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# Fullerton College Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Preferred Practice Handbook

Prepared by the Fullerton College  
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The SLOA committee developed the SLOA Preferred Practices Handbook with input and feedback from division faculty and the Curriculum Committee. The committee identified standards and guidelines with the understanding that departments and divisions may have valid reasons for deviating from the preferred practices.

When appropriate, the committee provided both a preferred practice and a rationale in order to help faculty develop practices that are consistent with the purpose and intent of the preferred practice. In all cases, activities and practices associated with the SLOA cycle should have as their goal to provide faculty and the college with necessary and reasonable information to ensure the quality of the college's courses and programs.

## A. Identifying appropriate course SLOs

- How should SLOs relate to instructional objectives?
  - Objectives represent the individual components of the course, while SLOs represent the result of those components. Objectives are the stepping stones; SLOs are the destination, or what the student takes away from the course.
- How should SLOs relate to course content?
  - To the extent possible, the SLOs should reflect all the major concepts of the course content.
- What level of difficulty is appropriate for SLOs?
  - The level of difficulty or level of critical thinking indicated in a course's SLOs should reflect the level of the course. For example, basic skills or developmental courses would be more likely to include recall or skill-based outcomes while 200-level course SLOs should reflect a higher level of analysis and critical thinking.
- Should all courses within a department have similar SLOs?
  - Not always, but it is preferred to reflect similar or sequential course outcomes in the SLOs where such similarities exist. For example, many math courses include an SLO of equation solving. The types of equations and difficulty level increase from course to course through the sequence. Many science courses have an SLO regarding the scientific method as applied to that course.

## B. Identifying appropriate methods of assessment (MOAs)

- How do we choose an appropriate MOA for an SLO?
  - **Rationale:** The selection of MOAs should be based on both practical and pedagogical concerns. In addition, MOAs should be aligned to those outlined in the curriculum approval process. (More information about approved MOAs is available on the Curriculum Committee website and through CurricuNET.)
  - **Preferred Practice:** Faculty should consider the measurable verb used in the SLO and select an MOA based on the level of critical thinking involved, the nature of the student work required to display the skill or knowledge indicated in the outcome. For example, SLOs that begin with verbs such as *explain, discuss, or analyze* would generally require students to write an essay, present a speech, write short answers, present proofs, or other subjective forms of assessment. Objective assessments, such as multiple choice tests, are appropriate for SLOs that begin with verbs such as *identify, select, label, or define*.

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- Who should select MOAs?
  - **Rationale:** The SLOA process is directly tied to course content and instruction, which are the purview of faculty. In addition, each discipline has unique needs and concerns related to the knowledge and skills being taught.
  - **Preferred Practice:** Department faculty should, through discussion with colleagues, identify MOAs from those approved by the Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Senate that are best suited to the course SLOs.
- Should all students being assessed in a course be given the same assessment?
  - **Rationale:** In order for assessments to be meaningful and useful for evaluating the effectiveness of a course, the number of variables involved in an assessment should be minimized.
  - **Preferred Practice:** For objective methods of assessment, students should be given the same assessment. For subjective methods of assessment, such as essays, performances, or speeches, assessments should be qualitative similar and their work should be assessed using a standard evaluation tool, such as a common rubric or performance description.

## C. Role of SLOs and MOAs in curriculum approval process (waiting feedback from Jennifer Combs)

- Does the Curriculum Committee evaluate SLOs when approving new and revised courses?
  - **Rationale:** The Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing all sections of course outlines and curriculum proposals, but generally trusts the expertise of department faculty regarding the appropriate content of the course.
  - **Preferred practice:** The Curriculum Committee should review SLOs in a similar way to how it reviews course objectives. The committee primarily checks for proper format and measurable verbs. However, the committee is free to comment or make suggestions if SLOs do not seem to align with course content.
- If a department wants to change the SLOs for a course, does the entire course come under review by the Curriculum Committee?
  - SLOs are on the curriculum committee's chart as a minor revision item.
- Does the Committee evaluate MOAs when approving new and revised courses?
  - **Rationale:** The Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing all sections of course outlines and curriculum proposals, but generally trusts the expertise of department faculty regarding the appropriate content of the course.
  - **Preferred practice:** The Curriculum Committee should review MOAs in a similar way to how it reviews methods of evaluation. The committee primarily checks that an MOA is included for each SLO. However, the committee is free to comment or make suggestions if an MOA does not seem to align with the SLO.
- If a department wants to change the SLOs for a course, does the entire course come under review by the Curriculum Committee?
  - SLOs are on the curriculum committee's chart as a minor revision item. Since MOAs are connected to SLOs, changes in MOAs should also be treated as a minor revision.

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## D. Conducting assessments

- How frequently should courses be assessed?
  - **Rationale:** The decision about how frequently to assess a course should find a balance between too frequent assessment, which can create an undue burden on faculty and staff and doesn't allow faculty sufficient time to reflect on and make use of assessment data, and too infrequent assessment, which introduces too many variables to allow for effective comparison of the results of subsequent assessment.
  - **Preferred Practice:** A comfortable middle ground between too frequent and too infrequent assessment would be to assess a course every three years. Courses that are offered infrequently may need to deviate from this schedule, and faculty may wish to assess a course sooner than three years in order to check the effect of changes in a course. Departments should develop a plan for assessing all active courses at least once every three years.
- Which students should be assessed?
  - **Rationale:** SLOs represent what students know and can do after successfully completing a course, which means passing the course with a C or better or a grade of Pass.
  - **Preferred Practice:** Whether departments assess enrolled students or only those who have successfully completed the course with a grade of C or better or a grade of Pass (referred to in the rest of this document as “successful students”), it should record separately the results for successful students and those who did not successfully complete the course with a grade of C or better or with a grade of Pass.
- How many students should be assessed?
  - **Rationale:** The decision about how many students to assess should take into account the nature of the assessment method and the type of student work being collected.
  - **Preferred Practice:** For courses using objective methods of assessment (i.e., multiple choice test items), all successful students in all sections should be assessed. For courses using subjective methods of assessment (i.e., student performance, essays, creative projects, or portfolios), random sampling should be used to assess approximately 25 % of the successful students in each section of the course.
- At what point in the semester should assessments be conducted?
  - **Rationale:** SLOs reflect the culmination of learning over the course of a semester. Assessing student work too early in the term will reflect only partial mastery of skills and knowledge. In addition, it is likely to include students who subsequently drop the course and therefore should not be included in assessment results.
  - **Preferred Practice:** Student work used for assessment should not be completed or collected before 80% of the term has been completed. In a 17.5-week semester, that would occur after week 14. For a 16-week semester, that would occur in week 13.

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## E. Collecting data

- **Should individual instructors be anonymous in the reporting of assessment results?**
  - **Rationale:** Assessments of SLOs are designed to evaluate courses and programs, not to evaluate instructors. However, many instructors may wish to see how their students did in the assessment.
  - **Preferred Practices:** Instructors should not be identified when reporting results. Data collection procedures should be designed to protect instructor's anonymity but still allow individual instructors to retrieve the results of their students. (For example, using instructor-generated codes on student work; using students ID numbers rather than CRNs.) Only instructors should be permitted to retrieve data about the results of assessment of their students.
- **Should students' identity be removed from work being assessed?**
  - **Rationale:** Assessments of SLOs are designed to evaluate courses and programs, not to evaluate students.
  - **Preferred Practice:** Student identity can be included but can also be removed if desired when conducting the assessments; however, student identity should not be included when reporting results of assessments.
- **Should the results of assessments be aggregated for all sections of a course?**
  - **Rationale:** Assessment is of a course, not sections.
  - **Preferred Practice:** When reporting results of assessment, all sections of the courses should be included in a single aggregated result.
- **Who should have access to the results of assessment?**
  - **Rationale:** Results of assessment have implications for the entire department and its offerings.
  - **Preferred Practice:** All faculty members of a department should be given access to the aggregated results of assessments done for any course offered by that department.
- **Should student work be stored after assessment?**
  - **Rationale:** Departments will find it useful to have examples of student work assessed when planning future assessments and for discussing the implications of assessment results.
  - **Preferred Practice:** A representative sampling of student work, such as 2-3 examples of work that meets the SLO and 2-3 examples of work that does not meet the SLO, should be stored until the next time the course SLOs are assessed. These samples can include tests, scantrons, essays, slides or photographs of projects/creative pieces, video or DVD recordings of performances, etc. When storing student work, the identities of individual students should be removed to the extent possible.
- **Where should student work be stored after assessment is completed?**
  - **Rationale:** Student work used for assessment purposes should stay under the control of the department.
  - **Preferred Practice:** With the help of the division dean, departments should identify a secure location for storing student work.

## F. Using assessment results to evaluate courses

After gathering assessment results, department faculty should meet to use the aggregated data to evaluate the course.

- What can be evaluated using assessment results?
  - **Preferred Practice:** Faculty should use assessment results in conjunction with other information and data to evaluate course content, methods of instruction, textbooks, and other factors associated with the course. In addition, assessment results may be used to evaluate the appropriateness of the SLO and the method of assessment (MOA), and other elements of the assessment process.
- What can assessment results tell us about a course?
  - **Preferred Practice:** In conjunction with other information and data about the course, assessment results can help faculty understand the effectiveness and appropriateness of instructional methods, course content, and the SLOA process. Examples of conclusions faculty could draw from assessment results include:
    - Incorporating additional methods of instruction
    - Expanding course content
    - Revising or adding an assignment
    - Revising an existing SLO
    - Adding one or more SLOs
    - Changing the method of assessment
    - Revising course content to emphasize a topic or skill

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## G. Reporting results of assessment

- **What information about assessment results should be reported within a department?**
  - **Rationale:** SLO assessments are a tool a department can use to evaluate its courses, and the focus of assessment results should be on how assessment results informed a department's ongoing discussion of the effectiveness of its courses. This information should be provided in a timely manner to the department faculty.
  - **Preferred Practice:** By the end of the semester following assessment, departments should prepare a report that includes:
    - Aggregated results by course for the percentage of successful students who met the SLOs and successful students who did not. **Information about individual students or instructors should not be included in this report.**
    - A summary of the department's discussion of the significance of the results
    - Any proposed changes to the course, SLOs, method of assessment, or other aspect of the SLOA process.
- **In what format should this report be prepared?**
  - **Rationale:** A common reporting form can be useful.
  - **Preferred Practice:** Departments should use the SLOA Reporting form (found on the SLOA website) if a similar document has not already been developed by the department.
- **Who should receive a copy of the SLOA Report?**
  - **Rationale:** Changes to a course and/or SLOA process may involve the division dean and staff.
  - **Preferred Practice:** The department coordinator should provide the division dean with a copy of the SLOA report.
- **What information about SLOA results may be shared with the campus?**
  - **Rationale:** Campus administrators need to be apprised of the progress of SLOA.
  - **Preferred Practice:** Division deans may share the SLOA report of aggregated results with campus administrators if requested.