

Student Learning Outcomes: Here, There and Everywhere at Cabrillo  
By Marcy Alan Craig, Assessment Coordinator

“What’s all this business about student learning outcomes?” you may be asking yourself. “What the heck are they and how they will affect my teaching and my life?”

Good questions! Though it may seem as if SLOs have suddenly invaded our campus like aliens from outer space, Cabrillo actually has a long history with them. Six years ago, faculty began to explore their use through the Learner Outcomes Summer Institute. When WASC, our accrediting agency, adopted SLOs as a focus for their new standards two years ago, alumni from the Institutes and other interested folks began to develop a faculty-centered approach to using them. Last Flex Week featured the results of the hard work done by the Faculty Senate and the Accreditation Planning Committee who have developed a plan for how the entire college can work with SLOs. The plan was presented to get your feedback, so that we can make sure that we fulfill the new accreditation standards in a way that fits Cabrillo’s culture.

As Assessment Coordinator, I’ve gone to many conferences to see what other schools are doing with SLOs. How does Cabrillo’s approach differ from those across the country?

- ❑ Our plan was developed by faculty, classified staff and administrators, working together as a team, rather than coming from the top down.
- ❑ Our plan actually focuses on teaching and learning, asking faculty to talk to each other about assignments, rather than just using exit tests (as in Texas), filling out forms on every student every semester (as in Maryland) or making sure that the same book, assignment and lecture is occurring in every section of the same class (as in Milwaukee).
- ❑ Our plan preserves instructor autonomy and academic freedom.
- ❑ Our approach asks protects faculty by keeping specific assessment results general and anonymous rather than using them for faculty evaluation.
- ❑ We feel playful and confident enough in our plan to have written a song above it, “The Core Four for Cabrillo,” by Rory O’Brien.

What does this mean for you?

1. You’ll need to learn what an SLO is and to become familiar with ways that your individual department and the rest of the campus will be working with them.

An SLO describes one major piece of knowledge, skill, or ability that a student should be able to demonstrate by the end of either a course, a program or a degree. The new accreditation standards require that we define SLOs for all three and then develop a way to measure if students have mastered them. In addition, they ask that each portion of the college, from Student Services to Payroll, look at how they contribute to student learning. The new attitude is “It takes a village to raise a degree or certificate. We are all in this together.”

2. You’ll need to participate in defining and measuring student mastery of course, program and degree SLOs.

The Faculty Senate already took care of defining the SLOs for our AA and AS degrees. These are the four core competencies: communication, critical thinking and

information competency, global awareness and personal responsibility and professional development. The Core 4 describe our overarching goals for students at Cabrillo. Think of them as the “big picture” skills that all parts of the Cabrillo village are aimed toward helping students achieve.

Individual departments will be defining SLOs for each course and for each occupational certificate and degree. Instructional Planning is the time when this occurs. It’s also the time when faculty begin to evaluate how well students are doing with the Core 4 competencies along with course and occupational certificates and degrees SLOs. Thirty-six departments on campus have already begun some part of this process.

The Faculty Senate developed an evaluation or assessment process for transfer and basic skills departments to use to look at both the Core 4 and the individual SLOs for classes. This process has proven so easy that many occupational programs are using it to assess their certificate and degree SLOs. Here’s what you’re asked to do:

- ❑ Choose one assignment or a series of test questions in one class that you feel addresses one of the Core 4 or a course SLO. You chose it – no one else does. Your academic freedom and autonomy is assured.
- ❑ Give it as usual.
- ❑ Evaluate it using a rubric or defined grading scale. If using test questions, analyze the results of each. Again, you evaluate it by yourself, preserving your academic freedom and autonomy.
- ❑ Analyze the results of the assignment, trying to identify any student needs or issues that you feel have been revealed. Plan how you might address those issues. You do not need to report the specific evaluation results of individual students.
- ❑ In a meeting during Flex, share your assignment, the issues revealed and how you think they can be addressed. As a department, discuss what you need from the college to address the identified issues. The results of the discussion become the basis for your department’s Instructional Plan. This is recorded on a simple three-page form that does not identify individual faculty’s assessment results.

Though this may sound complicated, faculty who have actually done it have found it to be fairly simple. They report that the process can be helpful in two ways. First, though developing a rubric or grading scale can be a lot of work, students respond well to them and grading can become easier. Secondly, this process requires that one department meeting per year is actually spent talking about assignments and teaching, rather than doing business.

3. When you’re evaluated, you’ll be asked to talk about the student needs and issues you’ve seen through the assessment of SLOs on the Self-Evaluation form.

One of the most troubling aspects of the new accreditation standards to many faculty was that they required some component of faculty evaluation include SLOs. Cabrillo is using our Self-Evaluation form to fulfill this requirement. The CCFT recently revised question #2 on Cabrillo’s Self-Evaluation form to read “In terms of classroom instruction, including the assessment of student learning outcomes, what have you learned about student needs, issues and your own teaching? On what do you plan work?” It is currently being negotiated.

4. You'll be asked to participate in dialogue within your department (during those Flex meetings to discuss assessment results) and at other times on campus to discuss issues that arise about student learning and teaching.

In addition to the emphasis on SLOs, the new standards also require more venues for campus dialogue about teaching and learning. The Accreditation Planning Committee has developed a plan for this which will be discussed in another newsletter.

Working with SLOs in all of the ways listed above requires time and effort. CCFT is concerned about the workload issues the new standards pose for faculty. These issues will be discussed during next fall's negotiations. Stay tuned.

More information about what is required of faculty can be found in three workbooks (Classroom/Course SLO Assessment, Occupational Programs, and Instructional Planning) on our SLO web. It's address is: [www.cabrillo.edu/services/pro/assess/assessweb/index.html](http://www.cabrillo.edu/services/pro/assess/assessweb/index.html). Or call or email Marcy Alan Craig, Assessment Coordinator, with your questions and concerns (479-6366; [malancr@cabrillo.edu](mailto:malancr@cabrillo.edu)).