

Northern California SLO-Net Conference Report

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Merritt College

Participants:

Marcy Alancraig	Cabrillo College	maalancr@cabrillo.edu
Hilary Altman	Merritt College	haltman@peralta.edu
Cynthia Alvorado	Merritt College	calvorado@peralta.edu
Elmer Bugg	Merritt College	ebugg@peratla.edu
Tracy Burt	City College of San Francisco	Tracy.burtccsf@gmail.com
Vina Cera	Laney College	vcera@peralta.edu
Scott Crosier	Consumnes River College	crosieS@crc.losrios.edu
John Dotta	Napa Valley College	jdotta@napavalley.edu
Ann Elliott	Merritt College	aelliott@peralta.edu
Cheli Fossum	Laney College	mfossum@peralta.edu
Mireille Giovanola	Chabot College	mgiovanola@chabotcollege.edu
Ken Grace	Chabot College	kgrace@chabotcollege.edu
Doris Hankins	Merritt College	dhankins@peralta.edu
Jane Hemmerling	Sierra College	jhemmerling@sierracollege.edu
Tina Inzerilla	Las Positas College	tinzerilla@laspositascollege.edu
Eileen Kerr	Modesto Junior College	kerre@yosemite.edu
Angela Khoo	Merritt College	akhoo@peralta.edu
Linda Legaspi	City College of San Francisco	elegaspi@ccsf.edu
Lorelei Leung	City College of San Francisco	lleung@ccsf.edu
Scarlett Liu	City College of San Francisco	scarlett.liu@mail.ccsf.edu
Christy Magnani	Sierra College	cmagnani1@sierracollege.edu
David Mitchell	Laney College	dmitchell@peralta.edu
Patrick Mitchell	Merced College	Patrick.mitchell@mccd.edu
A'kilah Moore	Los Medanos College	AMoore@losmedanos.edu
Yvonne Morrow-Reid	College of Alameda	ymorrowreid@peralta.edu
Anne O'Donnell	Santa Rosa JC	aodonnell@santarosa.edu
Bob Pacheco	Mira Costa College	rpacheco@miracosta.edu
Rebecca Perlroth	Santa Rosa JC	rperlroth@santarosa.edu
Jennifer Shanoski	Merritt College	jshanoski@peralta.edu
Alejandria Tomas	Berkeley City College	atomas@peralta.edu
Christine Trolinger	Butte College	trolingerch@butte.edu
Karen Wong	Skyline College	wongk@smccd.edu

At this conference, we spent a significant amount of our time working in small groups to discuss assessment at our colleges. Our goal was to work together to overcome challenges and share good ideas for the benefit of all of us. The roundtable discussions were focused on the following topics.

- Topic: Professional Development
 - What are some effective tools for assisting new faculty/staff with assessment?
 - What challenges have you encountered with professional development for assessment?

- Topic: Institutional Practices
 - What are some examples of changes that have occurred beyond the classroom as a result of SLO assessment? For example, has your college incorporated assessment results into budgeting and planning?
 - What are some challenges at your college associated with integrating assessment into various processes?

- Topic: Embracing SLOs in the Classroom
 - How do you incorporate SLOs in your classroom on a regular basis to ensure that students are aware of them?
 - What obstacles have you encountered in regards to the incorporation of SLOs in classroom activities?

- Topic: Faculty Involvement
 - Do you have any effective strategies for persuading faculty to get involved in assessment? How do you organize college-wide dialogue about assessment?
 - What are the big roadblocks to faculty buy-in?

- Topic: Assessment Tools
 - Share best practices from your college for the assessment of a course, a program, *and* an institutional learning outcome.
 - What is the biggest challenge that you face in ensuring authentic assessment is occurring at your college?

What follows are notes taken at each of the roundtables. Some of the groups kept very close to the assigned topics/questions while others move from one important topic to another. The notes are organized into two groups: What works? and Challenges.

Roundtable: Institutional Practices

What works?

Ways that assessment has impacted courses/programs/institutions:

- At Cabrillo College a new policy on plagiarism was developed through the assessment of Personal Responsibility. Two workshops called “Got Cheaters?” were held on Professional Development Days to establish an honor code.
- At Skyline College the Disabled Students Program found that students were not aware of services and so prepared a number of digital support tools such as YouTube videos and online modules.
- It might be useful to have a cross-discipline dialogue to identify college needs. There needs to be collegiality in order to identify things like the need for more librarians or computer labs (allocations in a department different from the one doing the assessment). Maybe each department could be charged with identifying a need from one other department; this could be embedded into their yearly report(s) or it could be part of program review: “Are there other services or areas or positions that are necessary to support your program?”
- At CCSF a general education workgroup was assembled for an area and a rubric was developed to assess a particular outcome. They analyzed the data and prepared a report that was submitted to the college community. Feedback was provided from a variety of areas and a number of interesting things were identified such as the connection between success rates and prerequisites.
- At CCSF an ILO assessment of critical thinking was done but was not standardized. Next time, more examples of rubrics/assessment will be provided.

Program Review practices:

- At Skyline College, Program Review asks for a summary of central findings.
- At Cabrillo College, the assessment reporting form has been changed to focus on a budget impact; it also asks about previous changes and how those changes impacted the course/program/service.
- At Chabot College there is a closing the loop form that ties assessment to budget. There is no penalty for doing a bad job, but it is very helpful if you do well. Year 1 asks you to plan for the three year cycle, year 2 asks you to reflect on what’s been done so far, and year 3 asks you to reflect on the entire cycle.
- At Butte College there is an SLO report that is due each January along with a Unit Plan Report. While the two reports are linked, not all departments make the connection. The timing of the reports is bad.
- Assessment questions need to be meaningful and clear to all participants. “What did you learn about assessment?” is too vague and isn’t useful.

Ways that colleges encourage participation:

- At Skyline there are mandatory monthly department meetings where assessment is discussed.
- At Modesto Jr. College all deans are serving on the SLO committee and send reminders to people asking about the completion of assessment.

- At Merced College there are cohort assessment trainers. Each trainer gets 1 unit of release time and is responsible for overseeing 40 courses.
- Having a representative from each division/department was suggested. These representatives could talk to their constituencies to ensure that everyone knows what needs to be done and how to do it.
- At Merritt College budgets are being cut next year. Any additional funds will need to be supported by assessment work.
- At Laney College an assessment question was included in the faculty prioritization (hiring) process.
- At Merced College all requests for resources must be supported with assessment data. Deans rank requests then the requests go to the master planning committee.

Challenges:

- Processes aren't integrated so student services, instruction, and administration all work separately.
- Time needs to be allocated for discussion of assessment.
- Quality data management is required. User-friendly interfaces need to be purchased and faculty/staff need adequate training.
- Administration needs to be supportive of those in charge of the process. There needs to be adequate resources allocated to support staff, stipends, and training as well as a positive attitude about the work and its impact on the college.
- There need to be real consequences for not getting assessment work completed.

Roundtable: Embracing SLOs in the Classroom

What works?

- Include learning outcomes in all new student orientations.
- Show students how assessment has impacted different courses and different instructors.
- Include SLOs on all syllabi.
 - o At Cabrillo College one instructor has a syllabus reading assignment on the first day of class.
- How do we measure student awareness? Are we asking students if they know about SLOs?
 - o Ask students at the beginning and end of the semester: "On a scale of 1-5 how familiar are you with SLOs?"
 - o Put questions about what an SLO is on an exam as an extra credit question.
- Provide tools that allow students to connect assignments with particular SLOs or state explicitly which SLO is being assessed at a given time.
 - o Provide links between what the course expectations are and how those fit together with the expectations in the workforce or at a university.
- SLOs can be used to provide meaning to students they answer the questions: Why am I here? What will I learn?
- In grading a final project one could identify where different tools were utilized (different SLOs were focused on) and how they were met or not.
- Have students utilize your rubric to grade themselves then have the instructor grade them and compare the two.
- Put the SLOs on the wall of the classroom every day just like the college mission is up on the walls. Make it visible.

Challenges:

- Some SLOs are so broad that they are meaningless and the whole process becomes busy work.
- Some faculty are not willing to do this work.
- There are not sufficient resources (personnel and software) provided for SLO work.

Rountable: Professional Development

What works?

Ideas for professional development workshops:

- SLO 101 Workshops
- Include assessment in the orientation
- One-on-one training for software
- At CCSF there are weekly training sessions with reminders sent on a weekly basis. Assessments are done in Microsoft Word and uploaded to the CCSF website.
- At Los Medanos College there is a teaching and learning committee and adjunct instructors are paid for assessing courses.
- Cabrillo College has an SLO handbook that is available online.
- At Sierra College, adjunct faculty are paid to attend Professional Development Activities where they are asked to discuss what they do in the classroom.

Ideas for encouraging more participation throughout the year:

- Train department chairs and encourage them to be champions for the process.
- Tie SLO assessment into accreditation and student success.
- Provide mentors for new faculty for their first two years.
- Use SLO committee funds to pay assessment mentors to work with new faculty.
- Use assessment results as a teaching portfolio that shows the development of a course over the years. Focus on the positive aspects of assessment and how it improves teaching.
- Form an SLO committee with participants from all departments.
- Provide a list of best practices and case studies online in a depository.
- Assessment coordinators (or designees) can attend department/division meetings and discuss assessment.

Challenges:

- Faculty members see assessment as a “waste of time” and separate from real teaching.
- There is a gap between content experts and teachers. Styles, pedagogy, lesson plans differ for different faculty members.
- Assessment is not a priority so it gets done at the end of the semester when it is rushed and less meaningful.
- There are issues regarding trust. Faculty want to be assured of academic freedom and that no harm will come from the results of their assessments.

Roundtable: Faculty Involvement

What works?

- Faculty members bring their syllabi and assignments to a workshop. The SLOs and assignments are matched so that faculty can see that they are already doing the work.
- Part-time faculty must be compensated for their work.
- Include assessment work in the union contract for full time faculty.
- Designate a special day for assessment. For example, the first Friday of the semester get together to work on SLO assessment plans.
- Increase the number of Professional Development Days each year with assessment work as the focus of at least one day per semester.
- Change the culture of the college – designate one day a week as a “work day” when faculty members are available to come and work together.
- Bring campus leaders together to strategize about SLO assessment.
- Talk to individuals one-on-one to determine why assessment isn’t getting completed.
- Provide rewards to those who complete assessment work: breakfast with the president, gift cards, resource allocations, etc.
- Create an assessment schedule for each department so that it is clear what needs to be done.
- Have an assessment day twice a year. Pay everyone \$100 to attend and complete the work at that time as a group.

Challenges:

- There is a negative perception of ACCJC and assessment seems like a directive that might change in the future.
- There is a perception that SLOs limit what can be taught in the classroom.
- The amount of work seems intimidating and time consuming.
- Faculty are not always interested in collaboration.
- The technology is a stumbling block to completing the work.
- Administrator and college leader buy-in is a challenge.
- Faculty members are not aware of what, how, and why with regards to assessment.
- There are no consequences associated with not getting this work done.

Roundtable: Assessment Tools

What Works?

- At Santa Rosa Junior College forms are provided for faculty to organize their assessment work. A final project/exam is used to assess all outcomes.
- Sierra College has identified levels for their SLO work: mastery, proficient, and unsatisfactory. They use these levels to identify where students should be with a particular SLO after completion of a certain class.
- Los Medanos College uses a template to standardize the assessment process and uploads word documents to their home grown program review tool.
- Medosto Junior College is using course outcomes to assess ILOs and GELOs. Six questions were used to help interpret the results.
- At Napa Valley College a pre- and post-assessment is given which asks students to assess their knowledge of each course SLO. The results are then analyzed collectively.
- Some colleges use ILOs that are broad enough to incorporate all of the GELOs. Assessment of the ILOs then encompasses the GELOs. ILOs are assessed for students who have completed at least 30 hours of coursework.
- Faculty buy-in is best when everyone is allowed to use their own assessment tool.
- Napa Valley College had inquiry groups where they discussed critical thinking in their courses. These discussions were recorded and uploaded as podcasts.
- At Merritt College, the model school is used for their capstone course. Evaluation of the PLOs at this level identified changes to the communication outcome that affected all of the courses in the program.
- Data can be compiled from multiple sources and looked at anonymously.
- Could we put employer testimonials on a website? Employers could describe what they are looking for and instructors could describe how they are meeting that need.

Challenges:

- What does authentic assessment mean?
- It would be nice to provide a realistic snapshot of our college but it might backfire. What if the results are used against us?