Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges,
Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC)

Web Report
2013 Status on SLO Implementation at Member Institutions

The current Accreditation Standards were approved in 2002. Among the significant changes in those Standards were a heightened emphasis on student learning, assessment, and improvement, and on data-based decision making. Five years later, in 2007, a Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness was circulated to the field, describing levels of implementation for the linked processes of institutional planning, program review, and student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment. As the cover memo with the rubric stated:

The purpose of the Rubric is to provide some common language that can be used to describe a college’s status vis-à-vis full adherence to the Standards, as well as to provide a developmental framework for understanding each institution’s actions toward achieving full compliance with Standards.

In 2009, the field was notified that the Commission would expect institutions to be at the Proficiency level of SLO implementation by fall 2012, and that member institutions should operate at the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement levels thereafter. In February 2012, the Commission announced it would request a report from each college to evaluate attainment of the Proficiency level across the region. The colleges were divided into two reporting groups, with half reporting by October 15, 2012, and the remainder by March 15, 2013. This report presents the results of the College Status Reports on SLO Implementation.

In accordance with ACCJC practice for monitoring annual self-reports from member institutions, staff reviewed the 2012-2013 College Status Report on Student Learning Outcomes Implementation and prepared a composite report on the results for review by the Commission. Each college’s report was also retained for inclusion with annual reports, annual fiscal reports, audits, and other college materials for external evaluation teams when conducting a review of the institution.

The 2012-2013 SLO reports completed by all institutions provided a means for gaining understanding of progress across the Western Region in the implementation of student learning outcomes assessment. The Commission based this report on the Proficiency implementation level on the Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness, Part III (Rubric), as that had become very familiar to individuals at the campuses who worked with SLOs. Moving forward, colleges are reminded they must demonstrate the Accreditation Standards on student learning outcomes are met.

In order to gather a snapshot of SLO implementation across the region, a scoring rubric was used to pull together elements from the submitted reports. The rubric was based on the information provided by colleges in their reports as it related to the Proficiency level. The rubric elements captured the largest aspects of practice and majority of reported items; however, some unique responses from colleges were included and scored to give benefit to the institution.
Summary of Results

The analysis of institutional status reports found that 80% of member institutions met or exceeded expectations for Proficiency level SLO implementation by March, 2013. Of that percentage, six member institutions exceeded expectations for Proficiency level SLO implementation, and 36 colleges solidly met or exceeded the expectations overall, with limited areas for needed improvement. The rest met expectations, but were not fully established in the areas of expected effective practice. Twenty percent of the member institutions did not fully meet the expectations for the Proficiency level, some of them with significant deficiencies.

The Numbers for Ongoing Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

At the time of the 2012-2013 College Status Reports (Status Reports), quantitative information on SLO implementation had been collected in Annual Reports for six years. The 2012-2013 expectation was that student learning outcomes were being assessed regularly in all venues where students are learning. The scoring of numerical responses took into account variations at colleges of how certain activities were conducted or defined. As colleges were expected to have completed the definition of SLOs for all courses and programs, the quantitative analysis of the Status Reports focused on assessment.

About 40% of member institutions report ongoing assessment in at least 90% of both courses and programs. Another 25% of member institutions solidly met the expectation that ongoing assessment of SLOs be in place for their courses, and 12% met implementation expectations for ongoing program assessment. Ten colleges had ongoing assessment in less than 40% of their courses, and ten colleges were assessing SLOs for less that 30% of programs. The low or modest levels of ongoing assessment at some colleges had significant implications for the institutional planning and program review processes and the use of assessment results in decision-making at the campus.

Student and learning support services, on the whole, had strong levels of assessment implementation. Sixty-three percent of institutions reported ongoing assessment in 95 to 100% of student and learning support services. For institutional learning outcomes, the implementation levels fell to extremes: most colleges had ongoing assessment for 90% or more of the institutional outcomes. However, more than 20 colleges were not assessing institutional outcomes at all.

Narrative Responses

Colleges were asked to provide eight narrative responses that were correlated with the Proficiency Rubric statements. The responses for the first proficiency statement, dealing with having outcomes and assessments in place, demonstrated implementation across the region at near the expected level. The analysis of responses for the other proficiency statements found a more mixed level of implementation. For some reporting institutions, the focus seemed to have been on the mechanics of defining and assessing outcomes more so than the use of SLO assessment results for influencing decisions at all levels, for improvement, and for improving student success.
Proficiency Rubric Statement 1: Student Learning outcomes and Authentic Assessments are in Place for Courses, Programs, Support Services, Certificates and Degrees.

For this element, the analysis sought narrative support for the numerical data provided; information concerning courses, programs, certificates, degrees and support services; and a discussion of authentic assessment. Overall, colleges were near the expected level of implementation. Within the narrative about ongoing assessment, most colleges offered support for the numerical data provided. However, few of the narratives discussed authentic assessments leading to understanding about student learning and gaps which need to be addressed.

Proficiency Rubric Statement 2: There is a widespread institutional dialogue about assessment results and identification of gaps.

In their responses, colleges were expected to go beyond providing a listing of meetings at which assessment is addressed, to specifically describe (or give examples) of where/how/for what purposes the assessment results are discussed. In addition, colleges were to describe processes for identifying gaps and instituting changes to address the gaps. Institutional messaging was expected to support the value of assessment and the need for improvement in student learning.

By way of example, one college described the dialog that takes place at the section and department levels, using assessment data, resulting in annual unit plans and department goals.

Dialogue among faculty and staff occurs at the curriculum committee, department meetings, and professional development workshops. Resource support units, such as information technology and marketing, establish goals and develop work plans based on discussion of the ways to address the SLO gaps identified in the unit, section, and division plans. College participatory governance groups, such as the institutional effectiveness committee, the budget development committee, and college council, discuss and oversee the process for instituting changes to improve student learning.

Member institutions generally described robust dialog about student learning outcomes in some areas of the college, but few of the colleges described processes for identifying gaps and instituting changes to address the gaps. Unfortunately, for about 10% of member institutions, their narrative responses revealed that dialog across the campus about student learning had largely been replaced by automated form-filling processes – from SLO development and assessment, to results examination in program review, to institutional considerations for improvement.

Proficiency Rubric Statement 3: Decision making includes dialogue on the results of assessment and is purposefully directed toward aligning institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning.

For this narrative response, colleges’ descriptions of how decision-making at the institution includes the results of assessment were sought. The responses were expected to include examples or explanation for how institution-wide practices were aligned/realigned to support and improve student learning.
For example, one of the colleges explained that its cyclical assessment processes have been devised to provide opportunities for participation, dialogue, and decision-making throughout each phase of SLO assessment on campus.

Key performance indicators (enrollment, success, retention, etc.) and SLO assessment data are integrated into program review and annual unit planning processes. The program review process asks departments to create short- and long-term goals, including those from SLO assessment results.

An example of a college’s use of assessment results affecting institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning involved assessment of the Independent Learner institutional learning outcome, which is a comprehensive measure of campus student engagement.

A specially-created project oversees efforts to broaden student engagement on campus, and provides faculty resources to implement learning around the specific dimensions of the Independent Learner outcome. Assessments of performance are communicated in published reports, in shared-governance meetings, and in the unit planning process. The outcomes from the Independent Learner competency have been used to institutionalize and provide a common framework for students and staff around the expectations of an engaged student body.

There were a number of strong responses by colleges in this portion of the narrative. However, only a handful of colleges addressed the alignment of institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning. Others described decision-making processes without linking them to SLO assessment results. Several reported that decision processes did not yet include a mechanism for considering student learning, and two colleges questioned whether decisions (other than curricular or pedagogical choices) should include considerations for supporting and improving student learning at all.

**Proficiency Rubric Statement 4: Appropriate resources continue to be allocated and fine-tuned.**

This narrative response was to be a discussion of how resources are allocated and fine-tuned to improve student learning. Fiscal, employee, technology, and physical resources should have been considered. In addition, a description of how institutional resource allocation is oriented toward student learning was expected. A number of colleges addressed resources allocated for the completion of SLO assessment. Across the board, report narratives tended to discuss the provision of training and of payment for participation in SLO activities, rather than use of resources to enhance student learning.
Proficiency Rubric Statement 5: Comprehensive assessment reports exist and are completed and updated on a regular basis.

In this response, the analysis looked for colleges to describe the cycle and format of assessment reports, participation in report completion and updating, and the comprehensive nature of assessment reports. It is noteworthy that many of the reports described as “comprehensive” were compilations of the deadlines and timelines for SLO work and lists of the courses and programs involved. Many of the colleges focused their comments on the use of databases and other software to record work on SLOs, though about 20% of colleges did not discuss reports at all beyond the paperwork submitted by individuals working on a single SLO activity.

The colleges which scored high on this question also generally scored well on the question related to decision-making including results of assessment and alignment of practices to improve learning. For these institutions, reports were not simply in a repository for possible reference by the individual departments. Their reports were compiled and presented to campus governance groups, governing boards, and used in planning processes.

In one effective response, a college described its wide range of regular and comprehensive reports dealing with SLO assessment:

- An SLO Profile by Department, received by department chairs, summarizes the number of assessments conducted per SLO and the percent of those assessments indicating successful student mastery of the SLO. These data are listed for each course and section offered by the department. The chairs also get SLO Profile by Course and SLO Profile by Section, which allow individual instructors to see how their assessment results compare the department aggregates.
- “Student Services Program Changes Resulting from SLO Assessments,” a report presented to student services departments and college administrators.
- SLO/ILO Assessment Summary, received by department chairs, academic administrators, the Academic Senate’s Institutional Effectiveness Committee and the governance committee, summarizes the total number of assessments conducted campus wide and uses mapping information to generate data on student mastery rates for each of the four ILOs and for each core competency. They also receive a General Education Outcomes Report, examining the level of mastery of core competencies for students completing the college’s most frequently awarded degree and certificate programs.
- Program Review Online Format and Program Review 6-Year Reports. Also included is the Program Review Annual Planning Recommendations document, which provides critical information used by the governance group to generate institutional objectives in the college’s Master Educational Plan.
- ILO Survey Report summarizes results of custom questions regarding ILOs that were asked of students in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).
Proficiency Rubric Statement 6: Course student learning outcomes are aligned with degree student learning outcomes.

The narrative was expected to state that course level outcomes are aligned with degree level outcomes, how this is accomplished and an indication of the completeness of this process. The alignment should include both the discipline and general education components of degrees.

Colleges reported a strong level of charting or mapping where programmatic and institutional outcomes would be addressed in courses. Interestingly, the relatively consistent implementation of course-to-program outcome alignment did not correlate with higher levels of performance in other Proficiency level elements. It may be the mapping activity has been seen as an end in itself, rather than the beginning step of alignment for curriculum and program updates and revisions, or as a precursor to examining student learning pathways within degrees for successful employment and transfer.

Proficiency Rubric Statement 7: Students demonstrate awareness of goals and purposes of courses and programs in which they are enrolled.

This element of the Proficiency rubric proved to be quite challenging for most of the colleges. It was one area in which most colleges did not fully meet expectations for effective practice. In their responses, colleges were expected to discuss the manner in which students are made aware of the goals, outcomes, and purposes of their courses and programs, and the basis for determining that students demonstrate awareness.

Several colleges indicated that syllabi did not necessarily include student learning outcomes, because of an inability to enforce compliance for various reasons. However, the vast majority of colleges did mention the universal inclusion of SLOs on course syllabi and placement of program outcomes in the college catalog. The difficulty for all but 25 of the respondent colleges was in student demonstration of their awareness of course and program goals and purposes. A few colleges reporting effective practices included student surveys and involvement with student government in their methods for capturing student awareness.

For example, one college described use of a learning management system by all instructors, online and on-site, to measure their SLOs. The software automatically populates course, program, and institutional outcomes to be measured into each course shell just prior to each semester. This ensures the correct SLOs are used by each instructor, and all SLOs can be viewed by students. The software also contains a specific link where students can view their personal progress in meeting the various SLOs associated with their course. When students click the link “Student Learning Outcomes,” they receive their own achievement information. The college also has a link on the Web page at which all SLOs can be viewed by course, program, and certificate. Students and community members may view how each course maps to program and institutional outcomes. Course outlines also list course SLOs. And, in response to the latest fall student survey prompt, “Instructors inform students of skills or learning outcomes we are expected to achieve,” 91% of students strongly agreed or agreed; and 6% were neutral.
Self-Assessment on Level of Implementation: What Level of SLO Implementation would you assign your College? Why? What Efforts Have you planned to Address Needed Improvements?

For the final narrative response section, member institutions were asked to state the level of SLO implementation they believed the institution to have achieved and to describe the basis for this self-assessed level. In the description of plans for addressing needed improvements, colleges were expected to focus on improving the value of assessment rather than solely addressing improvements to the process of SLO assessment such as software programs, participant time, and so on.

Interestingly, nine colleges were unable to determine a level of SLO implementation for themselves. Twenty-three of the colleges rated their implementation level at Proficiency or Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement (SCQI), though their performance fell below fully meeting expected performance levels.

Many of the colleges did not articulate any plans for improvement in the area of SLO assessment and its use in college processes for support of student learning. Approximately 25% of colleges had no future plans at all, and another 10% planned to continue doing what they were doing now.

Colleges which tended to have lower levels of assessment implementation reported future plans and activities related to:

- Changing and tweaking the process
- Seeking faculty support; dealing with bargaining agreement issues
- Still working on fully actualizing the program review and/or institutional planning processes
- Seeking or installing a first or replacement data system
- Faculty development as a primary vehicle for increased levels of SLO implementation

Common improvements cited for future attention included: reporting format; data and research capacity; doing more with institutional outcomes; e-portfolios for assessment; better linkage to resource allocation; and increased participation by adjunct faculty. A few cited the college’s plan to move toward the SCQI implementation level.

Some of the less common future plans came from colleges with higher overall implementation scores. These included the college intention to:

- Move to comparative analysis (peer/region/nation)
- Increase student awareness
- Link division goal-setting with SLO outcomes assessment
- Move more deeply into classroom practice
- Develop longitudinal analysis
- Explore better usage of indirect assessment
- Enhance the website for constituent and public transparency
Conclusion
The College Status Report on SLO Implementation provided a valuable snapshot of student learning outcomes implementation levels across the Western Region. The analysis found an overall level of meeting expectations of effective practice, but not necessarily at a fully implemented level. However, among the respondents are 42 colleges (nearly a third of the ACCJC membership) which have reached a level of fully meeting or exceeding expected levels of performance within the Proficiency implementation elements. These institutions have much to share with other colleges across the field.

The move to SLO assessment over the past ten years has represented a significant change within the region, and the impact has not yet been fully realized. It is expected that future monitoring and institutional evaluation reports will provide many examples of how improvement efforts arising from SLO assessment have increased student learning and achievement, and the academic quality and institutional effectiveness of the colleges.

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