

Assessment Philosophy

What is assessment?

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes is the process by which the college can improve college programs. It is an ongoing and cyclical process aimed at understanding and improving student learning through continuous refinement of our instructional practices. It involves making expectations explicit and transparent; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve instruction. Assessment involves collecting a sample of behavior from your students that can be observed and evaluated on the basis of specific criteria and developed and assessed in multiple modes and contexts with a focus on the learning process. As such, the measures used by department/programs may vary across the college. For example, artifacts of student learning can be expressed as narratives, a performance, skills demonstration or numbers.

Why assess student learning outcomes?

When we assess student learning, we identify which of our teaching practices are successful and which ones are not, enabling us to modify our teaching practices to improve student success. When we share student learning outcomes with students, we empower them to become more actively involved in their own learning. Regular assessments help maintain and enhance the quality of education for students. Assessment helps us create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education (AAHE Bulletin, 1995). Assessment promotes dialogue among the stakeholders, including faculty, students, administrators, and accrediting bodies. This communication fosters transparency and accountability within our processes.

Who will conduct outcomes assessment?

It is within the purview of the faculty of College of the Siskiyous to identify the core knowledge and skills that students need to master, and to shape, design, and disseminate institutional assessment as instructed by the Academic Senate. Only faculty can identify the learning outcome, or what they expect to happen for the student in college courses and programs. Only faculty can interpret the results of assessment and recommend improvements in instructional practices and curriculum. Faculty shall maintain ownership of student learning outcomes and assessment processes. Assessment should be completed by all faculty regardless of part-time or full-time status.

What will assessment be used for?

At College of the Siskiyous, ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes helps us understand, and thereby improve, student learning through informed decision making and planning. Assessment at College of the Siskiyous will be used to:

- Improve services, feedback, guidance, and mentoring to students.
- Design and improve programs and courses.
- Plan at the department and program level including resource allocation, based on evidence from assessment.
- Identify shared definitions and measurable benchmarks for evaluating student abilities.
- Understand how groups of students experience the college differently and respond appropriately to the needs of all students.
- Align and coordinate courses within and across disciplines.
- Align and coordinate courses and programs with external institutions' requirements as necessary.
- Continuously reflect, refine, and modify teaching and learning practices.

What will assessment not be used for?

Effective assessment relies upon a climate of trust and freedom of inquiry. As faculty at College of the Siskiyous, we perform assessments of student learning and control the results of our assessments.

Therefore, at College of the Siskiyous, we encourage faculty to not:

- Use assessment of student learning as an end in itself. Assessment that does not promote student learning is a misallocation of efforts.
- Use any single mode of assessment to answer all questions or strictly determine program decisions.
- Use assessment in a way that will impinge upon the academic freedom or professional rights of faculty. Individual faculty members must continue to exercise professional judgment in matters of assessment and grading.
- Assess all students in order to learn about the effectiveness of our programs and policies; a subset is sufficient.
- Assume that assessment is only quantitative. While numerical scales or rubrics can be useful, their accuracy always depends upon the clear understanding of the concepts behind the numbers.
- Use assessment only to evaluate the end of the student's experience or merely to be accountable to outside parties.
- Use results of assessment of student learning as a means of evaluating faculty.

What are best practices in assessment?

We encourage faculty to:

- Use multiple modes of assessing student learning, where appropriate, rather than relying on any single method.
- Assess those skills, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge that are important and valuable.
- Assess the ongoing progress of students throughout their experience at College of the Siskiyous.
- Use assessment processes and instruments that accommodate and encourage creativity and originality shown by students.
- Explain the purposes of assessment so that staff, students, and the community can see why assessment is being used.

What is the difference between grades and assessment of learning outcomes?

Assessment data collection is organized to target specific outcomes and is focused on how a whole group of students are learning, rather than the individual student. Final grades are based on multiple criteria and may not give specific information about the learning that happens. Student learning outcomes are generic abilities that can be developed, improved upon, and assessed.

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