Introduction

What is the task of education? The answer likely depends on who you ask, and whether or not you’re talking about pre-school, primary education, secondary education, or higher education. Even when the parameters are narrowed down to, say, higher education, answers may vary according to classifications like GE, CTE programs, or discipline training in the upper divisions. One answer, arguably platitudinous and too general to offer real traction into the relevant concepts, is to support students working toward their educational goals. Another answer, arguably too knee-jerk and narrow to comprehensively cover what education is meant to achieve, is to help students get good jobs and contribute to a prosperous economy.

The real task of education is to facilitate intellectual transformation and generate graduates prepared to participate meaningfully in their relationships. Intellectual transformation and meaningful participation in relationships require a prodigious amount of work from all parties involved in the educational experience.

Focusing one’s attention on, and using empirical evidence to assist in the improvement of that learning, is an element of this experience. We might liken the process of student learning to the body’s metabolic rate, which adjusts in minute ways to accommodate, e.g., increases and decreases in stress. Just as a blood test only provides a snapshot of the hormones involved in metabolism, so also SLOs provide one facet of the educational experience — both at the course and program levels.

Student learning is the process of transformation, and faculty dialogue and planning based on how best to help students realize their own transformation is the aim of student learning outcomes development, assessment, and revision. Although it would be nice to think that faculty discuss their courses among their departmental colleagues and across the curriculum, the fact is, not everyone does. Every institution should accommodate and promote the practice of faculty connecting with each other, with staff, with administrators, and with students to generate new ideas and solidify the investment in a culture of inquiry.

History

Depending on the standpoint from which outcomes are viewed, accreditation and outcomes are either inseparable or not. Outcomes are woven into the fabric of multiple accreditation standards, so from that standpoint, they are inseparable from the accreditation process. Having said that, however, and despite the fact that the so-called outcomes movement was successful in its efforts to have outcomes codified in accreditation standards, the movement itself offers nothing original to the philosophy of education. In other words, to the extent that a component of thoughtful teaching has always included monitoring learning, instructors have paid attention to outcomes,
all the while understanding that they are just a *component* of assiduous attention to the educational process.

Although the ACCJC released new standards — which included copious sub-sections on SLOs — in 2002, most of the region’s community colleges did not proactively address them. There was not only a lot of confusion about what SLOs were, but also (and likely partly as a result of the confusion) much resistance and outright rejection. The ACCJC subsequently provided a rubric for evaluating an institution’s level of achievement on SLOs and related items, e.g., institutional planning, as well as deadlines for meeting each level. “Proficiency,” the characteristics of which are articulated below, under ACCJC Proficiency, was to be achieved by 2012. So, when the college prepared its 2007 report, there was still little pressure to have specific institutional commitments to SLOs. The college acted accordingly, largely because a considerable number of faculty were not impressed with or were otherwise confused by the background from which the SLO movement emerged, the concept of SLOs as something different from, e.g., grades, and the process of developing and assessing SLOs, let alone acting on the results.

Prior to 2011, little progress was made on developing, assessing, and reporting on outcomes across the institution, although there were some faculty who had been doing similar work for a number of years already, and some faculty who actively embraced the SLO movement as a tool for understanding student learning achievement. There were also departments that had committed to, and completed full cycles of outcomes assessment and course or program improvement plans based on assessment results.¹

This is not to say that there was no significant work begun, in progress, or completed between 2002 and 2011. Beginning in 2002, and continuing through 2012, outcomes team members and external experts conducted numerous SLO workshops covering topics ranging from basic SLO concepts through authentic assessment.

In academic year 2006-2007, department chairs were asked to submit narrative reports on SLOs per course. Each document was collected and housed by Senate-appointed SLO “coaches.” In 2009, the coaches worked with faculty to develop more streamlined reporting processes. Two new reporting forms were developed and distributed to faculty. Again, the coaches collected completed forms, either hard or e-copies.

During this time, SLOs began appearing on the Course Outline of Record (COR) in Section II under the Course Objectives in ECD. In collaboration with the Curriculum Chair, Elizabeth Atondo, the outcomes team decided to remove that section from the COR and to create an SLO Addendum instead. This way, course SLOs could be changed or updated without triggering an update for the entire course through ECD.

¹ Computer Applications and Office Technologies, Child Development, Math, and Speech are among those departments that, as far back as 2007-2008 had worked toward completing assessment cycles.
The SLO addendums went through a tech review process and were individually reviewed and approved by the Outcomes Coordinator, Kirsten Thorne. As an addendum document, the campus researcher, Carol Kozeracki, also generated a master list of SLOs by course.

By 2009-2010, the outcomes team intensified its focus on courses for which no SLOs were written. The outcomes team also worked in a variety of ways to educate all faculty on authentic assessment and embedded assessment. Another consideration in 2009-2010 was the increase in new faculty who, as such, had not participated in early outcomes workshops in 2002-2005.

Substantial progress toward ACCJC-mandated (and defined) proficiency coincided with administrative support for centralizing outcomes in an online database, streamlining reporting processes, and making stronger links between outcomes results and institutional planning. The administration, supported by Senate leadership, stressed the idea that accreditation efforts would falter without significant progress on SLOs, and worked with the Academic Senate and department chairpersons to bring the college up to ACCJC-mandated proficiency.

**Status**

**Mechanisms**

Various iterations of Outcomes Coaches (faculty members: Barbara Anderson, Mary Chavarria, Jill Binsley, Monique Dobbertin, Jenn Rosenberg, Kirsten Thorne, and Joleen Voss-Rodriguez) had long advocated creating or procuring an electronic repository and system for reporting outcomes assessment results. When Anna Davies came to the college as the vice president of academic affairs, and began attending Outcomes Team meetings, the group began planning such a mechanism in earnest. In Spring 2011, research dean, Carol Kozeracki began working with Webmaster, Carlos Guzman, on building an outcomes database. The goal was to have a workable electronic system in place for the Fall 2011 assessment cycle.

The database went live in Fall 2011. Faculty Accreditation, Outcomes, and Assessment Coordinator, Mia Wood, served as the liaison between the groups, and subsequently worked with Carlos and student-worker, Jessica Scott, to monitor outcomes reporting. Running reports to conduct that monitoring fell to Carlos, Jessica, and Mia when Carol Kozeracki transferred to an academic dean position at East LA College, and research analyst, Kate Astor, went on maternity leave. Since then, more Pierce faculty have collaborated with Carlos and Jessica (through Mia and more recently, the College Outcomes Committee) to improve its functionality.

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2 See p. 4 below.
By early Spring 2013, the college reported 100% reporting on SLOs. In addition, the database had been expanded to include Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs), the latter of which also serve as the college’s Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs).

Outcomes Reporting

After the ACCJC released new standards in 2002, the college began grappling with Student Learning Outcomes — the concept and the movement. SLO Coaches attended various conferences and District meetings, and worked with campus faculty on developing SLOs and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). Assessing SLOs (one or more per course) began in earnest in the 2007-2008 academic year. Meanwhile, coaches continued to work with faculty on the shift from conducting so-called teaching-centered to learning-centered courses.

As the 2012-2013 ACCJC-mandated SLO proficiency deadline loomed, the college shifted its approach to SLOs in several ways. First, the Faculty Accreditation Coordinator took on the SLO Coordinator mantle and attending duties. This allowed for a concentration of focus on SLO reporting toward accreditation demands. At the same time, the Academic Senate approved Outcomes Team policies on SLO and PLO assessment and reporting. Combined with the new database, which provided the college with a centralized repository for outcomes reporting, and completed course and program assessment plans and course-to-PLO-mapping documents, harnessed an unusually and historically unwieldy process of documenting SLO and PLO assessment and reporting. With hundreds of active courses and hundreds more sections of those courses offered each term, and with close to 1,000 full- and part-time faculty conducting those sections, monitoring SLO assessment and collecting SLO reports was left to a few individuals, which led to a silo effect. Moreover, although reports were supposed to be housed in the research office, there was no mechanized way to keep track of them; all the work was done manually.

By Spring of 2013, not only did all courses offered within the past several years have documented SLOs, but there were also assessment plans in place (currently housed in the Faculty Accreditation Coordinator and department chair offices). In addition, course reports and PLO reports were documented and housed in the database.

ACCJC Proficiency

3 There were caveats on this figure, e.g., active courses that hadn’t been offered within the past assessment cycle and courses that were removed from the schedule pending updating or to be archived. The completed SLO report to the ACCJC can be found on the College Outcomes Committee page.

4 The Curriculum Committee undertook attaching SLO addenda to all CORs. In this way, there was not only a process in place to ensure that SLOs were attached to up-to-date CORs, but also were centrally housed and accessible to anyone who wanted to view them. In addition, updates to SLOs in the database followed a uniform and coherent process, so that changes could not be made to SLOs without departmental approval. Consequently, faculty conducting a given course know and approve of the stated SLOs.

The ACCJC provided a rubric that outlines what constitutes SLO proficiency:

- Student learning outcomes and authentic assessments are in place for courses, programs, support services, certificates and degrees.
- There is widespread institutional dialogue about the results of assessment and identification of gaps.
- Decision-making includes dialogue on the results of assessment and is purposefully directed toward aligning institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning.
- Appropriate resources continue to be allocated and fine-tuned.
- Comprehensive assessment reports exist and are completed and updated 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.

The college asserted in its 2013 annual SLO report to the ACCJC that it meets the standard for proficiency. The college has SLOs and assessments in place. There is some question about whether or not assessments are authentic. In an effort to avoid being prescriptive (however much, by definition, standards are themselves prescriptive, as is the SLO movement), the ACCJC does not provide a definition of “authentic.” The recommendation we received from the visiting team, which is not official, is that the college pursue comprehensive authenticity.

Pierce Assessment Day (PAD) is a significant twice-yearly event. It is one of the institution’s formal commitments to widespread dialogue and reflection about outcomes and assessment. There are also cross-disciplinary discussions of the college’s GE program by way of its GELO review. In 2011-2012, all six GELOs were reviewed. (The next steps on this process will be outlined below.) Historically, the Outcomes Team also hosted multiple SLO Salons every summer since at least 2006. These were opportunities for any faculty member to receive help from coaches on topics ranging from developing SLOs to revising assessments and reporting on results. In addition, coaches were available throughout the academic year to assist colleagues working on SLO and PLO-related topics and activities.

The Academic Senate ratified the College Outcomes Committee at the end of the Fall 2012 term. Committee members were assembled for one meeting that December. Goals were developed and approved. Given that the college’s attention was focused on the impending site visit in March 2013, COC members’ efforts were concentrated on supporting outcomes work.

At present, the College Outcomes Committee is populated by faculty, staff, and administrators. The committee guides and supports outcomes work across the campus – academic, student services, and administrative learning outcomes. Among the committees goals are: re-evaluation
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Prepared by Mia Wood, Faculty Accreditation and Outcomes Coordinator
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of GELOs assessment results and campus-wide dialogue about those results; integration of academic, student services, and administrative services outcomes with institutional planning; building upon the database’s capacities for more robust data sets.

The successful accreditation site visit exit report given by the 2013 visiting team included a recommendation to the college to focus on “authentic assessment” in its efforts toward continuous, sustainable improvement of student learning. Immediately thereafter, the College Outcomes Committee, Accreditation, Outcomes, and Assessment Coordinator, Vice President of Academic Affairs, President, and members of the Academic Senate Executive Committee began discussing the recommendation and how to move toward successfully acting on it.

Directions

Mechanism

• The database will be expanded to include Student Services and Administrative Services Area Outcomes (SAOs) reports. At present, the most recent set of assessments are housed on the College Outcomes Committee page.

• The database will be improved for security.

• The database will be expanded to include assessment cycle plans. (Course-to-PLO mapping is already in place, so there is no current need to alter that part of the assessment apparatus.)

• The Webmaster will work with a COC tech liaison, who will have access to various features of the database, from running reports to revising SLOs and PLOs according to updated addenda and adjustments in PLO assessment plans and maps. This liaison should be the college’s research analyst, who will be the VP of Academic Affairs designee.

• Assessment plans and mapping documents should be housed in the research office, as should hard copies of all SAOs.

Authentic Assessment

• The visiting team made a recommendation about authentic assessment. There is currently some discussion about what that means, and this will continue and intensify as the College Outcomes Committee defines “authenticity” (in consultation with the Academic Senate, the VP of Academic Affairs, Departmental Council, and the ASCCC document on SLO assessment).

  o It is imperative that the college undertake stipulating a definition and applying it to the evaluation of reports. A first step toward application to all course reports is the annual review of the GELOs. In 2011-21012, the Outcomes Team assembled groups to take samplings of reports, review them, and then collaborate on a GELO report for each of the six Gen Ed outcomes. Comments were made about how thorough course reports were, and so whether or not a given report aided the evaluation of the GELO under review. Aside from posting the GELO report, however, no further action was
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taken. The COC should review all six GELOs for the 2012-2013 academic year in early Fall 2013, and then report widely on the results of that effort. Reporting will include directed feedback on those course reports which do not aid in the GELO evaluation.

- In addition, the COC, in conjunction with the EPC, should impress upon department chairs the link between outcomes results and resource requests. At present, the Annual Plan form is replete with references and prompts involving student learning outcomes, but the college needs to improve linking outcomes results with planning.

College Outcomes Committee and Faculty Leadership on Outcomes

By ACCJC mandate, outcomes work is faculty driven. At the same time, student service and administrative service area outcomes (SAOs) exist, are assessed, results are reported, and action plans based on those results are constructed. The college’s response to the integration of outcomes across the institution was to inaugurate a College Outcomes Committee (COC).

The College Outcomes Committee is a sub-committee of the Educational Planning Committee (EPC), which in turn is a standing committee of the Academic Senate. The charter mandates representatives from the four academic areas of the college (Cara Gillis, Sheryl Nomelli, Margarita Pillado, and Ken Sharpe), as well as the Faculty Accreditation Coordinator (Mia Wood), a Senate member (Dale Fields), and designees from Academic Affairs (Ray Lim), Student Services, and Administrative Services. As of April 2013, the committee lacks a Student Services rep, since Phyllis Braxton transferred to West LA College. The committee did secure a designee from Administrative Services (Larry Kraus) in April 2013, who began attending meetings in May.

Just as the committee is getting off the ground, it has to undertake addressing the visiting team’s recommendation, making progress or completing its self-mandated goals, and preparing for a year’s worth of intensive work in preparation for the next Self-Evaluation report and site visit in 2015. To that end, the Academic Senate Exec is preparing to disconnect the accreditation and SLO coordinator positions, and revise the duties of each accordingly.

The College Outcomes Committee has the opportunity to, among other things, influence the dialogue on campus, especially around General Education. One of the tools we have in support of this effort is the current CSUN/Pierce Path project. We will need to firm up our work on demonstrating linkages between Pierce Path courses and the CSUN Path Project. The clearer we are about our institutional teaching and learning commitments, the stronger we will be in all our efforts to elevate the work we do. To that end, the committee will work with EPC on how to

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6 The COC charter can be found both on the College Outcomes Committee page and the college’s Academic Senate site.

7 Although the ACCJC has given the college no formal notification of this cycle change, the word from the District is that it will happen.
strengthen the existing links between SLO results in annual plans and resource requests, and between longitudinal outcomes studies and program review.

Institutional Assessment Plan and Implementation

In order for the directions to be successfully undertaken, the college needs to ensure the appropriate resources are provided. The major resource required is time, which in this case is equivalent to funding. The next step in the process is to write an institutional assessment plan that lays out the guiding principles, roles, responsibilities, and timeline for institution-wide assessment — i.e., integrated assessment — that solidly places the college on the continuous quality improvement path. This plan will capitalize on the work already accomplished, and structures and processes already in place, but it is imperative that the Outcomes and Assessment Coordinator have the requisite time to devote to a rather major coordination undertaking – faculty, staff, students, administrators across courses, programs, offices, departments, and committees; assessment cycles for all academic, student services, and administrative services areas; and implementation, interpretation, and dissemination of all outcomes and outcomes-related assessments, reports, and planning items.