

Final Report of the Student Learning Outcomes Task Force (SLOTF), 2005-2008

Santa Monica College (SMC)'s Student Learning Outcomes Task Force was established in June 2005 to engage the campus in a discussion of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) and to facilitate the production of stated outcomes and assessments from the course to the institutional level. More specifically, over a three-year period, its functions were to

- Create a timely process to achieve Student Learning Outcomes that reflect Santa Monica College campus culture.
- Promote a campus wide commitment toward student learning and success.
- Encourage a dialogue on student learning and success within and among all units on campus.
- Engage every unit of the campus in the production of specific outcomes and assessments.

In its first year (2005/6), Task Force co-chairs were Suzanne Borghei, Nancy Hanson, and Jacqueline Nagatsuka.¹ As director of SMC's Office of Institutional Research, Nagatsuka took responsibility for the Student Services work on student outcomes, while faculty-members Borghei and Hanson focused on the academic constituencies. The Task Force committed itself to a bottom-up process, beginning in year one at the course level, moving in year two to the program level, and ending in year three at the institutional level. This process reflected SMC's commitment to shared governance and ensured that SLO would be genuinely meaningful by being written by subject experts.

The Task Force co-chairs met initially with the outgoing and incoming chairs of the Curriculum, Program Review, and Chairs Committees. The first two of these committees have specific oversight over course and department level outcomes and were already involved in introducing the topic of SLO on campus, while the Chairs Committee facilitates communication via department leaders. Looking to coordinate and promote the process (which was encountering resistance among faculty concerned with academic freedom among other issues), the Task Force

- Prepared a SMC Handbook (Year One) that included a Definition of Student Learning Outcomes emphasizing the teaching-learning cycle and dialogue among colleagues as well as the preparation of specific outcome statements. The Handbook also included more detailed information, exercises, and samples.
- Held monthly meetings from November 2005 to June 2006 with SLO representatives recruited from each discipline to facilitate, through incremental steps, the Year One goal that each discipline write a minimum of two outcomes for a minimum of two courses. An average of eighteen to twenty representatives participated regularly; their activities included
 - training in SMC's approach to writing outcomes (so as to serve as a SLO resource in their disciplines), and discussion of the relationship of SLO to Curriculum Committee, Program Review, and Accreditation processes;
 - conferring with colleagues in their disciplines to identify two courses for which SLO would be written in Year One;
 - reporting back on the rationale for the courses which had been selected;
 - reporting back on their collaborative work with colleagues as they wrote SLO for these courses and sharing drafts of their results, and

¹ For spring 2006, Janet Harclerode replaced Suzanne Borghei, who was on sabbatical. Another Task Force leader was Deborah Kraut (Fall 2006).

- Submitting their Year One outcomes. Over 68 courses, representing twenty-one disciplines, submitted outcomes which were forwarded to the Office of Academic Affairs and the Curriculum Committee chair.
- The final meeting re-emphasized the need to prepare SLO for all courses while also beginning, in Fall 2006, to assess those already written.
- The Task Force also hosted an expert in assessment models, Jemma Blake-Judd from Mt. San Antonio College, looking toward Year Two's goal of assessing course-level SLO.

As Year Two (2006/7) began, focus shifted to discipline, department, certificate, degree, and program-level outcomes – those that encompass a cluster of related courses. For shorthand purposes, these various outcomes are referred to as “program-level.” The Task Force co-chairs (Borghei and Hanson) worked directly with department chairs, through the Chairs Committee, attending its monthly meetings to encourage and facilitate the on-going process of writing and assessing course outcomes while introducing the writing of program-level ones.

Among the year's specific activities, the Task Force

- offered a SLO Workshop/breakout session on Institutional Flex Day (August 2006)
- prepared a Year Two Handbook focusing on both assessment and the writing of discipline/department, degree, certificate, and program-level SLO.
- revised the Course SLO form, used by the Curriculum Committee, to include assessment tools and prepared Course and Program Assessment forms to use to document assessment results and planning.
- In discussion with the Chairs,
 - it was agreed that since many departments still had numerous courses without SLO, the focus in Fall semester would be on completing these; emphasis was made that assessment of SLO should begin as soon as they are written.
 - A timeline for creating discipline, degree, department and certificate SLO was established for the spring semester.
 - At subsequent meetings, Department Chairs were given copies of:
 - 1) Handbook for Year #1: Course Level SLO
 - 2) Handbook for Year #2: Department Level SLO
 - 3) Examples of course level SLO from a variety of SMC disciplines
 - 4) Readings supporting the importance of the SLO process, and
 - 5) a handout discussing different types and examples of grading rubrics.
- On February 2, 2007, Bill Scroggins, President of the College of the Sequoias and a statewide expert on SLO, gave an hour and a half presentation to the Chairs Committee and a second presentation to Student Services leaders. His focus was assessing course-level outcomes, from both a course and departmental perspective. Among the points he made (supplemented by a helpful packet of handouts) were
 - to conceptualize SLO as the “Teaching-Learning Cycle” (TLC), to highlight the fundamental goal of improving student success by “closing the loop” of an on-going process;
 - that the SLO process (or TLC) adds only two new elements to what faculty already do: 1) more frequent and directed discussion of desired outcomes and assessment methods and results; 2) preparation of a narrative and/or quantitative report documenting this discussion and collaboration;
 - to encourage use of collaborative “norming sessions” at which faculty within a discipline or teaching related courses articulate the traits used in evaluating student work (exams, performances, portfolios, projects, etc.) and the standards on which these traits are measured. Options include agreement on a standard rubric to be applied by all or a preference that individual faculty decide how best to implement the points discussed.
 - Scroggins also presented three assessment models that are being used from the departmental to the institutional level: 1) the Cabrillo College model which identifies an outcome to be assessed and leaves it to individual faculty to devise the means of assessment, followed by general discussion and reporting; 2) the Palomar College model which is similar to the Cabrillo model but defines desired

outcomes and assessments more specifically, essentially establishing agreed-upon rubrics to be implemented during assessment; and 3) the College of the Sequoias model which is based upon California State University General Education requirements. In this third method, student outcomes for individual courses are closely articulated and assessed in terms of GE requirements.

Through the spring of 2007, SMC's Task Force continued to provide Chairs with supporting material and to field questions on the process of preparing department, discipline, certificate, degree, and program outcomes. In April, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) requested a summary of SLO progress-to-date. SMC's data indicated that nearly 64% of all courses had SLO, more than half with assessment methodologies identified, while 63% of instructional support services and 81% of student support services had also written SLO, the majority of which had assessment methodologies and 29% of which had been mapped to courses. Between 26%-50% of support services had assessed outcomes and between 5%-13% had assessed the results and planned or implemented changes as a result. In response to SMC's Midterm Report, the Task Force received commendation for having prepared the two handbooks, Year One and Year Two.

Between May and August 2007, attention turned to planning the college-wide process for writing SMC's institutional learning outcomes (ILO). Facilitators were recruited and trained to lead twenty-five concurrent breakout sessions on August 23 Institutional Flex Day. Each session's two facilitators helped participants work in small groups to discuss and articulate their desired outcomes. The goal was to ensure the broadest possible input as to what faculty and staff endeavor for students to "take away" when they finish their studies at SMC.

During summer 2007, Borghei and Hanson also attended the California State Senate's SLO & Assessment Institute, in Coronado, along with Mary Colavito, the incoming chair of the Curriculum Committee.

In its third year (2007/8), Task Force members included, in addition to Borghei and Hanson, Georgia Lorenz (Academic Affairs), Judith Penchansky (Student Services), and Caroline Sheldon (Institutional Research), enhancing its campus-wide scope. The first task was to turn the raw "sticky notes" data and summary statements, produced by the 416 participants of the Institutional Flex Day's break-out sessions, into four institutional outcomes:

Through their experiences at SMC, students will

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

acquire the self-confidence and self-discipline to pursue their intellectual curiosities with integrity in both their personal and professional lives;

ANALYTIC & COMMUNICATION SKILLS--

obtain the knowledge and academic skills necessary to access, evaluate, and interpret ideas, images, and information critically in order to communicate effectively, reach conclusions, and solve problems;

APPLIED SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE & VALUES

respect the inter-relatedness of the global human environment, engage with diverse peoples, and acknowledge the significance of their daily actions relative to broader issues and events;

APPLIED KNOWLEDGE & VALUATION OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD

take responsibility for their own impact on the earth by living a sustainable and ethical life style.

After being adopted by the Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees in fall 2007, the ILO were integrated into a revised SMC Mission Statement. The Task Force requested department chairs to take the lead in writing "competencies" linking their program outcomes to one or more of the ILO and to "map" their courses to those ILO that they directly support. The Environmental Action and Global Citizenship Committees also participated.

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The purpose was to ensure a seamless relationship between the three levels of outcomes: institutional, program, and course. This relationship enables assessment of SMC's broad institutional outcomes through the specific tools associated with courses and/or programs as well as assessment at the institutional level itself.

In March 2008, the ILO were the focus of the March 4 Institutional Flex Day SLO breakout sessions titled "We're Already Doing it." The four sessions highlighted specific ways a diverse range of disciplines and programs promote students' achievement of the institutional outcomes. Later that month, Borghei and Hanson attended the State Academic Senate's SLO Regional Meeting at Mt. San Antonio College.

Year Three saw several additional needs addressed. One, assessment of program-level outcomes began, with reporting standardized through the Program Assessment Form, adopted by SMC's Academic Senate. In addition, a key step was taken to link course and departmental outcomes with budgeting decisions by including departmental action as a criterion in considering hiring requests. And, a multi-year calendar was established for assessing the ILO. The second Institutional Annual Report Update on SLO to the ACCJC (April 2008) showed progress in the percentage of courses with SLO written (96%), three-quarters of which with assessment methodologies identified, while all of the instructional support services and 96% of student support services had also written SLO, two-thirds of which had assessment methodologies and 63% of which had been mapped to courses. Between 50%-70% of support services had assessed outcomes and between 15%-50% had assessed the results and planned or implemented changes as a result.

In yet another important step, the College Services committee under the leadership of Charlie Yen began to look at SLO/ILO for the areas of the College that are not considered Student Services or Academic Affairs, i.e.; Campus Police, Food Services, Events, HR, Payroll, Grounds and Facilities. Both Georgia Lorenz and Judith Penchansky met with the College Services committee and several individual areas to support and guide their development of SLO. At a Management Association meeting in January 2008, Penchansky also presented a workshop for managers on writing SLO and mapping them to the ILO. She also served as a resource for them as they undertook the task.

Looking to its termination, the Task Force proposed creation of a new Joint Committee "to ensure campus-wide collaboration in the ongoing processes of developing, gaining proficiency in, and fully integrating learning outcomes and assessments. The committee, as workgroup, will serve to facilitate the efforts of various internal campus governance structures. Specifically, the committee will serve to enhance connectivity between the Academic Senate's Curriculum, Department Chairs, Professional Development, and Program Review committees. The committee will also serve as a bridge linking student and institutional learning outcomes to college-wide strategic planning initiatives (e.g. Academic Initiatives and Budgetary Planning)." The Academic Senate approved this committee in May 2008.

However, the Task Force continued to work through summer 2008 on its final project: August's Institutional Flex Day's launching of campus-wide engagement with ILO #1, as it relates to each department and unit. Preceded by an original comedic skit written by Bruce Smith (very well received!), the day's ILO break-out session "It Takes a Village" gave each campus unit the opportunity to begin to operationalize the ILO, by identifying concrete and assessable competencies and the strategies and tools they will use to reach and assess them.

In conclusion, by the end of its third and final year, the SLO Task Force made substantial progress in addressing its original functions through an inclusive, campus-wide process. That SMC has always focused on student learning and success was not in question. However, the SLO/ILO process has become understood as valuable tool through which to encourage greater dialogue within and among campus units as to the specific strategies and tools that achieve the best possible outcomes.