The Spotlight

SLO^S & AUO^S
Student Learning Outcomes &
Administrative Unit Objectives

From the Desk of Joan Sholars, SLO Coordinator

Humanities & Social Sciences Division

By Jim Jenkins

At the end of the Fall 2008 semester, the Humanities and Social Sciences Division ranked last in the number of developed and documented SLOs, with less than 20 percent of its active courses reflecting any SLO development. As of April 20, 74 percent of active courses within the division had SLOs through Column 3 developed and documented. Although there was certainly a great deal of work accomplished in those 3-4 months, what is unseen are the significant processes engaged by the departments for the several months (and in some cases years) before April 2009.

In most cases, the eight departments in this division have been involved in working on SLOs since the original SLO Implementation Team first began departmental presentations in Fall 2004. However, a substantial portion of that work has been an attempt to gain a practical understanding of what SLOs are and what exactly they are supposed to do to help us increase student learning. Although looking back on this issue after years of debate, workshops, and department/division meeting discussions, one would wonder how we took so long to finally create an understanding of how and why we are doing what we are doing with SLOs. It isn't because the *concept* of SLOs has been that difficult. After all, anyone who has ever created a course and had to consider learning, measurable, or behavioral objectives understands the need for creating student learning "goals" (expectations). And any teacher who has created a test in any form (whether criteria-based or normed, essay or multiple choice) understands the role that assessment plays in the learning process.

What we struggled with in this division was what the *relationship* was between SLOs and what we were already doing in classes. What we were actually struggling with was meaning-making. Although we understand that at a basic level SLO development and assessment is an accreditation issue, it is difficult to marshal and direct considerable amounts of time and energy to processes that have no apparent meaning in relation to student learning. The first big hurdle, then, was to understand and then create meaningful relationships between SLOs, learning, and instruction. What else would we expect from a group of professionals whose sole job it is to facilitate the development of critical meaning-making processes in others?

This first hurdle of meaning-making was the largest of the several we have had to address as a division. Our successful "leap" over it was facilitated by several activities that worked together to create a dynamic dialogue among the faculty: (1) workshops and hours of individualized assistance by the Research and Institutional Effectiveness Office staff with faculty *and* division deans; (2) permanent agenda space for SLO discussion at division meetings; and (3) a division macro-management process providing support but encouraging departmental-level exploration and dialogue. The single most important element in this part of the process has been the recognition of measurable objectives as foundations for SLOs. When that recognition occurred, our development of meaning was ensured.

A meeting in the Humanities & Social Sciences Division.

DEFINITIONS

- ***SLOs*** *(student learning outcomes) are statements about what a student will think, know, feel or be able to do as a result of an educational experience.*

- ***AUOs*** *(administrative unit objectives) are statements about what a client will experience, receive, or understand as a result of a given service.*

- ***GEOs*** *(general education outcomes) are statements that define the knowledge, skills, and perspectives acquired by students who satisfy our general education requirements.*

(Continued from Page 1.)

Once we had developed a clear, meaningful relationship between SLOs and our current curriculum, their development was not a difficult process. It is this process that has occurred over the last few months and explains the spike in the numbers of SLOs we have developed in such a short time.

The final hurdle has been the ePIE program review process training. Once lead faculty (which would include

chairpersons) were identified and trained, the recording of the SLOs has occurred very quickly.

The technical result of this process is an SLO completion rate of 74 percent (as of April 20), with five of the division's eight departments exceeding that 74 percent and three of those five achieving 100 percent completion. The practical and more significant result of this process is that we now have a *meaningful* process for assessment of student learning and responsive curriculum development.

Coordinator's Corner

Congratulations on all your hard work on SLOs over this past year. It has been a busy time for all in developing outcomes, means of assessment and criteria for success, and cataloging the data into our ePIE electronic program review system, not to mention, teaching.

We have successfully met one Academic Senate SLO goal challenge after another, and we are extremely close to completing another goal. I am confident that we are up for this challenge, which is, "By June [30,] 2009, 75% of all active courses will have a Means of Assessment and Criteria for Success for at least two course-level SLOs." Presently, we are at 71.8%, just 58 courses away from meeting this year-end goal. Together we can do it. *Will you accept the challenge? Will we meet the goal?* We shall find out when the fall term begins. Good luck!
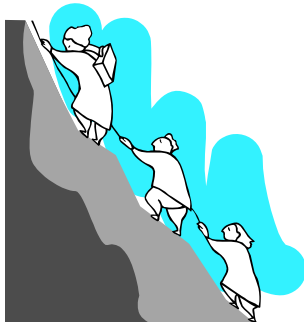
Thus, as we come to the end of the spring semester, what can we do during the summer to continue our work on SLOs? For those of you who have not yet developed the SLOs for their courses, I am available to help you this summer. Please contact me at jsholars@mtsac.edu or Extension 4610.

For those of you that have written your SLOs, can you start working on your assessment and evaluation cycle? Is it possible to assess some of your courses during the summer? Or is it more feasible to do all the preparation work (developing a rubric, choosing an assessment tool, etc.) during the summer so that you can hit the ground running in the fall. To all three questions, the answer is a resounding "yes." Again, if you need help, I am available during the summer.

To help you in your SLO work, two new white papers were developed and are now available. They are located

on the SLO website at http://www.mtsac.edu/instruction/outcomes/newsletter/ along with the previously released "Sampling Techniques for Assessing Course-Level SLOs" white paper. The new white paper topics are:
- Developing Rubrics
- SLOs: The Syllabus and Course Outline of Record

Also on the SLO website is a new Student Learning Outcomes Progress Report, which has been updated for May 2009 and provides a new fourth column that tracks the college's efforts in achieving a means of assessment and criteria for success for at least two course-level SLOs as referenced in the Course-Level Student Learning Outcomes Plan (revised May 8, 2008), approved by Academic Senate's Resolution 2008-04.
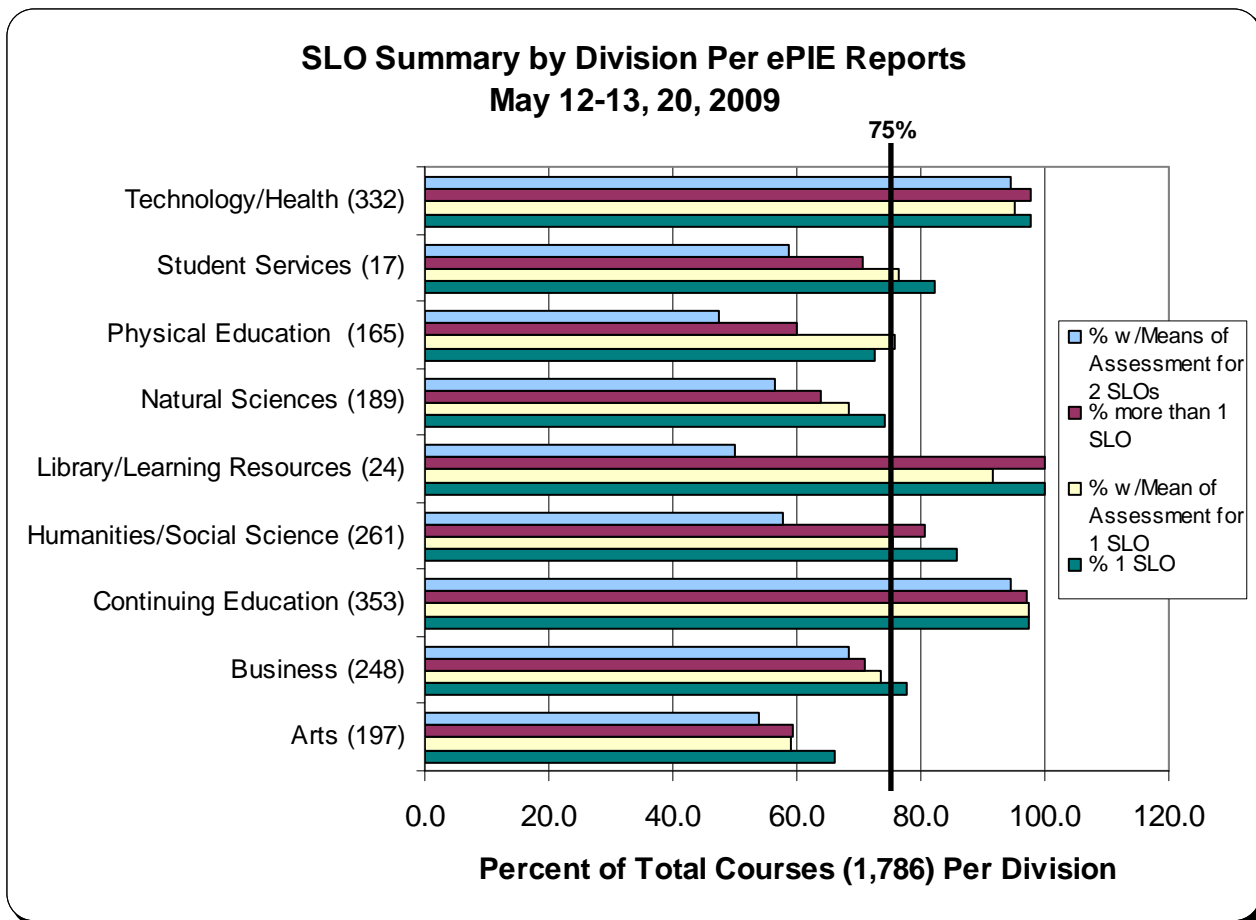
On page 3 is a graph that shows the cumulative progress each division has made as of May 12-13 and 20 in achieving course-level SLOs (for one and more than one SLO) and means of assessment (for one and two SLOs). The total number of courses per division is shown in parentheses. Of the 1,786 college courses in the online ePIE system:
- 84.8% have at least one SLO reported,
- 80.9% have one means of assessment for at least one SLO,
- 79.9% have more than one SLO per course, and
- 71.8% have means of assessment for at least two SLOs.

Finally, and once again, a great big "THANK YOU" for all your work this year. You have made my first year as SLO Coordinator both rewarding and educational. I have learned so much from all of you. I want to leave you with my final message of this academic year:

> SLOs are meant to help faculty assess a course, not students and, especially, not faculty. SLOs can help us with curriculum issues, delivery modes, assessment methods, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Remember, SLOs are a tool for faculty.

Have a great summer!

SLO Summary by Division Per ePIE Reports
May 12-13, 20, 2009

Bar chart titled "SLO Summary by Division Per ePIE Reports, May 12-13, 20, 2009" with a vertical line marked "75%". The x-axis is labeled "Percent of Total Courses (1,786) Per Division" ranging from 0.0 to 120.0. Divisions listed on the y-axis: Technology/Health (332), Student Services (17), Physical Education (165), Natural Sciences (189), Library/Learning Resources (24), Humanities/Social Science (261), Continuing Education (353), Business (248), Arts (197).

Legend:
- % w/Means of Assessment for 2 SLOs
- % more than 1 SLO
- % w/Mean of Assessment for 1 SLO
- % 1 SLO

Did You Know….

GLOSSARY TERM: Direct Assessment
Refers to a type of assessment that requires students to display their knowledge and skills as they respond to the instrument itself. Objective tests, essays, presentations, and classroom assignments all meet this criterion (*see key definitions in the SLO/AUO Guidebook, page 35, at* http://www.mtsac.edu/administration/senates/academic/documents/SLOAUOGUIDEBOOK090808FINAL.pdf). Direct assessment tools are fundamentally important when we look at students' core competencies (e.g., quantitative, comprehension) as broad skills crossing multiple disciplines. Such skills are thought to be attained through a general educational development process. SLOs are also clear outcomes of the direct assessment approach, as SLOs are principled on the idea that students' skills are directly evident through their demonstration via an instrument of some kind (e.g., tests, essay, and/or presentations).

FAQ: **What if the SLO results show that the students are not meeting the learning expectations?**
Such information is intended to prompt dialogue among faculty members. Dialogue could include a reflection on the assessment process and possible modifications, an additional iteration to verify the results, and discussion regarding what possible modifications can be made to the course to ensure a greater number of student meet the learning expectations. No matter your final results, as Winston Churchill stated, "Success is not final; failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts."

SLO Contacts

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Priya Chaplot, Educational Research Assessment Analyst, x5505, pchaplot@mtsac.edu (for information about SLOs, AUOs and assessment).

Jennifer Tucker, Educational Research Assessment Analyst, x4708, jtucker@mtsac.edu (for information about basic skills-funded SLOs, AUOs and SAs).

We're on the Web!
www.mtsac.edu/instruction/
outcomes/