

WHY MEASURE SLOs?

When the new accreditation standards were approved and implemented, the Southwestern College Faculty Senate worked to create a process that would assess and document student learning in all courses at Southwestern College. The Senate sought to create an SLO assessment process that:

- Implemented our student learning philosophy.
- Protected and enhanced Academic Freedom.
- Included students as active participants in learning and assessment.
- Provided new opportunities for fulltime and part-time faculty to dialogue about student assessment results and plan research based improvements to curriculum and instruction.

We have always measured student learning and evaluated assessment results as a part of grading each term and in a broader way as a part of Academic Program Review. The goal of our syllabi and instruction included clear communication of what to learn and how learning would be measured.

Assessment of SLOs provides additional structure for student learning that is based in Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLO). At Southwestern College this meant we found time for dialogue and discourse on the critical areas of learning we all valued and would support for our students: Communication, Thinking and Reasoning, Information Competency, and Global Awareness. This process raised our collective consciousness so that all curriculum and program planning is created to enhance student learning of skills in our ISLO Achievement Areas.

Assessment Process

Our Senate Faculty identified diverse measurement options for student learning. This process also resulted in research and discussion of new measurement options. One option is the use of rubrics to house explicit criteria for measuring student learning. The development of the criteria as with SLO development can include all faculty and can also include feedback from students. This is especially true of sequenced courses in which students advancing in a course sequence can provide feedback on instruction and measurement to faculty. Students can compare previous learning with new learning. Because of the national use of rubrics to measure student learning, our college invested in a proprietary software, eLumen, which is designed to house rubrics for course assessment, samples of student work that meets each criteria, and student outcomes. This software and method is designed to provide students with a clear understanding of what they need to do to develop competency in the areas of student learning assessed. Grades may or may not be tied to SLOs.

Our Academic Program Review process requires yearly review of each program plan, known as the Summary Work Plan, each term. This provides a natural opportunity for faculty to meet face-to-face and electronically to review the plan as well as SLO assessment results. The discussion of results is as important as the data itself. Thus minutes of the discussion are kept and archived in each school office.

Lastly, the Senate Faculty identified what student assessment is NOT:

- A way to evaluate individual faculty or staff
- A solution to learning problems at college
- A means to abrogate Academic Freedom