

**Harris-Stowe State University**  
**Guidelines for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment**  
**Spring 2010**

**Purpose and Steps**

**Purpose of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment**

Student learning outcomes assessment (SLOA) is the systematic gathering of evidence about student learning to be used to improve curricula and pedagogy in order to improve student learning.

**Steps**

**Step One: Establish Student Learning Outcomes**

Student learning outcomes address the questions: What do you want students to learn? What should your students know or be able to do at the end of your program? The focus is on student learning rather than on the department goals (e.g. complete these courses, learn this material, or read these textbooks). Therefore, outcome statements begin with “The students will” and state in measurable terms what the students should know or be able to do at the end of your program.

At HSSU, the Hallmarks of Student Learning and Development are the framework for student learning outcomes. Identifying and communicating outcomes to students in the framework of the Hallmarks lets them know what is expected of them. Thus, students should expect to find learning outcomes for all of the hallmarks for every program of study. These outcomes should be clearly communicated to students via syllabi, the web, and other ways.

Outcomes at each level of courses (e.g. 100, 200, 300, 400) should contribute to the overall outcomes for the program and offer students opportunities to practice and perform the culminating outcomes.

**Step Two: Assess Student Learning**

Once outcomes are determined, the next step is to decide on the assessment techniques that will best measure the quality of student learning. Assessment instruments should measure what you value most. Assessment techniques should include direct measures and may include indirect measures. The same assessment tools can be used for grading and for making decisions for improvement. Assessment techniques should fit the outcomes, and the program should help students understand the fit. The program will need to determine a schedule and responsibility for assessment; in other words, who will assess what and when?

**Step Three: Analyze Assessment Results**

The program needs to determine who will analyze the assessment results, how they will be analyzed, when the analysis will take place, and what will be included in the analysis.

#### **Step Four: Discuss Assessment Results**

While assessment of individual student learning is necessary to assign grades, the added value of assessment is the evidence it provides to improve a program which, in turn, improves student learning. Assessment results also inform curriculum and program planning and review. Thus, the discussion of assessment results should address the questions: What do the results mean for student learning, pedagogy, curriculum planning, and program delivery? What are your plans for improving student learning based on the results?

#### **Step Five: Document Discussions and Decisions**

An important component in the assessment process is to document the evidence gathered and changes made, especially in courses and programs of study. This type of documentation allows the program to provide solid evidence of improvements and the rationale for improvements to external audiences such as accrediting and funding agencies and to internal audiences such as curriculum committees and planning committees. The program needs to determine who will document the discussions of assessment results and how and when they will be documented. The program should track the changes made and plan to assess whether the changes were effective in improving student learning.

### **Examples of Assessment Techniques**

Assessment measures need to fit the student learning outcomes. For example, if students are expected to master facts and basic concepts, then a multiple-choice test may be appropriate. If students are expected to be able to analyze a complex problem and present solutions, then an essay test or paper may be appropriate.

Assessment techniques may include direct and/or indirect measures. Direct measures need not involve additional collection of evidence of student learning. They may simply involve faculty looking at existing measures in different ways. In other words, faculty who teach the same course look for patterns of student learning and areas of concern in the results of tests and other assessment measures. For example, if a faculty member sees that, over time, his students routinely do poorly on certain items on a test, then he brings this information to a faculty discussion about the course. The faculty members might discover that this is a problem across all sections of the course and decide to change the syllabus or the materials.

Embedded questions allow for easy analysis across sections of a course. For this technique, for example, faculty teaching the sections agree on some common questions on their final exams. Then, student responses to the common questions are examined across sections of the course to find where the majority of the students did well and where they did not do as well. This will help faculty identify areas for improvement in pedagogy and course content.

For direct measures such as performances, presentations, papers, internships, theses, and dissertations, faculty should develop scoring rubrics that address quality and content of learning. Here are some benefits of developing and using rubrics (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998, p. 72):

- Make grading more consistent and fair.
- Save time in the grading process.
- Diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses very specifically.
- Help adjunct faculty grade papers consistently.
- Reach agreement with colleagues on criteria for common exams, for multiple sections, or for sequenced courses.
- Introduce greater distinctions into one's grading.
- Provide data for program assessment.

Rubrics make the criteria for evaluation very clear and explicit and offer the advantage of evaluating students in similar ways. They allow for comparisons across students without having to use objective tests. While rubrics take time to develop, they save time in the grading process. Rubrics should be shared with the students so that they understand the criteria on which they will be graded. Using the results, faculty analyze the rubrics to find areas of strength and weakness in student learning.

Indirect measures ask students about their perceptions of their learning. Indirect measures may be more appropriate for measuring student learning at the institutional level.

#### Examples of Direct Measures

Standardized tests

Pre-post tests

Embedded questions

Portfolios (use rubric)

Reflections (use rubric)

Culminating projects, for example, in capstone courses (use rubric)

#### Examples of Indirect Measures

surveys, interviews, focus groups

retention and graduation rates

placement rates (jobs and graduate school)

course evaluations

surveys of graduating students and alumni

employer satisfaction surveys or interviews

National Survey of Student Engagement