AGENTS OF CHANGE: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT COORDINATORS IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

ADOPTED FALL 2007

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THE ACADEMIC SENATE FOR CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Choose one major area of responsibility (i.e., educational, vocational, personal/social counseling, or one of your major assigned corollary responsibilities -such as testing, financial aids, admissions, etc.) and give an extensive analysis including:
   a) The specific objectives you use to accomplish the assigned responsibility.
   b) The importance of this responsibility to the student.
   c) The methods or technique utilized to achieve this goal.
   d) The means by which the accomplishment of the responsibility is to be measured.

Need further review
   • Foothill-De Anza: See Tenure Review Handbook

Nothing jumps out for:
   • San Jose Evergreen
   • San Mateo CCD
   • Marin
   • West Valley Mission

Accreditation Standard III.A.1.c
Faculty and others directly responsible for student progress toward achieving stated student learning outcomes have, as a component of their evaluation, effectiveness in producing those learning outcomes.

Specific Findings: Page 44
The self study identified several components of the faculty evaluation process designed to ensure the effectiveness of producing student learning outcomes, including that the student evaluation provides measures of linkages between the faculty and SLOs. During the visit, the team was not able to substantiate these assertions. The actual instrument used for faculty evaluation does not include these component parts. A review of evaluations did not provide evidence that this sub-standard is being met (III.A.1.c).
ABSTRACT

Formally stating and assessing student learning outcomes (SLOs) is a new focus for California community colleges required by the 2002 Accreditation Standards. This paper, the first in a series, explores one aspect of this sea change across the state: the emergence of a new group of faculty leaders, Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Coordinators. Responsible for guiding the SLO development and assessment efforts at their colleges, these faculty are charged with designing and implementing assessment processes for instruction, the library, and student services. In addition, they provide training for whatever assessment model the college adopts and they must organize and report assessment data for accreditation. As assessment leaders, they must balance the often differing concerns of faculty and administrators as well as deal with any college resistance. Student Learning Outcomes Coordinators act as agents of change on their campuses; not change for the sake of change, but change anchored in campus culture and targeting improved learning. Unfortunately, many are working without clear job descriptions or have not received training for this position. Some SLO Coordinators shoulder this burden without any reassigned time on top of a full teaching load. Until now, there have been few opportunities for SLO Coordinators to network together and exchange ideas; they have been undertaking their task in isolation. This paper, detailing research conducted by the Academic Senate's Ad Hoc Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes Committee, explores the current status of California's SLO Coordinators and makes several recommendations to address the challenges they face.
A secondary consequence to the focus on outcomes assessment is that it forces the institution to clearly document what the results of a student’s education should be. In other words, what can a student do after he or she completes a course of study? What will a student, holding a degree from a particular program at a particular institution, really be able to do and how do we know he or she can do it? This type of questioning ultimately asks whether a degree, the grades from courses to accomplish that degree, and the time and money spent in the classroom to support that education, actually resulted in any qualitative difference. This corollary of outcomes assessment embodies a public and legislative desire for accountability. There is a body of literature that concludes that higher education has not been accountable or effective. This premise was first documented and publicized in a paper by the National Commission on Excellence in Education called *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983). The report has formed the basis of many external pressures upon educational practices. Accreditation practices are supposed to guarantee quality education, but since *A Nation at Risk*, the public and the legislature feel the process is inadequate and have published several attacks on the quality of higher education and accreditation processes.

Recently, new external reports have found fault in the California community college outcomes and institutional practices. In *Rules of the Game: How State Policy Creates Barriers to Degree Completion and Impedes Student Success in the California Community Colleges*, Shulock and Moore (2007) claimed that the California Community College System has failed expectations for specific outcomes. Some politically active organizations have taken aim at the process of peer review to accredit institutions and guarantee quality outcomes. In a report by the Association Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) called *Why Accreditation Doesn’t Work and What Policymakers Can Do about It* (2007) the national process of peer review accreditation is referred to as a broken and ineffective process. The Council on Higher Education Assessment (CHEA), which oversees the regional accreditation processes, summarizes the claims of the ACTA paper by stating,

> *Why Accreditation Doesn’t Work* offers breathtaking generalizations about accreditation, buttressed only by a series of anecdotes and offering little or no evidence for its broad condemnation of the enterprise. Accreditation, the paper says, is suffering from seven deadly sins: It does nothing to assure quality; it examines inputs and not the outputs in which the public is interested; it undermines institutional autonomy and diversity; it contributes to rising college costs; it is an unaccountable, federally mandated monopoly; it is largely a secret process and it is a “conflicted, closed and clubby system.” In short, accreditation is “bad education policy” and fails to assure quality. (Inside Accreditation Vol 3 No. 3)

Are any of these conclusions founded on solid evidence? Do the conclusions focus on the wrong type of measurement, of indirect and irremediable measures, paralleling yet separate from measuring actual learning? Have educators honestly answered these questions and provided either evidence to the contrary or plans to address issues that can be improved? Most certainly, without a response or with a business as usual approach, we are looking at pressures from external agencies and the federal government who feel they can do our jobs better or have answers that work.

There are many examples where outcomes and accountability measures have been undertaken by outside entities, other than faculty, and the results have not accomplished the desired effect: the improvement of teaching and learning. An example of this kind of failure is large stakes testing which results in comparisons between schools, as experienced by K-12 institutions through the No Child Left Behind Act. Another example
Agents of Change: Examining The Role of Student Learning Outcomes

Nichols, 1995; Volkwein, 2003; Walvoord & Anderson, 1998; Wright, 1999). This is important because well-stated outcomes actually suggest the means or method of assessment simplifying or directing faculty selection of assessment tools. Nichols (1995) highlights the importance of training faculty to develop a limited number of substantive outcomes. This entails reflective analysis of the complex skills, knowledge, and abilities that students should be able to do as a result of the coursework (Brookhart, 1999; Huba & Freed, 2000; Wright). Linkage of course outcomes to program outcomes, and program outcomes to institutional level outcomes, is essential and occurs most easily after faculty have developed the expertise within their own courses (Benander et al., 2000; Brookhart). Miller stated,

Classroom assessment is the purest form of assessment-for-improvement, because the information gleaned can be immediately used to improve teaching and learning ...the further away from the individual classroom you get, the harder it becomes to turn assessment data into useable information. (1997)

Unfortunately, training on student learning outcomes, pedagogy, and assessment often occurs on the run. Many faculty simply emulate the teaching practices of the most effective teacher in his or her educational experience. Nevertheless, assessing student learning is not a new technique; it is an integral part of the job when it comes to evaluating student work. Focusing on student learning outcomes and assessment involves more explicit and purposeful activities with respect to work faculty have always done (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998; Brookhart, 1999). The difference in meeting the assessment expectations delineated in the new accreditation standards requires conventions beyond typical grading and beyond faculty focusing on individual classrooms. It requires that faculty become both discipline experts and skilled assessment practitioners. This demands leadership and clearly defined tasks, plus well organized training to make the process beneficial. In an extensive literature review by the Ad Hoc Committee there was no evidence that any system of higher education has addressed an organized training plan for Student Learning Outcomes Coordinators.

Background

While career and technical education (vocational education) had been outcomes-based for years, student learning outcomes and assessment became a focus for all disciplines in California community colleges in 2002 when newly adopted accreditation standards placed them at the center of college life. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC/WASC) 2002 Accreditation Standards require:

Standard I B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness

The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to produce and support student learning, measures that learning, assesses how well learning is occurring and makes changes to improve student learning. The institution also organizes its key processes and allocates it resources to effectively support student learning. The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by providing 1) evidence