



Newsletter from the Office of Assessment & Program Review

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES REVISITED

*“Good teachers help students connect their own questions to ways of “finding out.” They also work with [learners] to “make sense” of what they find and construct arguments that seem convincing to others in their scientific community.” (Wendy Saul and Jeanne Reardon, *Beyond the Science Kit*, Heinemann, 1996)*

Statements about the anticipated results and expectations of educational programs provide a good foundation for doing assessment. Student learning outcomes (SLOs) also help to further communication with current/future students and also among faculty/staff about expectations for students. (Palomba & Banta, 1999). The difference between using the terms ‘goals’ and ‘student learning outcomes’ is in their level of precision. While the term ‘goal’ can express intended results in general terms, ‘student learning outcomes’ can do the same in precise terms. While ‘goal’ is used to describe broad learn-

ing concepts, ‘student learning outcome’ is used to describe specific behaviors and attributes that students exhibit as a result of their education. It is effective when faculty use a common language and are in agreement on the SLOs (i.e., the knowledge, skills/abilities, attitudes/values) they expect students in their degree programs to demonstrate. SLOs are more useful as an assessment tool since they specifically tell us what needs to be assessed (Paloma & Banta, 1999). They are guides in the selection of assessment measures.

SLOs are learner-centered and specific. They are not descrip-

tions of the opportunities or services the curriculum, faculty or the institution will expose students to, but what they will be able to do as a result of that exposure (Lopez, 1998).

Susan Hatfield (2004) proposes that they should be action-oriented, and cognitively appropriate. In this regard, Bloom’s taxonomy, containing six levels of increasingly complex categories, may be relevant. The six include:

- knowledge to use the learned information in a constructive manner;
- comprehension involving a deep understanding of learned material;

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Graduate Council Approves SLOs

In December 2003, the Graduate Council reviewed and approved the ‘Graduate Student Learning Outcomes.’

Dr. Gita Ramaswamy, Chair of the Graduate School Committee on Planning, announced that the Committee had created a list of graduate student learning outcomes, and had asked for feedback from the Graduate Council. The Committee then created a final draft of the Graduate Student Learning Outcomes, and submitted them to the Graduate Council for approval.

The Graduate Council moved

to accept the following student learning outcomes after discussion and proposing a few minor changes.

The graduates of advanced degree programs at K-State will:

Knowledge – Demonstrate thorough understanding and/or competency in a specific area of emphasis, study, or profession.

Skills – Demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge through critical thinking, inquiry, analysis, and communication to solve problems and to produce scholarly and creative works

including but not limited to design, art, performance, original research in the form of thesis or dissertation.

Attitudes and Professional Conduct—Exhibit an awareness of their responsibilities (professional integrity, ethical behavior, ability to work with diverse groups of peoples, etc.) and engage in professional conduct towards all constituent groups, including students, faculty, public, etc.

Further information can be found at www.ksu.edu/grad/gc/gradSLO.htm.

-Neena Gopalan

- ♣ Have an interesting assessment story to share?
- ♣ Need more information on assessment?
- ♣ Need to contact us?

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Results of GTA Communication Survey of Spring 2004

The GTA Communication Survey for spring 2004 has been completed. 33 first-time GTAs from 16 departments (excluding English, Chemistry, Mathematics and Statistics¹) had their communication skills assessed this semester.

No GTA showed any serious communication weaknesses, hence none of them had to be re-surveyed. Total number of students who were taught by these 33 first-time GTAs was approximately 1,675 (approximately 300 more than in spring 2003). The number of GTAs with communication problems also showed a steady decline with the number of GTAs with communication problems being '5' in spring 1995 to '0' in the current semester. Clearly, the departments are following the performance of their GTAs in teaching classes/labs. Kudos to the departments.

¹ The departments of English, Chemistry, Mathematics and Statistics conduct their own GTA Communication Survey. Despite a very small number of GTAs with some communication issues, all GTAs in these departments performed superiorly.



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- application involves the ability to put ideas/concepts into solving problems;

- analysis of dividing/breaking down information into component parts for in-depth study;

- synthesis involving the ability to put parts together for innovation; and

- evaluation involving judging of the evidence based on definite criteria, such as criticizing, prioritizing, etc. (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

A recommended format, in defining SLOs, is: 'students will be able to <insert action verb> <something>' (Hatfield, 2004). For example, students will be able to apply research methodologies to examine socio-cultural issues within the discipline.

WRITING student learning outcomes into simpler formats while pulling out the key components for the successful achievement of an outcome, can provide better

directions for selecting assessment tools (Hatfield, 2004). As an example:

From: Imagine and seek out a variety of possible goals, assumptions, or perspectives which can give meaning or solution to given situations or problems.

Better: Students will be able to provide alternative solution to situations or problems.

Key components: Assumptions, perspectives, interpretations, analysis of comparative advantage.

Please refer to the APR website, www.k-state.edu/apr/learning/howto.htm for more practical tips.

FEEDBACK LOOPS can create a great deal of interest in SLOs within departments and across campus. A large number of institutions are making their SLOs public by posting them on the internet. Others have instituted weekly

or monthly occasions to display their engagement in assessment activities.

Assessment of SLOs is key to improving student learning, to helping the institution verify its responsibility as a public institution, and to document the interest of the public in investing in education (Lopez, 1996.) Regional accreditors support and encourage these efforts. *-Neena Gopalan*

Sources: * Hatfield, Susan. (February, 2004). *Departmental Assessment Plans*. Academic Chair Conference. Orlando, Florida.

* Lopez, C.L. (1998). *The Commission's Assessment Initiative: A Progress Report*. Presentation at the 103rd Annual Meeting of the NCA/CIHE, Chicago, IL.

* Paloma, A.C & Banta, W.T. (1999). *Assessment Essentials—Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, SFO.

Encouraging Feedback on Conferences & Workshops

Regents Assessment Conference. Attendees of the statewide conference said they enjoyed the 'opportunity to network with other universities' and were able to see the 'different levels of assessment at various colleges and what did and didn't work.' Some important themes were the value of scholarship in assessment and faculty involvement in the complex process of developing assessment tools and plans. For future conferences, the KSU participants would like to see more specific examples of comprehensive assessment plans, finished cycles that discuss assessment results, the changes or actions made to improve student

learning, and online assessment.

Campus-wide Workshops (Themes 1 & 2). The Colleges of Technology & Aviation, Architecture, Planning & Design, Arts & Sciences and the APR Office hosted college and campus-wide workshops in March and April. Participants who submitted feedback commented on the overall usefulness of the materials, handouts, hands-on exercises and practical tips on improving student learning outcome statements. They mentioned the workshops enhanced their understanding of the assessment process and found applications to their present assessment activities. They also

enjoyed interacting with faculty from other departments and learning about assessment efforts from other units. Some were relieved that for the initial assessment plan due in November, they can start with assessing a few student learning outcomes instead of all of them. Patricia Marsh was also commended on her ability to respond to questions. Those who are more familiar with assessment would like to know more of the next stages in assessment. Assessment methods and measures, how to use results, and developing assessment plans will be the topics of the next workshops offered this fall.

-Ma. Concepcion D. Manzo