

IVC OUTCOMES NEWSLETTER

FALL 2008

Special Points of Interest:

The SLO Website can be found under Faculty & Staff / Committees:

<http://www.imperial.edu/index.php?pid=3771>



Imperial Valley College

A POSITION STAND ON SLOS BY DR. ED GOULD

The national movement to assess student learning has been a hot topic throughout the first decade of the Twenty-First Century and appears to be here to stay. Early in this decade I served as a lobbyist focused specifically on the Higher Education Reauthorization Bill and members of the House of Congress and the Senate, on both sides of the aisle, were adamant that higher education must be accountable. They were adamant because of the pressure they were receiving from public opinion as the cost of higher education degree increased by 240% in the previous decade. While at Capella University I participated in a Student Learning Outcomes Transparency project. We were

aligning degrees, programs, course content, and assessment with university, school, and discipline anticipated outcomes to meet the continuous quality requirements of the Northwest Association, Higher Learning Commission. This major project has resulted in the pledge to go public with all Student Learning Outcomes at Capella University by the Spring of 2009.

My experience is that student learning outcomes are a good thing. They inform the public as to the expectation of higher education degree at the college, program, and degree levels. Student Learning Outcomes allow faculty to develop curricula to meet the expectations of the institution and

the discipline. SLO's allow assessments to be aligned with outcomes. The competencies a student receives from a course, degree, and program is evident.

WASC has informed all community colleges within their jurisdiction that they must be proficient in the college, degree, program, discipline, and course level by 2012. As a pragmatist and a realist it is important to me that this institution embrace student learning outcomes. In order for programs and courses to continue to transfer to other accredited colleges and universities and to continue to receive federal funding, including funding for student financial aid, we must embrace and become proficient at (continued on Pg 2)

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THE STATUS OF SLO'S AT IVC—WHERE DO WE NEED TO BE?

This year the campus community is actively engaged in the identification and assessment of SLO's at the course and program level. I would like to congratulate the faculty and staff for the very hard work that has already taken place with identification of SLO's.

I am often asked where we need to be as an institution with SLO's. The ACCJC (accreditation commission) expectation is that the college be at the development level or above in Student Learning

Outcomes. The commission further expects institutions to be at the Proficiency level by 2012 (see page 4).

The commission defines the developmental stage as:

- College has established an institutional framework for definition of student learning outcomes (where to start), how to extend, and timeline.
- College has established authentic assessment strategies for assessing student learning outcomes as ap-

propriate to intended course, program, and degree learning outcomes.

- Existing organizational structures (e.g. Senate, Curriculum Committee) are supporting strategies for student learning outcomes definition and assessment.
- Leadership groups (e.g. Academic Senate and administration), have accepted responsibility for student learning outcomes implementation.
- Appropriate resources are being allocated to support

- Faculty and staff are fully engaged in student learning outcomes development.

We are well on the way to providing evidence to the commission on October 15, 2009 that our institution has met this standard.

Keep up the good work.

Kathy Berry
Vice President For Academic Services

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BY DR. GOULD...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Student Learning Outcomes. The consequences of not having our courses transfer or receiving financial aid would jeopardize the very existence of Imperial Valley College. Consequently I am a cheerleader for Student Learning Outcomes. I embrace what they can do for our institution and for our student learning. I also want this college to be able to serve the Imperial Valley. Most importantly, I want us to continue to grow and meet the educational and employment needs of our community. The result of staying in the educational business in Imperial Valley is that all of us will continue to be employed in the field we love, education.

So why do I apologize for asking the faculty to do Student Learning Outcomes some have asked? I do so because Student Learning Outcomes are hard work. SLO's demand time, and attention and agreement from many. Those of us within the walls of IVC know that our courses, programs, and degrees are valuable and reflect excellence in student learning. Therefore, I apologize for asking you to do something that we already know is good. I implore you to complete the Student Learning Outcomes and to demonstrate to the public, and to WASC, the value of an IVC degree.

"I implore you to complete the Student Learning Outcomes and to demonstrate to the public, and to WASC, the value of an IVC degree."

THE OUTCOMES RAPP BY FRANK RAPP

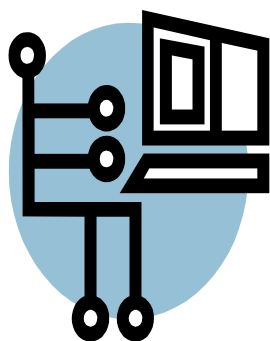
Dear IVC Faculty Members;

First, a quick review of my background, especially as it relates to students and learning and outcomes. My faculty experience spanned more than two decades. My administration experience is brand spanking new. So when I speak to you of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and the need to create and use them, I speak much more as a faculty member than as an administrator. I am also aware that some faculty members have reservations regarding the overall implications and effects of SLOs. Thus I intend to speak to those reservations, for the good of the college, which to me means for the good of our students, of our profession, of our community.

Properly applied at the institution, program, and course level, SLOs can be a powerful tool for generating effective learning, learning that is long term and useful. The name itself implies where the focus shall be—on what the students are actually to learn. This focus should help us all with what we went into teaching for, yes? We have chosen this profession because it is an honorable one. We have an incredibly important role to play in our society; perhaps none is more important in the long run. We are ones who have an area of expertise which we see the value of imparting to others so that they may learn and benefit. SLOs handled properly place emphasis on that learning. If there is significant increase in our students learning and growth, then the implementation of SLOs will have been worth it.

There are also some ways in which SLOs should not be used, I believe. SLOs should not be used as a tool for weeding out students. That is, they should not be used as some sort of gate keeper device to prevent students from moving on. This is especially true for classes in sequences, with prerequisites from class to class. Should students who have not demonstrated readiness to benefit from moving on to higher level classes be passed? No. But SLOs should be used in such a way as to make it more likely that those who are ready and capable of learning enough will be able to move on.

(continued on page 3)



**IVC
OUTCOMES
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LETTER**

THE OUTCOMES RAPP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

It's also very important that SLOs not be used to create mere conformity in our faculty. While they should be used to create sound, consistent pedagogy, if they are used to isolate renegades or to stifle creativity in teaching, we very much run the risk of ending up with stale classrooms, and that is not a result that will serve our purposes well. If we desire to help our students to develop into improved critical thinkers, we must model those behaviors and we must instruct in much the same spirit.

Here is one more way to look at all of this. Some are concerned that what we are doing is reinventing the wheel. Many have said that various



buzz words and concepts come along from time to time, and all are expected, if not ordered, to get on the bandwagon and pull their weight (and in the spirit of that, yes, I am deliberately using and mixing clichés and metaphors, in order to reflect the feeling that such tasks may create, stale and outworn and, in essence, empty of real meaning). The bottom line of such concerns is that, after all the sound and the fury, no real difference in teaching occurs. I prefer to think of the task of creating and implementing SLOs in a different way. We all must breathe to stay alive. Inhale, exhale, repeat. Ad infinitum. Well,

therein lies a cycle, too. The word *inspire* comes to us from the Latin for to breathe. *Perspire*, by the way, comes from the Latin to breathe everywhere. So I urge you to roll up your sleeves and work at SLOs until you perspire. And desire to inspire yourselves, your students, our community. See the opportunity to create and implement SLOs as a chance to breathe new life into what is our mission here at Imperial Valley College.

VIEWPOINT: SLO's – A Contrarians View by Dr. Dennis Carnes

Since we have started using the business model for higher education, we have acquired an implied responsibility for our “product.” Since our raw material and products are physically the same (students) our business is built on a “value added” model. More and more we are being pressured to demonstrate our value added. It is a noble and reasonable expectation. I do not object to the examination of our responsibility; I am a little cynical about the assessment (SLO's) and the assumption that that assessment indicates a strong correlation between an education experience and value added (a student learning outcome.)

In the distant past when higher education was reserved for the elite, discussion of responsibility of the few institutions was rare. In the last 65 years higher education has become considerably democratized. The number of institutions and number of students have increased exponentially. The function of higher education has drifted away from producing scholars (the classical egg head, ivory tower dwellers) who were responsible for scientific research and maintenance of the spirit and integrity of the civilization. It has on the other become a clearing house for providing “keys” to the good jobs for those who have successfully completed and endured. Hopefully during this test of endurance students acquire some of the knowledge and skills useful for those good jobs. It is my opinion that institutions of higher education provide not just skills, but also sets of values, appreciation of truth and direction toward the pathway to

not just skills, but also sets of values, appreciation of truth and direction toward the pathway to achieving excellence in the workplace.

I find the idea of selecting an activity, skill or demonstrable bit of knowledge as an accurate indicator of being a well-rounded, educated citizen ludicrous. I would happier to detect those good academic values, that appreciation of truth or locating them on that pathway to excellence. We have all had that experience of having a student grow within these values before our very eyes. It is a joy which makes teaching a delight. But unfortunately I do not know how to objectively evaluate those moments. How do you capture those moments?

When I was in grad school in the late 1960's I had a roommate from rural Georgia who was an African-American. He and I would talk about just about anything. One night we were talking about the concept of “soul.” I asked him to define soul. He thought about for a long time and said, “To define it would destroy it.”

Perhaps to define the quality of the educational experience would destroy that wonderful moment of learning what it is to learn.

(More Viewpoints on page 4)

VIEWPOINT — “SLO’S: FRIEND OR FOE”

With the adoption of SLOs as a totalizing basis for accreditation, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) has fundamentally changed the definition of what we do and the way we do it. As IVC strives to comply with these accreditation standards, it is important that we note some of the possible pitfalls:

1. SLOs could be used to as a basis for teacher evaluations. Even though for years instructors have been assured that SLOs are just data collection and will never be used for teacher evaluation, WASC Accreditation Standard III: Resources now reads: “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.”

2. SLOs could intrude on your classroom, by insisting that all learning is observable and measurable.
3. SLOs could compromise academic freedom, by forcing instructors to embrace a standardized approach to instruction.
4. SLOs could increase workload, as data collection, reports and feedback cycles continue.

It is important to be aware of these possible pitfalls as IVC continues to develop SLO standards. This process can produce

positive change at IVC, but only if we work together to preserve academic freedom and demand equitable treatment.

Gaylla A. Finnell
Assistant Professor of Political Science
IVC CCA/CTA/NEA Vice President

Source: Clemens, David. “Exposing the Big Lies about SLOs.” *The CTA Advocate*, Volume 43, Number 4, June 2008 <http://www.cta.org/media/publications/advocate/0608_cca_05.htm>.

VIEWPOINT—“MY TWO CENTS” BY DR. RON GAGE-MOSHER

My problem with the current SLOs is not whether we should measure, and thus perhaps insure, that students complete a course with the stated knowledge/skills/abilities (KSAs). My problem is that I view my primary job as presenting course content and assessing the degree to which students attain it, and NOT whether they learn self responsibility, communication skills, self esteem, or myriad of positive, but *not* directly content related, attributes. My frustration is, in short, being directed to think about, compose, and measure *sec-*

ondary issues to college education. While these concomitant goals are laudatory, teaching them is *not* what I spent twelve years in college learning to do. Though I have already complied I do resent having to spend time in non-academic focus. Perhaps needless to state I have already spent considerable time in devising measures to ensure that grades earned in my classes *are* valid representations of student learning. That is, in my mind, what I am paid for! My current thinking is that we are participating in doing

SLOs in order to “check the box” and get accreditation approval. In doing so we are actively avoiding making any meaningful change toward ensuring that students are actually increasing their KSAs. If that is so, then we will keep quite busy “searching for our missing keys under the light” because it is easier to look there rather than “in the dark” where they actually are. (Oh, that reference is from an ancient Sufi tale.)

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC)
Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness – Part III: Student Learning Outcomes
Characteristics of Institutional Effectiveness in Student Learning Outcomes
(Sample institutional behaviors)

Awareness

- There is preliminary, investigative dialogue about student learning outcomes.
- There is recognition of existing practices such as course objectives and how they relate to student learning outcomes.
- There is exploration of models, definitions, and issues taking place by a few people.
- Pilot projects and efforts may be in progress.
- The college has discussed whether to define student learning outcomes at the level of some courses or programs or degrees; where to begin.

Development

- College has established an institutional framework for definition of student learning outcomes (where to start), how to extend, and timeline.
- College has established authentic assessment strategies for assessing student learning outcomes as appropriate to intended course, program, and degree learning outcomes.
- Existing organizational structures (e.g. Senate, Curriculum Committee) are supporting strategies for student learning outcomes definition and assessment.
- Leadership groups (e.g. Academic Senate and administration), have accepted responsibility for student learning outcomes implementation.
- Appropriate resources are being allocated to support student learning outcomes and assessment.
- Faculty and staff are fully engaged in student learning outcomes development.

Proficiency

- Student learning outcomes and authentic assessment are in place for courses, programs and degrees.
- Results of assessment are being used for improvement and further alignment of institution-wide practices.
- There is widespread institutional dialogue about the results.
- Decision-making includes dialogue on the results of assessment and is purposefully directed toward improving student learning.
- Appropriate resources continue to be allocated and fine-tuned.
- Comprehensive assessment reports exist and are completed on a regular basis.
- Course student learning outcomes are aligned with degree student learning outcomes.
- Students demonstrate awareness of goals and purposes of courses and programs in which they are enrolled.

Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement

- Student learning outcomes and assessment are ongoing, systematic and used for continuous quality improvement.
- Dialogue about student learning is ongoing, pervasive and robust.
- Evaluation and fine-tuning of organizational structures to support student learning is ongoing.
- Student learning improvement is a visible priority in all practices and structures across the college.
- Learning outcomes are specifically linked to program reviews.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do we have to assess the same classes or student services programs in the Fall and Spring? Not unless you want to. We are trying to ease into the outcome venture by identifying outcomes and assessing them for 50% of courses/programs in the fall and the other 50% in the spring. If you are teaching a course that is only offered in Winter or Summer session, then please don't forget to complete it this school year. Student Services Programs (all non-instruction departments) should also identify at least one outcome and assess it this school year.

I want to write my own outcome! Your motivation should be commended, but everyone who teaches a course should communicate with others teaching that same course to decide on one outcome and assessment to be used this year. During Spring '09, we will assess the process and see what improvements can be made for '09-10.

But what if I don't want to use the outcome and/or assessment developed by my peers? You don't have to use it in your grading, but please collect the data so you can participate in the data analysis discussion with others.

I am the only one who teaches this class. Do I need to discuss my outcome and assessment with someone else? Yes, please do. You can discuss it with someone in your department or someone outside of your department. This is a great way to share ideas, brainstorm, meet others, and make sure your outcome is clearly communicated and measurable. Remember, outcomes and assessments should be visible and understandable to your students.

Where can I get a copy of the elusive SLO Identification (ID) form? On the SLO website in the section "SLO Forms & Handouts": <http://www.imperial.edu/index.php?pid=3912>

How do I turn in my SLO ID form? Please turn in a hard copy to Toni Pfister AND email an attached file to toni.pfister@imperial.edu

But I have already completed my syllabus for the semester without the outcome and assessment! What am I suppose to do now? Yes, we are a little behind. Ideally outcomes and assessments should be decided on prior to the beginning of the semester so they can be clearly communicated in the syllabus. Many of us will need to present the outcome to our students after the semester has begun. If you can include the assessment in your grading procedures without changing the syllabus, then that is fine. If you need to perform the assessment without including it in your grading that is also OK.

What do I do with my outcomes assessment after I collect it? Keep it filed within your department. After the fall semester, faculty and staff will be asked to evaluate the data they collected in the fall to find ways to improve the courses or student service programs.

What is a rubric? I have never used one before. Rubrics are helpful tools in evaluating student learning. Providing rubrics along with assignment directions can make instructions and the grading policy more clear to your students. Rubrics can also make grading papers, presentations, artistic creations, etc. an easier task. The SLO website ("Resources") includes information on assessments. Several IVC faculty members have graciously shared examples of their rubrics. There is an example of a rubric on page 4; this rubric illustrates steps that colleges take as they incorporate outcomes and assessments into the classes and programs.

*Moving toward our target:
We have identified nearly
200 SLOs !!!*

