City College has defined a total of 349 college programs, which include credit and noncredit certificates, degree majors, and disciplines and about 1880 classes active in Fall 2012 and/or Spring 2013, including credit and noncredit; online, hybrid, and face-to-face, work experience, field classes, lectures, and labs; full term and short term. 90% of courses and programs reported on SLO activities by Feb. 22. Online reporting forms were available on December 18th, 2012 and were due by January 31st. Discussions with department chairs about the lack of 100% reporting led to identification of a few obstacles to be removed in future semesters. All department chairs were sent a list of missing courses and programs. In that process, we have been better able to identify and rectify data issues and missed reports. Our goal continues to be 100% reporting.

EVALUATION OF REPORTING PROCESS

Spring 2013 is the second semester all courses and programs were required to complete standard online reporting forms, and the first in which these forms were also completed for all programs and services. The Spring forms were more extensive and thorough than those used in Fall 2012. In a single form, we gathered both a review of Fall activities and plans for Spring. We are still evaluating all the ways in which these reports are handled in the various departments to ensure that our one-size-fits-all semester reporting form/template is sustainable and appropriate college-wide. Changes made in Fall 2012, those planned for Spring 2013, and benefits received were especially inspiring and demonstrate the great things happening throughout the college in all units. Please look to summary reports for more information. Some of the challenges include:

- Forms were to be completed by course coordinators (one instructor, instead of all instructors) – combining data across all sections. In some departments, that’s a more manageable task than for others. For example, ESL 150, Advanced Academic ESL, has 19 sections. ESL 160, High-Advanced Academic ESL, has 17 sections. Biology 9 has 16 different instructors. MATH 60 Intermediate Algebra has 28. In these departments, coordination is especially challenging and requires dedicated leadership and appropriate coordination resources. The most successful models seem to include using a department-defined consistent document/form/record that all course instructors use throughout the semester to gather data and take notes – followed by the sharing of these reports at the end of each semester (and periodically during the semester during orchestrated meetings and/or email discussions). These documents make it easier for the Course Coordinator to summarize multiple-instructor efforts into one online semester form/report. RECOMMENDATION: Share best models and sample department forms in SLO workshops, especially for those departments struggling with the work load. A similar consistent-form process would also help with the coordination of part-timers who can’t regularly make department meetings and any instructors who might be working across multiple locations.

- Some departments have a single coordinator entering data on ALL courses. This task is then highly repetitive and time consuming. While it’s important that each department has the flexibility to manage SLO assessment processes, ways to alleviate as many obstacles as possible is a priority. RECOMMENDATION: Version 3 of the online forms (Spring 2013 Review and Fall 2013 Plans) should provide methods for referencing data from one form on subsequent forms. Now that folks are familiar with the way the online-form data are displayed online in reports, they can use that knowledge to reduce repetition and instead make references to previously-entered data. Also, for large batches, a
spreadsheet can be used for simple data entry. It will require more work for the coordinator, but less overall to all entities. This option can be made available to departments that request it.

- Engaging part-timers is difficult. The best models seem to be pairing part-timers who are course coordinators with full-timers to assist with form entry. However, that’s a challenge in a department that has one full-timer and 31 part-timers! RECOMMENDATION: Work with departments that have unique challenges to see how drop-in labs and coordinator efforts can help. Share best models, including use of standard reporting forms for all department faculty.

- The inability to edit these forms after closing the browser window caused endless frustration. As long as the browser remains open, a complete review and edit can happen. But once the window is closed, the only way to fix a mistake is to resubmit the form. As long as the course/program/service identifier is equivalent, only the most recent entry is included in online data reports. Minor edits can be completed to the records by the SLO Coordinator, but those edits can only be sustained if required in a very limited fashion. Another known bug is that when you the BACK button is selected, an error message can appear, preventing movement forward. Again, there’s a known fix – to just hit BACK continually until you return to the first page, then return forward to the last page entered, and the error message disappears. There is currently no budget or resources available to upgrade to alternative technology (current technology is free). One of the benefits to sticking with the current system, in addition to saving money, is the comfort, familiarity, and ease of use that comes from using a consistent report from one semester to another. Also the immediate online access to report data (possible with our current system) has been a huge benefit. The original intention of the forms was to be both a reporting and training tool that would engage many faculty. The benefit of using a known tool with known bugs is that we also have known fixes. The more we use this tool, the more gracefully we’ll be able to handle and work around these challenges. Having technical support readily available by email and in drop-in labs helps ease that frustration. RECOMMENDATION: research improvements that can be made with existing technology as well as different technology altogether, and gradually upgrade each semester. Continue to provide training, drop-in labs, and email assistance.

- It’s essential that the semester forms align with the value behind SLO assessment – that the forms support the process of course improvement and faculty dialogue – and do not become simply a time-consuming chore. RECOMMENDATION: Regularly improve and make reporting more efficient, and use weekly email updates to remind folks of ongoing tasks.

- For many departments and faculty, this online reporting form is yet another task on top of department forms, external accreditation agency forms, and individual instructor reports and notes. It can seem like busy work for many. We need to demonstrate the usefulness of this reporting so folks understand and buy-in to the value of the reports. RECOMMENDATION: Continue to summarize, share, and celebrate results from these reports – using them to foster college-wide dialogue and meet Accreditation needs.