

CLEAR EYES, FULL HEARTS: SKYLINE'S COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

"Clear Eyes, Full Hearts..." even for non-football fans, the television series, "Friday Night Lights," is inspiring. It's a moving drama of teens coming into their own against the backdrop of the high stakes Texan football that their community revolves around. Before every game, Coach Taylor calls out to his players this familiar refrain, and they respond in kind with a charged and emphatic "Can't Lose!" Coach's goal is not to shape only football players; it's to shape men. In one scene before a big game, he implores them to put their all into the game: to focus their energy, to draw from the joy and passion they have for football, and to tap into the pride that playing their hardest gives them. He prompts them to visualize the next day when others will look at them differently, and more importantly, when they see themselves in a new light. By focusing on the journey and not just the destination, the process and not just the goal, his players and even Coach himself emerge with a wisdom gained by immersing themselves in the task, and a firm and resolute self-respect ... all point to the inevitable truth that they "can't lose."

I mention Coach's philosophy because it can apply to our College's SLOAC efforts. With our upcoming accreditation visit in Fall 2013, together we will be in the big game, under the

glare of the stadium lights. The past seven years we've gained valuable experience, and now the onus is on us to show what we can do. At this point, the majority of departments have articulated their SLOs and implemented assessment plans. Our next

challenge will be to complete the cycle: to develop the capacity to derive meaning from our assessment results, discuss ways to improve student learning, and make institutional commitments to that improvement by planning, allocating needed resources, and implementing strategies for improvement. In short, we need to act on the insights that our assessments yield.

While we need to be mindful of the destination-- a successful Fall 2013 Accreditation visit, it's equally important to focus on the journey, on our means of getting there. Granted, the SLOAC is not a panacea, but it offers an unparalleled opportunity to advance student success as a learner-centered institution of higher education. Being learner-centered shifts the focus from teaching to learning. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching



**Act on the insights that our
assessments yield.**

Associate Senior Scholar Amy Driscoll explains that learner-centered pedagogy is manifested in many concrete ways, among them:

Students have clear expectations.

SLOs on syllabi help students to better understand the relevance of the curriculum since SLOs explicitly articulate what students are expected to be able to DO with what they learn. Ideally classroom activities, assignments, and assessments are clearly and visibly informed by and connected to the SLOs.

Students are actively involved in their learning. Interactive lectures, small group discussions, and classroom presentations are some of the ways that teachers can help students retain knowledge for the long term.

Students apply knowledge to problem solving. Learning is on a continuum, from basic knowledge to more sophisticated, higher level critical thinking. While students may begin with simply recalling and identifying concepts, applying it to case studies, burning issues, projects, and so on will not only aid long term retention but also reinforce its significance to their lives.

Students are able to practice and take risks. Our challenge as educators is to demystify complex ideas and processes. Thus many of us scaffold our lesson plans such that students learn one step at a time. Opportunities for students to practice in low-stakes contexts gives them incentive to try even if they doubt their abilities, and provides useful feedback for us to identify

what we need to review with them so that they can master it. Just as importantly, as they master each step, students can build up their self-confidence, which is so central to learning.

Students experience support and feedback for learning.

Yet another challenge is to give students honest, informative feedback on their work so that that they can continue to learn and have the will to do so. Distributing rubrics with assignments gives students a clear sense of how their work is being evaluated, and also provides excellent opportunities for us to discuss with our colleagues the criteria we consider most important in evaluating student work. Thus students see that the evaluation of their work is based on fairly objective criteria, which in turn demystifies learning. Secondly, noting dominant patterns in students' performance helps us to recalibrate our own teaching so that our students succeed. CATS (Classroom Assessment Techniques a la Angelo and Cross) and clicker technology are quick and easy means of identifying what students understand (or don't). Such learner-centered assessment enhances, extends, expands, and enriches learning.

Students can see how their course-work helps them to attain the PSLOs and ISLOs.

One of the most exciting aspects of the SLOAC is forging the connections between the goals of our courses and our programs, and the goals of our courses and student service areas to the College's overall goals. Forging these connections via the "mapping" process prompts us to consciously consider how the discrete knowledge and

skills that we foster within our classrooms and services areas help to develop the whole student.

Clearly helping students to succeed is a team effort from faculty, staff, and administrators, and successful teamwork requires effective communication. Once skeptical about assessment, Utah State History Professor Norman L. Jones came to recognize how powerful these dialogues can be, "The demand for outcomes assessment should be seized as an opportunity for us to actually talk about the habits of mind our discipline needs to instill in our students...It will do us a world of good, and it will save us from the spreadsheets of bureaucrats." Whether identifying the core elements of a course while forging SLOs, the different pedagogies and assignments, evaluation methods, and conclusions drawn from the assessment, arguably the most beneficial aspect of the SLOAC is the dialogue it engenders. We also can see how each of our departments and service areas

works within the grand scheme, both supporting the College's goals and helping to shape them so that our students have the best learning experience possible.

What the SLOAC offers is one means to reflect on student learning, as a concerted effort. The Academic Senate's Resolutions that were unanimously passed last spring reiterate the College's assessment philosophy: assessment should be used to improve student learning, and faculty and staff have ultimate authority over the SLOs, the assessment methods, the analysis and resultant action plans. With authority comes responsibility; as such, the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Cycle is as fulfilling and meaningful as each of us makes it. As we move closer to being evaluated by the accrediting visiting team, we'll either sink as a team, or we'll emerge victorious as a team. By investing time and energy into assessing what you care about, you'll know you've done your best: "Clear Eyes, Full Hearts...Can't Lose." Indeed.

SLOAC ANNOUNCEMENTS

⇒ **Participating in the ISLO Town Hall on Monday, September 24, 2-4, in Room 6203**

At this town hall meeting, we'll analyze and discuss the implications of the data from assessing Effective Communication, as well as reflect on the assessment process and rubric. This town hall is also a follow up from last spring's that was co-hosted by the Academic Senate and is an opportunity to voice your concerns and provide input about our College's SLOAC processes.

⇒ **Assessing the Critical Thinking ISLO in Spring 2013**

Many thanks to those of you who assessed

your students' work last spring. This upcoming spring we will evaluate critical thinking. Your participation is absolutely essential to giving the College a bird's eye view of how our students are faring at this higher-ordered skill.

⇒ **Accessing Resources on the SLOAC Web Page**

The SLOAC web page has been updated to highlight models of the assessment cycle, in particular what meaning has been derived from the assessment results and any resultant action plans. In addition, every department's six year assessment plan has been uploaded so that all faculty and staff can anticipate what will be assessed.



SLOAC CHECKLIST

- ◇ **Participate in your department's course level assessment.** Whether part or full time, each of us plays a critical role in helping students to learn. Note that there are different degrees of participation: administering the common assessment, creating the common assessment, tabulating data, analyzing the data with colleagues, etc. If you are an adjunct faculty member taking a leadership role in assessing course(s), please consult with your Dean about stipends to compensate you for your efforts.
- ◇ **When invited, participate in the College's assessment of the scheduled ISLO:** effective communication, critical thinking, information literacy, citizenship, or lifelong wellness. Typically you'll only evaluate the work of students with 36+ units; while you may feel as if your contribution is minor, it is crucial to helping the College reflect on how students are performing across the curriculum when we aggregate the data. Many thanks to those of you who participated last year in assessing effective communication.
- ◇ **Send your department's or service area's six-year assessment plan to the appropriate Office of the Vice President to be uploaded on the SLOAC website.** The point of assessment is to improve student learning and development, so focus your energies on core courses in your program whose assessment is likely to have the most widespread impact (ie., heavily enrolled courses, courses in a prerequisite sequence, GE courses, etc.), or courses that you're interested in troubleshooting. Eventually you may need to add in the other courses to your assessment plan.
- ◇ **Update TracDat entries so that everything is up to date since it will be the primary vehicle to evaluate our College's assessment progress.** Enter and upload new and revised SLOs, PSLOs, assessment plans, instruments, results, and action plans. Generate an annual assessment report to place in the "Annual Assessment Reports" folder.
- ◇ **On TracDat, map course level SLOs to PSLOs** by the end of Fall 2012.
- ◇ **On TracDat, map course level SLOs to ISLOs** by the end of Fall 2012.