



Peralta Community College District

College of Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney College, Merritt College, Principles of Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Peralta Community College District Academic Senate and the administrative leadership of the district and four colleges agree that the following statements reflect a mutual understanding of an assessment philosophy and related activities at College of Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney College, and Merritt College:

Why Assess Student Learning Outcomes?

Our primary objective is to see if student learning reflects mastering the course, program and/or general learning outcome objectives. Effective assessment of student learning outcomes serves to improve both teaching and learning. Assessment of student learning allows us to observe what and how well our students learn. When we identify student learning outcomes for our courses, programs, and institutions and share them with our students, we encourage students to become more actively involved in their own learning process. When we assess our students' learning, we are able to identify which of our teaching practices have succeeded and which have not, thus enabling us to modify our teaching practices in order to increase success. In any evaluation of student learning, the use of student learning outcomes is only one component of a general profile. The Council for High Education accreditation (CHEA) Board of Directors' *Statement of Mutual Responsibilities for Student Learning Outcomes* (September 2003) prudently affirms that "judgments about quality are complex and must be based on a range of factors, including the purposes, resources, processes, and values of an institution. In applying these guidelines, it is imperative for accrediting agencies, as well as the institutions and programs they accredit to avoid narrow definitions of student learning or excessively standardized measures of student achievement."

Further, as the second principle of Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) states, "Institutions and programs are responsible for establishing clear statements of student learning outcomes and for collecting, interpreting, and using evidence of student achievement." We agree with the CHEA principle that "collegiate learning is complex and evidence used to investigate it must be similarly authentic and contextual."

The responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of student learning outcomes and the interpretation of the results shall remain the purview of individual faculty department/programs or student services units.

What is assessment?

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information to understand and improve teaching and learning (Tom Angelo). Assessment helps us create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education. (AAHE Bulletin 1995)

Thus, assessment is not a single cycle of actions, but an **ongoing process**, which ideally permeates the institution. The assessment process involves **both gathering information and using that information** to modify and improve teaching and student learning.

This assessment is not for the purpose of evaluating an individual student or a faculty member's performance. It should be noted, however, that conducting of appropriate outcomes assessment is a responsibility of each faculty member.

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Who will conduct outcomes assessment?

The faculty at the College of Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney College, and Merritt, in consultation with their respective college communities, will shape, design, and disseminate institutional assessment activities and will identify the core knowledge and skills that our students need to master at the institutional, program, and course levels. All faculty should participate in this process at a minimum at the course level (instructional faculty) or program level (non-instructional) faculty since this is a faculty-driven process.

Who will develop the processes of assessment?

The faculty at each of their respective colleges (Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney, and Merritt) will develop the criteria to evaluate student progress. These will be ongoing processes, open to modification and improvement. Not all assessment need be done in individual classes or student services units, and not every faculty member need assess all of the institutional core learning outcomes. However, every class and every non-instructional program should be addressing some core learning outcomes. Faculty shall maintain ownership of student learning outcomes and assessment processes.

What will assessment be used for?

At Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney, and Merritt, we will use assessment of student learning outcomes primarily to understand, and thereby improve, student learning through informed decision making and planning. More specifically, assessment can serve the following roles in the institution:

To improve services, feedback, guidance, and mentoring to students to help them better plan and execute their educational programs.

To help design and improve programs and courses to better promote student learning and success and to be used in all program reviews.

To identify shared definitions and measurable benchmarks for evaluating student learning more coherently and effectively.

To help us understand how groups of students experience the college differently so as to respond appropriately to the needs of all students.

To help us understand how our different courses and programs affect students over time so that we can better coordinate and sequence the students' experience to produce more and deeper learning.

To provide staff and students with opportunities to reflect on their practice and their learning.

What will assessment not be used for?

Individual institutions make individual choices about how they will use the tools of student learning assessment. The College of Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney College, and Merritt College will not use the tools of assessment in any of the following ways:

We will not use assessment of student learning as an end in itself. Assessment that does not help us to promote student learning is a waste of time.

We will not use assessment punitively or as a means of determining faculty or staff salaries or rewards. The purpose of assessment is to evaluate student learning, not to reward or punish faculty or staff. **Student learning outcomes will not be used for evaluation of faculty.**

We will not use assessment to answer all questions or strictly determine program decisions in a way that will impinge upon the academic freedom or professional rights of faculty. Individual faculty members must continue to exercise their best professional judgment in matters of grading, discipline, course content, curriculum integrity, and all course requirements, including selecting all reading materials.

We will not assume the following:

Assessment can answer all questions about all students. We need not directly assess all students in order to learn about the effectiveness of our programs and policies.

Assessment is only quantitative. While numerical scales or rubrics (such as the four-point grading scale) can be useful, their accuracy always depends on the clear understanding of the concepts behind the numbers. Indicators of student learning can be expressed as narratives, a performance or numbers (as appropriate per class or program).

To use assessment only to evaluate the end of the student's experience or merely to be accountable to outside parties.

Assessment is only grading, because grades are not indicators of what students have learned.

How will we use assessment of student learning?

The following guidelines will govern the methodology and approach we will employ at College of Alameda, Berkeley City College, Laney College, and Merritt College to promote assessment of student learning:

We will always seek multiple methods of assessing student learning rather than relying on any single method.

We will assess those skills, attitudes, behaviors and knowledge that our faculty, in consultation with the entire college community, judges to be important and valuable.

We will assess the ongoing progress of a variety of students throughout their experience at the college.

We will use assessment processes and instruments to accommodate and encourage creativity and originality shown by students.

We will clearly explain the purposes of assessment so that staff, students, and the community can clearly see why we are using assessment, as well as the rationale for choosing each individual form of assessment in its particular context.

This document is based on the work done by Palomar College, Modesto Junior College, and San Diego Mesa College.

Signed:

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