

Fall 2011 Language and Rationality II Closing the Loop

Departments Involved:

Communication Studies, Computer Science, Economics, Math, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology

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ISLO:

Apply systems of reasoning in solving problems or analyzing and evaluating arguments.

Assessment Method:

Mapping of aligned course-level SLO assessments to ISLO

Criteria for Success:

The goal is that 70% of students will pass

Courses assessed Fall 11

Communication Studies 105
Communication Studies 105H
Communication Studies 223
Communication Studies 225
Communication Studies 227
Economics 291
Math 111
Computer Science 111
Computer Science 132

Passing rate 92%

Range for courses 69%-98%

How do we feel about these pass rates?

It is encouraging that overall passing rates are high. Our threshold is that 70% of students will pass the SLO. SLOs for each course in the Language and Rationality II area are mapped to the ISLO. One course did not achieve this threshold, but was very close at 69% passing. Overall, the results significantly surpass expectations. Because the courses are in a variety of separate and distinct disciplines (Communication Studies, Computer Science, Economics, Math, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology) and a multitude of professors, both full-time and adjunct are assessing them, we cannot be sure just how the course SLOs are being assessed. Validity and reliability issues come up time and again with regard to the process. We have no viable solution for this issue.

How will data collection change for next time? *How do we get everyone to report in a timely manner?*

Some of the suggestions apply to a lack of communication in the individual departments. Since this ISLO is mapped to the course level SLOs, department chairs should be letting their faculty know what courses are to be assessed each semester. The chairs, or faculty who collected the data, then report the aggregated data for each course that was assessed to the ISLO facilitator. This does not require any further data collection, just a simple report of how many attempted the SLO and how many passed for any course that was assessed. The difficulty arises in the last step, the reporting to the ISLO facilitator. IN the past, the facilitator emailed everyone involved to ask for the data, but not all responded, even after repeated emails. For Fall 2011, the Office of Institutional Research set up a survey monkey for data collection. About half of the departments responded after one request, and all except one department responded after one reminder; the final department responded after two additional reminders. One person suggested an Outlook reminder. This would work for many of us, but not all faculty/chairs use Outlook for their calendar system. Perhaps, as the facilitator, I will create a reminder for the departments in my area.

Strengths and weaknesses of process? Concerns? Suggestions?

Weaknesses—Some departments have difficulty getting adjunct professors to participate fully and in a timely manner. As they are not paid to conduct SLO assessment, this is a particularly difficult topic to raise in some departments. We also are wondering what to do with data aggregated across such a variety of classes (i.e., how do we compare math and sociology?) Some courses are higher level than others and are more challenging and we cannot, and should not, ask professors to lower their standards to achieve some arbitrary threshold. Individual course assessment may not reflect other factors in passing rates of classes such as students not taking the right class for their abilities (such as in math). The ISLO process may be a bit redundant insofar as it seems to replicate the SLO loops all departments are currently doing. Since this ISLO is mapped, each semester we will collect data for different courses, depending on their assessment cycles.

Strengths—The process is becoming more institutionalized and that helps to create awareness which seems to be the main issue here. I believe that most of us are enjoying the conversations we have had about student learning across disciplines.

General outcomes of the assessment?

Overall pass rates are high, we are having conversations about student learning, and we are aware that different courses are intrinsically difficult. We are excellent instructors who know what we are doing and do it well.

What trends/themes did you notice from aggregated data?

For Fall 2010, eight courses were assessed with a passing rate of 85%. In Spring 2011, only four courses were assessed with a passing rate of 84%. For Fall 11, 11 courses were assessed, representing 1557 students. Each semester represents a different configuration of courses assessed. Certain courses are just more challenging for students than others and this committee has no control over which courses are assessed in any given semester as that is a decision made at the department level.

What do the data reveal about students' success? Students' weaknesses?

In general, the data tell us that most students can apply systems of reasoning in solving problems or analyzing and evaluating arguments. We are helping to produce a new generation of critical thinkers and well-rounded members of society. However, we are not able to identify specific weaknesses or strengths of students since the data are aggregated across disciplines and not for individual courses/students. We believe this is the area of inquiry for course SLOs.