



INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

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NOTES FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT - Dr. Mary Kay Rudolph

Happy Thanksgiving, College Colleagues, and welcome to the second edition of Instructional Notes for Fall Semester, 2007. This edition is primarily devoted to Project LEARN and various issues surrounding Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). You will find success stories and testimonials to the value of adding SLOs into our existing courses and programs. There is also an interesting article on teaching tips for the community college student – particularly those students who may be under-prepared. Finally, we round out Instructional Notes with an update on our Accreditation Self-Study and several smaller articles.

This semester has truly flown by. I want to thank each and every one of you for the invaluable work you have done and continue to do. I know that we all have many projects on our plates: SLOs, the Basic Skills Initiative, a new Program Review process, a new curriculum module, and writing our Accreditation Self-Study, just to name a few. Your hard work and dedication have allowed us to accomplish more than many would have ever thought possible. Thank you and have a wonderful and much deserved holiday break!

Mary Kay

Mary Kay Rudolph, Vice President of Academic Affairs



Fall Rosters are due January 4, 2008
Grades Turned in Late
Adversely Affect Students

Late grades can cause major disruptions in the lives of students. If their records are incomplete, their eligibility for graduation, scholarships, transfer, financial aid or intercollegiate sports could be affected. Therefore, please submit your rosters to the Admissions & Records Offices as soon as possible once your classes have finished. **All final grades must arrive in Admissions & Records by 5pm on Friday, January 4, 2008.** *Please note that the college will be closed for Winter Break, December 22 –*

January 1, 2008, and will be open to accept rosters again on Wednesday, January 2, 2008.

Please use a dark #2 pencil to fill in the Final Grade Report, and sign the Official Roster in ink. **Final Grade Reports and Official Rosters must be turned in together.** If you did not receive an Official Roster, contact Admissions & Records at 522-2788 before turning in grades so that we can order a replacement.

PLEASE SUBMIT GRADES IN PERSON (recommended) to the Santa Rosa or Petaluma Admissions & Records Offices. Grades may also be submitted through intercampus mail—please be sure to sign your rosters before submitting.

Additionally, if you are unable to submit grades by one of the two preferred options stated above, you may send your grades by U.S. Mail; however, you **will** be responsible for providing an envelope and postage, and ensuring that your grades arrive by the deadline. **Please make copies before mailing your grades.**

Thank you for your cooperation.



Does Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Promote Meaningful Improvements in Student Learning?

Kris Abrahamson, Dean for Liberal Arts and Sciences

Before investing time and effort in a student learning outcomes initiative, faculty have a legitimate right to ask, "Is there evidence that the assessment of student learning outcomes contributes to meaningful improvements in student learning in the community colleges?" Initially, the statewide Academic Senate resisted the adoption of the new ACCJC accreditation standards because anecdotal evidence did not clearly suggest that assessment led to improved student learning. However, statewide Academic Senate President Mark Wade Lieu is now convinced that "there is a growing body of data to show that the SLO process is resulting in better alignment of curriculum and programs, better critical thinking by students, and a much needed look at some of our pedagogical techniques and content" (*Senate Rostrum*, September 2007).

So, what is this growing body of data in support of student learning outcomes assessment? A literature review reveals that a wide variety of colleges, including many community colleges, have achieved significant improvements in student learning by assessing student learning outcomes and by using the results of assessment to implement incremental improvements in teaching, curriculum, or programs. Some community colleges have experienced dramatic transformations when assessment becomes deeply a part of the campus climate and culture. For example, Danville Community College in Virginia focused on student learning outcomes to improve retention and completion for low-income, ethnic minority, and under-prepared students. Tallahassee Community College in Florida focused on new accreditation standards to close the achievement gap between African-American and White students while moving more students through developmental pathways towards successful transfer. Mt. Hood Community College in Oregon frequently publishes the results of their many successful assessment efforts that have improved student learning. Palomar Community College in Southern California began transforming their college from an “instruction-centered” to a “learning-centered” paradigm even before implementation of the new standards, and it continues to enjoy a strong commitment to student success. More common, however, are the hundreds of small success stories in which individual academic departments or disciplines have made incremental changes to their teaching practices, curriculum, or programs to improve student learning. For example, over 500 community college faculty members attended the recent Student Success Conference in San Jose in October 2007, and many shared their stories and their excitement about how student learning outcomes and assessment are changing teaching and learning at their colleges.

At Santa Rosa Junior College, two of our core values have always been our commitment to excellence in teaching and in learning. The new accreditation standards, as embodied in the Project LEARN initiative, encourage us to continue to build on these commitments in an informed, thoughtful, and systematic way. The accreditation standards above all encourage dialogue among colleagues about what we want our students to learn and how we can best support their learning. This is something we can and should embrace. For further information about Project LEARN, go to www.santarosa.edu/projectlearn



Q & A: Student Learning Outcomes

Q: If we identify program-level outcomes now, will we be locked into those outcomes in the future?

A: No. It is quite possible that program outcomes will evolve as faculty engage in dialogue about what they want students to learn and as the expectations of the workplace and the transfer institutions change. This year, our goal is to identify outcomes for all majors and career certificates, and to post those on the web. If faculty later want to refine or change the outcomes, there is a one page *Certificate or Major Revision* form that departments can submit with changes.

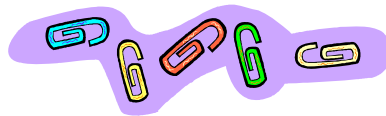
Q: What if students are not succeeding in meeting the outcomes for the course? Will that reflect negatively in the instructor's evaluation?

A: The *Project LEARN Handbook* explicitly states, "Assessment results are not and should not be associated with individual faculty or staff evaluation" (*Handbook*, p. 4). The AFA/District Contract allows faculty to voluntarily refer to assessment activities as part of their own self-assessment, but assessment results are not a factor in the evaluation process.

Q: Why do we need to identify and assess student learning outcomes? Don't faculty already assess students by grading their work?

A: Yes, grading is a form of assessment, but grading reflects the individual performance of particular students. Grading practices may vary widely among instructors teaching the same course. In contrast, student learning outcomes are developed collaboratively by discipline colleagues teaching the same course, and assessment of outcomes is intended to evaluate if students across all sections of the course are meeting learning goals and to identify ways to improve learning.

If you have questions about Project Learn or Student Learning outcomes, please direct those to ***Craig Foster and Wanda Burzycki, Student Learning Outcomes Coordinators***. Responses to common questions will be featured in upcoming issues of ***Instructional Notes***.



When Is Our Learning Assessment Project *Done*?

Over the past few years, many departments have launched Learning Assessment Projects (LAPs). Some have been completed within their original time-frame; others have reached certain stages and then become stalled. Perhaps a stack of data is sitting on someone's desk, or a draft of a report is waiting to be read by other department members. Maybe someone even sent a summary of project results in, but the question still arises: Are we *done* yet? Of course, the specific answer will vary according to the nature of the LAP, but there are two general answers in the new ***Project LEARN Handbook***. And you might find that your department is farther along than you thought.

The first answer, based on the ***Five Row Model*** currently being used, is that you are done when you have documented the four required steps:

1. Formulation of Student Learning Outcomes
2. Determination of the means of assessment
3. Implementation of assessment activities and recording results
4. Analysis of results to determine ways to improve the course or program.

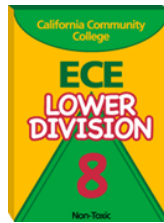
Once you have analyzed the assessment results, planned how these results will be used to improve the course, and submitted a report of this information to your dean or

supervising administrator, you have completed the *required* documentation of your project. As far as official paperwork goes, you are *done*. However, the second answer is the more pedagogically “true” answer. It stems from the optional fifth step of the *Five Row Model*:

5. Follow-up assessment to determine effectiveness of improvement plan.

As stated in the ***Project LEARN Handbook***, “If our goal is to improve student learning, then we must determine if our instructional changes had the positive impact that we desired.... *Outcomes assessment is an ongoing process*. When you compile the findings of your follow-up assessment, you of course will want to compare them to the initial assessment.” In other words, as instructors or directors of programs, our interest in our students’ achievement towards Student Learning Outcomes continues well past the paperwork and becomes an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

Craig Foster and Wanda Burzycki, SLO Coordinators, are in the process of contacting departments about the progress of their Learning Assessment Projects. Already, a number of departments have discovered that they are further along in their project than they thought. With the accreditation process moving forward, Project LEARN’s goal to update its record of LAPs that have completed the first 4 steps and to assist other departments in reaching that point. With this foundation, the cyclical process of assessment and improvement can continue.



PROJECT LEARN ASSESSMENT PROJECTS

Child Development Department: SLOs – Part of the Bigger Picture

Joel Gordon, Director, Child Development

The Child Development Department at SRJC is providing a leadership role and working collaboratively with the other child development departments around the state to develop a common set of program and student learning outcomes and similar content for the core 24 units that form the basis of an AA major. As more and more emphasis is put on early childhood education by the public school system, it is an important step in the professionalism of the field that there be a common definition of the competencies, skills and knowledge necessary to be an accomplished teacher.

Having a common set of outcomes and similar content for the first 24 units or eight classes will help students move easily between community colleges and help them reach their educational and career goals. We have also been working with our colleagues in the Early Childhood Education and Child Development departments in the CSU system to develop a method whereby the entire 24 unit package would be accepted as fully transferable into the major and would form the foundation for upper division study.

This Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) coincides with the accreditation emphasis on Student Learning Outcomes, so part of the process of developing the foundation courses involved defining the SLOs for courses and relating them to program SLOs. While the approach each college takes for these courses will differ to some degree and academic freedom will be preserved, the continuity among colleges will provide students with a smoother path towards an AA degree, transfer and career.

The process in developing these courses has involved a good deal of networking and discussion over the last year and a half. While the CAP is still a work in progress, it represents a tangible leap in our field. An article about the project in *Bridges* from the California Department of Education reflects the collaborative and constructive nature of the development of the CAP: "Community college faculty report that they feel they are stronger teachers and educators as a result of this year's collaborations."

At this point the consortium of community college ECE/CD departments has completed draft SLOs of all the courses and the program. These should be completed this year, along with the development of assessment criteria. In SRJC's Child Development Department, Susan Carpenter, one of the regional leads for Northern California, will be coordinating this. It promises to be both an exciting and challenging project.

For more information, see the CAP homepage at http://www.childdevelopment.org/cs/cdtc/print/htdocs/services_cap.htm. The *Bridges* article, found on Page 2 of that edition, is also available through a link on that website.



Ergonomically Correct: Keyboarding Assessment

In December 2005 Business Office Technology submitted a learning assessment project for BOT 50A (Keyboarding). In response to recommendations from the Project LEARN committee, they submitted a revised version of the project in March 2006, having selected a single outcome (ergonomics) to assess. BOT faculty surveyed students to determine the effectiveness of instruction, much of it online. The results of the survey, submitted in March 2007, confirmed that students were in fact learning what the course intended for them to learn, though some instructors felt that minor tweaking of some

instructional practices might improve performance. A final report of the learning assessment project is being prepared and will be submitted early in 2008.

BOT's work with this Keyboarding class illustrates the "cycle of inquiry and assessment" at the heart of Project LEARN. They engaged the assessment process and in so doing discovered that their current instructional practices were working well and needed only the most minor changes. The Project LEARN committee wants faculty to know that their learning assessment projects may have similar results. At the same time, faculty may discover that a particular outcome in one course is not being achieved by a majority of their students, in which case more substantive revision may be required.



Building Student Confidence in Writing: Assessment in English 1A *Craig Foster, English*

The English Department's Learning Assessment Project (LAP) in fall 2005 centered on student confidence levels in English 1A. Students were asked to rate their confidence as writers at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the semester. In addition, at midterm students brainstormed lists of strategies and methods their teachers might adopt to increase student confidence. Data compiled at the end of the semester was enlightening - students entering English 1A averaged 3.54 on a 5.0 scale of confidence; by midterm, that average had dropped to 2.9; but by semester's end, the average was 4.1. Student comments emphasized the importance of direct instructor feedback, which led in spring 2006 to a renewed effort to get students into the Writing Center, where individual instruction was available. Then, in fall 2006, one English faculty member used her sabbatical leave to develop the On-line Writing Lab (OWL), a series of computer-based lessons on topics identified by students in their midterm assessment of confidence levels. Many of these same students continue to use the Writing Lab to help them with writing assignments in courses outside the English Department. The final report of this two-year learning assessment project will be submitted in December 2007.





Accreditation Self-Study Update *Gary Allen, Self-Study Chair*

The approximately 100 classified staff, faculty, and administrators who volunteered to serve on the accreditation self study are well into the process of gathering information and responding to the best practices statements of the standards. Several of the nine committees are already in the process of drafting their reports, which have a due date of March 1, 2008.

When the draft is completed, it will be posted on the SRJC accreditation website and feedback will be solicited from the campus community. This website contains a wealth of information about the accreditation standards, the structure of our accreditation body (Western Association of Schools and Colleges or WASC), and the organization of the SRJC self study. The website address is <https://www.santarosa.edu/accred/>

In addition, many of you may have seen the faculty and staff accreditation survey in an email circulated by the Director of Institutional Research KC Greaney. Thanks to those of you who have responded. If you have not yet responded, please take the 8-10 minutes of time the survey requires. These questions were written by your peers, the members of the accreditation committees, and they are very interested in getting your feedback on many college issues.

Thanks so much to all who are participating in this important process that allows us to celebrate what we do well and make constructive suggestions about how to make SRJC an even better institution.





A Dozen Teaching Tips for Community College Classrooms

By PIPER FOGG

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Section: Community Colleges

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For the majority of community college professors, teaching is the most important part of their jobs. And it's not easy. Community college students are a diverse bunch but often face a particular set of challenges. Many entering students are not prepared for college-level work. And while some students plan to transfer to competitive four-year colleges, others struggle to complete remedial courses. Some students commute long distances, and many have jobs or families. In one class, a teacher may face an 18-year-old who is fresh out of high school, a single mother who works part time, and a first-generation college student who doesn't speak English well.

Community college students require teachers who are engaging, creative, responsive, and energetic — and who understand their students' needs. Professors have to be up on the latest teaching methods, know which of them work for their students, and be flexible enough to change when something isn't working. Here are a dozen tips — many from seasoned professors — for those just starting out, or for veterans who want fresh ideas.

1. Remember that your students are freshmen and sophomores.

One trap new faculty members fall into in their first jobs out of graduate school is to harbor inflated expectations, says Robin D. Jenkins, director of the Writers Institute at Georgia Perimeter College. "One new instructor in my department, for instance, asked students to write four lengthy essays during one 75-minute period," he says, "because that's the sort of thing she'd been expected to do in her graduate courses."

Mr. Jenkins advises new teachers to look at what their more-experienced colleagues are assigning, and to check out their syllabi. Even better, take them to lunch, he says, and pick their brains. "We all want to have the appropriate amount of rigor in our classes," he says, but that doesn't mean piling on the work when students aren't ready for it.

2. While setting realistic expectations is important, you must also share them with your students.

If you are a stickler for grammar, let it be known on Day 1, advises Delaney J. Kirk, a professor of management at the University of South Florida at Sarasota-Manatee. Tell students if you give grace periods for assignments or if you will not tolerate tardiness. "Have a rationale so the policy is seen as reasonable," says Ms. Kirk, the author of *Taking Back the Classroom: Tips for the College Professor on Becoming a More Effective Teacher* (Ti-berius Publications, 2005). After explaining your philosophy, take time to learn what students expect of you as well: Teaching is a two-way street.

3. Take advantage of the technology-training courses your college offers, but don't feel pressured to use technology for its own sake.

Sample everything that interests you, find the applications that best fit your teaching style, and try to incorporate them into your teaching. Just because your college offers fancy technology with a big "wow" factor doesn't always mean it will help you. "Experiment with what works for you," says Georgia Perimeter's Mr. Jenkins. "Feel free to ignore the rest."

4. Look at the whole experience — including the syllabus, the textbook, and the classroom from your students' perspective.

Are the books affordable or easy to find in the library? Is the classroom comfortable? Are assignments well spaced? It pays to think like your students, says Ellen J. Olmstead, an English professor at Montgomery College, in Rockville, Md., who was the 1999 Carnegie Foundation Community College Professor of the Year.

5. Consider keeping a teaching journal.

Verna B. Robinson, a professor of English at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland, says it's a great way to keep track of your experiences, including successes and failures, challenges, aspirations, inspirations, expectations, and, yes, complaints.

6. Be mindful of the pressures on students, some of whom have families, jobs, or long commutes.

Use the Internet, for example, to make course material, assignments and feedback available online, so students can log in any time from home.

7. Know what services are available at your college to help struggling students.

It's great if your college offers tutoring, English-language help, or career counseling, but they're useful only if students actually use them. Distribute a handout at the start of the term and approach individual students if they seem to need a hand. Have a counselor come and introduce himself or herself to the class.

8. Make sure students understand why the subject matter of the course is worth learning, and how it relates to the real world.

If you get students invested, they will put in more work, says Richard L. Faircloth, a biology professor at Anne Arundel. Mr. Faircloth, who teaches anatomy, asks students to find a topic in current events that relates to the week's assignment and write a short essay on why the topic is relevant in everyday life. "I've always found these aha's that occur outside of class, when we've learned something in class, help to reinforce it," says Mr. Faircloth. Expanding students' media diets, he says, helps them find those everyday connections. It also gives them fresh perspectives and "gets them out of their little circle of e-mail, cell phones and text messaging."

9. Encourage your students to give you feedback on your teaching.

Anne Arundel's Ms. Robinson suggests passing out index cards midway through the semester and asking students what they would like to see more of and less of. Or ask students to grade you in one or two areas of your teaching. "Students appreciate being asked," she says. Listen to what they have to say and try to incorporate their reasonable responses.

10. If you are concerned about plagiarism, consider increasing the load of in-class work, such as problem sets and essays.

You will learn quickly who is struggling, and it helps procrastinators and those who might otherwise turn work in late, says Tina Lombard, an associate professor of English at Miami Dade College. It also teaches students to work better under pressure.

11. Develop at least one assignment that requires each student to meet with you, one on one, in your office.

The meeting could be devoted to reviewing an essay or homework assignment. Then use that time to discuss the student's progress and answer any questions. "You will be amazed at how beneficial even a brief face-to-face meeting can be for you and the student," says Ms. Robinson.

12. Identify at least one quality you appreciate in each student, and keep it in mind every time you come in to class.

"It'll make you smile when you walk in to the classroom and look around at everyone," says Ms. Olmstead of the English department at Montgomery College.