

Student Learning Outcomes Workshop

May 5, 2006

Over 50 Del Mar College faculty, chairs, and instructional administrators attended the workshop led by Dr. Sharon Pate, Director of Learning Outcomes Assessment at Central Texas College.



Current SACS-COC accreditation processes that directly impact the QEP and evidentiary supporting analyses such as the development and assessment of student learning outcomes were reviewed. You may read or download a complete review of the SACS-COC accreditation process from the SACS website at <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/PrinciplesOfAccreditation.PDF>.

Briefly, the accreditation process is now broken into two distinct parts: compliance certification and the QEP. Compliance certification is administratively driven, the QEP is faculty driven.

Compliance Certification consists of evaluating the institution's compliance with core requirements, comprehensive standards, and federal mandates. Institutions are required to judge and indicate to SACS whether they are compliant, partially compliant, or noncompliant on each item and supply supporting documentation. Documentation for each item consists of a brief narrative and other supporting documents. All documentation should emphasize the institution's activities regarding student learning improvement.

Quality Enhancement Planning (QEP) and Student Learning Outcomes

The Core requirements and comprehensive standards define effective Quality Enhancement Planning as research based planning, evaluation, and continuous improvement of programs and services. In order to continuously improve programs and services, educational, administrative and support services outcomes must be identified. These outcomes are based on internal goals of the programs and services, in pursuit of achieving their component of the institution's mission. The outcomes are then assessed. The results are used to identify areas which need improvement. Adjustments are made to these areas. This cycle is continuously repeated and documented to both achieve the continuous improvement and provide the required evidentiary documentation of the process.

Several sources of relevant evidence may be needed to justify decisions and support a claim of compliance. Development and assessment of student learning outcomes at course and program levels are critical forms of evidence. The faculty is charged with establishing and evaluating program and course level student learning outcomes, as well as outcomes to assess whether graduates have attained competency in the general education core curriculum.

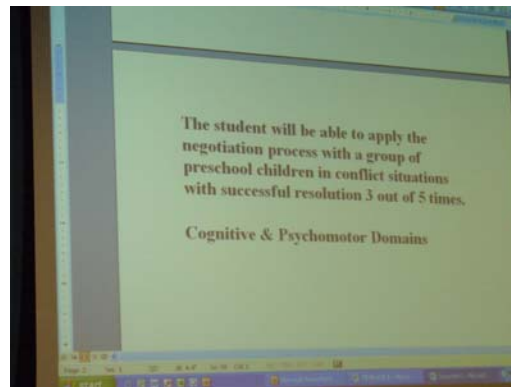
On the course level, faculty need to collaborate with each other and seek out information from professional association meetings and peers from other institutions to develop a set of outcomes for each course in their program. Higher level course outcomes should represent subsequent levels of

skills as students advance through the established course hierarchy. This process is known as course mapping. Lastly, or perhaps, firstly, the program itself should have learning objectives that deconstruct into each of the outcomes represented at the course level.

The simplest definition of a course level student learning outcome is what the student learned from taking the course. SACS requires documentation of three components: the knowledge, skills or attitude that the student will learn; the acceptable level of performance; and the method of assessment. A variety of methods can be used to assess the learning outcome, such as grades or success criteria.

Developing/Writing Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes can be conceptualized as Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, Communicated (SMARTC). In other words, identify the learning objectives of each course and develop learning outcomes specific to each objective. Each learning outcome should describe observable knowledge, skills, or behaviors that can be actively acquired and rated for mastery. Mastery of these outcomes should prepare students for their next level of coursework. Outcomes should be communicated to students, typically via course syllabus or accompanying documents, where criteria for mastery are explicitly stated. The outcomes should also be communicated to other faculty in the department for purposes of course mapping within the program, and to administrators and the college at large.



In the afternoon, Dr. Pate took the Del Mar audience through the steps for writing good student learning outcomes. Several faculty from different departments shared drafts of student learning outcomes for their discipline. With audience participation, these sample learning outcomes were modified and improved.

Dr. Pate provided a handout of her PowerPoint presentation to participants, and gave each person a CD with her forms that can be used to draft learning outcomes.

Feedback regarding the workshop was very positive. A few CD's are available at the Office of Institutional Research; the CD contents are also available at a later date.