

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: AN OVERVIEW

ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

November 10, 2017

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Coordinator / College
Assessment Committee

INTRODUCTION

What is in this report

This report provides a summary of practices and procedures for, and experiences with, SLO assessment across academic and learning support services, as well as student services

Background

The College Assessment Committee is committed to improving support for our current assessment process (Goal 2, CAC Institutional Plan, 5/15). Our primary goal is to improve CSM's assessment process, by making it **less onerous and more meaningful**.

We also need to make sure that our SLO data collection remains compliant as standards evolve. ACCJC has added a new disaggregation requirement to their most recent standards (June 2014), which will mean, for some departments, changing how SLO data is collected.

Method

Interviews were held with SLO coordinators listed on Program Review documents. In all, twenty-four (24) interviews were conducted with twenty-nine (29) coordinators of twenty-five (25) different labs and academic and student support services, as follows:

Student Services

Admissions & Records

Veterans Services

Assessment Center

Career Center

Transfer Center

CalWorks

Counseling

EOPS / CARE / MCC

Child Development Center

Financial Aid

Health Services

International Student Center

Counseling and Wellness Services

Student Services

Academic Support Services

Anatomy / Physiology Lab

CIS Lab

Communications Lab

Learning Center

Integrated Science Center

Math Resource Center

Nursing Skills Lab

Reading/ESL Center

Writing Center

Questions

Coordinators were asked to share their experiences with writing learning outcomes, collecting data, and analyzing it. (Questionnaire attached.)

Specifically, the goal was to find out

- What processes were in common use across campus
- Which processes would have difficulty adapting to Standard I.B.6 (disaggregation of SLO data)
- How well the outcomes for academic and support services align with the overall institutional (GE) outcomes
- Whether the process was useful
- Whether the process was onerous
- How we might improve it.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICES, PROCEDURES AND ATTITUDES

SLO Practices and Procedures

Here is a snapshot of what we are doing.

Compliance: All academic and student support services collect data routinely, and are in compliance with ACCJC requirements. (There is no general compliance with the new standard I.B.6, but this is the case across the college, and is no longer a priority.)

Goals: The learning outcomes for most academic and support services are quite varied.

Many support services focus not so much on ultimate goals (that more students graduate, or that more students do better in academic work) but on whether students know what resources are available to them, and how to use them. The Career Services Center, for instance, has one defined learning outcome: that “students will be able to accurately identify key services offered by the Career Services Center.” So learning outcomes data should help staff and faculty find out how well they are communicating and educating students about their resources.

In many cases, however, faculty and staff survey students are also interested in determining the extent to which students feel they have benefitted from their interactions with the service. In the Writing Center, for instance, students are routinely surveyed about the quality of their experience, whether they feel it helped them, and so on. Faculty in learning centers also frequently track the usage of their centers, to see to what extent students are actually using them.

Specific activities, like workshops, are vetted with pre- and post-tests to ensure that the message of the workshop is clearly communicated. And other metrics are consulted as applicable (for instance, the Transfer Center gauges its effectiveness in part by keeping track of the college transfer rates).

Routines: As with instruction, services and centers across campus vary a great deal in the frequency and methods of gathering learning outcomes data.

1. *Frequency:* There’s no single routine for data gathering. Most services gather data regularly; labs and learning centers look at the

usage logs generated by SARS, and routinely administer surveys to students as they use the centers. Student services like Financial Aid tend to gather data annually, while support services that offer workshops gather data specific to those workshops, usually through surveys, student interviews or quizzes. Some services draw on other institutional effectiveness data (e.g., transfer rates).

Six (6) services gather data annually

Twelve (12) services gather data regularly, twice a year (each semester)

Four (4) services gather data “as needed” or “when possible” (mostly every year, but it varies)

2. *Method:* The methods for culling SLO data also vary. Surveys are the most popular, but many services use other measures, and most use multiple measures, reflecting the different goals for gathering learning data. In at least one program, CalWorks, staff and faculty use state data to gauge effectiveness.

Fifteen (15) use surveys

Four (4) use banner or PRIE data

Eight (8) use some combination of results (i.e., transfer rates, immediate student feedback, attendance at fairs or workshops, etc.)

Five (5) use pre- and post-tests or surveys

Eleven (11) use multiple measures

3. *Disaggregatability:* One important goal behind this report was to establish whether faculty and staff in learning and support services

would be able to meet the disaggregatability requirement (I.B.6).

For most services, disaggregating at least some of the learning outcomes data would not be a problem. Student usage of labs is monitored by SARS, which uses the student ID to log in. Surveys can be associated with a student G-number (though someone would have to disaggregate this data, which would be a lot of work).

However, in some cases, faculty and staff pointed out that it would be virtually impossible to collect the G-number that would make student data disaggregatable. In many surveys, confidentiality is a bonus – more likely to get genuine responses – and in services like Health, or Personal Counselling and Wellness, anonymity is indispensable.

While disaggregating the learning outcomes data might be possible for many services, it is not a priority. (Nor did any faculty or staff express concern that we disaggregate our learning outcomes data.)

Eighteen (18) could, or do, record disaggregatable data (i.e., associated with a G#)

Three (3) could *not*, because of confidentiality concerns, or methods of data gathering

Two (2) services do not have a response noted.

Experiences with SLO assessment

Interviewees were also asked about their experience of SLOs – how useful they felt SLOs had been, and how SLOs might be improved. Here is a summary of responses.

Usefulness: Academic and student support services expressed a much greater appreciation of SLO data than their counterparts in instruction, where faculty already spend much of their time evaluating student learning and recording data (i.e., grading). In learning and student support services, however, learning outcomes data can provide feedback on whether service goals are being achieved: whether a particular workshop has been helpful, whether the resources of a service have been clearly communicated, whether students are using a learning center and what they think of their experience, and so on. Many services said that learning outcomes data was very helpful, and in some cases, interviewees wished it were feasible to collect more.

There were some reservations, however. A number of interviewees pointed out that we need a clearer institutional process for aligning and analyzing our various data pools. Some services were rather lukewarm, pointing out that they generally conducted surveys or pre- and post-tests anyway, or that the data didn't really speak to the kinds of improvements they would have liked to make. In the case of instructional centers, for instance, the reasons students use the service are so varied that learning outcomes must be very broad, and hence the "data points" don't really amount to anything specific and aren't very useful.

Workload. Most services reported that gathering and analyzing learning outcomes data took up quite a bit of time. However, only a few services (six of twenty-three, or 26%) characterized gathering the data as a *lot* of work, with most reporting it as a fair amount, but not unmanageable

(fifteen, or 65%).

Tracdat. Here, the experience of faculty and staff in learning and academic support echoes that of instructional faculty: none found much use for Tracdat. Most did not struggle with the interface, but none of them found it helpful for generating reports or making sense of their data.

Alignment with institutional or GE learning outcomes: One difficulty shared by virtually all the learning and academic support services was alignment with overall institutional learning goals.

All instruction and support services are supposed to align with the overarching learning outcomes of the college. In April 2013, the Academic Senate Governing Council had adopted a set of General Education Outcomes (GESLOs) for the college. These fitted the transfer pattern courses, but the map they created did not offer a clear place for services and programs with no specific instructional goals, but whose purpose is to support students in their academic or student life.

Some services agreed that they had aligned with specific GESLOs out of necessity, rather than because their outcomes were really tied to the GE outcome. They did not really identify the goals that they were serving. For instance, Admissions and Records' learning outcomes were aligned with the GESLO in "Effective Communication" – but this doesn't really reflect the goal of the office, nor help the college shine the light on what needs improvement. If students were not performing well at communication, we would not immediately think of improving Admissions & Records. In total, eleven of the services (47%) said that their outcomes did not fit the GESLOs. A few did feel they were connected to the GESLOs (four, or 17%),

mostly instructional or instruction-related services (labs, counseling classes, parent workshops in the Child Development Center).

DISCUSSION

What's working

Faculty and staff, for the most part, have clear and useful procedures for finding out whether students know about their services; whether students are using those services; and what students think about those services.

Problems

While the general feedback on learning outcomes in the world of academic and student support services is modestly positive, there are definitely some issues that can be addressed.

Survey fatigue among students: Almost all of the services use surveys, often with low returns. A number of interviewees wanted to see some more organized way to conduct surveys – perhaps through a central PRIE survey that canvassed students for their overall knowledge of, and satisfaction with, some student services.

Closing the loop: Faculty and staff faithfully gather data, record it in Tracdat, and discuss it in Program Review. But there is no post-Program Review feedback that can help them get something meaningful out of the data. A number of interviewees said they would like to see better alignment between their services and overall college outcomes, more follow-up with other services, stronger ties to instruction, more

connection between data pools, and more opportunities to communicate with instructional faculty as well as other support services.

It is notable that, as with instructional faculty, not one of the interviewees said they had used Tracdat to analyze data and generate learning outcome reports. This is no doubt partly because of Tracdat's unhelpful interface, but it also tells us that the college has not yet developed or communicated a clear idea of what to do with the data we're gathering. Individual services (and indeed disciplines) can certainly look to their own data to see if students found a particular workshop helpful, or which academic center service students preferred. These sorts of results don't change much from semester to semester, however (which could explain why a number of interviewees said that SLOs are "repetitive").

Quality of data: In some services, the data is clear, and meets the needs of the program. For instance, nursing labs have clear outcomes which clearly support the (readily assessable) skills that nursing students must acquire.

However, other services have more difficulty coming up with learning outcomes that create meaningful data. One learning support center pointed out that the learning outcomes must be written to accommodate a variety of student goals, and thus are too broad to really convey much information.

Alignment: All outcomes at the college must be mapped to show how each service, program or course relates to the overall academic goals of the college. Because these goals are expressed as GESLOs, many academic and student support services have strained to find a place. Of course students can indeed strengthen their communication or

quantitative reasoning skills by learning about financial aid, or admissions procedures, and so on; but that's not what those offices are really for, and not a useful way for them to define their role in the students' lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Revise the GE-SLOs

This is already done. In May 2017, the Academic Senate Governing Council approved a revised set of college-wide learning outcomes. We revised some of the language to the existing GE-SLOs. And we created a second, over-arching set of learning outcomes for the college – Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) – which include the GE-SLOs, but also a new outcome intended to bring the learning and support services into the tent:

Independent Learning and Development. The ability of students to develop, evaluate, and pursue personal, academic, and/or career goals. Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate effective study strategies;
- Articulate realistic and achievable academic and/or career goals;
- Identify and make use of college and community resources (academic and student support services).

2. Improve institutional procedures for “closing the loop”

Whether it's a regular “college day,” better connection with data drawn from the many data pools we fill on a regular basis, post-Program Review feedback, or some other process, we need to create much stronger structures for faculty and staff to *do*

something with the learning outcomes data they gather. Currently, the process tends to stay at the level of the department or service; there's no real ability to connect across services or disciplines. At an institutional level, we should find ways to help faculty and staff, from instruction and support services, connect so they can identify and collaborate on potential improvements.

One suggestion is for an "assessment calendar," or structured use of flex days, to make sure that faculty have time set aside to look at student learning, and to make connections beyond their department or service.

Another suggestion is for the college to follow up on Program Review with an institution-level effort to find themes and trends across disciplines and services.

3. Coordinate data-gathering efforts

Rather than have each discipline or service inventing the wheel, there may be room for college-level coordination of things like surveys. Disciplines and services will of course always want to use their own instruments for gathering learning outcomes data, but where possible, it would be helpful to centralize.

4. Support efforts to get better data

Most interviewees reported that the data they gathered was useful. But in some cases, interviewees said they had difficulty coming up with meaningful data, because learning outcomes were necessarily

too broad, or because they weren't sure how to get better or more relevant data.

Rather than have individual services (or disciplines) reinventing the wheel, we need to have clear guidance and ongoing support from the college. This can take the form of clear policies and procedures around writing, assessing, and discussing learning outcomes; a toolkit for faculty in writing and aligning learning outcomes, and in gathering and recording data; and so on. It can also take the form of an assessment calendar, as noted above.

This is in progress, to a large degree. This report, and its predecessor on instructional practices, is intended to clarify where we need policies, procedures, and a toolkit for faculty and staff to help them develop and assess learning outcomes. The goal is to have clarity about policies, procedures and support for faculty and staff in place by Fall 2018.