Where Do Course SLO's Live?

By Dr. John Nixon, Commissioner
with Dr. Barbara Beno, President

The 2002 Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements (especially ER-10) placed an increased emphasis on the assessment of student learning as a means of evaluating and improving the educational effectiveness of institutions. A few examples of standards that deal with learning outcomes are below:

Standard IB: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to produce and support student learning, measures that learning, assesses how well learning is occurring, and makes changes to improve student learning.

Standard II A.1.c:

The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and uses assessment results to make improvements.

Standard II.A.6:

In every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies learning objectives consistent with those in the institution's officially approved course outline.

This article seeks to add some clarity to the dialogue between and among member institutions, particularly the faculty members, about what the Standards require. The interpretation and application of SLOs at the course level has generated four common questions:

- How do course SLOs relate to learning objectives?
- Must SLOs be consistent across all sections/classes of a course?
- Must SLOs appear in official institutional documents such as the official course outline or catalogue?
- Must SLOs appear in the faculty members' course syllabi?

In an ideal situation, intended student learning outcomes should be the foundation upon which a course is developed. Faculty first define the learning outcomes they expect successful students to achieve and demonstrate, and then from those intended outcomes, design the course. Pedagogy, learning environment, and learning support materials all follow from intended SLOs.

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Realistically, many course designs have been driven by other matters, including transfer institution requirements for general education, articulation agreements, course sequencing, and the notion of the canon of course objectives – what the course will "cover." Vocational or technical courses may have begun with intended learning outcomes as the basis for design, but most institutions are really *adding* student learning outcomes onto existing academic courses. Nevertheless, a good course (and one that successfully addresses accreditation requirements) identifies the intended SLOs for the course, as well as the means of authentically assessing whether and how well students learn.

How do course SLOs relate to learning objectives? Most of the confusion about the difference between SLOs and learning objectives lies in the term "objectives." Generally, objectives specify discrete steps taken within an educational program to achieve an outcome. They are the means, not the ends. So the "course" objectives specified by the California public college system's Academic Senate, for example, are defined as follows: "Objectives are the key elements which must be taught each time the course is taught."[1] Course SLOs are the intended learning outcomes; objectives are the things that must be taught/covered in order to achieve those learning outcomes. Sometimes, these things are very close; often, they are quite distinct.

Must SLOs be consistent across all sections/classes of a course? With SLOs defined in part as the foundation of a course, the ACCJC requirement is that each course has a single set of SLOs that is common to all

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1   The Course Outline of Record: A Curriculum Reference Guide, adopted Spring 2008 by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.

sections/classes of the course, no matter who teaches the section or class (Standards II.A.6 and II.A.6.c.). This assures that all students will know what to expect as the potential outcomes of completing a course successfully. One might refer to that set of SLOs as "core" SLOs for the course. This also means each faculty member teaching the course must ensure the core SLOs are adequately addressed in the pedagogy, pacing, educational materials, learning environment and assessment strategies of the individual classroom. A question often asked is: Can individual faculty choose different strategies and course materials to help students achieve the same core SLOs? The answer is, "That depends on whether the strategies are appropriate to help students learn the intended SLOs." Accreditation standards ask institutions to analyze learning and to use the results to guide improvements in learning by changing pedagogy, curriculum, etc. (Standards II.A.1.c, II.A.2, II.A.2.a, b, e and f). So, diverse strategies among faculty members will be a means of identifying diverse approaches to high quality education and, over time, of identifying which strategies should be abandoned in favor of more effective approaches. In addition, some faculty may want or need to emphasize *additional* SLOs within a course. As long as students are notified of all course SLOs, this practice is acceptable. (See the last question and answer in this article.)

Must SLOs appear in official institutional documents such as the official course outline or catalogue? Since a course must have a single set of core SLOs, it is reasonable to expect those SLOs to appear in the official course outline which guides the faculty teaching the course. The Commission's use of the phrase "official course outline" refers to the document used by the institution to define its official curriculum. Should the SLOs appear in the catalogue? The catalogue serves as a contract between the institution and its students. Standard II.A.6 states that "The institution describes its degrees and certificates in terms of their purpose, content, course requirements and student learning outcomes." It is clear the degree and certificate learning outcomes have to be in the catalogue. In practice, some current institutional catalogues, particularly those in print copy, do not provide a great deal of detail on course content. Others do. In any case, the intended course SLOs ought to be accessible to students who are contemplating taking the course, either in the catalogue or through a link or

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other reference found in the catalogue.

Must SLOs appear in the faculty members' course syllabi? Yes. The answer to this question appears at the beginning of this article, in the quotation from Standard II.A.6. The Commission acknowledges that the use of the words "learning objectives" in this standard appears to be vestigal language from the 1994 Standards. The Commission is currently editing the standards to change the words "learning objectives" to "student learning outcomes."

Just as important as the existence and placement of SLOs is their assessment and the use of assessment results to improve educational effectiveness and learning. These topics will be covered in future articles appearing in this newsletter.

Department of Education Begins Negotiated Rulemaking

The U.S. Department of Education will begin negotiated rulemaking to finalize the regulations that implement the Higher Education Opportunity Act passed last September by Congress. There are four negotiation committees scheduled, and the one that will negotiate on accreditation matters began its work March 4, 2009. Negotiated rulemaking will occur over the months of March through May in three-day sessions. The Department's list of topics to be negotiated includes both elements of the new law as well as issues it attempted to negotiate in 2007. Among those topics are:

A new definition of distance education: The new law attempts to more clearly distinguish between distance education and correspondence education, and the Department has indicated it wishes to incorporate a definition of correspondence courses into the regulations that pertain to accreditation. The accreditors would be required to assure the quality of correspondence courses.

Qualifications of accreditation team members: The new law requires accreditors to assure that their team members who evaluate distance education are "... qualified by education and experience in their own

right and trained by the accreditor, including training on their responsibilities regarding distance and correspondence education."

Standards for Student Success: The new law requires accreditors to have accreditation standards which effectively address "success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission which may include different standards for different institutions or programs, as established by the institution." This language is very confusing, and the rulemaking will be an important means of clarifying it.

Transfer of Credit: The law mandates accreditors to require institutions to have transfer of credit policies that are publicly disclosed and include a statement on the criteria established by the institution regarding transfer of credit.

Teach-out Agreements: The law mandates accreditors to require an institution to submit a teach-out agreement when the institution is notified by the Department that its participation in Title IV has been suspended or terminated, when the accreditor acts to terminate accreditation, and when the institution decides to cease operations.

Conditional Recognition: The Department wishes to negotiate a definition of the recognition process it uses to approve accrediting bodies and to include in that definition the conditional nature of recognition (i.e., that it can be withdrawn any time an accrediting body is found to fail to meet all required criteria). The Department's proposal includes no provisions for prior notification to the accreditor (i.e., no "due process").

Existing regulation called the "one-year rule" requires the Department to withdraw the recognition of any accreditor found out of compliance that fails to come into compliance within one year. The Department proposes to clarify this language.

A current regulation concerns the procedure for limitation, suspension or termination of recognition. The Department seeks to combine this topic with the first item on conditional recognition.

Direct Assessment of Student Learning: The new law requires that an institution that uses direct assess-

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ment of a student's learning to grant credits to prove the learning is equivalent to a specific number of clock or credit hours. The new law requires accreditors to review this practice for inclusion in the institution's accreditation reviews.

Distance Education: The new law requires accreditors to assure that institutions offering distance education have processes in place that establish that the student who registers for a distance education or correspondence course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit.

Monitoring Institutions: Current monitoring regulations are very broad and general and require an accreditor to periodically reevaluate whether an institution remains in compliance with agency standards throughout the accreditation period. The new law inserted a requirement that accreditors monitor the growth of programs at institutions that are experiencing significant enrollment growth, and also to be accountable if the distance education or correspondence course enrollments increase by more than 50% in a fiscal year. This language is of concern over how the negotiations will likely operationally define "monitoring."

Substantive Change: The Department wishes to negotiate additional language defining Substantive Change and the accreditors' responsibility for review of change. The Department has indicated a concern about the pace with which change is occurring in higher education, particularly in distance education programs, new locations, new curriculum, and change of ownership.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality: The Department wishes to obtain information about institutions from accreditors regarding Title IV eligibility and compliance and is sometimes thwarted in these efforts by the Freedom of Information Act, which offers some exemptions from disclosure such as trade secrets or privileged financial information. The Department wishes to clarify its regulations in this area. It also wants to develop a rule that would require accreditors to retain "necessary data and information." Presum-

ably this "retained data" is to serve the Department's own needs.   In the last year, a contractor working for the Department has been asking accrediting bodies for extensive historical information on accreditation, substantive change approval of new programs and sites, and closure of programs and sites.

Appeals: The new law modifies the due process requirements for accreditors considering an institutional appeal of an accreditor's decision to deny or terminate accreditation. The Department proposes to also clarify some of the relevant terms used in the law, which uses both the terms "adverse action" and "adverse decision." The new law also requires an accreditor's appeals policy to permit an institution to introduce new and significant (and necessarily relevant) financial information during the appeals process; in all other regards, an appeal allows no introduction of new evidence.

Summary of Agency Actions: The new law requires that an accreditor make available to the public and the Department a summary of the agency's actions, including (1) the award of accreditation or reaccreditation, (2) final denial or termination of accreditation, and any findings made in connection with the action taken, together with the official comments of the affected institution, and (3) any other adverse action taken with respect to an institution or placement on probation of an institution.

ACCJC member institutions should check the Commission's website in June for a report on the outcome of negotiated rulemaking.
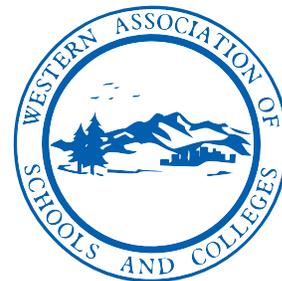
January 2009 Commission Actions on Institutions

At its meeting January 7-9, 2009, The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, took the following institutional actions:

Reaffirmed Accreditation
College of the Canyons
Contra Costa College
Los Medanos College
San Bernardino Valley College

Removed from Warning and Reaffirmed Accreditation
Cañada College
College of San Mateo
College of Marshall Islands
College of the Redwoods
Hawai'i Tokai International College
Marymount College

Removed from Warning
Victor Valley College

Removed from Probation and Reaffirmed Accreditation
The Salvation Army College for Officer Training at Crestmont

Removed from Probation
Modesto Junior College

Removed from Probation and Placed on Warning
Lassen College

Placed on Warning
Cuesta College
El Camino College
Long Beach City College
Rio Hondo College
Santa Ana College
Santiago Canyon College

Continued on Warning
Imperial Valley College
Ohlone College
Palo Verde College
Shasta College
Sierra College

Continued on Show Cause
Northern Marianas College

Placed on Probation
American Samoa Community College
Crafton Hills College
San Joaquin Delta College

Placed on Show Cause
Diablo Valley College
Solano Community College

Accepted Midterm Report
Mt. San Jacinto College
Reedley College

Accepted Focused Midterm Report
Columbia College
DeAnza College
Deep Springs College
Foothill College
Fresno City College
Yuba College

Accepted Progress Report
Grossmont College
Heald College
Irvine Valley College
Saddleback College

Accepted Follow-Up Report
Antelope Valley College
College of the Sequoias
Hawai'i Community College
Los Angeles Valley College
MTI College
Oxnard College
Riverside City College
San Jose City College

Accepted Report
Los Angeles Harbor College

Accepted Closure Report
Brooks College

Accepted Show Cause/Closure Report and Terminated Accreditation effective April 3, 2009
TransPacific Hawai'i College

Rejected Follow-Up Report
College of Micronesia – FSM

The following Substantive Change actions approved by the Committee on Substantive Change were ratified by the Commission at the January 7-9, 2009 meeting.

a. **Hawai'i Community College:** To offer a Certificate of Completion in Substance Abuse Distance Education Program at Kaua'i Community College. (Approved 6/20/08)

b. **Santiago Canyon College:** To offer 11 degree program majors, 40 degrees and 11 certificates of which 50% or more of the courses to complete the majors, degrees or certificates are offered online. (Approved 6/20/08)

c. **West Hills Lemoore College:** To offer an Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Program. (Approved 6/20/08)

d. **Western Career College:** To change ownership by selling stock of the parent corporation, U.S. Education Corporation, to DeVry, Inc. (Approved 9/5/08)

e. **Citrus College:** To add an Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Program; to add 8 programs of which 50% or more of the courses to complete the programs are offered online. (Approved 9/19/08); to add an Emergency Management and Homeland Security Program via distance education. (Deferred for further information 9/19/08)

f. **College of the Canyons:** To rename, relocate and enlarge the Canyon Country Access Center so that students can complete at least 50% or more of their educational program through the mode of distance or electronic delivery. (Approved 9/19/08)

g. **Cosumnes River College:** To offer 16 degrees and 43 certificates of which 50% or more of the courses to complete the degrees or certificates are offered online. (Approved 9/19/08)

h. **Napa Valley College:** To add an Emergency Medical Technician: Paramedic Program (Approved 9/19/08); to add a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Program. (Deferred for further information 9/19/08)

i. **City College San Francisco:** To offer distance education programs in General Education for the Associate Degree in Business, Computer Networking, Information Technology, Computer Science and Spanish. (Approved with additional information to be sent as an addendum to ACCJC 10/17/08)

j. **College of Micronesia-FSM**: To offer a Public Health Training Program (Approved 10/17/08); to offer an Associate in Science in General Agriculture Program. (Deferred for further information 10/17/08)

k. **Honolulu Community College**: To offer the Fire and Environmental Emergency Response Program (FIRE) 50% or more of which is offered through distance or electronic delivery at Kaua'i Community College. (Approved 10/17/08)

l. **Napa Valley College**: To offer online instruction that constitutes 50% or more of the Associate Degrees in Administration of Justice, Business, and Hospitality and Tourism Management Programs. (Approved 10/17/08)

m. National Polytechnic College of Science: To offer Associate of Science Degrees in Health Information Technology and Substance Abuse Counseling. (Approved 10/17/08)

n. TransPacific Hawai'i College: To accept the Closure Report pending documentation for the legal plan and refer to the Commission for action at its January 2009 meeting. (11/14/08)

o. San Joaquin Valley College: To offer a Therapeutic Massage Program and a Registered Nursing Program; (Approved 11/14/08) to open a Victorville campus site. (Deferred for further information 11/14/08)

p. Heald College: To relocate the Portland campus (Approved 11/14/08); to offer 50% or more of programs through a mode of distance or electronic delivery. (Deferred for further information 11/14/08)

q. Yuba College: To offer general education degrees through a mode of distance or electronic delivery. (Approved 11/14/08 with a request for additional information)

r. Allan Hancock College: To offer courses that constitute 50% or more of a program through a mode of distance or electronic delivery. (Approved 11/14/08)

s. Napa Valley College: To offer a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Certificate. (Approved 11/14/08 with a request for additional information)

January 2009 Commission Actions on Policy

At its meeting January 7-9, 2009, The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, took the following policy actions:

Policies Adopted After Second Reading
> Policy and Procedure for Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit
> > Districts or Systems
> Policy on Credit for Prior Experiential Learning in Undergraduate Programs

Edited Policies
> Commission Actions on Institutions

Changes in Commissioners

Newly-selected Commissioners:

Dr. Richard J. Scardamaglia – Dr. Richard J. Scardamaglia was selected to serve as a public member of the Commission. Over the course of his career in education, Dr. Scardamaglia has served as a teacher, principal, and superintendent in seven school districts in northern California. He is founder and partner of a company that evaluates charter schools. Dr. Scardamaglia's service on the Commission began July 1, 2008.

Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne – Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne was selected to serve as a public member of the Commission. Dr. Whitehurst-Payne is employed by California State University, San Marcos, where she is the Clinical Practice Coordinator for Special Education Programs. She formerly served as a program evaluator and assisted public and private Title I schools prepare for state and federal reviews. Dr. Payne's service on the Commission began July 1, 2008.

Commissioners to be Selected

The Commission is accepting applications to fill three vacant positions on the Commission. Application forms are available from the Commission Office.

Per ACCJC Bylaws, Commissioners are appointed for staggered three-year terms and are limited to two, three-year terms unless the person is elected as an officer for a term which extends beyond a sixth year. In such a case, an additional three-year term may be served.

A Selection Committee will meet this year to fill three Commission vacancies: two Commission members representing faculty and one member representing administration.

Comprehensive Visits

Under current U.S. Department of Education regulations, ACCJC must provide opportunity for third-party comment regarding the institutional qualifications for accreditation. The institutions noted below are scheduled to undergo comprehensive visits in the spring of 2009, the fall of 2009, and the spring of 2010 and review by the Commission at its June 2009, January 2010, and June 2010 meetings. Third-party comment on these institutions should be made to the ACCJC President, Dr. Barbara A. Beno, at 10 Commercial Blvd. Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949. For consideration, such comment must be made in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and received no later than five weeks before the scheduled Commission meeting.

Spring 2009
(for June 2009 Commission Review)
Berkeley City College
Butte College
College of Alameda
College of the Marshall Islands
East Los Angeles College
Laney College
Los Angeles City College
Los Angeles Trade-Technical College
Merritt College
Palomar College
Pasadena City College
Santa Rosa Junior College

Fall 2009
(for January 2010 Commission Review)
American River College
Chabot College
Citrus College
Cosumnes River College
Folsom Lake College
Las Positas College
Moreno Valley Campus (Initial Accreditation)
Napa Valley College
National Polytechnic College of Science
Norco Campus (Initial Accreditation)
Sacramento City College
Santa Barbara City College
Southwestern College
Taft College

ACCJC Spring 2009 Workshops

Each year, ACCJC holds workshops to train evaluators and team chairs who will conduct comprehensive reviews of member institutions as well as workshops for institutions about to begin the process of self study leading to the Self Study Report and comprehensive visit.

Self Study Training Workshops

Self Study Training Workshops will be held this spring for the following institutions preparing for self study and comprehensive review:

February 27, 2009 Victor Valley College, Deep Springs College

March 6, 2009 West Hills College-Coalinga, West Hills College-Lemoore, Merced College

March 13, 2009 Cypress College, Fullerton College, FIDM, College of the Desert

Additional ACCJC Workshops

Academic Resource Conference
April 15 – 18, 2009

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges in collaboration with the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities is holding the first ACSCU/ACCJC-WASC conference. The event will be held April 15 – 18, 2009 at the Renaissance Hollywood Hotel. The ACCJC strand of the Academic Resource Conference (ARC) will feature a session titled "Higher Education and Its Implications for Two-Year Colleges" and will focus on the key elements and most current themes in the new Higher Education Act, how it will affect higher education, and the expectations and requirements on institutions. In a session titled "ACCJC/WASC Requirement: SLOs in Accredited 2-Year Institutions by 2012," ACCJC staff will explain what is required of member institutions to meet accreditation standards related to the development and implementation of the Student Learning Outcomes–Assessment–Analysis–Improvement Cycle by 2012. This session will feature an institution's successful use of assessment to improve student learning. A third session titled "Program Review and Integrated Planning for Two-Year Institutions," ACCJC staff will present the key components of integrated planning with the expectation that institutions achieve sustainable and continuous quality improvement throughout the college. A model diagram outlining the integration of the key components of data collection and use in planning and resource allocation will be presented together with one institution's successful application of this process.

At this writing, ten ACCJC member institutions will be featured in the ACCJC strand: Barstow Community College, Chaffey College, College of Marin, College of the Marshall Islands, Long Beach City College, Guam Community College, Honolulu Community College, San Joaquin Valley College, and Taft College. Details of these workshops are noted in the program.

Assessment workshops will be held prior to the start of the conference. In addition, an invitation-only program will be offered for new chief executive officers on the accreditation process.

For registration and additional conference information, visit the ARC website at www.wascarc.org.

ACCJC Fall 2009 Workshop Strengthening Student Success

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges is again proud to be a co-sponsor of the Strengthening Student Success Conference this fall (October 7-9, 2009). The conference will be held at San Francisco Airport Marriott Hotel. The purpose of the conference is to bring together practitioners to share new ideas and current assessment practices around strengthening student success through the themes of equity, professional learning and development, and student voices. The 2009 conference will explore using evidence to improve practice, as well as the integration of curriculum with basic skills, student services, CTE, and college institutional effectiveness structures.

For further information, see the Research and Planning Group conference web site at http://www.rpgroup.org/events/sss09.html.

Substantive Change Committee Meeting Schedule 2009

Meetings are usually held on the 3rd Friday of each month from 2:30 to 4:30 P.M.

For the purposes of scheduling, and for an initial staff determination about the nature of the change in question, it is important to contact Commission staff *before* submitting a substantive change proposal. Institutional proposals for substantive change must be completed according to the requirements as detailed in the *Substantive Change Manual* (www.accjc.org). Every proposal must include supporting materials as detailed in Section VI of the Manual. The Substantive Change Committee reserves the right to return incomplete proposals without review.

Copies of each institutional substantive change proposal along with a college catalog must be mailed directly to each of the members of the Substantive Change Committee (mailing list will be provided). In addition, one electronic copy and one hard copy should be sent to the ACCJC office. Proposals must be received no later than *one month before* the date of the scheduled meeting.

Dates of Meetings
(subject to change depending on scheduling circumstances)

March 13	April 17	May 15

After April 1, 2009, no new proposals will be scheduled until fall 2009. The 2009-2010 Committee on Substantive Change meeting schedule will be posted after the June 2009 Commission meeting.

If there are further questions, please contact ACCJC/WASC at 415-506-0234 or accjc@accjc.org.

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COMMISSIONERS