# SLOAC NEWSLETTER

Assessment as a Means to Achieving Equity

For those of you fortunate to have a summer break, what did you do? In June, Liza Erpelo and I journeyed to Daytona Beach, Florida: the land of surf, sunshine, fast cars, and the confederate flag (hence the name the "Redneck Riviera"). While we indulged in a relaxing swim in the Atlantic most afternoons, we weren't there for R & R. We helped to score a million essays written by high school students who hoped to earn college credit via the Advanced Placement English Composition exam. While the work was demanding and exhausting, I definitely valued it for its professional development. Imagine training 900 high school and college English teachers from all over the U.S. to apply a common rubric accurately and efficiently. That's exactly what the College Board did (a significant accomplishment considering that English teachers are particularly ornery, independent thinkers). I especially enjoyed conversations about teaching with my high school counterparts, many of whom start the fall semester by asking their students to apply the rubric to these normed sets of essays. This useful exercise enables them to be explicit with expectations on a national scale, yet also reinforce them on the local level in their classroom. As one high school teacher remarked to me, "Students come to realize that grading isn't random and the whim of the teacher." I emerged from this grading marathon

Skyline College SLOAC Team

"Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement."

-AAHE
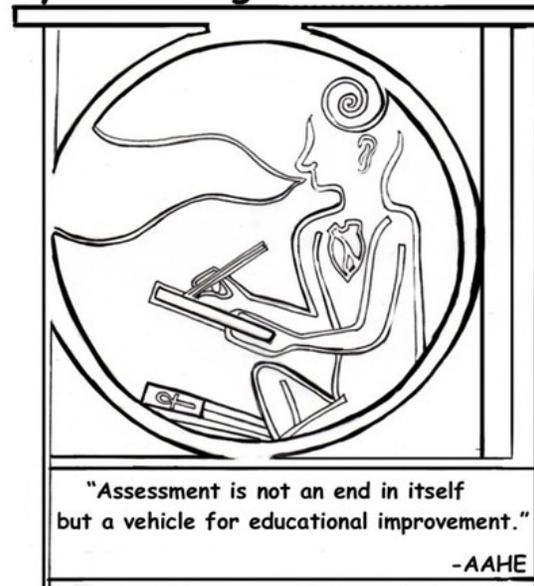
invigorated, and reassured that students are in good hands, if this group of AP teachers/readers is any indication.

While few of us community college teachers work with entire classes of honor students, we are presented with the unique opportunity to engage all types of learners from all walks of life, an exciting though challenging task. Using assessment is one means to help students achieve if we stay honest to what I see as its intent. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement

Assessment as a Means to Achieving Equity (continued)

of Learning (2008) puts it best, "… community colleges can be powerful laboratories for creating a fuller, richer set of assessment tools—aimed not simply at tracking progress (or its lack) but at understanding how to facilitate important forms of learning and personal development…Seen in this light, accountability is more than an external reporting requirement; it is an enactment of our professional responsibility as educators" ("Basic Skills for Complex Lives"). By assessing our Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), we're not all that different from these AP teachers: explicit expectations accompanied by solid instruction to help students to achieve them. But unlike them, we're providing this learning opportunity for everyone. Given this construct, assessment can be a means to achieving equity. Imagine if *all* students had access to the quality of instruction that AP students have. Assessment can be the first step in the right direction.

Assessing Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs)

With considerable input, Skyline adopted Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs) in 2007. Students who complete an AA/AS degree and/or transfer preparation should have mastered ISLOs in critical thinking, effective communication, citizenship, information and computer technology literacy, and lifelong wellness. Now Skyline is poised to assess to what degree students are achieving these ISLOs.

We took the first step in Spring, 2008, administering the Community College Survey for Student Engagement (CCSSE) as an indirect measure (since students evaluate themselves). The CCSSE measures student engagement in a variety of dimensions. For instance, students identify how frequently they contribute to class discussion, or make judgments about the soundness of information, arguments, and methods. Four to sixteen CCSSE items per ISLO were determined, and then the resultant data was converted into 1- 100 scales. The overall means score for Information and Computer Literacy was highest (60.7), while Citizenship was lowest (42.9).

In between were Critical Thinking (55), Lifelong Wellness (54.7), and Effective Communication (50.3). Since the CCSSE has been administered only once, this data will be used to set benchmarks for subsequent administrations of the survey. Engaging in a preliminary discussion about the data, the SLOAC Steering Committee also identified ways to enhance the CCSSE survey.

The second step was last Fall, when every department completed a matrix aligning their courses with the ISLOs. Which courses within a program contribute to student achievement of the ISLOs? If they do, which are "central" to a course, and which are "supported" by a course? Unfortunately there was some confusion about whether an ISLO was "central" to a course. Many of us probably address all of these ISLOs to a certain extent, but the purpose of the matrix is to help the College identify who is best situated to assess those institutional outcomes, so as to eventually employ a direct measure of student achievement of these ISLOs. Those best situated are the departments that prioritize the ISLO in at least one core course, and can provide evidence via student performance on major assignments such as essays, tests,

performances, presentations, et. al. ***Departments that identify an ISLO as "central" to at least one of their courses may be asked to help assess it in the future.***
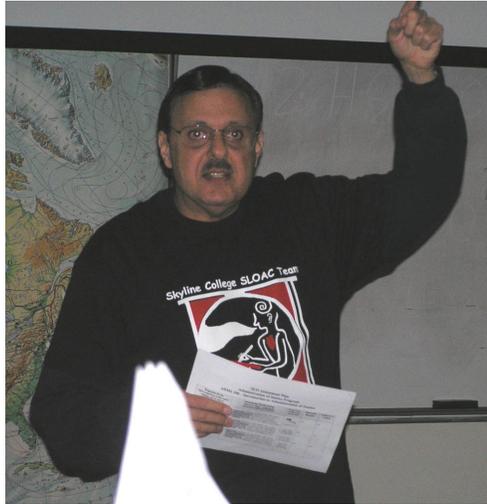
…and the future is here! The direct measure of ISLOs will roll out this year. In preparation, the SLOAC Steering Committee created a draft rubric to assess the Effective Communication ISLO, and we will be piloting it this Fall. Thanks to Skyline's commitment to the SLOAC, stipends also are available to convene teams to create and pilot rubrics for the remaining ISLOs. These rubrics will essentially "kill two birds with one stone," as they can be used to assess student work both within your course and on the institutional level. Students can receive an explicit assessment of their work with a completed rubric, and the data from the completed rubrics can be aggregated from the courses for which the ISLO is central Because presumably the data will be drawn from courses across the disciplines, we'll have a means to assess to which degree students are achieving the ISLOs. Please contact Karen Wong at wongk@smccd.edu if you are interested in participating in any capacity.

Each department is expected to assess at least one course per year, submitting an annual assessment report to the Office of Research and Planning. One option is to collect data in the Fall, and analyze the data and its implications in the Spring. Downloadable from the "Implementation Schedule" link is a convenient flowchart and checklist to plan how your department will assess. Have you:

- Created SLOs for your department/program courses?
- Identified core courses in your department/program?
- Written assessment plan(s) for core course(s)?
- Aligned your courses to ISLOs?
- Collected data for your completed assessment plan(s)?
- If applicable, created PSLOs for your department/ program?
- If applicable, matched your SLOs to PSLOs and PSLOs to ISLOs?

Thumbs Up for SLOAC Workshops

Thanks to all that participated in and/or staged the March 11th SLOAC Flex Day. Approximately 140 faculty and staff participated, with 40% from our adjunct ranks. (Let's hope that the District will continue to support compensating adjunct faculty for their crucial participation!) Out of the 65 that completed the surveys for the hands-on workshops, over 90% felt that the workshop was informative and would recommend it to others, and 80% plan to immediately apply what they learned. This Fall Flex, departments are encouraged to meet to work on their own assessment plans, surveys, and the like (as many of the March 11 participants requested for subsequent flex days). Keep an eye out for the November flex, when experienced assessors will anchor round table "poster" presentations.

Articles by Karen Wong, graphic designed by Carla Milagro Castillo, and photos by Arthur Takayama and Soodi Zamani