STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs) IMPROVEMENT ACTION(S) GUIDE

The primary goal of the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Assessment process is to make data-guided decisions related to improving student learning. Whether or not the goals/benchmarks set for Student Learning Outcomes have been met, academic program faculty and leadership should establish a plan of action for the next academic year based on the most recent year's results and take-aways from internal discussions about the data. Implementing enhancements and then circling back to check whether they indeed led to the desired improvement is one of the best assessment practices and is an accreditation requirement.

SOME COMMON IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS:

IMPROVE THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS:

- *Switch from using course letter grades and/or percentages/points to using grades and/or percentages/points earned by students on specific assignment(s)* (see pages 14-15 in Suskie (2009) for discussion on why course final grades are not suitable to assess student learning outcomes):
    - Instead of using a course letter grade, choose the number of points earned by the student on a midterm reflection essay.

- *Specify or change the course(s) in which assessment is conducted* (align SLOs with program curriculum):
    - List specific course number and course name (or a series) where assessment of SLOs will occur,
    - Move SLO assessment to a later course in the program's sequence to give students more time to develop mastery,
    - Move SLO assessment to a course that is better aligned with the nature of the learning outcome (e.g., assess fundamental disciplinary knowledge in a theory course as opposed to research methods course),
    - Move SLO assessment from an elective to a core course in the program's curriculum to measure learning of a larger group of students (e.g., all students in program's single major/concentration track, all majors/concentration tracks in the program, non-majors).

- *Specify or change the Assessment Instrument(s) used to measure the SLO:*
    - List specific course assignment or learning experience (or a series) that will be used to assess SLO,
    - Replace one assignment with another that is better aligned with the nature of the learning outcome (e.g., switch from a multiple-choice quiz to an essay in order to better assess student's written communication skills),
    - Use a specific subset of questions from an exam that are specifically focused on the SLO instead of using the overall exam score, which may include student performance in areas not related to the SLO.

- *Change the instructions/prompts in the Assessment Instrument(s) used to measure the SLO:*
    - Expand, shorten, rephrase, clarify, or otherwise edit the directions associated with the Assessment Instruments so that students better understand performance expectations,

- *Design or change a rubric used to measure one or several SLOs* (rubric examples)*:*
    - Create a rubric to better assess multifaceted observable performance by a student on a single assignment using a set of predetermined expectations (e.g., a capstone project is used to assess 3 SLOs, each corresponding to a separate criterion on a rubric (analysis of data, interpretation of results, and oral presentation/communication) using a 3-point scale (exemplary=3, acceptable=2, unacceptable=1)),

o   Change the rubric type, used dimensions/criteria, rating scale, or description of expected performance (e.g., add a previously missing important assessment criterion 'flow, logic and clarity of writing').

IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND/OR PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES:

- *Change or add new instructional materials:*

  o   Provide more and/or enhanced in-class and/or outside-of-class opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and skills in certain areas (e.g., supplement lecture with a small-group activity focused on application of learnt content/skills),

  o   Conduct an evaluation of course topics for their currency and relevancy in the field and make any necessary updates (e.g., update course syllabus and slides to include content covering some latest technological advancement),

  o   Create a rubric to accompany the high-stakes, culminating/final course assignment so that students (especially those from under-resourced backgrounds) can better understand the performance and grading expectations.

- *Organize or strengthen pedagogical and assessment structure:*

  o   Embed formal assessment of student learning into annual workflow (e.g., reserve half-a-day during faculty retreat before the start of the academic year to jointly review prepared report on SLOs, to analyze achieved levels of learning, to discuss enhancements, and to document the process),

  o   Collaborate with institutional partners on assessment design (e.g., work with faculty in the Center for the Advancement of Teaching to enhance how a given course reinforces an SLO),

  o   Arrange for standard instructional and/or assessment materials to be used in different courses and/or course sections where the same SLO is assessed (e.g., embed a set of same 10 questions that assess target SLO into every final exam in course sections taught by different instructors).

FINE-TUNE THE STANDARD(S) FOR SUCCESS

- *Define or change the level of sought mastery:*

  o   Specify a minimally acceptable level of student performance on a measure of learning (e.g., decide that at least 15 correctly answered questions out of total 20 questions on a final exam (75%) constitutes a satisfactory level of demonstrated content knowledge for a student graduating from the program);

  o   Increase or decrease the minimally acceptable level of student performance on a measure of learning (e.g., adjust the standard from at least a C (73%) to at least a B- (80%) on a term paper used to assess the target SLO).

- *Define or change the threshold of acceptability:*

  o   Specify the minimum percentage of students who must attain certain level on a measure of learning in order for the SLO to be considered successfully achieved by the students in the program (e.g., decide that at least 80% of majors enrolled in the course must achieve the level of sought mastery);

  o   Increase or decrease the minimum percentage of students demonstrating the minimally acceptable level of performance (e.g., lower the standard from at least 100% to at least 90% of students defending their dissertations in a given year will achieve a certain rating on a criterion in a rubric).

UPDATE LEARNING OUTCOME(S)

- *Retire a learning outcome in pursuit of a new learning outcome:*

  o   If an SLO has been assessed and has been met consistently and at high levels for many years, there is sufficient evidence that the program curriculum is effective at preparing students to demonstrate knowledge and skills associated with this learning outcome. The SLO may be 'rotated out' and another, perhaps almost as important, learning outcome can be 'rotated in'.

- o If there are changes in the academic discipline such as new tools and technologies, fresh scientific discovery, and/or innovative techniques, once the new content is incorporated into the curriculum, there may be a need to either select new SLOs or update existing SLOs so they include the new knowledge sets or skills.

EXAMPLES OF IMPROVEMENT ACTION(S) NARRATIVES:

- Because for the last three years, the goal/benchmark for this SLO has been achieved by our students, academic program faculty and the curriculum committee decided to increase it from 80% to 85%. Beginning in the next Fall, we expect a higher percentage of students enrolled in SPC 3210 to attain mastery in this SLO by receiving an average 'Good' or 'Excellent' rating on all three criteria in the grading rubric. To ensure continued success on this SLO, the instructor of the course will spend an extra class period devoted to the content assessed by rubric criteria #2, which results for this SLO suggest students are not understanding as well as we would like them to. Student learning results from different campuses were comparable (Distance/Online = 84% and Tallahassee Campus = 86%), these improvements will be implemented at both location/modalities at the same time.

- First, even though the SLO goal/benchmark (75% of students) has been consistently achieved for the last four academic years, academic program faculty and curriculum committee decided against increasing it to a higher threshold. Instead, we decided to redesign the 'easy' exam questions to test higher levels of learning. Specifically, exam items #17 and #25 will be modified to test middle levels of Bloom's taxonomy (application and analysis). We plan to deploy the redesigned exam during the upcoming academic year. To better prepare our students for a higher level of learning, we changed one in-class activity and modified one homework assignment. Now, in addition to teaching students what a t-test and a correlation test are, we want them to be able to apply this knowledge to analyze and interpret results of these two statistical tests.