If the Walls Could Talk

By Karen Kane
Newsletter Editor & Subcommittee Member

I have worked in the field of education for a long time. I have seen change. I have watched the process of change—it is viewed suspiciously, it is painful, it is decried, it is submitted to, it is institutionalized, it is accepted, it is celebrated or castrated...for better or worse. I remember tuition free community college; a group named “Faculty Wives,” life before “shared governance” and “Title 9.” I remember a true college hour where no classes were scheduled; a real fight to get a student group called the LGBSU on campus; the oddity of a few students who dared to get multiple tattoos and multiple piercings; and an activity called “Faculty Frolics.” I remember when the LBUSD and LBCC shared a Board of Trustees; when Veterans Stadium belonged to the city of Long Beach and when building anything besides athletic facilities on the “other side of the street” would have been unthinkable. I have been in meetings too numerous to count, in every building on both campuses talking, arguing, expressing opinion; and I have laughed and cried with students and colleagues all throughout our “hallowed hallways,” as we permanently implanted our thoughts and ideas and ideals into these walls. If the walls could talk… would we hear whispers and echoes of the Long Beach City College we remember, know and love? If the walls could talk, would they remind us of our colleagues, no longer here, who loved and fought for a community college they believed in? If the walls could talk, would they tell us to stay in our history, or move with open arms to a future yet unknown?

Some of us have an easier time adapting to change. I remember shaking my head in disbelief when my grandmother refused to try a microwave. I remember spending hours trying to convince a much admired secretary I worked with, to attempt the new computer the college placed on her desk instead of her typewriter. I remember trying to convince faculty that the International Students Program was a good thing, that Outreach was necessary, and marketing the college was the wave of the future; and now, for the last year, that Outcomes and Assessments are incumbent and necessary, and are here to stay. I know, quite honestly, that our Walls have heard cursing, anger and confusion over O’s and A’s, and I feel a sense of satisfaction that all of that will be recorded and encapsulated within our walls. It needs to be, because just like other major shifts and changes, this process (thought of originally by many of us as more busy paperwork) is here to stay, and will be embedded in community college history just as surely as shared governance, hiring diversity and AB1725.

As we prepare to close another school year in our long and colorful history, we analyze and evaluate how we have done, how we will change, and what we will keep and do differently in the 2011-2012 academic year. Some of this will be up to us and what we think best, some will be up to our state, and the budget our elected officials decide to impart. If we had that “magic looking glass” to foretell what is to come, life would be easy. But the fun part of learning and discovering is usually the part that isn’t easy. It is the parts where we struggle and fight and bleed, that are the most indelible. One thing is certain—the California Community College is in for some real face changes. What we offer and how we offer it are most certainly up for grabs. How we respond? That is up to us. But, even without a magic looking glass, I know that the faculty of LBCC will do what’s right. The Walls carry a long
history of faculty who have loved and cared for the place, and students educated who have moved on to outstanding futures. In their honor, we can do no less. Our response to Outcomes and Assessments, in the very trying times of the last 18 months, has been success. We chose success. Did we scratch and claw, chew and bite to get where we are? Absolutely. Are we 100% sure it works? No. Are we required to meet deadlines and benchmarks with the process? Yes. Does it reflect poorly on college administration if these are missed? No. Within this realm, we can’t pass the buck on a change we may or may not like. This faculty-driven process falls squarely on our shoulders and the backs of our faculty leadership. If we fall, the onus is on us. So what have we done? We have moved a mountain in the last 18 months to get us closer to where we need to be. And how to proceed? Keep yelling at the walls, place our objections squarely into our history, pick up the mantle and keep moving. We need to support one another, look to our colleagues at other community colleges to see how they are coping, and trudge forward with faith in the process. Like it or not, the wave of change is washing over us and we need to ride it all the way into the shore. Let’s make sure OUR history, the history we will leave within the walls, is worthy of our community, our students and us.

This article was inspired by the vision and wisdom of our esteemed colleagues retiring at the end of this 2010-2011 academic year, who leave an indelible, memorable mark in our college history. Thank you! And to Dr. John Fylpaa, whose career has spanned more than 30 years at LBCC, and who always kept what is best for students at the forefront of all decisions, regardless of the changes swirling around him. Happy Retirement, John. Your professionalism, perspective and knowledge of LBCC will be missed. The Walls will echo and whisper “Fylpaa-isms” for years to come!

### Summary of Progress for Academic Schools: Spring 2011

#### SLO Assessment Plan (AP) Submission*

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th># (and %) of Courses with APs</th>
<th># (and %) of Programs with APs</th>
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<td>Business &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>310 (90% of 344 total courses)</td>
<td>21 (88% of 24 total programs)</td>
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<td>Creative Arts &amp; Applied Sciences</td>
<td>431 (95% of 450 total courses)</td>
<td>27 (90% of 30 total programs)</td>
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<td>Health, Science &amp; Mathematics</td>
<td>178 (91% of 195 total courses)</td>
<td>6 (67% of 9 total programs)</td>
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<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>175 (99% of 176 total courses)</td>
<td>7 (100% of 7 total programs)</td>
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<td>110 (100% of 110 total courses)</td>
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<td>Trades &amp; Industrial Technologies</td>
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<td>13 (76% of 17 total programs)</td>
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<td>Counseling &amp; Student Support Services</td>
<td>2 (25% of 8 total courses)</td>
<td>2 (100% of 2 total programs)</td>
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<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>1415 (92% of 1537 total courses)</strong></td>
<td><strong>92 (88% of 105 total programs)</strong></td>
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*As of 4/19/2011
Outcomes Assessment Update

By Kim Anderson
Subcommittee Chair

◆ Course Assessment Plans
Current status for instructional departments:

92% course assessment plans have been submitted
8% course assessment plans are still due (123 course assessment plans)
The following departments still have course assessment plans due:
Associate Degree Nursing, Architecture/Drafting, Art, Automotive Technology, Life Sciences, Construction, Counseling, Electricity, English, History/Political Science, Allied Health, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences.

Congratulations
Acknowledgement should go to the Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Program for recently completing all of their course assessment plans and beginning the collection of evidence.
Faculty should be especially pleased with their contributions to this process. We began this academic year at 68% and increased the number of course assessment plans to 92%.

◆ Program Assessment Plans
Current status for instructional departments:
87% program assessment plans have been submitted (91 assessment plans)
13% program assessment plans are still due (14 assessment plans)
The following departments have program assessment plans due:

Congratulations
Acknowledgement should go to the Fashion Merchandising Program for recently completing their program assessment plans and beginning the collection of evidence.
Both full and adjunct faculty have worked collaboratively within instructional programs to develop program assessment plans. This academic year has shown an increase from 19% to 87% of all instructional programs.

◆ Collection and Reporting of Course and Program Evidence
Be advised that courses that are due for course review in 2010-11 (174 courses) and programs that are due for their program review in 2011-12 (48 programs from 12 departments) also have assessment results due. That means the analysis of the collected evidence, the full reporting of results (column 4), actions taken (column 5), and establishing a new assessment cycle should be completed during this spring semester.

Currently 13% of courses in our curriculum have reported out results and actions for at least one SLO. Most of these courses have reported out on all of their SLOs. This is an excellent start.
At the program level, 0.06% of all instructional programs have reported results and actions for at least one SLO.

◆ Institution Assessment
The ongoing and systematic GEO assessment process was presented last month and the initial phase will focus on the assessment of selected categories of the Communication GEO: that being reading, writing, and oral communication. Selected departments have been invited to participate in this upcoming Communication GEO assessment. The department heads from English, Read, Speech Communication, and Foreign Language are working with the ASLO Subcommittee to refine this cross-disciplinary assessment in a meaningful and timely manner.

◆ Curriculum Mapping
The SLO Officers have been presented with information about the curriculum mapping process, which will be an assessment task that department faculty will want to be engaged. Curriculum mapping is a process to determine curriculum alignment and correlation that produces evidence for decision-making and possible action to improve student learning within instructional programs. As part of the ASLO process and for Program Review the development of these maps can be used not only as a visual representation of a program’s curricular organization and structure, but also maps provide evidence to frame course and program discussions about the alignment and relationship of concepts and skills and between their levels of learning. These discussions will assist the instructional program’s faculty in creating a practical plan to enhance program effectiveness and student learning.
The next upcoming GEO assessment will be Civic Engagement in 2012. There are two subcategories—Cultural Sensitivity/Diversity and Democracy. Programs identified from the GEO curriculum map that may consult and participate in the Cultural Sensitivity assessment are: Art, Child Development, Dance, English, Fashion Design, Foreign Language, Health, Humanities/Social Science, Music, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, and Speech. Programs identified from the GEO curriculum map that may consult and participate in the Democracy assessment are: Anthropology, Economics, English, Geography, History, Political Science, and Public Administration. The ASLO Subcommittee will developing an assessment rubric and all of the corresponding and specific plan parts with program faculty representatives.
Our Most Sincere Thanks!

Collaboration with many individuals is essential for the ASLO Subcommittee to be able to meet its charge.

A big THANK YOU goes to the following colleagues for their generous support and contributions to the work of outcomes assessment at LBCC.

Eva Bagg, Associate Dean Institutional Effectiveness
Cindy Baker, Accounting Supervisor
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Bill Zeilinger, Graphic Design Specialist

Looking forward to another productive year!

The ASLO Subcommittee
Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

By Brad Mello
Associate Director for Educational Initiatives within the NCA (National Communication Association)

It should come as no surprise that I joined the rabble clamoring for the blood of administrators who were heaping an extra burden on busy faculty in the form of this newly popular (at least to me) term “assessment.” The cry became louder at the University where I taught when we were required to attend an assessment workshop during the start of the semester that confirmed our worst fears.

An assessment expert from another college ran the workshop. He spoke about how assessment worked on his campus and how resistant the faculty was to developing assessment procedures. My colleagues and I were not overly impressed. However, when we finally had a chance to ask questions such as: “What is assessment?” and “How do you do it?” our worst fears were confirmed. To those questions he said, “Oh well – just decide what you want your students to know, teach it and imbed questions in your tests to see if they learned it.” He gave a few examples involving simple recognition and recall sorts of things such as remembering the President of the Confederacy and then developing questions for a test to see if students know the answer. It was the worst example of teaching to the test and passive learning I had encountered and many of my colleagues shared my view. My colleagues and I prided ourselves on active learning, and engaging our students in the learning process so they took ownership, not rote regurgitation.

However, my colleagues and I were still faced with a mandate to build assessment programs even though we received little assistance on how to do so. We were resistant, as faculty often are, yet we cared about improving the educational experience of our students. That semester, while thinking about how I might, as chair of our program create an assessment process I stumbled across my first assessment of a very specific student learning outcome. I was teaching the senior seminar in communication. One of the course outcomes was that students had to demonstrate the ability to write and cite in APA. So I asked my students why and they responded that they didn’t know how in senior seminar. They had never been taught how to use APA but they clearly demonstrated that they didn’t know how in senior seminar. With a simple modification of the curriculum we were able to influence the desired outcome positively. My good fortune to stumble across this example changed my outlook on student learning outcomes assessment. While I am still wary of ‘teaching to the test’ ways of looking at assessment, I am positive that thinking about and clearly defining what the faculty expectations of a communication major upon graduation, improved both the curriculum and the students overall educational experience.

James C. McCroskey in his article, “Raising the Question #8 Assessment: Is It Just Measurement?” speaks of faculty reaction to concepts of learning outcomes and assessment that demonstrates that the reaction of my colleagues and myself is not atypical:

The response of faculty at all levels has been highly diversified, from considering these concepts to be totally irrelevant and of no value to viewing these concepts as center pieces for improving the quality of instruction at all levels. Whether one loves or hates these concepts and what they stand for, learning objectives and assessment are here to stay.

Mary Lou Higgerson in her article, “Important Components of an Effective Assessment Program” and Phil Backlund and Pat Arneson in their article, “Educational Assessment Grows Up: Looking Toward the Future” confirm also that faculty are often resistant to assessment but for assessment to be effective faculty must ‘buy-in’ and come to own the assessment process.

The remainder of this essay will lay out the basic components of effective assessment based on the articles mentioned above and my own experience with performing various assessment talks as chair of a communication program. I believe there are three distinct levels of assessment. The first is student learning outcomes in a course; the second is learning outcomes for the major and finally an overall program review and assessment where learning outcomes

Con’t. on page 6
Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

are one part of the picture. This essay will focus on the first two. In no way is this essay a comprehensive guide to assessment, it is meant as a primer for ways to think about designing student learning outcome assessment processes.

When thinking about assessment it is important to first identify terms. McCroskey defines the two basic concepts, learning outcomes and assessment well. Learning outcomes refer to the perceived need to determine specifically what student learning's are expected from either a single class or a whole instructional program before either is implemented. Assessment refers to the perceived need to measure and evaluate the degree to which the learning outcomes are met in either a single class or a whole instructional program during the instructional process or after its completion.

McCroskey argues in support of creating clearly identified, concrete learning outcomes in the traditional learning objective areas of “cognitive learning (content/information), affective learning (attitudes, beliefs and values related to cognitive learning), and psycho-motor learning (performing specific behaviors).”

The problem of course is bringing faculty together to actually agree on course specific and major specific desired learning outcomes. As Backlund and Arneson point out, many faculty have never had discussions with colleagues about desired learning outcomes but those discussions are necessary to set the stage for an effective assessment process. The conversations can be difficult but they can identify differences and open them up for discussion, which can lead to greater understanding and a common sense of purpose.

Higgerson lists 10 basic components of an effective assessment program:

1. Assessment must be a campus priority
2. Effective assessment programs require a climate of trust
3. Assessment activity must be seen as an opportunity
4. Faculty should own the process
5. Program learning outcomes must be clearly defined and accepted by the faculty
6. Program learning outcomes should be specific and measurable
7. Assessment measures must be linked to the curriculum
8. Capitalize upon existing data collection processes
9. Assessment results should have campus utility
10. Evaluate and revise the assessment program

Higgerson develops each of the 10 components in more detail in her article. Thinking about a few of these components in relation to my example above it was clear that my University was doing some things well and was off the mark on others. Assessment was priority but it was not owned by the faculty at the start. We were sent to training programs run by people we didn’t know or trust and we feared it might be a way of somehow proving that we were bad teachers. Once I stumbled upon my learning outcome issue with APA writing style it became clear to me how working with my faculty to define what it is we wanted students to know and be able to do upon leaving our shores could improve our teaching, our program and our students’ success. Discovering that students didn’t know APA did not prove that any of my colleagues were bad teachers and it was not used against them. What the discovery did was improve the curriculum – which is a mark of good teachers!

Although many have argued that assessment is a difficult process I tend to see it otherwise. It has its time consuming aspect but defining what it is you want students to learn in a course and in a major and then selecting what evidence to collect to determine if students are learning what it is you want them to is an invigorating academic exercise that has always helped enhance my understanding of the discipline because it forces me to clearly articulate it.

Our faculty tried to be as creative as possible in planning assessments. For example, in the senior seminar we wanted our students to be able to ask and answer original humanistically oriented and social science oriented research questions. Where would they learn how that was done? We chose to include a focus on research questions in a variety of communication electives. For example, I had designed a seminar in editorial cartooning that was interdisciplinary in nature. I required students to read rhetorical criticism articles, historical articles and traditional social science articles about the nature and influence of editorial cartoons. Students encountered firsthand how researchers from various perspectives asked and answered research questions. A simple addition of pointing out to my students that knowing how to ask such questions will be helpful for senior seminar was all that was required. Students could then bring that knowledge into the senior seminar when they needed to demonstrate their ability to do the same. They had countless models to guide them in their work. Thinking carefully about a major, sequencing courses and ensuring that students are provided the tools for success are time consuming but important.

As all the authors I’ve cited so far indicate, some faculty still hope that the assessment movement is a passing fad. Unlikely. The pressure from administrators, legislators and the public for higher education to be more accountable considering the huge public dollar investment will not subside. It is incumbent upon faculty to take the lead or others will for us. But it mustn’t be overly onerous. Higgerson simplifies assessment in this manner, “Put more simply, assessment asks the questions: Are students...
learning what the program is designed to teach?” We need to be able to answer that question if we are to ensure the continued success of our communication programs. This essay has tried to simplify the assessment process a bit but in no means is this meant to be a comprehensive ‘how-to’ of assessment. There are countless books that can provide more detailed guidelines. For example, Phil Backlund and Gay Wakefield’s “A Communication Assessment Primer” a non-serial publication of NCA is a robust resource for the nuts and bolts of assessment. In this essay, I only have defined the terms learning outcomes and assessment and provided some hopefully useful examples to encourage creative thinking about the process.

While I have become an assessment convert and find the process helpful for improving instruction and curriculum, I still have some lingering resistance and doubt and probably always will. I can’t ever imagine an assessment process that will demonstrate or measure the ‘ah-ha’ moment when a student finally grasps a concept. I can’t ever imagine an assessment that can measure the importance of a student coming back to campus for a reunion and recalling the public speaking course she took with me and how enjoyable it was then and how useful the skill has been in her career. I can’t ever imagine writing an assessment report that rivals the joy I feel when a student who has been struggling with giving a speech over comes their fears and ‘knocks one out of the park.’ These wonderful teaching moments that are the joy of teaching for me can’t be quantified, measured and assessed. And there is no need. We can enjoy those moments and make sure that we have adequate evidence to prove that students leave campus with the knowledge and abilities the communication major was designed to teach.

REFERENCES:


## SLO OFFICERS

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</table>

All faculty (including the department appointed SLO Officers) contribute to the assessment of SLO process within their programs and departments. However, this process is multi-layered and multi-dimensional, and requires additional knowledge and skill to get all of us working together to move forward. The SLO Officers have received approximately 20 hours of training to be able to guide the faculty through the loop of outcomes, assessment plans, results of assessment, evaluation and future planning. SLO Officers serve as a resource for all phases of SLO information; provide guidance and suggestions to department colleagues; serve as a trained peer reviewer for submitted ASLO information according to process protocols; establish an internal management structure to the area he or she is responsible; facilitate outcomes planning and upload SLO information (assessment and other data provided by area faculty) into TracDat. Make sure you utilize your informed SLO Officer. We are all in this together!