



**What are Student Learning Outcomes?
Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)
Southwestern college**

WASC Accrediting Commission for Schools Recommendations (*In the WASC Evaluation Report based on site visit October 2009*):

#4. ..."that the college identify SLOs for all of its courses, academic programs, learning and support services, and identify administrative unit outcomes for non-instructional areas." (by March 15, 2011).

..."that the college use data and analysis to assess student achievement of those outcomes and use the assessment results to make improvements, (Standards II.A, IIA.2.e, and IIA.2.f)"

..."the Commission requires Southwestern College to demonstrate that the college is at the Developmental level on the Commission's Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness-Part III: Student Learning Outcomes, and is making progress toward the Proficiency level on the Rubric by fall 2012".

Southwestern College Mission Statement

Southwestern College is committed to meeting the educational goals of its students in an environment that promotes intellectual growth and develops human potential.

Philosophy of Learning

Learning is more than simply memorizing facts; it demands that students participate in the process as they discover and use resources, master concepts, apply knowledge and critical thinking to solve problems and to extrapolate ideas and concepts. Effective teaching and learning develop the student's ability to master and communicate course content, concepts and skills, foster a student's ability to think critically and logically in order to apply knowledge, concepts and skills in relevant "real-life" contexts. The entire Southwestern College community works together to promote student success as "life-long" learners.

Southwestern College faculty members employ an active model of instruction and student learning. The table below clarifies the change away from an old teaching paradigm of passive instruction to a new learning paradigm based on active learning:

Old Instructional Paradigm	New Learning Paradigm
Transmits information	Provides learning experiences
Quality of instruction equals success of faculty	Quality of learning equals success of student and faculty
Student passively listens	Student must actively participate and perform
Focus on objectives and course content and rigor	Focus on what student knows and can do after the educational pathway
	Focus on student application of critical thinking and logical reasoning



Southwestern College Institutional Student Learning Outcomes: The Southwestern College community has identified four major Institutional Student Learning Outcomes with eleven (11) Achievement Areas in which we expect students to develop proficiency through the completion of their course of study:

1. Communication Skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)

- a. Listen and speak actively and critically to identify a person's position and then analyze the position to determine its quality.
- b. Present ideas in a clear and organized way.
- c. Analyze and evaluate text in writing.

2. Thinking and Reasoning (Creative Thinking, Critical Thinking, Quantitative Reasoning)

- a. Formulate and share ideas, analyze the ideas of others, integrate them into their thinking.
- b. Assess and analyze data and information as they investigate issues and solve problems.
- c. Use quantitative reasoning to identify, analyze and solve quantitative problems.

3. Information Competency (Research and Technology)

- a. Research topics by identifying, analyzing, and assessing the ideas from a variety of sources to conduct research.
- b. Students will use print material and technology to identify research needs and develop and evaluate information effectively and responsibly.

4. Global Awareness (Social, Cultural, and Civic Responsibility)

- a. Collegially work with diverse groups of people.
- b. Identify and examine the cultural values of different ethnic groups in a sensitive and respectful manner.
- c. Analyze and assess historical, political, economic, scientific, and social issues in a way that enables them to participate in their community, nation, and world.

Curriculum and instruction are faculty driven

At Southwestern College, as at all other California Community Colleges, curriculum and instruction are faculty driven. This means that faculty members are responsible to develop and revise all courses, certificates and programs of study. To do this faculty must be cognizant of the requirements of:

- transfer institutes (four-year colleges and universities)
- licensure and certification for Career and Technical Programs
- our California Community College system for curriculum development and articulation
- our accreditation office, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

All community college courses and programs have a written **Course Outline of Record (COR)** written by faculty who are experts in the course discipline. For example, only mathematics faculty can develop or revise math courses or programs of study. The Course Outline of Record

(COR) is developed and reviewed regularly by faculty for every college course offered. These are public record and can be viewed in CurricUNET. (<http://www.curricunet.com/Southwestern/>) The COR provides a description of the course, information about possible prerequisites/corequisites and enrollment limitations, measurable course objectives (course learning objectives), core content to be covered in all sections, methods of student evaluation, examples of assignments, instructional methodology, and required and optional readings/textbooks/software/materials. Faculty are required to develop two hours of meaningful assignments in reading, homework, and study for every hour spent in class.

Course Objectives

Traditionally, education has focused its instruction, measurement and assessment of student learning on approved **course objectives**. Course objectives reflect the official core content of a course and describe the specific skills, information, knowledge, and understanding that will be taught during a course. Course objectives are what the instructor sets out to teach (and the student to learn). Southwestern College faculty members employ an active model of instruction and student learning. Course objectives are written using measurable action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy. The student's achievement of course objectives can be measured in a variety of ways by individual faculty. Historically, course objectives became fundamental to our official Course Outlines of Record (COR) that became the basis of curriculum review and articulation processes.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

As we enter a new era of education, the instruction, measurement and assessment of learning will now include a new layer of assessment based on successful completion of **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**. Student Learning Outcomes became a part of the 2002 Accreditation Standards for the California Community Colleges.

What are SLOs?

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are statements that clearly identify what we want our students to be able to do, or be able to demonstrate upon successful completion of a course or program of study. The successful achievement of student learning outcomes is dependent on student active engagement in learning, completion of learning activities, study of course material, and successful completion of assessment measures.

Every Academic course/program and Student Service **Student Learning Outcome (SLO)** supports one or more of the Achievement Areas. We work with our students as partners in their development of these Achievement Area skills through their participation in classes and Student Service activities.

How do course objectives differ from student learning outcomes?

Course objectives "are the key elements which must be taught each time the course is taught" (ACCJC Accreditation Notes, 2009). Student learning outcomes are the intended outcome after instruction and after the student has participated in class and completed course assignments, completed quality study, and assessment of learning.

The following table highlights differences between a specific course objective and over-arching student learning outcomes:

Course Learning Objectives	Student Learning Outcomes
Include numerous skills or content to explain what is taught	Identify 2-3 overarching results, what the student can do after learning
Detail content coverage and activities which make up a course curriculum	Based on Core Competency skills that require higher level thinking abilities that integrate content and activities
Objectives can be numerous, specific, and detailed to direct the daily activities of class.	SLOs are limited in number and focus on what student learned and can do.
Objectives do not necessarily result in a product.	Outcomes result in a product that can be measured and assessed.
Formative in nature, based on specific course learning objective.	Summative ~ broad end of semester goals based on the summative achievement of specific course objectives.

Locating Student Learning Outcomes

Southwestern College has reached the 99% (98.9%) mark in the number of courses that have their SLOs written and archived for public access in **CurricUNET**. As of November 16, 2010, only 1.1% (20 of 1,774) courses still need their SLOs archived in CurricUNET.

The following steps can locate a specific course's SLO Report on **CurricUNET**:

- Go to >> <http://www.curricunet.com/Southwestern/>
- Ignore the User Name and Password...you do not need these in order to access the SLO Reports for courses.
- In the left box under the title "CurricUNET Home, under "Search", click on "Course". A new screen will appear. In the center of the page, in the window titled "Course Search", is the dragdown box titled "Discipline". Click "All" and scroll down to the department of choice.
- Click the abbreviation for the department
- Click OK. You will now see a new screen listing all of the Courses for that department or discipline.
- Scroll down to the title of the course that you are interested in. Ignore the versions that are marked *Historical*. Focus on the course version marked with the notation *Active*.
- Move your mouse over the WR icon to the left of the course's title.
- Dragdown and select SLO Report.

In addition, some SWC schools have provided their Course and Program (Discipline) SLOs in their school website. For example, the School of Mathematics, Science and Engineering (MSE) has embedded the SLO Reports for their MSE courses in the school's website. To access the course SLO Reports:

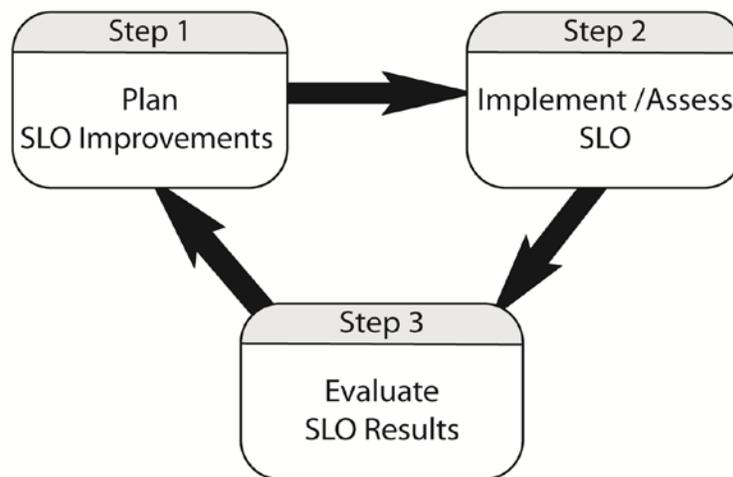
- Go to >> <http://www.swccd.edu/~mse/>
- Click on Course Info
- Click on the underlined title of the Department
- Scroll down to the course and click on "SLO Report"

Course Level SLO Cycle ~ Closing the Loop

The "closing the loop" process involves the writing, implementation and measurement of course SLOs and then the assessment of the results. Dialogue between faculty members might involve the perfecting of either or both course objectives and SLOs with the ultimate goal that students actually learn what we think we are teaching. As sufficient real data is collected and analyzed, the assessment of academic student learning outcomes will become an integral part of cyclical academic program reviews, and as Southwestern College "closes the loop" by using the results of SLO assessment to improve student learning through collegial dialogue.

Southwestern College's mission statement and student learning outcomes are part of the same integrated circle or loop. While the college's mission statement defines and drives the college's vision and values, which then drive institutional decisions (master educational plan, resource allocation, human resources, facilities, technology, and enrollment management), course and departmental academic SLOs are part of academic program reviews, which directly impact budget, resource allocation and faculty hiring prioritization. Academic (SLO) and Student Affairs outcome (SAO) assessment tightly integrate to catalyze increased student retention and success. The assessment of Academic, Student Affairs and Institutional Unit outcomes (IUO) integrate forming the college's cultural and functional frame.

The development and review of student outcomes occurs on a regular basis as a fluid cycle.



- Step 1: Faculty collaborate in identifying and writing SLOs to be used by all faculty teaching the course and identifying measurement tools. SLOs are archived for public access in CurricUNET.
- Step 2: Faculty implement the SLOs in class dialogue, learning activities and course design, measure the student achievement of the learning outcomes, and subsequently assess student learning.
- Step 3: Faculty use SLO assessment data to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction and to guide decisions and goals through the discipline's Academic Program Review process to realize sustainable quality and improvement to curriculum and to foster increase

student learning and success.

Measurement of Course Level SLOs

When the new accreditation standards were approved and implemented, the Southwestern College Faculty Senate worked to create a process that would measure, assess and document student learning in all courses. The Senate created an SLO assessment process that:

- Implemented our student learning philosophy.
- Protected and enhanced Academic Freedom.
- Included students as active participants in learning and assessment.
- Provided new opportunities for fulltime and part-time faculty to dialogue about student assessment results and plan research-based improvements to curriculum and instruction.

We have always measured student learning and evaluated assessment results as a part of grading each term and in a broader way as a part of Academic Program Review. The goal of our syllabi and instruction included clear communication of what that student would be expected to learn and how learning would be measured.

Our Senate Faculty identified diverse measurement options for student learning. This process also resulted in research and discussion of new measurement options. One option is the use of rubrics to provide explicit criteria for measuring student learning. The development of the criteria as with SLO development can include all faculty and can also include feedback from students. This is especially true of sequenced courses in which students advancing in a course sequence can provide feedback on instruction and measurement to faculty. Students can compare and connect previous learning with new learning. Because of the national use of rubrics to measure student learning, our college invested in *eLumen*, a proprietary software, which is designed to house rubrics for course and program assessment, samples of student work that meets each criteria, and student outcomes. This software and method is designed to provide students with a clear understanding of what they need to do to develop competency in the areas of student learning assessed. Grades may or may not be tied to SLOs.

Program Student Learning Outcomes

Our Program SLOs identify what the faculty teaching in a program want students to be able to do upon completion of their program. A student's program goal may include a certificate, degree, and/or transfer, or to update job skills. The program SLO will be presented during all courses that may be taken for completion of a certificate, degree, and/or for transfer. Program SLOs will be assessed during the program courses to evaluate progress in attainment of the outcome. Program SLOs can be found by a search by program in CurricUNET. (<http://www.curricunet.com/Southwestern/>)

Measurement options

Our Faculty Senate developed course-embedded assessment methods to assess the SLOs for individual courses. The option to use rubrics and *eLumen* to house assessment results is a simple way to identify criteria and method of assessment for our students. The goal is that our students will quickly become adept at using rubric information posted to guide their participation in class assignments and study for tests. Over time rubric criteria can be refined so that the

language clearly communicates faculty expectations for assignments and tests. Samples of student work that exemplifies the different criteria can be posted to further reinforce student understanding of expectations for work, study, and participation. We support student feedback as an additional way to refine and improve both our directions for assignments/tests and measurement tools. The intent is to increase student understanding, motivation, and confidence as they approach course measurement tasks.

To get started, faculty can choose specific course SLOs and then follow the following cycle:

- Assess the SLO.
- Evaluate the results of the students' assessments, note what student needs and issues were revealed and how the assignment or teaching activities could be altered to improve student learning.
- Dialogue about their results in department meetings, sharing their course assignments, measurement tools, rubrics and the evaluation of the results and their ideas for improvement, including what assistance the college could provide to improve student learning.
- Use assessment data to guide course, departmental and discipline goals through their Academic Program Review process.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) adds a new layer of assessment beyond the measurement of learning based on instruction to Course Objectives. We now identify in SLOs what we want our students to be able to do in one or more of the four Institutional SLOs, which include communication, thinking and reasoning, information competency and/or global awareness, upon successful completion of a course.

What is assessment?

Dr. Thomas Angelo, Professor of Education, Associate Provost, and founding Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Akron, has defined assessment as follows:

"[SLO] Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance" (Angelo, 1995).

In addition, Palomba and Banta, 1999 describe assessment as the systematic collection, review, evaluation and use of information about educational endeavors undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development.

Role of assessment

At Southwestern College, assessment of SLOs shall be used to understand, and thereby improve, student learning through informed decision making and planning. More specifically, assessment can serve the following roles in the institution:



To improve services, feedback, guidance, and mentoring to students in order to help them better plan and execute their educational programs.

To help design and improve programs and courses to better promote student learning and success.

To identify shared definitions for evaluating student abilities to more coherently and effectively promote student learning.

Outcomes assessment occurs in an academic, counseling (student services), and research (library) settings essential to student learning. An essential component of Southwestern College's assessment process is the emphasis on faculty led, classroom/student service based-assessment which ensures a direct focus on learning. The assessment of student learning outcomes is an academic matter, and the Academic Senate has primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining the general guidelines for academic assessment. Individual departments and programs create specific assessment standards and methods through a process of dialogue and faculty involvement. Such ongoing student outcomes assessment is fundamental in improving institutional effectiveness. Southwestern College assessment will be based on valid, reliable, and relevant assessment procedures.

Our goal is to realize sustainable quality improvement to our curriculum and instruction using feedback from SLOs and the Academic Program Review process. To accomplish this we make our course and program SLOs known to our students (online and in the classroom). Our students understand what will be taught, how they will be evaluated, and they will be clear on what tangible outcomes they are working to develop during their experiences at our college. We evaluate our students' progress by course and program.

Assessing students is not new to Southwestern College; we have always done this at the course level in the grading process. What is new is that the assessment of SLOs has become an additional part of our process. And depending on the tightness of the correlation between a course's specific learning objectives and student learning outcomes, as well as the faculty members' variance in what goes into a grade and what tools are used to assess SLO achievement, grades might be very different than SLO assessment results.

Assessment of course and program SLOs will require ongoing communication between fulltime/part-time discipline faculty about student progress and will include cyclical review of SLO assessment data for program improvement (as part of Academic Program Review).

Student learning outcomes are assessed at the Course, Discipline, Program and Institutional levels and this assessment data drive course, discipline, program and institutional decisions. Student learning outcomes will become part of our college culture.

Students will know clearly what they should expect to be able to do upon completing a course. Faculty will communicate information about the specific course SLOs to students throughout the semester. Faculty will dialogue with colleagues on a regular, ongoing basis to foster activities and decisions to increase achievement of student learning outcomes. Dialogue will be systemic: between students and faculty, between course and discipline faculty, and ultimately between academic, student affairs/student services and institutional units.

Importance of SLO Assessment to Students:

- Because students better understand their roles and potential outcomes, they become partners in learning.
- Students benefit by better understanding the anticipated outcomes and then working with faculty to develop those explicit skills.
- Students improve their own self-insight about their academic growth, are then better at monitoring their own progress during the course, and develop highly refined problem solving and coping mechanisms for the future.

When embedded effectively within our larger institutional system, SLO assessment not only monitors how well students learn, but it also focuses our attention on the examination of our assumptions about student learning and our methods of instruction. Because students better understand their roles and potential outcomes, they become partners in learning. Our institution continues to plan and provide effective learning opportunities and student support services using assessment results in an environment that improves the quality of education on our campus (Angelo, 1995).

Our goal is to work in partnership with our students as they develop the skills necessary to become successful life-long learners in the four Core Competencies, which include communication skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), thinking and reasoning (creative thinking, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning), information competency (research and technology) and global awareness (social, cultural, and civic responsibility).

Importance of SLO Assessment to Faculty:

SLO assessment data provides information to faculty for development of strong programs, effective curricula, and innovative teaching. In addition, SLO assessment assists disciplines, programs and our institution by providing evidence of quality teaching and student learning expected by WASC Accreditation.

Assessment of SLOs provides additional structure for student learning that is based in Core Competencies (also known as Institutional Learning Outcomes). At Southwestern College this meant we found time for dialogue and discourse on the critical areas of learning we all valued and would support for our students: Communication, Thinking and Reasoning, Information Competency, and Global Awareness. This process raised our collective consciousness so that all curriculum and program planning is created to enhance student learning of skills in our competency areas.

As a part of Academic Program Review (APR), assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving Student Learning Outcomes. It involves:

- Making our expectations explicit and public; identifying clear and appropriate criteria for students
- Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well Student Learning Outcomes match expectations
- Using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve Student Learning Outcomes
- Dialogue involving students, faculty and staff



- Using assessment data to drive decisions made by course faculty, departments and programs
- Integrating SLO assessment data with Student Affairs (Service Area) programs and to institutionally "close the loop" in a way that reflects SWC's Mission.

Our Academic Program Review process requires yearly review of each program's plan. This provides a natural opportunity for faculty to meet face-to-face and online to review the plan as well as SLO assessment results. The discussion of results is as important as the data itself.

Southwestern College Student Learning Outcome assessment is generated through multiple measures to collect quantitative and qualitative information in an effort to improve courses, services, programs, and all student experiences.

The data will provide evidence to guide departments/disciplines in their formation of goals, curriculum reform, student service improvement, allocation of resources, hiring, organizational leadership, and staff and student development.

Citations & References:

Angelo, Thomas A. 1995. *Reassessing (and Defining) Assessment*. The AAHE Bulletin, 48(2), November 1995, pp 7-9.

Palomba, Catherine A. and Trudy W. Banta, 1999. *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Santiago Canyon College Assessment Policy on Student learning Outcomes (adopted Dec. 2007)