

Learning Outcomes

Report to the Academic Senate
Based on League of Innovation Annual Conference,
San Francisco, March 2004

Lesley Danziger, Senator, PDI Chair
March 16, 2004

Why does OCC need to care about Learning Outcomes?

- The League of Innovation, currently the most respected national community college system-wide organization in the nation, pro-actively supports and encourages the refocusing of the community college to a Learning Outcomes approach
- It would be fair to see that well over 80% of the sessions at the National League of Innovations Conference this year were concerned with promoting the use of learning outcomes in community colleges.
- It would also be fair to say that many colleges across the nation and internationally (Canada and the UK especially) are already fully engaged in converting their college-wide goals and discipline curriculum to the learning-outcomes based approach
- Most accrediting institutions, including WASC are expecting community colleges to be embarking on/making progress in the incorporation of learning outcomes into all aspects of the institution.

In General, How Could the Learning Outcomes Approach Affect OCC?

To demonstrate that we are incorporating learning outcomes as a college, and becoming what the League of Innovation calls a "Learning College", we would do the following as a college:

- Develop a thoughtful, systematic approach to assessing essential student learning that cuts across the entire institution
- Envision the college as the place in which students learn and out of which they take their learning. Once they come out of the college, into the world of work or higher education, what are the essential skills and behaviors that you expect them to have learned and how do you know that they have learned them?
- Examine every segment of the college institution to determine how it contributes to the learning experience that you want students to take out of the college?

Specifically, How Would the Learning Outcomes Approach Affect the Different Sectors of OCC?

Once the college has determined the 4-5 general learning outcomes that it wishes students to take away from their total experience at OCC

- Each division, department, program, course, class would in turn develop a series of 4-5 statements describing what the student will take away from that specific experience that will reinforce the overall learning outcomes of the college.
- The Learning Outcomes are always stated in terms of student performance

- They are different from performance objectives – not statistics based, broader and usually more conceptual
- The faculty/staff/managers decide how the students they serve will demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes they hope to achieve
- In an academic department, the learning outcomes are often measured in terms of capstone assignments, i.e. assignments that bring together all the learning outcomes expected from the course/program

What are the Positive Aspects of Learning Outcomes?

- They place the student firmly at the core of the learning process.
- They reinforce the notion that the community college is an organic whole, in which every faculty, manager and staff member contributes to the learning that the student will take away from the institution.
- They set a framework in which every department or program within the college can assess whether students are learning what they believe as a group to be important, and what the college as a group has determined to be important.
- They reinforce continuity across classes and programs that students are required to take in terms of continuous, but not necessarily sequential learning
- They prioritize and help programs and institutions articulate and focus on key behaviors and skills

How do you create Learning Outcomes?

- As an institution, you determine the 3-5 major learning outcomes that you want any graduate to have when they leave
- Each division creates its own 3-5 learning outcomes, bearing in mind the institutional core
- Each department or program creates its own 3-5 learning outcomes based on these prior ones
- Each course syllabus is designed according to the development of the learning outcomes prioritized by the department
- Each of these areas also determines how it will assess if and to what extent students have learned the outcomes deemed most important.

The Challenge for OCC

- To agree on the core institutional, divisional and departmental learning outcomes, then revisit programs and course descriptions in terms of these learning outcomes.
- To ensure that assessment at all levels is based on the demonstration that the learning outcomes have been achieved
- To allay faculty and staff concerns that the emphasis will be on accountability; it is not