Greetings from the ASLO Chair

By Kim Anderson, ASLO Chair

Welcome to the first newsletter, OUTCOME-INGS & GOINGS from the ASLO (Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes) Subcommittee. We are looking forward to communicating with faculty, staff, and administrators as we all begin to implement the Outcomes Assessment Process. The subcommittee is eager to assist all colleagues as we navigate the various steps in the assessment cycle. This newsletter is but one avenue to reach out to our community as we highlight student learning at LBCC.

In the last 18 months, we have been doing lots of work on student learning outcomes (SLOs)--course-level SLOs, program-level SLOs, and college-level GEOs (General Education Outcomes). The focus should be on the courses and developing assessment plans and tools for them. Then address the instructional program(s) that are the responsibility of your department. There is a GEO Work Group who will be addressing these outcomes and Plan A beginning this semester. We have a comprehensive approach that has begun with vigor. But it is the sustained effort of the community of professionals here at LBCC that will make this work.

In the past months, I have visited many departments and have answered questions about SLOs, assessment plans, and assessment tools. The goal is to get all course assessment plans emailed in to slo@lbcc.edu by the middle of May. Quite a few departments and programs have already met this deadline and goal.

Congratulations to:
Speech Department; Library Program; Associate Degree Nursing Department; Administration of Justice program; Photography program; Economics courses; Vocational Nursing Department; Food & Nutrition program; Dance program; Film program; Academic Support & Development Department; Geography courses; Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Department; Learning & Academic Resources Department; Physical Education Department; Human Services program; Aviation Maintenance Department; Sheet Metal program; LAC/PCC Multidisciplinary Success Center; Math Success Center and the Writing and Reading Success Center.

The college has a clerk assigned to the ASLO project who has been uploading all course assessment plans into TracDat (database for outcomes and program review) and will be doing the same for program assessment plans. However, assessment plans must be emailed in quickly because of the limited budget for this position. The uploading of the plans is truly clerical work and taking advantage of this opportunity will pay dividends back to you in the near and long term. There are assessment plan templates on the Outcomes Assessment website for both course and program. Use those templates and please don’t delete the embedded prompts. Our IT Department is working with the clerk to automate the uploading process (thank you Komal) to increase efficiency. Your use of the plan templates is another way your assistance is greatly appreciated. Again, email assessment plans in to slo@lbcc.edu and identify the course or program in the subject line. Thank you to the many faculty who have contributed to this important beginning.

If your department needs help, please contact me at kanderson@lbcc.edu so that I can make time to visit. I can come to a department meeting, work with small groups, or one-on-one with any faculty member.
The LBCC Foundation, in conjunction with the ASLO Subcommittee, has established 3 different grants to honor and award those departments that are diligent in meeting SLO deadlines. The first grant was awarded to the department that completed all assessment plans first. **CONGRATULATIONS to the **Vocational Nursing **Department**! They will receive $250 for their instructional supplies and materials budget! **Stay tuned for more Foundation Grant Awards as we go forward with the ASLO process.**

**SERVICE UNIT OUTCOMES, Continued**

In early February, Craig Hendricks (ASLO Subcommittee Member) and Edith Kahrs (ASLO Subcommittee Student Representative) surveyed 41 course syllabi from 11 departments representing 5 of the schools (divisions) at LBCC. They found that only 6 of the 41 syllabi did not have SLOs and those represented mostly adjunct faculty. Several of the surveyed syllabi had directions for students to go to a WEB page and access the SLOs.

**Way to go, faculty!**

Service Unit Outcomes are developed as part of the college’s Program Review process. Student Support Services had been developing SLOs and SUOs over several semesters and refined these, along with their assessment plans, in fall 2009. All administrative units developed their SUOs and assessment plans last summer. Student Support Services and administrative units uploaded their SUOs and corresponding assessment plans into TracDat, the college’s web-based software that has been designed and customized to help us facilitate, document and manage both products, and/or processes which maintain the college and are essential to its operation. They are not directly related to student learning, but they support activities which ultimately lead to student learning.

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The Way We Are

By Karen Kane, ASLO Subcommittee Member

In the last 20+ years it seems that we have been forced to incorporate acronyms into our cultural experience that connote anger, horror, disaster, fear, uncertainty and dread. There’s AIDS, 911, 9/11, Y2K; H1N1, and now, in the world of academia…ASLO. While certainly ASLO does not carry the gravity that some of the above mentioned acronyms do, I dare say that the everyday incorporation of this acronym into our daily academic lives has been met with the same type of dread, horror, anger, fear and uncertainty. As with anything new, that isn’t our idea, we are suspicious and reluctant to acceptance. And while we are told that “this is a faculty driven process” I would like to go on record as saying that I have felt like something akin to a disastrous avalanche of work being tossed my way, rather than me—a faculty member—actually being in that “driver’s seat!” And so, like most of you, I have been unhappy about this (I mean seriously, if anyone knows someone on campus REALLY excited about this process, will you forward their name? They would deserve a special article in this newsletter or something!) Of course, as educators, we have always had objectives and outcomes, and assessed and given grades. We know that outcomes based education has been educational jargon for quite some time. But, now, someone or something is making us get quite serious about it. And we don’t like it, because most of us hold a set of beliefs that make the whole topic of learning outcomes assessment seem boring, useless, or both. Meanwhile, amidst my negativity and reluctance, deadlines were looming and I had to take action.

After much apprehension and wringing of hands (maybe a little gnashing of teeth) I sat down and committed to paper, course outcomes. And then I sat with colleagues to discuss assessments for these outcomes. And I watched as colleagues got enthused (mildly) with the sharing of ideas. I watched as people began to smile at the thought of collaboration. I also want to admit that I watched and listened to the complaints of extra work, to the fear of the loss of academic freedom, of the fear of outcomes based evaluations, and the grumbling about “who is really making us do this anyway?” And yet, as we plugged away at those incessant deadlines, I started to see and feel a slow groundswell of response. I watched as people started developing tools that could be shared, and I watched as people started to think that this sharing of ideas and working together, was actually a benefit, and even, shall I dare say … fun. The fear of the loss of academic freedom turned into the joy of sharing responsibility with other professionals, and, OK, OK, OK … I know … I’m getting carried away. Perhaps I saw a glimmer of this that made me realize, this process can be something that elevates our teaching and validates what we do in a real way; an opportunity to think seriously about what students should know, value and do; to refocus our attention on things that really matter in our research and in our service. After all, we are the most proficient practitioners of learning outcomes assessment. We are the ones who develop new methods. We are the designers and developers of curricula, courses, and the core of higher education itself. Knowing that we all need to hear about success, a portion of this newsletter will be dedicated to outlining, documenting and celebrating our efforts as we go forward. Many departments and programs already have great successes to share, and this newsletter will definitely be a place to shout those accomplishments to the masses! And while we talk success, I am also a proponent for advertising our frustrations, our stumbles and our attempts to “muddle through.” Because this is a “faculty driven process” I expect us to be honest, and real, and dedicated. I expect us to expect the best, be diligent in our efforts, and be real about our results. I expect that we will grumble, but I also expect that through our grumbling, we will begin to bond and regain that collegiality that so many of us (who have been here forever!) know we’ve lost. Perhaps the sharing of ideas and the outcomes of our assessments, will result in us eating lunch together again, getting together to laugh over our attempts, feeling happy to celebrate our accomplishments with colleagues within our departments, and departments college wide. I believe that as we collaborate and corroborate, we will show that we deliver amazing results with minimal resources to the most academically diverse student population in higher education. As we realize that what we do each day produces data that matters, data that changes and shapes our community, we will begin to feel that we ARE in the driver’s seat of this faculty driven process! We are the front line of this institution, and while initially we might stumble and muddle, we will persevere and succeed at this, because we are educators, and … that is the way we are.
Why We, the Faculty, Need to Own and Embrace Student Learning Outcomes: A Cautionary History and Political Lesson

Lesley Kawaguchi, Chair, ASCCC Accreditation

Reprinted from the Academic Senate Rostrum, Dec. 2008

A recent letter from the president of the California Federation of Teachers has asked the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) to amend two standards, stating ACCJC’s apparent intrusion into collective bargaining in Standard III.A.1.c. and into academic freedom regarding syllabi in Standard II.A.6 (see http://www.cft.org/index.php?page=287&Itemid=57). As was evident at several meetings and breakouts at the Fall Plenary 2008, this letter again brought to the forefront the voices of those who oppose student learning outcomes (SLOs). Anger and/or frustration directed toward ACCJC also became apparent, perhaps fueled by so many colleges now facing sanction. Finally, some expressed their opinion that a change in the leadership in Washington D.C. will mean a relaxation of the federal demands for accountability in education, despite President-elect Obama’s stated support for No Child Left Behind and other accountability measures. Many are not aware that National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), the federal committee that approves college accrediting bodies, has placed the charge of ensuring that SLOs are defined and assessed in the hands of the regional accrediting agencies. This was a blow to the Secretary of Education who wanted the federal government to define the accountability measures and directly impose them on all institutions of higher learning, including writing outcomes, assessing all classes and all students, and putting the information into a national database, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The six regional accrediting bodies in the U.S., including ACCJC, successfully ensured that they were the ones to oversee student learning outcomes and assessment, instead. Their standards clearly charge us, as faculty experts, with the responsibility for writing the outcomes and assessing them. Yet some faculty believe that the upcoming change in administration bodes well for altering this charge, despite the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act. They seem equally unaware that though the accrediting agencies were successful in defeating the aims of the Secretary of Education, congressional leaders from both sides of the house told them that they had only five years to clearly prove that they, and the faculty they were depending upon, could assess SLOs and did not need the government to do it instead. If the accrediting agencies are not successful, the kinds of changes the Secretary of Education wanted will come to pass when the Higher Education Act comes up for renewal in 2013. This is where the cautionary history and political lesson enters. My field, history, faced a major battle in the 1990s over the K-12 National History Standards that peaked during the Clinton administration. In 1992, the National Endowment for the Humanities, under Lynne Cheney, and the Department of Education asked the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to write the K-12 U.S. and World History Standards. For almost three years, the National Center for History held meetings with elementary, middle school, and high school teacher task forces, academic historians, school administrators, and other history educators to devise the Standards. A national council, which included people appointed by Cheney, approved the standards. However, in October, 1994, Lynne Cheney attacked the standards in a Wall Street Journal article titled “The End of History,” because she disagreed with the emphasis and direction that K-12 history teachers, academic historians, and others had devised. Her disdain was so vociferous that the Senate voted 99-1 in a non-binding resolution to support her call to defund the project. In short, the standards (http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/) developed by the experts in the field and the opinions of Lynne Cheney http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/cheney.htm clashed, creating a huge controversy that spilled into the Clinton administration (albeit with a Republican Congress). Even Richard Riley, Clinton’s Secretary of Education, decried the new standards. When the federal government has the ultimate power to determine standards, when faculty are not considered the experts, the true value of education and academic freedom are at stake. The standards developed and controlled by faculty discipline experts are the only way to ensure academic freedom and educational standards that are not politically motivated and controlled. When faculty are in charge of developing SLOs they are free from the inaccuracies and skewed political pandering
that occurs when the federal government makes the curricular decisions. Unlike the case of the history standards, which are national, we have been given the opportunity to establish our own locally-defined outcomes as part of our professional and academic duties. We define what we want our students to be able to do when they leave our classes. Do we need to have these in our syllabi? This is a local decision, though the language for Standard II says that learning objectives as defined in our Course Outlines of Record (COR) should be in our syllabi. Aren’t our course objectives, as established in our CORs, our contract with our students? Don’t we ensure that any student taking any section of a particular course will have the same course objectives despite different instructors, different methods and modes of teaching, and different assignments designed to assess students’ work? Do we need to place SLOs in our Course Outlines of Record or have them as addenda? This again is a local decision. As public institutions, the SLOs need to be available for members of the public, including our students, but each having seen a fairly recent attempt to undo standards created by the experts in the field, any attempts to have standards imposed by the Department of Education or any other external body would be the ultimate undermining of academic freedom. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act has provided faculty with the opportunity to define our own student learning outcomes. Each of the 110 California community colleges has its unique culture. Even on the 110 campuses, departments and disciplines have their own culture. This is why it is essential that we engage our colleagues in discussions that result in establishing and assessing SLOs.

Although we can hope that a new administration and a new Secretary of Education will not impose standards with the same fervor, experts at all level of higher education warn that political party changes will not diminish this growing demand for accountability and the threat of politicians determining what we teach (see, for example, the October and November 2008 articles by Judith S. Eaton, President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation at http://www.chea.org/index. In the wake of the financial collapse that we are currently experiencing, accountability measures will likely only get stronger, not weaker. And as the faculty members with the expertise, we need to be the ones defining them. This will require a pro-active posture, not a dismissive or antagonistic one.

Assessments need to be: Manageable, Measureable, Meaningful

DID YOU KNOW?

- ASLO course assessment plan submission deadline is FRIDAY, MAY 14TH!
- ASLO Subcommittee Members are available to go to your department or group meetings to answer questions and assist with assessment plans.
- ASLO workshops will be held on FLEX Day- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24TH!
  - 10:30 a.m. – Rubric Workshop
  - 1:30 p.m. – Program SLOs
  - 3:30 p.m. – Rubric Workshop
- Sample rubrics and assessment plans are on the ASLO website.

Remember …

We’re all in this together!!