

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

**Report on College Implementation of SLO Assessment**

June 7, 2013

The current Accreditation Standards were approved in 2002. Among the significant changes in those Standards were a heightened emphasis on student learning, assessment, and improvement, and on data-based decision making. Five years later, in 2007, a Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness was circulated to the field, describing levels of implementation for the linked processes of institutional planning, program review, and student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment. As the cover memo with the rubric stated:

The purpose of the Rubric is to provide some common language that can be used to describe a college's status *vis-à-vis* full adherence to the Standards, as well as to provide a developmental framework for understanding each institution's actions toward achieving full compliance with Standards.

In 2009, the field was notified that the Commission would expect institutions to be at the Proficiency level of SLO implementation by fall 2012, and that member institutions should operate at the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement levels thereafter. In February 2012, the Commission announced it would request a report from each college to evaluate member institution attainment of the Proficiency level.

The colleges were divided into two reporting groups, with half reporting by October 15, 2012, and the remainder by March 15, 2013. This report presents the results of the College Status Reports on SLO Implementation.

Method of Analysis

A scoring rubric was created with a scale of 5 (exceeds) to 1 (doesn't meet). The scoring rubric was applied to the characteristics identified for each of the Proficiency statements, and a score was assigned based upon the degree to which the college report demonstrated implementation of the statement. Non-responses were scored as 0.

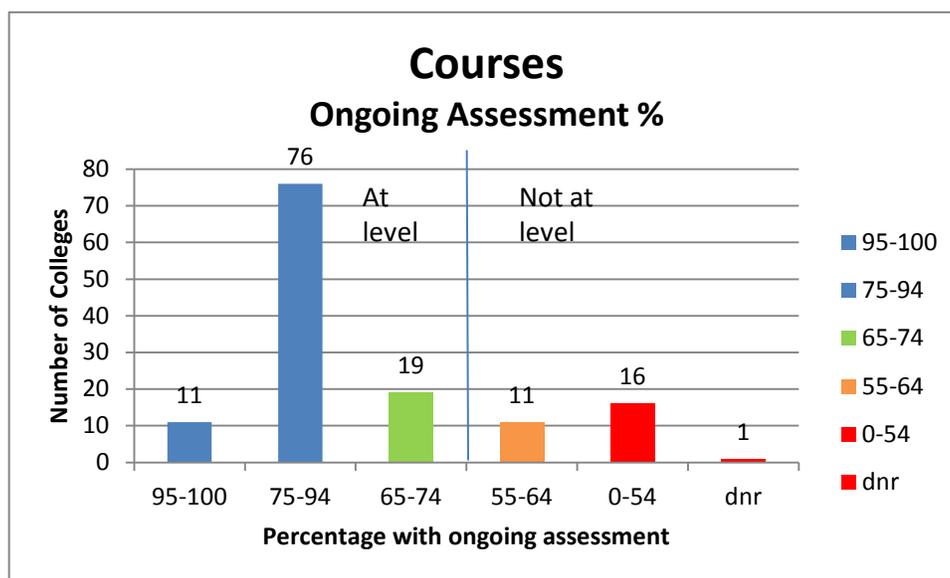
The evidence submitted with the status reports was not scored separately. However, it was noted that many colleges took an "include every possible item" approach to evidence submission that was not helpful in understanding the relevance—for the college—of the evidence to the report narrative. In addition, questions concerning the number of SLOs defined in particular categories were not scored. Given that definition of SLOs is a necessary preliminary step for the assessment and improvement process, member institutions should have all SLOs defined at this time.

## Summary of Results

Upon analysis of the institutional status reports, it was found that six colleges generally exceed expectations for Proficiency level SLO implementation, and 36 colleges solidly meet the expectations overall, with limited areas for needed improvement. Another 62 institutions meet expectations, but aren't well established in the areas of expected effective practice. Thirty member institutions do not fully meet the expectations for the Proficiency level, some of them with significant deficiencies.

## Ongoing Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

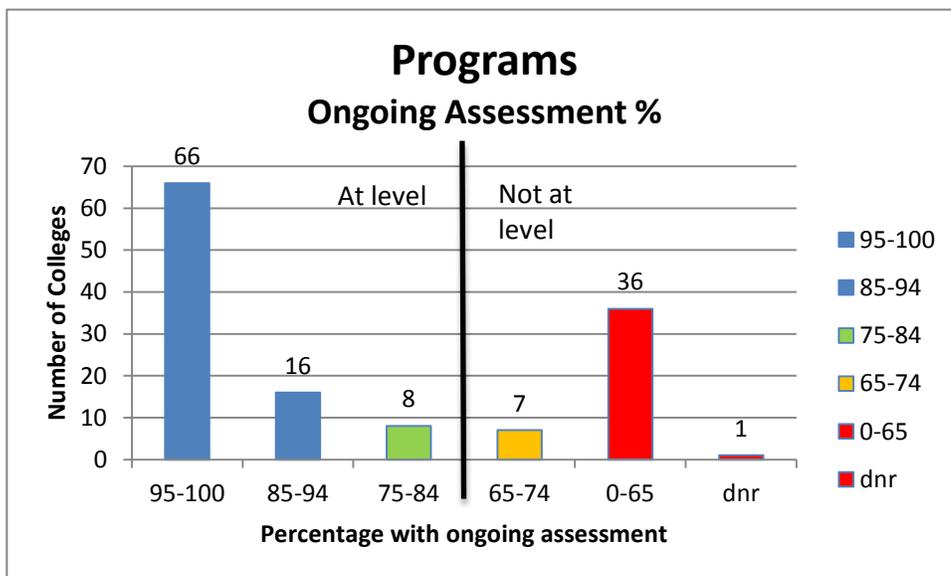
*Courses.* About 65% of member institutions solidly meet the expectation that ongoing assessment of SLOs be in place for their courses (with implementation rates of 75% or higher). Another 14% of colleges are barely meeting the expectation, with implementation rates between 65 and 74%. Only 40% of respondents report ongoing assessment of at least 90% for both courses and programs.



Twenty-seven colleges are not engaged in ongoing assessment of their courses at the expected levels. About 8% of those are assessing 55 to 64% of courses; 12% are assessing less than 55% of courses. The ten colleges with the lowest percentages of course assessments report these levels:

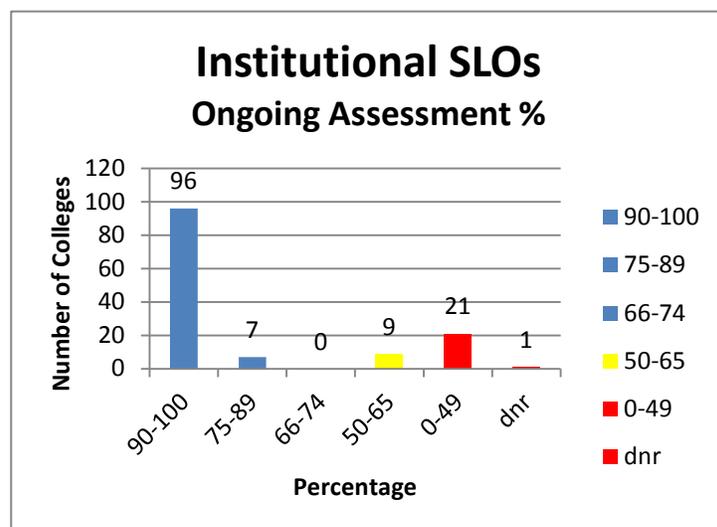
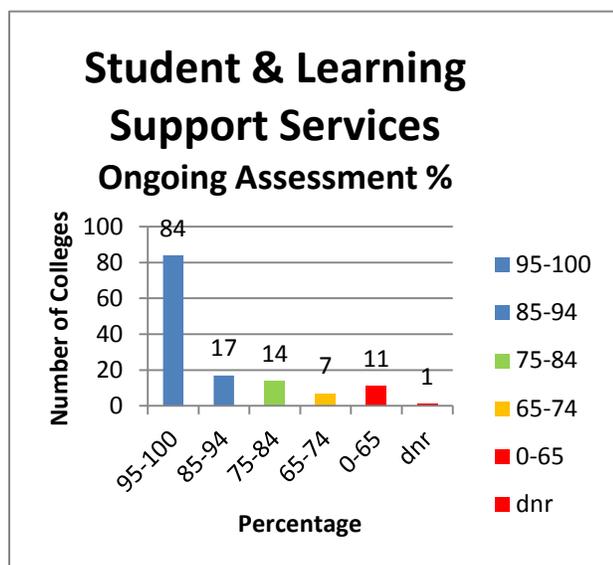
42%, 39%, 37%, 34%, 30%, 29%, 27%, 25%, 24%, 24%

*Programs.* A number of colleges have implemented ongoing assessment of programs at a high level. Forty-nine percent of colleges have ongoing assessment in 95% or more of programs. Twelve percent solidly meet implementation expectations with 85 to 94% of programs being assessed. More than a quarter of the member institutions (27%) report ongoing assessment in fewer than 65% of programs. This has significant implications for the institutional planning and program review processes and the use of assessment results in decision-making at the campus.



The ten colleges with the lowest percentages of program assessments report these levels: 31%, 29%, 25%, 25%, 23%, 19%, 18%, 10%, 2.5%, 1%

*Student and learning support services.* Student and learning support services, on the whole, had strong levels of assessment implementation. Sixty-three percent of institutions reported ongoing assessment in 95 to 100% of student and learning support services. Only 8% of colleges have ongoing assessment of less than 65% of these service areas.



*Institutional learning outcomes.* The implementation levels for ongoing assessment of institutional learning outcomes fell largely to the scoring extremes: seventy-two percent of colleges have ongoing assessment in 90 to 100% of their institutional outcomes. Sixteen percent of colleges have less than 49% of institutional outcomes being assessed. About half of those are not assessing institutional outcomes at all.

*Narrative Response 1:* Within the narrative about ongoing assessment, most colleges offered support for the numerical data provided. Few of the narratives discussed *authentic* assessments leading to understanding about student learning and gaps which need to be addressed. The average score was 3.51,<sup>1</sup> something less than solidly meeting expectations in this area.

### Other Elements of Proficiency Level SLO Implementation

The scoring for the other Status Report narrative responses resulted in average scores between 2.5 and 3.5. This means that across the field generally, effective practices in all aspects of the Proficiency elements were either not present, or were somewhat rudimentary in the implementation. Within that generalization, there were colleges which demonstrated effective practices across all or most of the elements.

*Narrative Response 2: Widespread dialog about results and gaps.* In this area, colleges were expected to go beyond providing a listing of meetings at which assessment is addressed, to specifically describe (or give examples) of where/how/for what purposes the assessment results are discussed. In addition, colleges were to describe processes for identifying gaps and instituting changes to address the gaps. Institutional messages should support the value of assessment and the need for improvement in student learning.

By way of example, one college described the dialog that takes place at the section and department levels, using assessment data, resulting in annual unit plans and department goals. Dialogue among faculty and staff occurs at the curriculum committee, department meetings, and professional development workshops. Resource support units, such as information technology and marketing, establish goals and develop work plans based on discussion of the ways to address the SLO gaps identified in the unit, section, and division plans. College participatory governance groups, such as the institutional effectiveness committee, the budget development committee, and college council, discuss and oversee the process for instituting changes to improve student learning.

The average score for college narratives on this Proficiency element was 3.4. Few of the colleges described processes for identifying gaps and instituting changes to address the gaps. Fifteen colleges do not fully meet this expectation. For these, dialog had largely been replaced by automated form-filling processes from SLO development and assessment, to results examination in program review, to institutional considerations for improvement.

*Narrative Response 3: Decision-making includes results of assessment and is directed toward aligning institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning.* Colleges were to describe how decision-making at the institution includes the results of assessment. Examples or explanation should have been given for how institution-wide practices are aligned/realigned to support and improve student learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Rubric: 5- Exceeds norm of effective practice: described practices indicate breadth, depth, innovation, or other aspects beyond expected effective practices. 4- Solidly meets expectation of effective practice: effective practices in all aspects of this element of SLO implementation are present. 3- Barely meets expectation of effective practice: effective practices are present, but they are limited to basics or are undeveloped. 2- Doesn't fully meet expectation of effective practice: some aspects of effective practice are not present. 1- Doesn't meet expectation of effective practice: performance in this area is deficient. 0- Did not respond.

For example, one of the colleges explained that its cyclical assessment processes have been devised to provide opportunities for participation, dialogue, and decision-making throughout each phase of SLO assessment on campus. Key performance indicators (enrollment, success, retention, etc.) and SLO assessment data are integrated into program review and annual unit planning processes. The program review process asks departments to create short- and long-term goals, including those from SLO assessment results. One example of the college's use of assessment results affecting institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning involved assessment of the Independent Learner institutional learning outcome, which is a comprehensive measure of campus student engagement. A specially-created project oversees efforts to broaden student engagement on campus, and provides faculty resources to implement learning around the specific dimensions of the Independent Learner outcome. Assessments of performance are communicated in published reports, in shared-governance meetings, and in the unit planning process. The outcomes from the Independent Learner competency have been used to institutionalize and provide a common framework for students and staff around the expectations of an engaged student body.

Despite a number of strong responses, the average score for this narrative response was 3.3. Only a handful of colleges addressed the alignment of institution-wide practices to support and improve student learning. Others described decision-making processes without linking them to SLO assessment results. Several reported that decision processes did not yet include a mechanism for considering student learning, and two colleges questioned whether decisions (other than curricular or pedagogical choices) should include considerations for supporting and improving student learning.

*Narrative Response 4: Appropriate resources continue to be allocated.* This narrative response was to be a discussion of how resources are allocated and fine-tuned to improve student learning. Fiscal, employee, technology, and physical resources should have been considered. In addition, a description of how institutional resource allocation is oriented toward student learning was expected.

The average score for college narratives was 3.2. Of the respondent colleges, only 45 were found to fully meet expectations in this area. Eleven colleges were found to not fully meet expectations. A number of colleges addressed resources allocated for the completion of SLO assessment but did not discuss how institutional resource allocation is oriented toward student learning. Instead, these tended to be about the provision of training and of payment for participation in SLO activities.

*Narrative Response 5: Comprehensive assessment reports exist, and are completed and updated on a regular basis.*

Colleges were expected to describe the cycle and format of assessment reports. The narrative should discuss participation in report completion and updating, and the comprehensive nature of assessment reports.

The average score for this narrative response was 3.15. It is noteworthy that many of the reports described as "comprehensive" were compilations of the deadlines and timelines for SLO work and lists of the courses and programs involved. Many of the colleges focused their comments on the use of databases and other software to record work on SLOs, though about 20% of colleges

did not discuss reports at all beyond the paperwork submitted by individuals working on a single SLO activity. The colleges which scored high on this question also generally scored well on the question related to decision-making including results of assessment and alignment of practices to improve learning. For these, reports were not simply in a repository for possible reference by the individual departments. They were compiled and presented to campus governance groups, governing boards, and used in planning processes.

In its effective response, one college described a wide range of regular and comprehensive reports dealing with SLO assessment:

- an SLO Profile by Department, received by department chairs, summarizes the number of assessments conducted per SLO and the percent of those assessments indicating successful student mastery of the SLO. These data are listed for each course and section offered by the department. The chairs also get SLO Profile by Course and SLO Profile by Section, which allow individual instructors to see how their assessment results compare the department aggregates.
- Student Services Program Changes Resulting from SLO Assessments, a report presented to student services departments and college administrators.
- SLO/ILO Assessment Summary, received by department chairs, academic administrators, the Academic Senate's Institutional Effectiveness Committee, and the governance committee, summarizes the total number of assessments conducted campus wide and uses mapping information to generate data on student mastery rates for each of the four ILOs and for each core competency. They also receive a General Education Outcomes Report, examining the level of mastery of core competencies for students completing the college's most frequently awarded degree & certificate programs.
- Program Review Online Format and Program Review 6-Year Reports. Also the Program Review Annual Planning Recommendations, which provides critical information used by the governance group to generate institutional objectives in the college's Master Educational Plan.
- ILO Survey Report summarizes results of custom questions regarding ILOs that were asked of students in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE).

*Narrative Response 6: Course SLOs are aligned with degree SLOs.* The narrative was expected to state that course level outcomes are aligned with degree level outcomes, how this is accomplished and an indication of the completeness of this process. The alignment should include both the discipline and general education components of degrees.

The average score for college narratives was 3.5. Interestingly, the relatively consistent implementation of course-to-program outcome alignment did not correlate with higher levels of performance in other Proficiency level elements. It may be the activity is seen as an end in itself, rather than as a precursor to examining student learning pathways within degrees for successful employment and transfer.

*Narrative Response 7: Students demonstrate awareness of the goals and purposes of the courses and programs in which they are enrolled.* Colleges were expected to discuss the manner in which students are made aware of the goals, outcomes, and purposes of their courses and programs, and

the basis for determining that students demonstrate awareness. This element of the Proficiency level proved to be quite challenging for most of the colleges.

The average score for this narrative response was 2.6, meaning that the colleges overall do not fully meet the expectations of effective practice in this area. Several colleges indicated that syllabi did not necessarily include student learning outcomes, because of an inability to enforce compliance for various reasons. However, the vast majority of colleges did mention the universal inclusion of SLOs on course syllabi and placement of program outcomes in the college catalog.

The difficulty for all but 25 of the respondent colleges was in student demonstration of their awareness of course and program goals and purposes. Those performing effectively included student surveys and involvement with student government in their methods for capturing student awareness.

For example, one college described use of a learning management system by all instructors, online and on-site, to measure their SLOs. The software automatically populates course, program, and institutional outcomes to be measured into each course shell just prior to each semester. This ensures the correct SLOs are used by each instructor, and all SLOs can be viewed by students. The software also contains a specific link where students can view their personal progress in meeting the various SLOs associated with their course. When students click the link “Student Learning Outcomes,” they receive their own achievement information. The college also has a link on the Web page at which all SLOs can be viewed by course, program, and certificate. Students and community members may view how each course maps to program and institutional outcomes. Course outlines also list course SLOs. And, in response to the latest fall student survey prompt, “Instructors inform students of skills or learning outcomes we are expected to achieve,” 91% of students strongly agreed or agreed; and 6% were neutral.

*Narrative Response 8: The institution can assess its level of SLO implementation, applying the Proficiency rubric, and can identify plans for needed improvements.* The college was to state the level of SLO implementation it believes to have achieved and describe the basis for this self-assessed level. In addition, the plans for addressing needed improvements were to focus on improving the value of assessment rather than solely addressing improvements to the process of SLO assessment such as software programs, participant time, and so on.

The average score for college narratives was 3.25. Nine colleges were unable to determine a level of SLO implementation for themselves. Another 23 colleges rated their implementation level at Proficiency or Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement (SCQI), though their performance fell below fully meeting expected performance levels.

Many of the colleges did not articulate any plans for improvement in the area of SLO assessment and its use in college processes for support of student learning. Approximately 25% of colleges had no future plans, and another 10% planned to continue doing what they were doing now. Colleges which tended to have lower levels of assessment implementation reported future plans and activities related to:

- Changing and tweaking the process
- Seeking faculty support; dealing with bargaining agreement issues

- Still working on fully actualizing the program review and/or institutional planning processes
- Seeking or installing a first or replacement data system
- Faculty development as a primary vehicle for increased levels of SLO implementation

Common improvements cited for future attention included: reporting format, data and research capacity, doing more with institutional outcomes, e-portfolios, better linkage to resource allocation, and increased participation by adjunct faculty. A few cited the college's plan to move toward the SCQI implementation level.

Some of the less common future plans came from colleges with higher overall implementation scores. These included:

- Move to comparative analysis (peer/region/nation)
- Increase student awareness
- Link division goal-setting with SLO outcomes assessment
- Move more deeply into classroom practice
- Develop longitudinal analysis
- Explore better usage of indirect assessment
- Enhance the website for constituent and public transparency

### Conclusion

The College Status Report on SLO Implementation provided a valuable snapshot of student learning outcomes implementation levels across the Western Region. The average overall score from the college reports is 3.44. This represents an overall level of meeting expectations of effective practice, but at a rudimentary level. However, among the respondents are 43 colleges (32% of total) which have reached a level of fully meeting or exceeding expected levels of performance within the Proficiency implementation elements. These have much to share with other colleges across the field.

The move to SLO assessment over the past ten years has represented a significant change within the region, and the impact has not yet been fully realized. It is expected that future monitoring and institutional evaluation reports will provide many examples of how improvement efforts arising from SLO assessment have increased student learning and achievement, and the academic quality and institutional effectiveness of the colleges.