



Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Handbook

For Cuesta College Faculty

2016-2017

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San Luis Obispo County Community College District

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Introduction to Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

What are Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)?

The San Luis Obispo County Community College District (“Cuesta College”) has adopted the following definition of SLOs: “Student Learning Outcomes describe, in measurable terms, the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that a student will attain at the end of a course, sequence of courses, program, or degree.” Explicitly defined learning outcomes exist for each course, and *these outcomes must be included as part of the syllabus for each class.*

How does defining and assessing SLOs benefit students?

By clearly defining and stating the learning outcomes that we hope our students will attain—as opposed to thinking about courses and programs merely in terms of the *topics* we will teach—we clarify the purpose of our instruction, both for ourselves and our students. Often, having these clear outcomes in mind allows us to improve our teaching strategies. When teachers clearly state the learning outcomes for a course or program, they clarify their priorities for the course and their expectations of students. In addition, the relevance of various activities and assignments might become clearer. One would also expect that when programs carefully define and assess student learning outcomes, students will receive a more consistent and effective learning experience within and across courses and programs.

Of course, in many ways, assessment of student learning outcomes is a common sense process that we, as educators, already follow. At Cuesta College, we aim to take advantage of what we already do while systematizing the process and broadening our individual efforts to gather evidence about the educational practices that best help our students learn.

In addition, the establishment and assessment of student learning outcomes is prioritized in the standards established by our accrediting body, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges ([ACCJC, Standards I.B and II.A.1, 2, and 3](#)), and we are required to meet these standards.

In June 2014, the ACCJC added a new standard, II.B.6 which states: “The institution disaggregates and analyzes learning outcomes and achievement for subpopulations of students. When the institution identifies performance gaps, it implements strategies, which may include allocation or reallocation of human, fiscal and other resources, to mitigate those gaps and evaluates the efficacy of those strategies.”

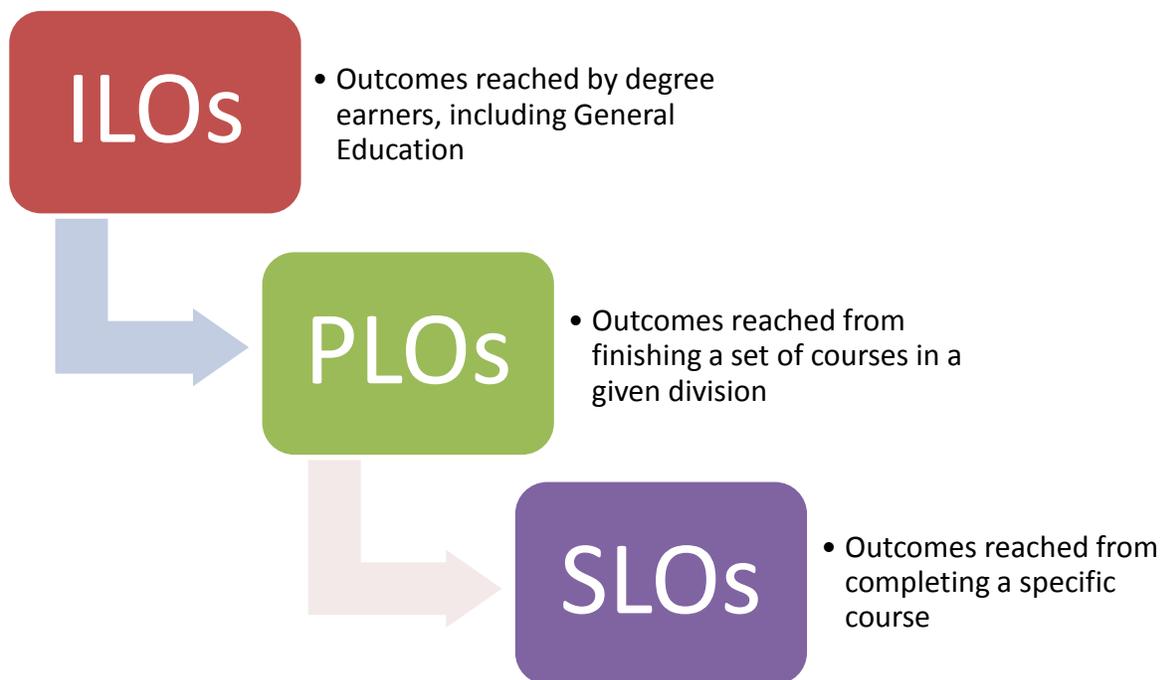
With this new standard, SLOCCCD adopted eLumen to allow the institution to ‘disaggregate’ by various student sub-populations, and to address the needs of student sub-populations by providing identified resources.

What are the different types of learning outcomes?

Course SLOs— Most faculty attention will be at the course-level. SLOs reflect outcomes that are specific to a particular course, they are not objectives or course topics but measurable outcomes that students are expected to meet by the time they successfully complete the course. It is important to note that SLOs are for courses—not for specific instructors or sections. SLOs are changeable. As we teach, assess, and reflect, it may become evident that the outcomes initially written may not reveal what the faculty expected. SLOs are changeable, but a process must be followed so that all faculty who teach the course are in agreement.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)—Program Student Learning Outcomes are those outcomes that a student will achieve upon completion of a college program such as a certificate or a degree. eLumen allows the mapping of course level Student Learning Outcomes to the Program Learning Outcomes, so that as instructors evaluate their courses, that data is transferred in aggregate to the Program level outcomes. This also allows faculty to have aggregate level data about program outcomes without having to get access to the course level data.

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) — Cuesta College’s Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are the comprehensive outcomes that students will attain upon completion of Cuesta College associate degrees. They include all areas of the GE pattern as well as additional learning outcomes related to professional development, information fluency, and technological fluency. They were approved in March 2012 by the Academic Senate and are listed in Appendix C for reference.



The Role of Student Learning Outcomes in College Planning Processes

Student Learning Outcomes do not exist in a vacuum. Rather they are part of the larger integrated planning process at Cuesta. The San Luis Obispo County Community College District (SLOCCCD) uses the [SLOCCCD Integrated Planning Manual](#) to guide planning and resource allocation, along with the planning processes and timelines that Cuesta will follow. Student Learning Outcomes appear (most significantly) in relation to the Institutional Program Planning and Review process, since SLOs are a priority when it comes to program planning and resource allocation within each unit and cluster.

Program Planning and Review Documents:

Course or Program Assessment Summary (CPAS)—Faculty must complete a CPAS document for each course and program that has been assessed. The CPAS documents serve as the comprehensive assessment reports for all instructional assessment activities. As courses are re-assessed, CPAS documents may be either updated with new information or they may be replaced with a new, more current CPAS document (The most recent CPAS template can be found on the SharePoint with the Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment committee documents).

Comprehensive Program Plan and Review (CPPR)—The CPPR is completed every four or five years (four for Career-Technical Education Programs, five for other programs). The CPPR requires a full report of SLO assessment for each course and program, requiring that a current CPAS document be submitted for each course and for each program. During each program planning and review period, at least one assessment cycle for outcomes should be completed, with two cycles constituting best practice.

Annual Program Planning Worksheet (APPW)—The APPW is submitted annually by each program and the document requires a summary of recent program-level assessment.

eLumen and the Review Process:

In Fall 2015, the Academic Senate approved the use of eLumen to track Student Learning Outcomes starting in Spring 2016 and to be used going forward. eLumen allows faculty to track student-level assessment data, which can then be used in evidence to support program review. At the course coordinator level and above, reports will be run to show the number of SLOs assessed by each course and the number of student who were able to reach proficiency. By implementing eLumen, it is easier to track data, and easier for data to be used in program review, as the software can automatically generate program level reports based on the student assessment at the course level (see mapping on page 8 for more).

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

There are many ways that faculty can assess student proficiency of learning outcomes. In this section of the handbook, some of those methods are described, along with some of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Direct Assessment—As instructors, we are very well practiced in the area of direct assessment. Every time we ask our students to write an essay, conduct an experiment, take an exam, solve an equation, or demonstrate an activity, we are asking them to show us what they know or what they can do. In this way, we are directly assessing the degree to which they have mastered a learning outcome. Best practice suggests that we should assess our students directly when we are trying to gauge student knowledge and skills.

What are some common direct assessment tools?

Many different types of direct assessment methods are in use at Cuesta. The ESL, Chemistry, and Math Departments, for example, use common exam questions that are scored across multiple sections of courses. Faculty in nursing use the regulatory requirements to determine proficiency and faculty in art and music have used rubrics to score student work and performances, and faculty in English have used rubrics to score essays. In fact, rubrics are a very common tool for assessing student work in a quick and meaningful way since they are typically used to assess work that students are already doing for a class. Additionally, you can recreate the rubric in eLumen, add an assessment guide (an optional feature, which may use to attach the questions or examples of proficiency) and make it available to all faculty who teach that course.

Indirect Assessment—Many Cuesta faculty began assessing SLOs through *indirect assessment*—methods that *do not involve direct examination* of student work. Indirect methods use tools such as self-report surveys, exit interviews, and focus groups. Indirect methods are particularly valuable when we are trying to gather information about student attitudes and behaviors to which we might not otherwise have access. Gathering this kind of feedback from students can be meaningful. However, indirect methods may not give us the most reliable information about the degree to which students have, in fact, mastered an outcome. Direct assessment is preferred to indirect assessment, however there are times when indirect assessment is useful, such as if the outcome is referencing how the student feels about a certain stated outcome, or is aware of resources.

Why aren't grades enough?

It is tempting to ask why we can't just look at final grades to determine whether or not a course is successful. Although counting letter grades is easy it does not give us specific information about how students—as a group—perform on specific learning outcomes across various sections of a course.

There are two key distinctions between *scoring an outcome* and *grading a student*:

Final grades are an *aggregate* assessment of a student's entire body of work for a course, often including attendance and class participation. Consequently, looking at a distribution of final grades may provide only vague information about the degree to which students have learned each discernable outcome that has been identified for the course. For example, although one might easily determine that a student's average grade in English 201A is a B-, that doesn't tell us about the degree to which the

student has achieved various outcomes, such as essay organization, research documentation, or reading comprehension.

In short, *grades do not provide specific information about students' performances on discrete tasks* and outcomes or consistent data across sections. Scoring student performance on specific outcomes, however, can give us that information.

How Do I Score Direct Assessment?

A common direct assessment method involves using a rubric to score student work. Rubrics are common because they are useful across many different disciplines, and they can be used to score pre-existing assignments. They can even be used to score assignments that are very different from one another but that share the same outcomes. For example, instructors could use a rubric to score the level to which students across multiple sections (and even disciplines) have demonstrated critical thinking, even if the assignments assessed were to vary widely. You can find links to additional sample rubrics in Appendix E of this handbook.

If you use a multiple choice exam or similar, you can do this by setting levels of mastery based on how many questions a student has gotten correct. Or, you can set up your assessment level to be a Yes/No scale, and rate the student as either proficient (2) or not proficient (1), based upon whether the student got the question correct or not. There are many different ways that faculty score assessment across campus, the key is to have consistence within one particular course.

How Do I Assess Program Outcomes?

There are two main ways to assess program outcomes: by aggregating course-level data for the program-level outcomes, or by assessing completers through a capstone project or other assessment tool. Aggregating course-level data use to be very difficult, as you would need the student level data from each course and then have to aggregate it up to paint a complete picture. With the implementation of eLumen, this has become a much simpler process. Simply map the course level outcomes to the program level outcomes within eLumen, and then as faculty upload student level data that has been mapped, scores will be aggregated up to the program level outcomes according to the mapping.

How Often Do I Need to Assess SLOs?

Depending on the department, each program has a program review every four (CTE) or five (non-CTE) years. ***Within one program review cycle, every Student Learning Outcome in every course should have been assessed at least once.*** Divisions are given the flexibility to decide if this means doing all student learning outcomes in each course over different semesters, or choosing one or two student learning outcomes from many different courses every semester.

Program Review & Student Learning Outcomes

Mapping – getting Student level data to Program and Institutional Level

eLumen has built into its system the ability to map course level student learning outcomes to both the Program learning outcomes and to the Institutional Learning outcomes (listed in Appendix C). Each department is responsible to create the student to program mapping and amend as necessary (such as if a student or program learning outcome has changed).

Such mapping allows us to do the following:

- Aggregate course outcome assessment results to indicate student achievement of program outcomes or ILOs
- Review the degree to which our course outcomes sufficiently support our program learning outcomes
- Identify gaps or redundancies in the program

CPAS Documents - Course Assessment Summary

Regular, systematic assessment of SLOs should be documented in Course or Program Assessment Summaries. A CPAS document serves as a record of the SLO assessment, the analysis of that assessment, and the dialogue about plans for improvement efforts. Faculty can create new CPAS documents for each new course or program assessment project, or CPAS documents can be updated as more work is completed.

The old way is that CPAS documents should be stored on the program's G drive. (If faculty have non-electronic assessment materials, those should be scanned and included on the G drive.)

As we transition to eLumen, faculty can also create their Course Assessment Summaries or Program Assessment Summaries, as applicable, directly into eLumen. Since student level data is already being collected by eLumen, this alleviates the problem of doing manual analysis of student proficiency. Using eLumen, faculty need only describe the assessment process, document changes to future assessment processes or instructional methodology, document dialog among faculty, and ensure that the course SLOs have been mapped to the appropriate PLOs.

Program Review

The CPAS documents for each program (and for each course within a program) will be submitted as part of the Comprehensive Program Planning and Review report as a record of the program and course assessment and analysis that has been completed. A narrative overview of program-level assessment is included in each Annual Program Planning Worksheet.

Assessment Cycle & Timeline

Each program should have an assessment cycle calendar that indicates the ongoing assessment plans for each course. These calendars should be available both on the G (or group drive) as well as on the V: drive in the appropriate year's "Outcomes_Assessment" folder. Any changes to the calendar should be noted.

Assessment Cycle and Timeline:

Each cycle is completed over successive semesters as explained below. It is recommended that half of the courses in a program begin an assessment cycle in the Fall semester, while the other half begin the assessment cycle in the Spring semester. Courses offered less frequently than once a year should be assessed every time they are offered.

First semester of cycle: SLO Assessment Stage

- **Pre-assessment:** Identify methods for assessment of program and course SLOs in the beginning of the semester. Course SLOs are required to be on the syllabi. It is recommended practice that Program Learning Outcomes also be identified on the syllabi, especially courses that are required for a particular degree.
- **SLO Assessment:** At some time within the semester, assess SLOs and submit student level data through eLumen.

Second semester of cycle: Planning Improvements Stage

- **Post-Assessment Analysis and Planning:** eLumen offers the capability for Course Coordinators and higher to run reports that aggregate all data that has been entered into eLumen. Program faculty should meet to discuss the assessment results, particularly the students' success in achieving the program and course SLOs, and plan ways to improve student learning and program effectiveness.
- If there have been previous SLOA plans, analysis of assessment results will examine the effectiveness of previous improvement plans and identify additional changes to produce plans for continuous improvement. The conclusions of this discussion will be summarized on the Course Assessment Summary to identify the following:
 - Evidence of success in student learning,
 - Teaching methods or previous plans for improvement of SLOs.
 - Potential changes to the course and/or program SLOs and assessments.
 - Areas and suggestions for improvement in teaching, curriculum, and course and/or program organization to facilitate student achievement of SLOs.
 - Funding needs to be included in the Unit Plan(s) to improve the program based on the SLO Assessments.
 - A strategy for implementation of plans for improvement.

Third and fourth semester of cycle: Improvement Plan Implementation Stage

- **Plan Implementation:** To the extent possible, in the following semesters implement the changes and recommendations to teaching, curriculum, course delivery, program organization, etc., as identified in the improvement plan.
- If necessary, edit or change student learning outcomes, from discussion with other faculty, and come up with edited assessment plans for the new student learning outcomes.

Begin the cycle anew:

- **Post-implementation SLO Assessment:** In subsequent semesters after implementation of improvement plans has been completed, assess SLOs and analyze results. Depending on the types of planned improvements, course scheduling and other circumstances, it may be necessary to delay this post-implementation SLO assessment to allow sufficient time for plan implementation to be properly evaluated.

Program Assessment Calendar

Semester

CYCLE STAGE	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Fall 2018	Spring 2019
SLO Assessment	Group A	Group B			Group A	Group B
Analyze Results & Plan Improvements		Group A	Group B			
Plan Implementation			Group A, round 1	Group A, round 2 Group B, round 1	Group B, round 2	

KEY: A = First Group of Courses: Half of the Program courses, as determined by Division Chair and/or program faculty

B = Second Group of Courses: Second half of the Program courses, as determined by Division Chair and/or program faculty

Appendix A: SLOCCCD Principles Statement

Principles Statement on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

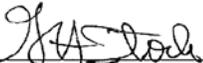
Fundamental to the mission of Cuesta College is a commitment to quality education and the promotion of student success. To attain these objectives, student learning outcomes are produced and assessed to plan improvements to our courses, programs and institutional effectiveness.

As we establish institutional SLOA processes to plan and implement strategies for successful student learning, we affirm the following principles as essential to the professional rights and responsibilities of faculty and the effective shared-governance of the College. Accordingly, the Academic Senate of Cuesta College, the Cuesta College Federation of Teachers (CCFT), and the administration of Cuesta College join in affirming the following principles:

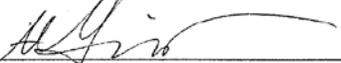
- (1) Academic Freedom is a bedrock principle in higher education, as has been recognized and embraced by the American Association of University Professors, the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges, Cuesta College Academic Senate, American Federation of Teachers, California Federation of Teachers, Cuesta College Federation of Teachers, and the Community College League of California. In acknowledging both the core value of academic freedom and that faculty are the subject matter experts in their fields of expertise, we affirm that Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) assessment must be faculty driven. This approach to SLO Assessment as a faculty-driven process will guide the policies on the use and assessment of course and program-level SLOs produced by the faculty.
- (2) Faculty shall have responsibility for development of the SLOs, methods, instruments and standards of assessment for instructional courses, programs and degrees, and department faculty shall maintain full control over any dissemination of the assessment data and results. Faculty shall have the full authority to store assessment data in a location determined and accessed by the division and/or department faculty only.
- (3) It shall be the responsibility of the administration to provide adequate support and funding of SLOA training and professional development.
- (4) The purpose of SLOA is to provide the basis to plan improvements, and hence, no initiatives to change this purpose shall be undertaken without full agreement of the Academic Senate and CCFT.
- (5) Institutional procedures for the implementation of SLO assessments shall not be mandated without full participation and, when appropriate, consent of the Academic Senate and CCFT.
- (6) Faculty will not be evaluated on students' achievement of SLOs, the results of SLO assessments, or the methods used to assess SLOs.
- (7) SLOs or SLO assessment results shall not be employed as an indicator for program revitalization, suspension, and/or discontinuance.
- (8) Workload issues arising from the production of SLOs and the implementation of SLO assessments and reporting will be resolved through the collective bargaining process.
- (9) Faculty rights as established in these principles, the law, and the collective bargaining agreement will be protected, and faculty are advised to inform CCFT and the Academic Senate of any SLO Assessment activities or procedures which they perceive may erode their rights, especially those that may:
 - a. increase the workload of the individual faculty member beyond what has been established by the collective bargaining agreement or Education Code;
 - b. impact the evaluation of faculty, and/or their programs;
 - c. affect the allocation of resources in such a way that the terms and conditions of the faculty member's employment are changed in any manner.

SIGNED on May 18, 2010:

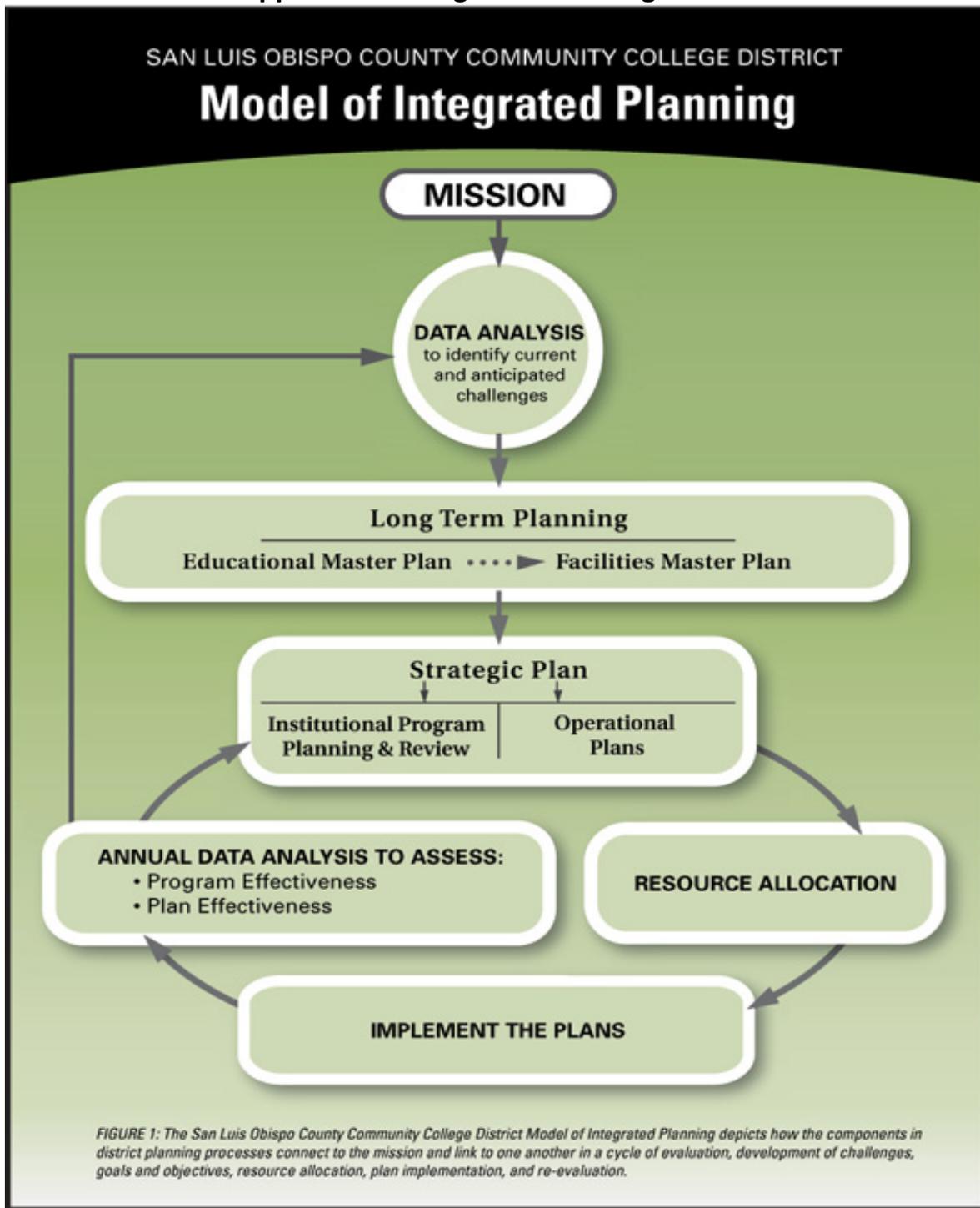

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Appendix B: Integrated Planning Model



Appendix C: Cuesta College Institutional Learning Outcomes

Approved by the Academic Senate Council 3/16/2012

1. **Personal, Academic, and Professional Development**
2. **Critical Thinking and Communication**
3. **Scientific and Environmental Understanding**
4. **Social, Historical, and Global Knowledge and Engagement**
5. **Artistic and Cultural Knowledge and Engagement**
6. **Technological and Informational Fluency**

In March 2012, the Academic Senate Council at Cuesta College, CA approved Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) to clearly define the comprehensive learning outcomes for the San Luis Obispo County Community College District (ACCJC Standard II.A.2 and II.A.3). The combined ILO statements are the expected student learning outcomes for Cuesta College students either graduating with A.A. or A.S. degrees, or who will transfer to a four-year college or university. These students will be able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes contained within all of the six ILO areas based on General Education and discipline-specific courses at the lower division level. In addition, these ILOs address some areas of learning that go beyond the current General Education patterns for degrees, and, therefore, all students who attend Cuesta College will be exposed to at least one ILO as a result of their overall experiences with any aspect of the college, including courses, programs, and student services.

ILO Categories	Representative Outcomes— Students achieving these outcomes will be able to . . .	Cuesta GE Areas Included / Embedded
1. Personal, Academic, and Professional Development	a. Recognize, assess, and demonstrate the skills and behaviors that promote academic and professional development b. Recognize, assess, and practice lifestyle choices that promote personal health and mental well-being c. Demonstrate the professional skills necessary for successful employment	<i>Health Requirement, the Diversity Requirement</i> Standard II.A.3.c
2. Critical Thinking and Communication	a. Analyze and evaluate their own thinking processes and those of others b. Communicate and interpret complex information in a clear, ethical, and logical manner.	D1 Standard II.A.3.b

<p>3. Scientific and Environmental Understanding</p>	<p>a. Draw conclusions based on the scientific method, computations or experimental and observational evidence.</p> <p>b. Construct and analyze statements in a formal symbolic system</p> <p>c. Analyze the relationship between people’s actions and the physical world</p> <p>d. Make decisions regarding environmental issues based on scientific evidence and reasoning</p>	<p><i>A and D2</i></p> <p>Standard II.A.3.a Standard II.A.3.b</p>
<p>4. Social, Historical, and Global Knowledge and Engagement</p>	<p>a. Analyze, evaluate, and pursue their opportunities and obligations as citizens in a complex world</p> <p>b. Demonstrate understanding of world traditions and the interrelationship between diverse groups and cultures</p>	<p><i>B, E, the Diversity Requirement</i></p> <p>Standard II.A.3.a Standard II.A.3.c</p>
<p>5. Artistic and Cultural Knowledge and Engagement</p>	<p>a. Identify, create, or critique key elements of inspirational art forms</p> <p>b. Demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to diverse groups and cultures through studying the world’s languages, societies, and histories</p>	<p><i>C, the Diversity Requirement</i></p> <p>Standard II.A.3.a Standard II.A.3.c</p>
<p>6. Technological and Informational Fluency</p>	<p>a. Recognize when information is needed, and be able to locate, evaluate, and utilize diverse sources effectively and ethically</p> <p>b. Produce and share electronic documents, images, and projects using modern software and technology</p>	<p>Standard II.A.3.b</p>

Appendix D: Resources and Links

Cuesta College SLOA channel:

When logged into MyCuesta, click on “Manage Content” link just below the MyCuesta banner. Click on the tab where you want to add the channel, click “Add channel”. Choose category “Academic” and chose “SLOA”. Click “Add Channel” and you will now find the SLOA channel with links to how-to videos and eLumen manuals.

SLOCCCD Integrated Planning Manual:

<https://www.cuesta.edu/aboutcc/planning/accreditation/integratedplanning.html>

California Statewide Academic Senate Paper on SLO terminology:

<http://asccc.org/papers/slo-terminology-glossary-resource-local-senates>

California Statewide Academic Senate Paper on “Guiding Principles” of SLOs:

<http://asccc.org/papers/guiding-principles-slo-assessment>

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) Eligibility Requirements and Standards:

<http://www.accjc.org/eligibility-requirements-standards>

More on Rubrics:

The Rubric Library:

<http://rubriclibrary.com/>

A Blog with a lot of rubric links:

<http://www.schrockguide.net/assessment-and-rubrics.html>

Rubrics posted by the Association of the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education:

<http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm>