

# Meta Assessment Interim Report

September 2023 by the SLO Coordination Team

## Introduction / frame setting

Starting in Fall 2021, the SLO Coordination team, in consultation with the SLO Committee, embarked on a “meta-assessment” of the SLO assessment practices at CCSF. It had been about a decade since the college implemented a uniform system for assessing and reporting on student learning outcomes, a process that had settled into a familiar pattern: each faculty member assesses at least one SLO for each section (CRN) taught, with all SLOs in a course assessed at least once within a 6-year period. Course and program aggregate assessments are now linked to the Curriculum revision process, inviting faculty to look back at how the course has been meeting its intended outcomes prior to updating the course or program outline. CRN-level data is rolled up, not only into those course- and program-aggregate reports, but also into the General Education Learning Outcome (GELO) and Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO) reports used for institutional assessment. Given the primacy of the CRN-level data to the whole system and given that faculty buy-in to the SLO assessment process has been mixed, the time seemed ripe to take a closer look at assessment processes. We were also inspired by innovations in the SSO Workgroup to make the assessment of student services more useful – we thought the instructional side of the house might also benefit from taking a fresh look at what we do.

Student learning outcome assessment has the potential to help improve the already impressive pedagogy at CCSF. Yes, SLO assessment is an accreditation requirement, one that is not going away. (If anything, the new ACCJC standards have added emphasis on SLO assessment, particularly as a tool for equity.) SLO assessment can help meet CCSF’s own educational priorities, beyond simple compliance with an accreditation requirement. It can play an important role in testing assumptions (e.g., are students learning what we think we are teaching?), in identifying stumbling blocks (e.g., which competencies, specifically, do students struggle with the most?), in tracking subtle trends over time (e.g., by pooling data over many sections, can we see effects of curriculum changes?), and in sparking conversations that help us learn from one another. The intention of the META Assessment is to understand better where and how SLO assessment is helping the college, and where there is room for improvement.

The Meta Assessment has included a few different phases, and it is not yet complete. This interim report includes what we have learned so far. By sharing these findings, we hope to continue and deepen the conversation about how SLO assessment at CCSF can improve, recognizing that there is no single answer to that question. Our next phase is to support several pilot projects or experiments among faculty who want to try something new in SLO assessment. And of course, we will continue to dialogue with faculty and others at the college, to learn more about how SLO assessment can help meet the needs of our complex, dynamic, and committed community of educators and learners.

This report includes the result of our review of CRN-level reports, a synthesis of key points from many focused conversations about SLO assessment, and some promising directions for the future.

## CRN report review

### **Intention & Methodology**

The review of CRN-level reports assesses the quality and usefulness of the narrative (qualitative) data entered into CRN reports submitted by faculty each semester. The quantitative data (the actual rankings of students as meeting the SLO, developing the SLO, or neither) was not reviewed under the assumption that that data accurately represent the faculty member's assessment of SLO attainment. However, the qualitative data provides evidence of assessment validity and shows how the assessment results may contribute to improvements in teaching and learning.

Driving questions of the assessment include:

- Are the assessments valid?
- To what extent do CRN level assessments lead to course and program improvements?
- Are there identifiable barriers that could be addressed to improve the process?
- What changes to the process might make SLO assessment more meaningful?

The SLO Team developed a rubric which was then tested and adjusted by the SLO Committee in October 2021. The following criteria were identified for evaluation of the written portions of the CRN level reports:

1. Do the fields have information in them?
2. Is the field content responsive to the prompts?
3. Does the report reflect specific outcome assessment, not global performance (i.e., final grade)?
4. Is there evidence of reflection on teaching and learning?

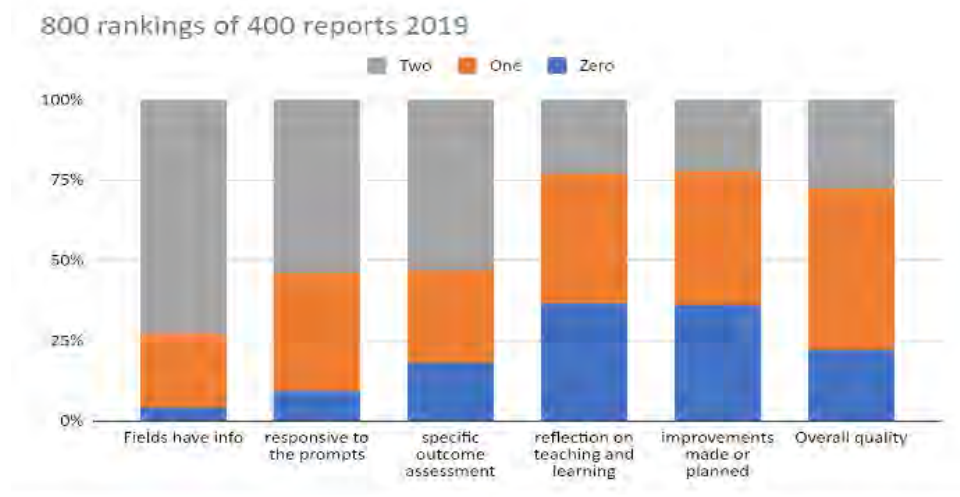
The sample size was 400 reports from fall and spring semesters 2019, 200 from each semester respectively. The reviewers were given the URLs to each report and they used the [rubric](#) to evaluate and track the data. Each report was reviewed by two separate reviewers. Results were discussed in the SLO Committees. Frequency calculations were completed in Google Sheets.

### **Brief Summary of Results**

The full report of the CRN-Level assessment provides graphs and charts. Below please find highlights of the main findings.

All 400 reports reviewed.

Figure 1: Frequency of Scores (ranking) Overall



- Nearly all the reports show answers that are responsive to the prompts (entirely or in part).
- A little more than half of the reports described assessment of a specific outcome, and about 30% described an assessment where it was unclear whether it was outcome assessment or not. About 20% of the reports described assessment practices that seemed to reflect the students' global performance in the course, not specific outcome assessments.
- About two thirds of the reports included at least some reflection on teaching and learning, as well as discussion of improvements made or planned. Around a third of reports had no such reflection or discussion.
- Only a little more than a quarter of the reports were assessed to be of substantial quality, with about half being scored as having at least some quality or usefulness.

## Discussion

The validity of the CRN-level assessment reports as a measure of outcome attainment is probably sufficient. If the assessments are reasonable and well-constructed, then the quantitative data tied to overall SLO attainment are valid. This finding is an important one because it validates not only course CRN-level assessments but also program, GELO and ILO assessments that are conducted through the mapping of course outcomes to broader outcomes in CurriQunet.

Most CRN reports do represent outcome assessment, but there is room for improvement. Three findings are worth reflection and could lead to improvements in our SLO practices to make them more meaningful:

*CRN-level SLO reports are not serving effectively as prompt for reflection and critical thinking among faculty.*

Less than 25% of the reports reviewed showed substantial reflection on teaching and learning or discussion of improvements made or planned. More than a third of reports showed no reflection or discussion of improvements at all. This finding is the most actionable one to address. Though the quantitative data recorded in CRN level reports is valid and important to keep for all levels of college SLO assessments, the qualitative data prompts could be adjusted.

Do we need all the prompts? Could they be made simpler? Are there more ways to promote dialogue in the college assessment process? Though the current timing of assessments at the end of each semester works well for some, it does not support dialogue amongst faculty which has shown to provide a positive impact on course and program improvement. Is there a way to solicit more dialogue through the reporting structure?

*Variation in reporting across sectors.*

Noncredit non-CTE reports reviewed were overall the strongest quality. Noncredit CTE reports were overall the weakest. On the credit side as well, the non-CTE reports reviewed tended to be stronger. This may point to a need to reach out to CTE instructors, especially in noncredit for professional development around outcome assessment. Or it could point to the need to gather more data from CTE programs about their outcome assessment process and what adjustments could be made to better support their assessment processes.

*Changes to the question prompts may be needed.*

CRN level assessment report proposals ask instructors five questions about the assessment. Faculty may benefit from the rewording of some prompts that seem confusing and by adding more clarification of the prompts to help ensure the answers are better aligned to and directly address what is being asked. The second question on the report proposal states: "What criteria were used for assigning an assessment level to each student?" This question was widely misunderstood. Also, the last optional question which asks about highlights could be omitted or changed to ask more directly about dialog, collaboration, or reflection.

## Focused conversations

The SLO team engaged in two rounds of conversations with faculty, administrators, staff and students (mostly faculty) about SLO assessment. These conversations mostly took place during various committee meetings or flex workshops, lasting from 10 to 90 minutes. In 2021-2022, the conversations focused on eliciting their experiences of SLO assessment so far, with some exploration of alternatives or improvements to the process. In 2022-2023, the conversations shared the results of the meta assessment to date and asking for more specific input on what they would want to do differently in SLO assessment in the future. The conversations were essentially a "convenience sample," and are weighted to the views of that subset of faculty who volunteer to serve on committees, which may not be representative of the faculty as a whole.

Conversations were held with the following groups (some more than once). For a sample of what the conversations were like, see these slides from our [Flex workshop](#) or these from the [CTE meeting](#):

1. Academic Senate Executive Committee
2. SLO Committee
3. Curriculum Committee
4. Career & Technical Education (CTE) Committee
5. Student Equity Strategies Committee
6. Program Review Committee
7. Planning Committee of PGC
8. Department Chairs Council (DCC)

9. Deans and Chairs
10. Individual departments – Health Education, ESL
11. Associated Students Council
12. Flex Workshop – October 2021

## Themes

Several salient themes emerged from these conversations, summarized here.

*Many faculty report their SLO assessment for the sake of **compliance**, not because they find intrinsic value in it.*

- Many faculty find SLO assessment to be tedious, time consuming, and not useful.
- Many faculty conduct SLO assessment in isolation, with minimal dialogue with other faculty or students about it.
- Some faculty find SLO assessment to be duplicative of other assessments they already do (for example, ESL placement in levels), or poorly suited to noncredit open entry/exit.
- SLO assessment often seems to be siloed from other processes like program review – while outcome assessment currency is included in program review, the results of SLO assessment are rarely incorporated into departmental reflection and plans for action. “While SLOs are nominally a part of every process at the college, they feel performative, procedural, not tied in – there is an obvious opportunity there.”

*When there is **dialogue and collaboration** about assessment within a program or among faculty teaching the same or related courses, faculty often do gain value from SLO assessment.*

- Faculty described changes to instruction that have arisen from the SLO assessment process, such as changes to assignments, improved scaffolding of assignments, alignment of assignments to SLOs, and pacing changes.
- Faculty spoke of the value of assessing students’ support needs as well as their learning.
- Dialogue *with* students about SLOs and evidence of their learning was also mentioned as valuable when it happens – and worth doing more often.
- Completing SLO reports *together* was a positive experience for some faculty, “to share ways to change an assignment or update an outcome.” Another instructor noted, “When I see a need to improve my class, I need dialogue, because I don’t know all the possible ways to improve my class [on my own].”
- Communities of practice are one place where significant discussion, reflection, and experimentation with teaching and learning happens at the college. This is a place where SLO assessment could be infused more.
- In CTE programs, the competencies that students need are often discussed at industry advisory boards – SLO assessment is sometimes a part of this and could be more so.
- Many faculty mentioned that having SLO-focused discussions at the School level during Flex Days were beneficial in the past, and they would like to see that again on a Flex Schedule occasionally (or alternatively, group departments by the newer Academic & Career Communities instead of Schools).
- While dialogue about teaching and learning is highly valued, many faculty found few formal opportunities for that dialogue, given everything else that occupies departmental and

committee meetings. (“Reflection is what we least have time for.”) There was interest in spaces for dialogue that include students, instructors, counselors, and others working in student or academic services. Interdisciplinary interests (e.g., all introductory science courses, or soft skills across CTE areas) could provide a focal point for such convenings.

- Some of the challenges to dialogue included faculty being spread too thin (especially in small departments); faculty schedules not overlapping; part-time faculty balancing teaching at CCSF with other jobs; and a lack of structure for this kind of dialogue.

*There is an unrealized potential to use SLO assessment to improve **student equity** and reduce opportunity gaps.*

- If specific competencies within a course or program contribute more to opportunity gaps, SLO assessment could help to identify which ones, so remedies can be found.
- Very few faculty reported experiences of using student learning assessment to specifically tackle opportunity gaps and/or to assess the impacts of implementing equity-focused teaching practices.
- SLO data is not easily sorted by demographics and in many cases may not be granular enough to identify or solve the equity challenges.
- There was interest in this as an area for the college to develop further.

***Tension** exists between wanting to make the SLO processes more useful and wanting to make them more efficient and streamlined.*

- Many faculty would simply like to make SLO assessment reporting *easier* – for example, shorten the forms or report less often – which is understandable, especially if they are not getting much value from the process.
- However, when faculty talk about how to make the SLO process more *useful*, it often involves more planning and dialogue around assessment, which would require putting in time and effort.

The focused conversations also generated several recommendations for future directions and possibilities, many of which are captured in the following section on promising directions for SLO assessment.

As we move into the next phase of this meta-assessment (2023-2024), the SLO coordinators plan to work with interested faculty (and others) on pilot projects to try out new approaches and learn more.

## Promising Directions

New approaches to assessment worth exploring include increasing dialogue about assessment; leveraging technology; and designing assessments to generate more actionable data that the college can use to address real issues, from equity to employability of graduates.

### Increasing Dialogue

Dialogue about teaching and learning, including the assessment of learning outcomes, was consistently mentioned as something that directly contributes to improvement, and yet that doesn’t occur as routinely as it might. Dialogue among faculty (or more broadly, among faculty, staff, administrators,

and/or students) was cited as key to designing useful assessments and to interpreting assessment results in a way that enhances teaching and learning. Opportunities for increased dialogue include, at least, the following:

- Utilizing the data in CurriQunet, combined with other sources of information that the different faculty teaching in a program may be aware of, for richer course- and program-aggregate assessments.
- With students, involving them in self-assessment of learning outcomes. Faculty and students shared various ways to do this, for example, through student e-portfolios mapped to the course or program outcomes, through inviting students to personalize the SLOs to their own goals, and through learning discussions within affinity groups of students with shared life experiences.
- Bringing SLO assessment into existing or new faculty learning communities, focused on increasing student equity and student achievement.
- Promoting and facilitating discussions of outcome assessment and teaching approaches at the program, departmental, ACC, and school levels, on Flex Days and at other times.
- Fostering collaborative dialogues between student & academic services and instruction, focused on improving equitable student learning.
- Use the GELO and ILO reporting processes more effectively to promote dialogue on student learning in areas that bridge many departments.
- As a component of other planning efforts at the college, such as the Educational Master Plan.

### **Assessment Design & Actionable Data**

Designing assessments so that they produce more useful and actionable data for improvement is another promising direction for faculty.

- This might require a culture shift from doing assessment mainly for compliance and to verify that students are learning enough, to taking a more experimental approach to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in student learning, within the broader competency of an SLO.
- How “meets SLO” and “developing SLO” are defined within a given department or course may merit examination; if students are consistently meeting the SLO at 90%+, there may not be room in the scale to detect improvements.
- Faculty advocated for assessment to become more authentic, especially in CTE, which might require more flexible methods of reporting those assessments.
- Bringing together equity data and SLO assessment data is an area for further development, as noted above.
- A focus on program assessment, not only using data mapped through courses to programs, but through direct assessment of program outcomes (e.g., in a capstone course, through portfolios, or through certification in CTE) could be beneficial to some programs.

### **Leveraging Technology**

Leveraging technology to improve assessment is another promising approach. One fairly simple way to do that would be to revise the prompts in CurriQunet, especially ones that have created some confusion. A bigger lift would be to modify how Outcomes in Canvas are set up and used, so that they can be better applied to course -level and program -level assessment. Together with the Educational

Technology department, the SLO coordinators are exploring this option further.

All these approaches would be supported by ongoing professional development in SLO assessment, with more emphasis on integrating SLO assessment into our work as educators, breaking SLO assessment out of its silo.

### Want to get involved?

If you would like to get involved with trying something new in SLO assessment within your own courses or programs, please reach out! We would love to support you in that. If you'd like to join the conversation about SLOs at the college in general, and future directions, perhaps you'd like to join the SLO Committee, too!