

# **Student Learning Outcomes Committee**

## **Meeting Agenda**

### **November 2015**

Members: Lupe Alvarado, Jose Arroyo, Robin Babou, Alyson Cartagena, Janet Cha (Business alternate), Fran Cummings, Karleen Curlee, David Dawson, Bob Feliciano, John Frala, Rachel Garcia, Yvonne Gutierrez-Sandoval, Robert Holcomb, Julie Huang, Howard Kummerman, Sondra Moe, Aimee Ortiz, Daniel Osman, Kenn Pierson, Yolanda Ramirez (support staff), Barbara Salazar, Adam Wetsman

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. ACCJC Follow Up Visit
- III. Follow Up on Next Steps
  - a. Adding “program-level” SLOs to courses
  - b. Program-level SLO assessment
  - c. SAOs
- IV. The Utility of SLOs – See Attachment
- V. Other issues
- VI. Adjournment

## "An Embarrassingly Modest Impact"

Student assessment through measurable learning outcomes consumes an increasing amount of time, energy, and resources at U.S. public institutions of higher education. In Texas, the directives come mainly from the Legislature and Coordinating Board, spurred on by expert testimony and reports from think tanks and philanthropic foundations. Selected faculty members in various disciplines also participate in this process through advisory committees.

But as for tangible results nationwide it's not happening yet, according to a review of pertinent studies over seven recent years, [published in \*Change\*](#). The article has multiple authors. *Change* is a formidable and prestigious publication.

Here is a key passage from the introduction, which will be noticed immediately by faculty members:

Despite all this activity, the studies we have conducted at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) over the past seven years suggest that assessment has had an embarrassingly modest impact on student accomplishment. The *process* of assessment has taken precedence over the *use* of its findings to improve student success and educational effectiveness.

Hats off to the authors for not "burying the lead"—an old journalism expression. Please look through the entire piece for context, especially the latter parts.

Here's another good segment:

Moreover, assessment activity tends to be driven more from the *outside*—in response to the demands and expectations of policymakers, accreditors, and others—and less by institutional needs and priorities for evidence that can be harnessed for improvement. The result, alas, is that assessment does not matter in the ways it could and should.

The expectation for accountability is legitimate. But to have the desired effects, evidence of what students know and can do must respond to genuine institutional needs and priorities. Far too often, that condition is not met. On too many campuses, assessment activity is mired in a culture of compliance rather than driven by collective concern about student performance or an ethos of "positive restlessness," where information about student learning outcomes helps answer questions of real significance to faculty, staff, and students.

Of course seven years is a brief time frame in which to statistically monitor anything significant in the field of education. And the article emphatically does not call for trimming or abolishing such assessment, but recommends its intensification, to get more deeply into outcomes that are truly measurable.

All the same, the article drives home the difficulty of quantifying student learning in detail or with any precision across disciplines.

Taxpayers have a right to know how their dollars are being spent, but they might be amazed at the size of the present assessment enterprise. Even if some of the needed revenue comes from private foundations, one wonders if it's a misdirection of precious resources and psychic energy. And so far with little to show for it.

College teachers with a background in public education are saying in unison: "We've seen this movie before. And it doesn't end well."