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Summer 2019 Session begins
June 10, 2019

Parking permit requirement begins for Summer 2019
June 17, 2019

Independence Day Holiday
July 4, 2019

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Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Assessment at CSM FAQs

The point of assessment is not to gather data and return 'results;' it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

*From the American Association of Higher Education's Assessment Principle #7
 Adopted by College of San Mateo Academic Senate Governing Council 4/23/2013*

Your SLO assessment FAQs, briefly answered: what we are supposed to do, when and why we are supposed to do it , and who is responsible for what.

For more details on how to create, assess and document learning outcomes, follow links to [Toolkit](#) or [Resources](#) pages.

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What are student learning outcomes?

Here is a definition of student learning outcomes from the National Institutional on Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA): "Student learning outcomes statements clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind that students are expected to acquire at an institution of higher education."

Each course, degree or certificate program, general education or transfer pattern, and (in many cases) student service or lab interaction has its own defined student learning outcomes (SLOs) – the knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and/or habits of mind that students should take away from that interaction. SLOs typically consist of three or more clear, declarative sentences, explaining what successful students should be able to walk away with ("The student will be able to...")

Where can I find learning outcomes for courses, programs, services, or the institution?

- The most up-to-date course and program learning outcomes are available in [Curricunet](#). No log-in required (scroll down on the left to the "Search" function).
- Program learning outcomes are also published in the [College Catalog](#).
- Institutional learning outcomes, including the general education outcomes, are published in the Catalog, and at the [Institutional Learning Outcomes](#) page on this website.

What is mapping?

(YouTube video: "Mapping Outcomes" - Fall 2018)

The single course or service, for almost all students, is just one milestone on a larger journey. Educational goals typically involve several courses (completing a degree or certificate, or a pattern for transfer).

By linking specific learning outcomes at the course or service level to those larger goals, student learning outcomes can provide a context for faculty to gauge the effectiveness of courses and services (as milestones along a path), and to gauge the coherence of programs and institutional goals (as clearly mapped journeys with meaningful milestones). This is known as mapping, or alignment of outcomes.

For instance: a degree or certificate program includes a list of required and optional courses. These courses must have *at least one* outcome that serves *at least one* of the program outcomes (otherwise, why is it included in the program?). If the outcomes do not align, something needs review - either the outcomes language, or the curriculum itself.

Mapping also clarifies the relationship between courses or services, and the core competencies (effective communication, critical thinking and so on) that students should develop by completing a pattern for transfer. Courses and services should have *at least one outcome* that supports *at least one institutional outcome*, to help clarify how that course or service fits into the students' overall general education.

What is assessment?

(YouTube video: "How and Why To Assess Your Program" - Fall 2018)

Learning outcomes clearly state learning goals. Assessment uses these outcomes as a framework for exploring whether students (and, therefore, whether we) are achieving those goals.

In other words: How are students doing?

We can ask this question

- at the course level ("Do our students learn as effectively in the accelerated ACTG 101 as they do in the regular semester-long version?")
- at the program level ("Does our Certificate in Wine-Making give students the skills they really need?")
- as the service level ("Does our plagiarism workshop help students understand and avoid plagiarism?")
- at the institutional level ("Do students completing the general education pattern really come away with strong ethical reasoning?")

Assessment, then, refers to systematic and regular inquiry into student learning, with the goal of finding ways to improve it.

Isn't grading enough?

Instructional faculty, of course, spend about three-quarters of their working life assessing student learning: by assigning work intended to show the student's grasp of the material, by analyzing the work, and by conferring a grade that ultimately communicates a verdict on the student's overall performance.

Grades can certainly provide the answer to many assessment questions. If we want to know whether a new pedagogical strategy helped close achievement gaps in a course or course sequence, grades should tell us. If we want to know where students wash out in a course sequence, grades (and withdrawal rates) will tell us. And if course assignments are clearly aligned to the course outcomes, and if the grades are not distorted by compliance factors like extra credit or punctuality points, course grades are as good a way as any to assess how well students are achieving overall course learning outcomes.

But assessment does not just mean gathering student learning data at the course level; it also means that we **gather and analyze learning data for a larger purpose**. When we grade, our ultimate goal is to evaluate the student. When we assess, we are assessing ourselves – our programs, courses, services, pedagogy, and institutional effectiveness.

So grades alone can't answer all our assessment questions:

- grades summarize student learning across several outcomes, and don't reveal patterns of strength or weakness;
- grades focus on the milestone, and not the journey - they can't tell us whether students have retained what they learned in class, or made connections between disciplines, or indeed achieved larger educational goals (i.e., degree, certificate or general education outcomes).

What are faculty supposed to be doing about SLO assessment?

In summary: Each academic year, disciplines and services identify a question about student learning to follow up and share out.

- October: Complete and submit an Assessment Plan which identifies a question about student learning at the course, discipline or institutional level;
- Fall/Spring semester: Gather the data that will help answer that question;
- Spring semester: Analyze the data, and draw conclusions that determine future curricular or pedagogical planning; complete and submit "Assessment Results"
- Fall / even years: Summarize assessment activities in Program Review.

Wait, aren't we supposed to assess *each* outcome on a regular basis?

Discipline faculty already *do* assess each course learning outcome, as part of the normal work of grading assigned work. (Course grades should, by and large, reflect the student's competency in the knowledge, skills and abilities imparted by the course.)

The SLO assessment planning process, however, allows discipline and service faculty to prioritize an aspect of student learning that needs special attention.

In other words: We do gather a lot of assessment data routinely (i.e., grades), but the SLO assessment process involves asking questions about student learning which may require other forms of assessment.

What about Student Services and Learning Center faculty and staff?

Like instructional faculty, faculty and staff in these areas have an annual assessment cycle:

- October: Complete and submit an Assessment Plan which Identifies a question about student learning or achievement*
- Fall/Spring semester: Gather the data that will help answer that question;
- Spring semester: Analyze the data, and draw conclusions that determine future planning;
- Fall / even years: Summarize assessment activities in Program Review.

Academic and student support services do gather assessment data routinely (i.e., surveys, usage tracking etc.), but the SLO assessment process involves asking questions that may require other forms of assessment.

*NOTE: Student services also assess their effectiveness through service area outcomes as well as student learning outcomes.

What is the assessment calendar?

Assessment planning follows a routine.

Every year:

- Discipline and service faculty identify an assessment question each year, submitting an Assessment Plan in October, and an update in Spring.
- Institutional outcomes are systematically reviewed every year, through flex workshops and embedded activities (all six institutional outcomes are assessed every two years).

Every two years:

- Discipline and service faculty submit Program Review, including a summary of assessment activities and planning (Fall semester)
- Academic Senate and subcommittees read Program Review, establishing themes and trends, and using these as the basis for future planning (Spring semester)
- The Assessment Committee produces an "Assessment Report" summarizing assessment activities (Spring semester)

Why do we have to do assessment?

For three main reasons:

1. To create a community of practice. The assessment process gives us a way to capture and communicate these results, not only within but across disciplines and services. We can learn from each other; and we can also collaborate more, and create a more cohesive learning environment for students.
2. Because it's what teachers do. In fact, faculty and staff across campus have *always* engaged in assessment activities. We've always looked for ways to do better, probing around to see which skills are weaker, which student populations need support, and what strategies work best to improve student learning
3. To keep our accreditation status. The Accrediting Council of Community and Junior Colleges' standards mandate that institutions adopt a process for systematically defining and assessing student learning outcomes at all levels (course, service, program, institution), integrating these assessments into institutional planning, and communicating assessment results.

What is an Assessment Plan?

An Assessment plan is a form that summarizes, very briefly, what question you have about student learning; why it matters; and what you propose to do about it.

The update summarizes, also briefly, what came of the assessment activity.

For an example of an instructional Assessment Plan, [click here](#).

For an example of a student service assessment plan, [click here](#).

Where do we keep Assessment Plans?

Each discipline and service has its own folder, accessible to anyone with a College email log-in, at our College Assessment Committee Sharepoint site.

Assessment plans, mapping documents, and other material can be uploaded to these folders.

The site can be accessed here: <https://smccd.sharepoint.com/sites/csm/CACSLOs>

What other assessment documentation should faculty keep?

The Assessment Plan is a summary; but usually, an assessment activity involves other documentation.

For instance, if faculty administer a survey to students, their assessment documentation will include

- a text of the survey
- a table of the results

- (possibly) minutes of department meeting discussing results.

It is probably helpful to keep additional documentation, with the Assessment Plan, in the Sharepoint folder for your discipline, service or center.

What is the role of Program Review in all this?

(YouTube video: "Assessment and Program Review" - Fall 2018)

In Program Review, discipline and service faculty summarize the achievements, experiences, challenges and ongoing needs in their programs.

Program reviews are read and analyzed by a broad, inclusive group of faculty, administrators and staff, to inform institutional planning.

For assessment, specifically, Program Review contains a summary of assessment activities over a two-year period. Program reviews are analyzed by Academic Senate and the College Assessment Committee, in order to

- drive planning for flex and other professional development opportunities focusing on assessment, equity and other issues;
- create opportunities for collaboration, or provide support, in response to faculty needs;
- share interventions or research approaches that are working, to support a community of practice on campus.

What is the Assessment Report?

The biennial Assessment Report is produced by the College Assessment Committee. It summarizes and communicates assessment activities to the College community.

The report discusses:

- assessment highlights in Program Review (themes, trends, areas in need of support, shared challenges, and success stories at the discipline or service level);
- flex-day assessment activities addressing institutional learning outcomes;
- assessment activities embedded in learning communities / interdisciplinary groups;
- results of college-wide student surveys or other focus groups.

The purpose of the report is to promote collaboration between disciplines, to create a forum supporting a community of practice, to give a sense of context for discipline-level work, and to keep student learning front and center.

What about Tracdat?

Disciplines and services have traditionally stored SLO data in Tracdat.

Faculty are still welcome to record SLO data in Tracdat, along with a narrative explaining assessment activities.

However, use of Tracdat is optional.

Submitting an Assessment Plan is required. The Assessment Plan asks for the same information as Tracdat: summary of purpose, analysis and next steps, and so on. The format, however, is easier to communicate and retrieve.

Who is in charge of assessment?

Faculty are responsible for conducting, organizing and shaping the assessment process.

- Discipline and service faculty: Discipline and service faculty are responsible for conducting and reporting on assessment activities.
- Academic Senate: The development, assessment process, and analysis of course, certificate, degree, general education and institutional learning outcomes are curricular matters and thus under the jurisdiction of the Academic Senate. While assessment and the analysis of results for SLOs are a responsibility of faculty, decisions based on analysis of assessment results for college planning are shared amongst all constituencies. Interpretation and implementation of SLO assessment shall remain within the purview of discipline faculty and the Academic Senate.

The development, assessment and analysis of SLOs for academic and student support services are under the jurisdiction of the faculty, staff, and administrators of each service area.

- College Assessment Committee: The College Assessment Committee (CAC) is responsible for supporting faculty and staff assessment work. Working with the Center for Academic Excellence as well as the Curriculum Committee, the CAC organizes assessment workshops and trainings; reviews activities, policies, and other issues relating to assessment; and communicates the results of assessment activities through flex workshops, division visits and a biennial Assessment Report.

The CAC is an independent subcommittee of the Academic Senate and reports to the Academic Senate.

Due to the extensive nature of assessment, CAC's membership includes broad representation comprising faculty from various disciplines, classified staff, students, and the Dean of Academic Support and Learning Technologies (ASLT). Ideally, one member of the CAC is also on the Academic Senate and another on the Curriculum Committee. Meets monthly.

- Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Coordinator: The SLOAC is a faculty member who serves as chair of the College Assessment Committee and reports to the Academic Senate as needed. In addition, the SLOAC serves on the Curriculum Committee's Technical Review committee, reviewing new course and program SLOs (See [Curriculum Handbook](#), p. 4).

