

Assessment Manual  
Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)  
Solano Community College

In addition to assessing student outcomes at the course level, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) requires the assessment of outcomes at the program level to maintain our accreditation. We are defining an academic program as a series of courses that lead to a certificate or a degree. (There are Service Area Outcomes (SAOs) for non-academic programs, but those are not included here.) Do not confuse “Program Assessment” with “Program Review.” Program Assessment will probably be done on an annual basis as part of the District’s Integrated Planning Process (IPP) whereas Program Review will be done every five years (though CTE programs funded through Perkins will do so every two years) and requires significantly more effort from faculty.

Program outcomes: (1) should lead to improved student success by finding and removing obstacles, especially as our funding is going to be tied to the number of students **who successfully complete our classes and programs** rather than the number of students who initially enroll in them; (2) are tied to the Integrated Planning Process (IPP) and Strategic Proposals to prioritize funding (so programs that are not assessed will receive no funding through the Strategic Proposal process); (3) contribute a critical component to our redesigned Program Review process; and (4) are now an obligation of faculty workload.

Programs can be assessed in various ways, including (1) a state licensing exam, (2) a capstone course, or (3) use of curriculum maps.

For those academic programs that lead to a **state licensing exam**, e.g., nursing or cosmetology, the success rate at which students pass their state exam is a good measure of the program’s effectiveness. Other measures could certainly be included; in nursing, for example, the results of an employer survey will also be incorporated.

Assessment of a **capstone course** that incorporates all of the PLOs would be another way to assess a program. In Child Development and Family Studies (formerly ECE), the assessment of CDFS 066 (Early Childhood Education Practicum II) will serve as the program assessment. Again, other factors that faculty think are important can and should be included.

But most academic programs will probably be assessed by using their curriculum maps. It has been a while since most of us looked at ours, but the Math CM can serve as an example:

PLO 1*	PLO 2
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Solve a problem applying appropriate math concepts and ideas.

Effectively communicate solution(s).

MATH020	M	M
MATH021	M	M
MATH022	M	M
MATH023	M	M
MATH011	D	D
MATH012	D	D
MATH040	M	M

\*“I” introduced, “D” developing, and “M” mastered.

Note that Program Learning Outcomes go across the top and then the various courses that contribute to that PLO are listed to the left. In the math example, lower-level courses, e.g, algebra, have not been entered as they are not college-level courses.

Using the MATH CM above, Joe Conrad, academic renaissance man, assessed the program as:

## Program Assessment

**Program name:** Mathematics Degree

Date of assessment: Summer 2012

Assessment performed by: Joe Conrad

### **PLO 1: Solve a problem applying appropriate math concepts and ideas.**

Results: Students typically performed well in this area.

Planned action: None.

Narrative: The assessments for the course SLO's which link to this PLO were analyzed in the following courses: Math 11, Math 22, Math 23 and Math 40. These courses represent the ends of various curricular threads and even though not all students will take each of the courses, they will take at least two of them to complete a degree. The assessments showed satisfactory to high performance on the outcomes at the course level. Students typically did well on solving typical problems although non-standard problems did create difficulties.

### **PLO 2: Effectively communicate solution(s).**

Results: Those assessments that specifically addressed this PLO showed poor results.

Planned action: Attention to effective communication, both in assessment and in specific course SLOs, should be addressed. Instructors should be adding attention to communication in their classes. More assessments should be designed to measure this PLO. It would be helpful to have some course SLO's added which specifically include consideration of this PLO.

Timeline for planned actions: 2012-13

**Narrative:** As with PLO1, assessments were analyzed in the courses listed above. None of the course SLO's specifically mentioned this PLO, however a couple of the assessments incorporated the idea. In particular, a Math 23 assessment mentioned difficulty with vocabulary. Also, a Math 11 assessment (SLO3) discussed the difficulty students had in communicating the results of their analysis of media stories.

Note that this program assessment is three paragraphs long, though the assessments of programs with more outcomes will undoubtedly be longer. Student strengths in problem solving are identified (and that need no action) while the problem students have in communicating solutions needs to be addressed by including communication as a course learning outcome and by adding more assessments regarding communication.

Faculty should identify and include any needs of the program, including personnel, equipment, supplies, needed workshops/training, etc. These needs will then feed into the Integrated Planning Process and funding through the Strategic Proposal process.

So Program Assessment is vital for increasing the success of our students and maintaining our accreditation; it need not be an onerous task.

If you need help, contact your School Coordinator, Dean, or SLO Coordinator.

Program assessments should be turned into the Deans, who will post them to the shared folders.