any additional resources or training?

Finally, think about how and when you will share the assessment results and use the results in decision-making about the course and/or program (“closing the loop”):

- What needs to be done to gather and present the data?
  - Do you need data from Institutional Research?
  - What format will you use to share the data? PowerPoint? Handouts? Other?

- When will be a meaningful time for your department to reflect on the results?
  - Department retreats?
  - Department meetings?
  - Other?
Developing Assessment Plans for Department-Level Programs

In addition to assessing the SLOs for courses, departments are also responsible for assessing the programs within that department.

**In order to develop an assessment plan for instructional programs within your department, follow these steps**

(for how to create an assessment plan for a non-instructional program, please see Appendix F):

**Step 1: Decide how many programs your department has.**

Title 5 defines a program as “an organized sequence of courses leading to a defined objective, a degree, a certificate, a diploma, a license, or transfer to another institution of higher education”

- Programs can also be defined as “student pathways”
- Programs are often organized by academic disciplines and departments, but not always
- Many departments may have multiple programs – the number will vary by the number of degrees and certificates and also by student pathways through the department’s offerings
- Your department may have a course or two that is part of another department’s program
- Some departments may not have a program solely contained within the department – they may, instead, be part of the GE program and/or one of the General Arts and Sciences degrees

**Some questions to ask:**

- **Does my department have any degrees and certificates?** If yes, each degree and certificate is a program, and each one must have one or more program SLOs.

- **Why do students take the courses in my department?**
  - If it is primarily to fulfill GE requirements, then those courses are part of the GE program (you’ll be working with your GE group to write and assess GE program SLOs)
  - If students take a series of courses in preparation for another program (for example, biology as pre-nursing preparation or basic skills courses as preparation for transfer-level), that cluster of courses could be defined as a program.
  - If students take a sequence or concentration of courses in your department as preparation for a major they will declare after transfer, that cluster of courses could be defined as a program.

**Step 2: Consider the purpose/goals of each program.**

When trying to write a program SLO, it is often helpful to create a mission statement for the program

- Program mission statements may or may not be different from the mission statement for your department. A department with a single program may have the same mission statement for department and program, while a department with multiple programs will likely have a broader department mission statement and more specific program mission statements.

- A mission statement will often begin with the program in question, then make a statement about what that program does or provides, and to whom or for whom it is provided.
You also might ask yourself questions:

- What will a student who completes this program be able to do?
- What concepts or skills run throughout all (or many) of your program’s courses?
- What skills or knowledge will students who complete the program have?
- What will students gain from completing this program?

Step 3: Decide how many SLOs your program needs.

Some programs may only need one SLO

- Some programs consist of courses that all develop a single skill through various topics (for example, literary analysis is a single skill developed through practice with multiple literary traditions and genres)
- Some programs have a capstone course that ties together elements from all of the other courses – in this case, the capstone course SLO(s) can also be the program SLO(s) (for example, a paralegal studies capstone course that integrates concepts from previous courses and provides students the opportunity to practice them in a workplace setting)

Other programs may need several SLOs

- Some programs’ courses may develop two or more “strands” of knowledge or skills within the program (for example, a psychology program may include courses that fall into biological and social psychology or a modern language program may have goals in both linguistic and cultural competence)
- Some programs may have a split focus between content knowledge or theory and the application of that knowledge (for example, a science program that has lecture and lab components or a CTE program that focuses on both content area and workplace (or “soft”) skills)

Step 4: Draft your program SLOs.

Writing program SLOs is very similar to writing course-level SLOs. Keep the SLOs focused on the students (what will the student be able to do?) as opposed to the teacher (what will be taught?)

- Use critical thinking verbs (use the Curriculum Committee's verb chart – see Appendix G)
- Avoid verbs that are not readily observable (such as “understand” or “know” or “feel”)

Step 5: Double check your SLO with assessment in mind.

Make sure that the program SLO is something that is readily observable and measurable – in other words, build in assessment from the beginning. Don’t create a program SLO that you can’t envision a way to observe or evaluate or that requires data that you won’t be able to access.

For answers to Frequently Asked Questions about program SLO assessment, please see Appendix H.
Developing and Assessing SLOs for Institutional-Level Programs

The SLO steering committee has developed a first round of institutional-level SLOs for degrees, certificates, transfer, personal development and job skills based on ICETC/CSUGE. This process included defining the SLOs, mapping the SLOs to courses, defining the assessments, assessing the SLOs, and analyzing the results. The committee decided to focus on common educational goals and develop the SLOs according to the GE categories for transfer and degree seeking students. A workshop was held on April 4, 2008 with administrators and faculty representing the appropriate departments, to create the SLOs and develop assessments for the respective SLOs. Institutional SLOs were created for the following areas: English Communication (IGETC/CSUGE), Mathematical Concepts and Quantitative Reasoning (IGETC/CSUGE), Arts and Humanities (IGETC/CSUGE), Social and Behavioral Sciences (IGETC/CSUGE), Physical and Biological Sciences (IGETC/CSUGE), Languages other than English (IGETC), and Lifelong Understanding and Self-Development (CSUGE).

Since the April 4, 2008 workshop there has been a shift in thinking regarding Institutional-level SLOs, resulting in the decision to base them on Associate Degree Requirements, plus College Skills and CTE. Many of the SLOs developed by the participants in the original workshop remain valid. More collaboration will be necessary to develop SLOs for some new categories and to revise some of the older SLOs that don’t work for the new categories.

The new categories, based on the G.E. areas defined in the Associate Degree Requirements 2009-2010 are:

**GE Areas (for a list of courses in these areas, please see Appendix I):**
- Natural Sciences
- Social Science
- Humanities and Fine Arts
- Language and Rationality (English Composition and Communication and Analytical Thinking)
- American Institutions
- Physical Education and Wellness
- Diversity

**Plus:**
- College Skills (Developmental English and Math, English as a Second Language, and Counseling)
- CTE (Career Technical Education)

For all of these areas, interdisciplinary groups will meet to draft SLOs, create an assessment plan, and agree on an assessment schedule. The groups will go through a very similar process to the one used to develop departmental-level program SLOs – the only difference is that these institutional-level programs are much larger and will involve the collaboration of multiple departments.

The goal for SLOs at all levels (course, program, and institution) is to improve the quality of instruction, thus improving student learning and success.
Scheduling Assessments

In order to organize the assessment process, it is important for each department to create a schedule of assessment to ensure that all courses and programs are assessed on a regular basis. While SLO assessment for courses and programs should be regular, it is not necessary to assess every course and program each semester.

First, consider how many courses and programs your department has. The number of courses and programs will likely affect how often each course or program is assessed. Aim to assess each course at least once every 2-4 years (maximum time 6 years).

Departments may consider grouping like courses together to assess in the same semester using a similar assessment tool. Or, if there aren’t clusters of like courses, departments may just split the courses evenly, assessing a similar number of courses each semester.

Because each course and program must complete at least one assessment cycle before fall 2012, your department should prioritize assessing courses and programs that have not yet been assessed. Once each course and program has been assessed at least once, a regular cycle of assessments for courses and programs should be developed.

Each department should create a written assessment schedule so that the timelines are clear. For assessment schedule forms and sample assessment schedules, please see Appendix J.