

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

“Learning can and often does take place without the benefit of teaching, and sometimes even in spite of it, but there is no such thing as effective teaching in the absence of learning. Teaching without learning is simply talking.”

-Angelo and Cross

What is assessment?

Palomba and Banta stated in Assessment Essentials (1999), “The overriding purpose of assessment is to understand how educational programs are working and to determine whether they are contributing to student growth and development.” The new accreditation standards require colleges to provide evidence for student learning and then use the results of the evidence to improve education. Fortunately in higher education, assessment involves developing, assessing and discussing student learning locally within the academic institution.

What does the assessment movement look like at the college level?

We must identify what students should be able to do after they complete a course, a major or a program, and the overall college experience. Therefore, at the course, department or program, and institutional levels, we—faculty and staff—with the support of administration need to establish student learning outcomes (SLOs), assess them, and analyze the results for educational improvement. An immediate as well as long-term benefit of instituting SLOs is the dialogue that will take place throughout the institution—between individual faculty members, among faculty members within a department or program, and among faculty and staff members at the broader college level. This focus on SLOs represents a paradigm shift in education from what is taught to what students should know or do at the end of a course, program or degree, or educational experience.

What are SLOs?

In the new accreditation standards, a student learning outcome (SLO) describes the knowledge, skills, abilities, or attitudes that students have attained by the end of a college experience; a college experience is defined as a course, a program, a degree or certificate, and interactions with Student Services and the library. Thus, SLOs touch every aspect of our college life. Once SLOs are identified, they must be assessed, and subsequently, the results of the assessment will help shape changes to improve student learning. Thus, the assessment cycle continues.

How will we—faculty and staff—at CU address student assessment?

SLOs at the course and department/program level (including library services and Student Services) will be guided by faculty and staff who are experts in their disciplines or areas. Institutional-level SLOs will be guided by our college mission statement and the input of the campus community and key committees, such as UCCCAP, IEAC, SASC, LERC and etc.

Our goal is that ultimately this approach to assessment will result in fruitful collegial dialogue and improved student learning. Achieving Academic Excellence!