BRIC Technical Assistance Program

Inquiry Guide

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

bric
Bridging Research Information & Culture

An initiative of the Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges

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www.rpgroup.org

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Preface

Overview of the Bridging Research, Information and Culture (BRIC) Project

BRIC is a Hewlett Foundation funded project with a general goal to help community college faculty, staff, and administrators discover or recapture passionate, thoughtful inquiry and then use it to help students. The project hopes to encourage more people to ask a wider collection of questions, and then to use their evidence and conclusions to enhance the broader student experience at their college. One tool to promote this goal is the RP Group's collection of inquiry guides such as the one you are currently reading.

The BRIC Inquiry Guides

Collectively, the guides developed for BRIC provide a set of tools to address different areas of the college and the activities outlined in the BRIC Framework below. Where BRIC is able to serve schools directly through its Technical Assistance Program (TAP), these guides will be bolstered by facilitated conversations on the college campus during technical assistance site visits. For colleges that we are not able to serve directly through TAP, these guides can be used by the colleges to start their own campus conversations about these critical issues.

The guides have been designed to respond to the needs of college constituency groups–faculty, staff, institutional researchers, and administrators–in all areas of inquiry-based practice, including data collection and interpretation, data usage, research, planning, and evidence-based decision-making. The guides recommend best practices and strategies to promote increased and authentic use of inquiry and evidence, with suggestions for potential directions for processes, procedures, standards, and protocols. One important observation is that colleges will need to find their own fit between their campus culture and the set of possible approaches outlined in these guides. The suggestions made here are done in a spirit of collaboration and with an understanding that there are a range of tools and approaches that can result in the successful evolution of a culture of inquiry.

BRIC Framework

Institutional Domains –
What areas of the college and activities does BRIC hope to impact?

The BRIC Framework provides an organizational structure for responding to the various areas of data and information usage within a college in the following five broad domains:

- **Evaluation and Assessment**: The bundle of activities, skills, and practices a college uses to assess student learning and practices leading to student success.
- **Planning and Decision-making**: The practices a college uses to make decisions, evaluate effectiveness, and create short and long-term plans.
- **Communication**: The mechanisms and approach a college implements to communicate information at all levels and to all constituents.
- **Organizational Structures**: The processes, procedures, and policies that provide a frame or structure for college practices.
- **Culture and Climate**: The spoken/unspoken, accepted/unaccepted guidelines for behaving in a college and creating an environment that is conducive to collaboration and to effective teaching and learning.

Expected Outcomes –
What does BRIC hope to achieve?

The following five overarching outcomes are the goals of BRIC. The college will:

- **Develop Actionable Data** by applying evaluation and assessment techniques, practices, and models that are grounded in good assessment principles and result in evidence that is used to help students succeed.
- **Interpret Data through Discussion** by using research evidence and assessment data in meaningful and thoughtful discussions that leads to a wider variety of improved program interventions and classroom teaching and learning strategies.
- **Facilitate Dialogue** by employing facilitation skills in discussions of institutional research and assessment with an increased number of participants from all college constituency groups.
- **Integrate Data into Institutional Processes** by creating integrated planning strategies that are equity focused and have well-defined links to budget and other core decision-making processes.
- **Build an Inquiry-Based Practice** by developing an infrastructure for a culture of evidence that promotes thoughtful, evidence-based collaborative inquiry as a normal, ongoing activity.

Description

The Purpose of this Booklet

This brief guide provides an overview of the student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment cycle and presents a framework to use in order to improve student learning through evidence-based assessment and analysis. All who interact with students and desire to foster student learning can benefit from the methods and practices presented in this booklet. It is designed to be a concise, easy-to-read summary of the essential principles of student learning outcomes assessment. For those professionals seeking more in-depth coverage of specific outcomes assessment topics, pedagogies, and practices, the hyperlinks within the text offer additional resources.

More importantly, this guide provides a systematic way for educators to talk about student learning. Implicit in this is our belief that SLOs are not only at the core of an institution's continuous improvement, but also that their assessment provides a basis for improving practice and the allocation of resources. In fact, SLO assessment data should be integrated through collaborative, college-wide planning to support the goals, missions, visions, and values of the California community colleges.

Beginning the Conversation:

Throughout this guide you will find guiding questions. These questions are intended to shepherd the conversations you will have as you work through the guides. Consider these questions as prompts for robust discussions of where your institution is now and where you want it to be in terms of the assessment of student learning. Feel free to expand your conversations beyond the guiding questions so you may better capture the unique structures and qualities of your own community.

Guided Inquiry

1. **Institutional Snapshot: Take a moment to think about the education your institution provides to its community, the state, and the nation. Consider the institution's various structures and demographic profile. What important skills, knowledge, and values should graduates from this college have in common?**

2. **Moving Forward: Now more specifically, describe what kinds of conversations take place on your campus about outcomes assessment? Is there broad dialog about what students should know and be able to do within courses, programs, student services, administrative units, and the institution as a whole? What constituencies have been involved (e.g., instructional and student services faculty, administration, classified, trustees, students)?**

Why Do We Assess?

The student learning outcomes assessment process is a method we use to continuously improve what we do as educational experts by looking directly at student work. Assessment helps us implement and evaluate strategies that respond to the diverse needs of our students and to meet ever-changing community and workforce demands. Successful assessment practices improve the effectiveness of our institutions by:

- Measuring how and what students learn
- Developing new and varied educational experiences that our students need to develop their talents and abilities
- Revealing whether our students master the skills and knowledge that our courses and programs promise

These assessment practices also help us determine whether adjustments and interventions we have made in our courses or student services actually help students succeed. They provide the empirical data and the critical reflection that validate our effective teaching practices.

There are four overarching principles to guide these purposes of assessment.

- Assessment is a collaborative, dynamic, and continuous process to improve courses, degrees, certificates, and programs. It is in the dialogue among practitioners where the seeds of true institutional improvement are sown.
- There is a considerable difference between using data for accountability and using it for institutional improvement. While there is a call for accountability by the public, accrediting agencies, federal and state governments, the onus is on the institutions to evaluate themselves to assure quality education for our respective communities and to place value on improvement through reflection on assessment data.
- A focus on learning is the goal of teaching, research, and educational leadership. All professionals who interact with students play a critical role in the way students learn and develop as individuals.
- Assessment is integrated in our daily classroom and service practices and not something over and above what we already do. The solution lies in striking a balance between making the process thoughtful and meaningful rather than simplistic and compliant while still dealing with the reality of our already taxed workloads.

Guided Inquiry

1 **Institutional Snapshot: Based on your reading of the section "Why Do We Assess?" describe how your institution addresses the bulleted list of principles.**

2 **Moving Forward: How could these overarching principles be integrated into your current college culture?**

Background

Community colleges today are faced with a series of important questions:

- How do we know what students are really learning?
- Are the teaching practices used today equally effective for diverse students?
- How do we improve our practices to address student success?
- Are we assessing whether students can apply information to real world applications?

Clearly it is important to articulate what students should learn and be able to do, in order to assess whether and what students are actually learning. With carefully documented outcomes, direct assessments inform adjustments, improve our practice, and increase student success.

This cycle of student learning outcomes and assessment has a long history. In the early 1990s, a growing emphasis on regular improvement in education, coupled with accountability for funding, resulted in a perspective shift nationwide. As it became apparent that improving education required more than just simple metrics attached to funding, an educational paradigm shift emerged, moving from teaching-centered strategies (which focus on what we invest in a class or a student interaction) to learning-centered strategies and learning outcomes (which indicate what the students have gotten from the class or a student interaction). Real-time assessment became essential to improving education, located as it was at the interface of teaching and learning.
This shift of focus was also evident in accreditation practices. In 2002 the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) adopted SLO assessment standards, and these standards must be fully addressed by 2012. Previously college quality was judged by the use of resources, but the new accreditation standards determine quality not by teacher/resource input, but rather student output—what they have learned and what they can do.

At the heart of student learning outcomes and assessment is a simple question:
"Are students truly learning and acquiring skills and values, and how do we know?"
The important answer to this question is our motivation for student learning outcomes assessment. To find the answer we engage in a self-reflective process concerning our practice, whether it is in the classroom, in a student service interaction, in the library, or on the athletic field.

In fact, student learning outcomes assessment should become a professional habit, one of evaluating our own work. We look not at what we put into it, but what students take away from it. In order to conduct this type of assessment we should examine not only our own content and delivery, but also what students take away from our classes. The SLO assessment process moves our work away from intuition and our past experience to individual self-reflection, formalized assessment, collegial discussion, and evidence-based improvement. At the core, this is a process focused on student populations, not

individuals, and on improving practice, not evaluating individual employees.

For more on the history of student learning outcomes assessment, see: http://online.bakersfieldcollege.edu/courseassessment/Section_2_Background/Section2_2WhatAssessment.htm

Guided Inquiry

1. **Institutional Snapshot: What kind of reflective processes do you currently use to assess whether students have learned something?**

2. **Moving Forward: How do you translate student learning into improving your professional practice?**

Impact

The learning outcomes assessment process builds an environment of good educational practices that enhance student learning through the improvement of programs and services. This occurs through both formative and summative means. Formative assessment uses immediate or intermittent feedback to guide the student to improve learning towards a final outcome. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is the final analysis of students' knowledge, skills, or attitudes in a course or program and reviews the cumulative learning at the conclusion of this learning experience.

Assessing student learning enables us to systematically inform ourselves and students about what is happening in courses and programs. From there, we can reframe, modify, or redesign existing courses, programs, services, and teaching practices. Additionally, it enables us to determine the effectiveness of a given educational experience (e.g., a course, a program, an institution). Through the assessment process, educators can engage in dialogue about what a successful student looks like (e.g., what they should know or be able to do). Within these discussions, educators can also determine what is important to them and decide how a set of educational experiences (i.e., a course, a program of study) can contribute to student learning. Through self-reflection and collaborative inquiry, the learning outcomes assessment process can facilitate a shared vision for student success.

While the benefits of learning assessment efforts are apparent, the assessment cycle also requires awareness and additional resources. Though assessment can stem from existing practices and provide a systematic framework in which improvement can be made, it also asks faculty and staff to prioritize this task in their already taxed workload. Additionally, the reflection that necessarily follows the assessment phase requires practitioners and institutions to both carve out time for analysis and evaluation as well as provide the relevant support necessary for effective practice (e.g., support for institutional research, IT, and SLO coordination). Finally, the institution must create the infrastructure for ongoing and campus-wide dialogue surrounding the findings and the actions stemming from these results. Note that a truly healthy and engaged space for discussions about institutional improvement through the assessment of learning outcomes must address the perceived relationship between SLO assessment and faculty evaluation.

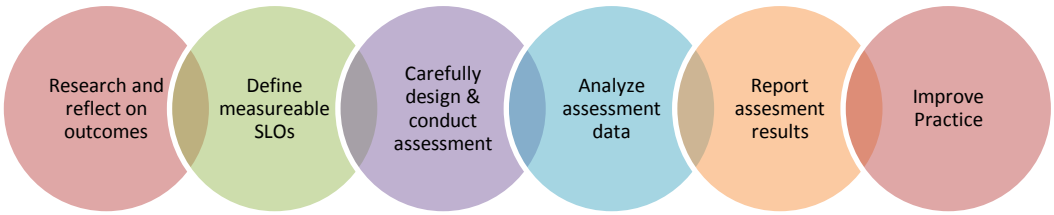
Guided Inquiry

1. **Institutional Snapshot: What institutional practices should connect to and embed assessment of student learning outcomes?**
2. **Moving Forward: Which existing institutional infrastructure or activities can be leveraged to offer additional opportunities for dialogue surrounding the assessment process?**

Components & Strategies

Six Building Blocks to Assessment

As institutions move through the assessment process, there are six fundamental steps that serve as the building blocks that need to be reviewed to assure continuous quality improvement. The steps are seamless and interconnected to assure a unified, cohesive outcomes process.



This guide links each phase of the process with guiding principles to help practitioners review the elements of the prior stage, address the issues at the current stage of assessment, and set a foundation for the subsequent stages of the assessment process.

I. BUILDING BLOCK #1 – RESEARCH & REFLECT ON OUTCOMES

This process involves a recursive and in-depth look at the aspirations of the institution and its students. It also includes research that compares what other colleges, professional organizations, and discipline groups define as essential. At the outset of the assessment process, it is critical to reflect on student learning at all of the levels of learning—course, program (instructional and student services), and institutional level. This should be an inclusive process where all campus constituents are involved in the conversation to assure that relevant student issues are identified. The faculty plays the central role in the outcomes process since the primary responsibility for teaching and learning lies within the classroom and student services. Importantly, however, effective decision-making involves *all* departments and units of a learning institution; all stakeholders in student learning should participate in the process. After all, sustainable assessment is a collaborative endeavor and college-wide improvement occurs when all areas of the college are involved in generating their own solutions—not simply accepting uniform answers from outside the college. Those involved in the reflection and research stage of the assessment process should discover the pressing learning issues and develop the relevant questions about how students learn. Specifically, the reflection process considers:

- The skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to be learned from a course, degree, certificate, instructional program, or student service program
- The way that mastery of the outcomes is defined
- The way we improve practice after we have measured student learning

After this internal reflection takes place, it is essential to look outward and verify that you have included the important elements as identified by other colleges or discipline experts. This exploration helps to make the work simpler. For instance, when creating institutional outcomes and assessment, survey the landscape to see what other institutions are doing. When developing course outcomes and assessment practices, it can be very helpful to go to professional organizations and statewide discipline groups to compare their focus with yours. Then:

- Align the key elements that other colleges and organizations have stated as important knowledge, skills, and values
- Review the uniqueness of the students at your institution and identify what may require additional areas of outcomes focus
- Define framed outcomes and assessment processes with rigor equivalent to similar institutions, programs, and courses
- Look to any outside agencies that define knowledge, skills, or values that must be considered (e.g. nursing, business, or engineering boards; licensing or certification qualification; ICAS literacy and math competencies, or discipline groups such as AMATYC, ECCTYC, CATESOL, CRLA, NABT etc)

II. BUILDING BLOCK #2 – DEFINE MEASURABLE SLOs

Learning outcomes provide the guiding beacon for instruction and student and administrative services interventions. Specifically, a student learning outcome defines ***observable*** or ***measurable*** results that are expected from the student at the end of a learning experience. SLOs address the knowledge, skills, or attitudes of students that relate to the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains of established taxonomies of learning (e.g., Bloom, Webb). More importantly, SLOs are the overarching result of a course, program (including student services), degree, or certificate. To reach an outcome, students master many discrete and individual skills, called objectives, to produce a final demonstration of integrated and complex learning outcomes. Thus, outcomes are larger than course objectives. Note that grades differ from SLOs because grades focus on individual students and include many components within a course often without linkage to outcomes. The SLO process is a class-focused one and ultimately aligns with institutional practices and outcomes.

Specifically the SLO process asks:

- What should a student know, be able to do or value at the end of the course, program, student service, or institutional experience? (Reference: http://online.bakersfieldcollege.edu/courseassessment/Section_3_SLOs/Section3_1.htm
- Are these outcomes consistent with real world applications? (i.e., are they 'authentic'?)
- Do these SLOs reflect major professional and discipline concepts associated with this course of study?
- Are the SLOs measureable? (i.e., can meaningful conclusions be made about the outcomes?)
- Do the SLOs measure higher level learning as exemplified by Bloom's taxonomy? (References: http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm or http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/wyhpenet/wahperdhandouts.htm)

Guided Inquiry

1 **Institutional Snapshot: Describe what outcomes and assessment strategies your institution has developed to measure learning at the institutional, program, and course levels.**

2 **Moving Forward: Based on your description of the above, what might your logical next steps be in your development of effective assessment structures?**

III. BUILDING BLOCK #3 – DEFINE AND CONDUCT ASSESSMENT

Learning assessment refers to the methods used by an instructor or program professional to generate and collect evidence to evaluate processes, courses, and programs. Importantly, assessment is not one single test, paper, event, or result. Rather, assessment is a process that generates a continual flow of evidence to demonstrate student learning and to suggest areas in which programmatic and course level improvements can be made.

The measurement of learning produces data, or evidence, in the form of scores, observations, and results. Data for data's sake does not help the assessment process along and it is easy to get lost in the wealth of evidence available and in the lexicon of educational measurement terms. Thus, the data gathered must be manageable and directly tied to decision-making at a variety of levels. The evidence can be either quantitative (capable of numerical manipulation and analysis) or qualitative (performance or observation-based experience). The type of evidence collected will depend on the questions being asked. Consider the old adage "what you measure is what you get." Clearly the design of the assessment must be carefully considered so that it addresses the validity and reliability of the results. Effective assessment design is often informed through a successful relationship between the faculty/student services practitioners and the institutional researcher(s).

A critical concern for assessment is how to keep the process manageable, yet still worthwhile. As one professional puts it, "How do you balance rigor and reality?" All educators have demanding schedules and duties, and it is essential to integrate assessment whenever possible into existing practices and assignments so that faculty and staff are not overburdened. Embedded assessment, as it is called, occurs within a regular curricular or programmatic activity. Assignments are linked to student learning outcomes through primary trait analysis and assessment instruments are used to inform grading.

When creating effective assessment opportunities, ask:

- Does the assessment design assure mastery of the content as described in the SLO?
- Do assessment methods mirror real world situations?
- Are there opportunities and flexibility in assessment methods for all students to show their mastery of the SLO?
- Are the assessment results consistent if administered over time?
- Where and how will the assessment results be recorded and stored?

Guided Inquiry

1 **Institutional Snapshot: What embedded assessment strategies are already being used or can be integrated into your classroom/program practice?**

2 **Moving Forward: Describe the infrastructure for assessment that your institution already has in place. What do you need to support your assessment processes?**

IV. BUILDING BLOCK #4 – ANALYZE THE RESULTS

The next step in the process is to interpret and analyze the assessment results. This stage looks at the snapshot of our class or program resulting from the assessment data and describes what students are learning. Assessment results show two kinds of student performance: 1) an absolute level of achievement or "mastery" and 2) growth as a result of a course or program. The key here is to match the assessment measure to the information desired.

Absolute achievement or mastery measures student attainment against a set of criteria established by the faculty/student services practitioner. A student's work is examined to determine whether work is, for example, advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic performance. If the goal is to measure student mastery of a concept, then a criterion-referenced design using a rubric would be an appropriate assessment measure.

Growth or value added, on the other hand, sets baseline levels of performance, implements an intervention or a lesson design, and then retests the performance level afterwards. Each student's growth can be measured to see the relative impact of the intervention or lesson. For growth analysis, a pre-test and post-test research design might be used to provide a direct comparison of student work to measure improvement.

Each assessment design has its strengths, weaknesses, and limitations regarding the conclusions that can be drawn from the results. For example, in a criterion-referenced analysis, it is critical to ensure that the reviewers of the student work evaluate the product in the same way (sometimes called "norming" or "inter-rater reliability"). As with all analysis of human conduct, it is rare that the results will show a direct cause and effect relationship—so it is important not to assume one. It is impossible to consider all of the factors that improve or hamper success. Yet, the assessment process does chip away at the hurdles to learning, and in this way, increases the body of knowledge and helps us better understand the learning process.

When analyzing assessment results, consider the following issues:

- The practitioner who will be part of the dialogue about the results
- Any critical factors that relate to the context of these results
- Whether the assessment results confirm or challenge existing assumptions
- Potential trends or patterns that may appear over time
- The way the results may be used to inform teaching, learning, and/or services
- Mechanisms necessary for the college to follow up on the results
- Communication and distribution of the data, interpretations, and necessary improvements

V. BUILDING BLOCK #5 – REPORT THE RESULTS

The assessment process needs to be distributed in a final document or file that allows easy review and analysis by the decision-makers who will look at the outcomes in order to promote change. While assessment reports differ from college to college, there are some guiding principles for a final assessment report. Specifically, assessment reports should:

- Identify the true purpose of the assessment
- Be useful and helpful to decision-makers
- Tell the story of outcomes assessment effectively
- Focus assessment summaries on decisions that the results can inform
- Celebrate and publicize good assessment results
- Identify areas of improvement or further inquiry
- Be created in a sustainable format—simple, easily completed, read, interpreted, and organized

As with the design of the assessment itself, the generation of the final report varies on the level of the assessment and reporting. At the program and institutional level, it is beneficial to have a common template for the report developed collegially through a working relationship between the faculty/student service practitioner and the institutional researcher(s).

Particularly, when publicly reporting assessment results, make certain:

- The overall message is one that is judgment-free and stimulates professional reflection
- The reports adequately reflect what was planned in the assessment design
- That privacy is maintained, for both students and professionals
- The reports are disseminated to all who can use the evidence to make improvements

VI. BUILDING BLOCK #6 – IMPROVED PRACTICE

The ultimate goal of the assessment process is continued quality improvement in what we do as learning professionals. Assessment guides our unyielding search for effective methods, critical strategies, and pedagogies that are shown to maximize student learning. Assessment is designed to promote positive change both in student performance and in our own work product.

When examining the improvements to practice, consider:

- How instruction could be modified to improve courses
- How to provide better feedback to students to improve results
- Programmatic changes to address desired outcomes
- Processes for integrating outcomes results into program review, or influencing discipline, departmental, or unit priorities
- Linking results to inform integrated planning and resource allocation

Guided Inquiry

1. **Institutional Snapshot: Describe how your institution uses the learning outcomes process as a continuous improvement feedback loop. What challenges exist to implementing full assessment cycles at your college? Describe how your college incorporates assessment results into integrated planning and resource allocation.**

2. **Moving Forward: Given your answers above, how might you develop a collaborative and integrated assessment process at your institution? What existing infrastructures can you use to more fully involve the college community in assessment? How might you engage your community at the institutional, program, and course level in assessment design and reflection?**

Practical Application

Student learning outcomes assessment involves a variety of internal, locally-determined outcomes statements, which are assessed using locally-appropriate authentic methods, and generate data that are analyzed within the institutional context. It is a faculty and institution-driven process that supports and improves our uniquely diverse institutions in a culturally appropriate manner. The requirement to develop student learning outcomes and assess them with a vision for improvement is the only "standard" applied. Within that mandate, institutions are free to determine diverse methods in order to address both accountability and improvement. Below are some practical applications of the process applied at different colleges in very different ways. You will notice: (1) the important linkage between course outcomes and "passing the course"; (2) program outcomes are integral to program review efforts and educational master planning; and (3) institutional outcomes are linked to strategic planning.

Course Assessment – Glendale College

Examples of course assessment resulting in improvement abound in California community colleges. One example of changes at the course level includes work done at Glendale Community College, which began with a simple linkage statement between assessment and grade distribution data—"For the rest that passed with a C or better, they all achieved the stated Student Learning Outcomes." The process evolved beyond using this "grades for data" approach to more defined SLO assessment. By the third assessment cycle, faculty were able to focus on more specific outcomes. For example, the faculty observed that in general, students did worse on the questions that had to do with the vocabulary related to the chapter themes than the vocabulary that dealt with calcos, idiomatic expressions, "Spanglish," and homophones. This finding indicated that the students were paying attention to the problems that heritage speakers tend to have and that homework and in-class activities were generally effective, but students did not spend much time studying vocabulary. This information provided specific valuable feedback to adjust teaching practices.

Program Level – Bakersfield College

In 2002-2003 the Bakersfield College biology department, organized as a single academic program by discipline, began examining its program and curricular student learning outcomes. This outcomes perspective guided faculty to conclude that the biology department really served three significant programs of study contributing to different outcomes.

The majority of students taking biology were pre-allied health, followed by the next largest number of students only taking a single course for general education, and distantly followed by a handful of Biology majors, most of whom never completed an associate's degree. The outcomes and expectations for students taking only one course to meet a general education science requirement differed significantly from outcomes for pre-allied health students and biology majors.

It was evident that a single set of outcomes and a single degree for all students taking biology was not reasonable. The intensity, breadth, focus, and depth of study varied significantly for each pathway. The Biology Associate of Science degree was reframed in the context of student learning outcomes as a *Biology Associate of Science degree with an emphasis in Human Biology* (the pre-allied health track) or a *Biology Associate of Science Degree with an emphasis in Biology* (for majors). The program assessments used for each degree were different because the final outcomes were different. The General Education Biology (GE) course became part of the GE program and was assessed as a course. Data were used to improve success and curriculum in all three biology pathways.

Aligning outcomes with the degrees increased the number of biology degrees awarded ten-fold (see table below). Students expressed extreme satisfaction in graduating and being awarded a degree for completing an educational pathway that truly represented an accomplishment and completion of a course of study with explicit outcomes.

Old Biology Program Required: Courses in chemistry, math, biology Target: Students transferring as a biology major	New Biology Program Emphasis in Biology Required: Courses in chemistry, math, biology Target: Students transferring as a biology major Emphasis in Human Biology Required: One course in chemistry, one course in math, biology courses related to the human biology Target: Students seeking multiple local Allied Health pathways including transfer in Allied Health areas

Award Program	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Biology	9	10	7	5	12	18	46	58	56	87

Student Services – Santa Monica College

The counseling department at Santa Monica College (SMC) has an extensive SLO assessment process that has closes the loop and is linked to SMC's Institutional SLOs. The counselors determined that some outcomes were easily assessed through examining the student education plan process as well as the actual student education plans. The following outcomes were assessed:

- Students will formulate a realistic self-appraisal of their educational status and its relationship to their overall goals
- Students will identify their math and English course sequence and chart their individual math and English course sequence to achieve their educational goals as a result of the educational planning presentation in the Counseling 20 class and subsequent counseling session(s)

The student education plans and process were examined through three different assessment strategies: 1) Education Plan Competencies were evaluated by counselors using a common rubric, 2) students were given a common quiz based upon a case scenario, which was administered approximately eight weeks after the counseling sessions, and 3) at which time a student survey was also conducted to gather student feedback on the process and final plan. The data from these three authentic assessment methods provided both direct and indirect information about what the students were able to do as a result of the counseling class and sessions. The data were collected in 2008 and 2009 and then compared to see whether the process helped students translate the information into a plan, whether the quality of the plans improved, and whether the process itself needed improvement.

Ultimately SMC counselors learned that over the last two years the students were improving in their expertise in educational planning as measured by the rubric. The counselors also learned that they needed to spend more time on certain topics during the counseling class and session. They also learned that students felt that it was important to have more individual time with counselors on certain topics.

Institutional Level - College of Marin

Research at the College of Marin led the entire college to re-think the use of "butts in seats" measures and to look instead at what each program was trying to achieve for students and align measurable goals with outcome assessment. As a result of research and vision, Marin re-organized the college around student pathways: basic skills/ESL; transfer; career and occupational training; and personal growth and enrichment. Outcomes were written for each pathway. For example, "Full-time transfer students will be able to complete their programs and transfer within two years." Baseline data and longitudinal data track the progress of each pathway to demonstrate student success (and non-success).

Three years ago, the College of Marin Academic Senate went through a radical transformation in thinking about the way they measured their success. The college had traditionally looked to input measures to determine the success of programs: head count, WSCH/FTE (load), class size. Research prepared by a faculty member and presented to the Senate led to an understanding that program effectiveness would be captured better if they looked at output measures including: job placement, number of transfers, the success of transfer students, the number of degrees granted, the efficiency of programs, completion rates, ESL transitioning, and student satisfaction.

Guided Inquiry

1. **Institutional Snapshot: Describe ways that your institution uses elements of these practical applications.**

2. **Moving Forward: What elements of the Practical Application examples might be effectively integrated into your institution's assessment processes?**

Evaluation

The process by which student learning outcomes are developed and assessed can be evaluated through several means. Additionally, this evaluation can be expanded to include the relationship between SLOs and other institutional practices such as program review and resource allocation. Such evaluation is most successful if a college has designated venues for discussion and feedback appropriate to the college. Evaluation plans should be designed prior to implementation of a new process and should be based upon the criteria that make this process valuable and effective for the institution. In addition, the evaluation process should be transparent with clear expectations for everyone.

One method of evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes assessment is to designate a college committee focused on student learning outcomes to coordinate efforts, review a sample of the college's SLO assessment efforts, and identify areas of collective achievement, opportunities, and growth. This effort can be facilitated through the development of a rubric that outlines the college's shared principles and practices for effective learning outcomes. The findings from this effort can be shared with the faculty and student services leadership, with the intention that the institution will showcase exemplary efforts and design additional professional development addressing the areas of growth.

Another method to examine the effectiveness of learning assessment efforts would be to use existing venues or create new ones to enable ongoing dialogue. For example, a part of the faculty professional development day could be devoted to facilitating departments in evaluating the quality and rigor of their own assessment efforts using an institutional rubric or guiding principles. From this activity, departments could identify their strengths and areas for growth and launch discussions about strengthening their outcomes efforts.

Guided Inquiry

1. **Institutional Snapshot: What institutional practices connect to the assessment of student learning outcomes? Which existing institutional infrastructure or activities can be leveraged to offer additional opportunities for dialogue surrounding the assessment process?**

2. **Moving Forward: What might your next steps be in your efforts to improve or develop effective methods of assessment?**

Developing an Action Plan

Based on your responses to the Guiding Inquiry questions in each section of this guide, identify the specific steps you could take to develop and/or improve the assessment of student learning at your institution.

Consider each of the building blocks to assessment and identify next steps.

- Engaging in reflection and research at the institutional, program, and course level
- Defining measurable SLOs
- Designing and conducting assessment
- Analyzing assessment data
- Reporting assessment results at the institutional, program, and course levels
- Improving practice and providing opportunities for professional development

BRIC TAP Inquiry Guide Series

1. Assessing Student Learning Outcomes
   Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty*

2. Using an Equity Lens to Assess Student Learning
   Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty, Student Services Staff*

3. Assessing Strategic Intervention Points in Student Services
   Primary Audience: *Student Services Staff*

4. Assessing Institutional Effectiveness
   Primary Audience: *Institutional Researchers and Administrators*

5. Assessing Basic Skills Outcomes
   Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty*

6. Maximizing the Program Review Process
   Primary Audience: *Instructional Faculty, Institutional Researchers*

7. Turning Data into Meaningful Action
   Primary Audience: *Institutional Researchers*

8. A Model for Building Information Capacity and Promoting a Culture of Inquiry
   Primary Audience: *Administrators, Institutional Researchers*