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Background to the Institutional Learning Outcomes Assessment Project

In 2011, the San Luis Obispo County Community College District (SLOCCCD) initiated a project to define and assess Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). The first drafts of the ILOs were developed and presented to the Academic Senate Council in May 2011. In fall 2011, the Student Learning Outcome and Assessment co-coordinators began a process to refine the original drafts of the ILOs while collecting district-wide feedback on the ILO statements. After a number of workshops and other opportunities for feedback, the ILO statements were finalized and then approved by the Academic Senate Council on March 16.

The district has taken the approach that the ILO statements are to be inclusive of the outcomes in the General Education program. 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 areas of learning that are specified by the Accrediting Commission for Colleges and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) in Standard II.A.3 that go beyond the current General Education patterns for degrees. 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.

Assessment Administration

The assessment of student attainment of the ILOs was initiated in spring 2012. An electronic assessment tool was created and delivered to 746 students who applied for A.A. or A.S. degrees in spring 2012. The assessment tool contained 16 common questions that were given to all students. The common questions were a blend of student self-report questions on the attainment of the ILOs and questions regarding the impacts of specific attributes of their college experience. All assessments included free response questions. In addition, the assessment tool was customized with additional, discipline-specific questions in order to assess students earning degrees in the areas of social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, and science and mathematics. The assessment sent to the science and mathematics degree earners contained content-related direct assessment questions to determine the ability of students to use the scientific method for solving problems. Appendix A contains the exact questions on the assessment tools.

The assessment was delivered to the district-issued email addresses of the degree candidates. The students were given 30 days to respond. After one week, a follow-up reminder message was sent. At the May commencement ceremony, a number of paper versions of the assessment tool were circulated for students who did not complete the email version.

As an incentive for students to complete the assessment, the Vice President of Academic Affairs arranged for a Kindle Fire tablet and ten Starbucks gift-cards to be randomly awarded to participating students.
Assessment Results

The ILO assessment was completed by 155 students online, and an additional 33 students completed the paper version of the assessment at commencement for a 25% overall rate of return. The following figures present the assessment results.

Figure 1: Percent agree, All Respondents (n = 188)

Figure 2: Percent Agree, Arts and Humanities (n = 30)

Figure 1: The percentages of students who agree or strongly agree with the ILO statements.

Figure 2: The percentages of students earning degrees in the Arts and Humanities who agree or strongly agree with the ILO statements.
Figure 3: Percent Agree, Social and Behavioral Sciences
\( (n = 44) \)

Figure 3: The percentages of students earning degrees in the Social and Behavioral sciences who agree or strongly agree with the ILO statements.

Figure 4: Percent Agree, Math and Sciences Sciences
\( (n = 48) \)

Figure 4: The percentages of students earning degrees in Science and Mathematics who agree or strongly agree with the ILO statements.
Discussion of Assessment Results

It is clear from the results that a large majority of students report that their experience at Cuesta College has led to their achievement of the institutional learning outcomes. In the overall results (n = 188), at least 85% of the respondents indicated agreement with the assessment questions for all but three of the questions. The questions with the highest positive responses were for the following questions:

1. During my time at Cuesta College, I developed my ability to set and achieve academic goals. (96.1%)
5. In my courses at Cuesta College, I improved my ability to critically evaluate the quality of my own thinking. (89.4%)
13. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to use information effectively and ethically. (90.0%)
14. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to communicate clearly and logically. (90.3%)

When the individual discipline assessments are examined, these four questions are among the highest rated questions in their respective groupings, indicating that the attainment of these ILOs is widespread across the institution. Three of the four top scoring questions relate to General Education outcomes that are emphasized in multiple disciplines, revealing a possible explanation as to why these questions receive higher scores.

The overall results show that students rated their abilities in two questions much lower than the average response. The following questions were rated the lowest among all of the respondents:

9. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to comprehend the readings assigned by my instructors. (77.0%)
15. During my time at Cuesta, I gained the technological competencies that are necessary for my future success. (73.1%)

An examination of the discipline-specific groupings shows that the reading comprehension question (#9) was rated low throughout all three of the sub-groupings, although the science and mathematics cohort scored lower (70.8%) compared to arts and humanities (76.6%) and social and behavioral sciences (75.0%). The science and mathematics cohort scored much higher on the technological competencies question (#15, 81.3%) than the arts and humanities (70.0%) and social and behavioral sciences (54.5%).

In addition to the quantitative data, the ILO assessment project captured student comments from over 60% of the respondents. The students reported significant learning gains, identified inspirational departments and instructors, and gave a very positive description of their experiences at Cuesta College. A selection of the student comments are documented in Appendix B.

Actionable Improvement Plans

A: Evaluations of the assessment method:
After reviewing and evaluating the ILO assessment methods, a number of areas of improvement were determined:

1. Response rate. The response rate of 25% was almost certainly higher than what it would have been without the potential prize offerings. However, the response rate would likely be higher if:
   - the district captured the personal email addresses of students and this was retrievable in the Excel file of degree candidates.
   - more advertising was done prior to the survey launch. This could be done through the catalog or in the degree application itself.
   - faculty announced the availability of the survey in classes.
   - more advertising was done on campus, via posters or through student clubs.
2. Assessment questions. The survey itself provided useful, differentiated responses that were easily interpreted for areas of success and areas of improvement. The ability of the survey to capture student self-report and direct assessment data was confirmed, as the science content questions were easily scored and provided useful feedback on science instruction. Several areas of improvement were noted:
   • Demographic data should be collected, either by student ID number correlation or by actual questions. This information will be essential for disaggregation of the data in future assessments.
   • Specific, direct assessment questions are viable in this method, and should be extended to additional subject areas.

B: Evaluations of the assessment results:
After reviewing and evaluating the ILO assessment results, a number of areas of improvement were determined.

   • The results of the science direct assessment questions will be discussed at science division meetings in 2012-2013.
   • Recommendations and actions regarding the assessment question results are contained in the relevant excerpts from the Institutional Effectiveness Committee SLO Assessment Review and Recommendations Report, which begin on the following page.
Relevant excerpts from the IEC Assessment Review and Recommendations Report, 2012:

### INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS COMMITTEE

**Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Review and Recommendations**

**FOR SUBMISSION TO:** Academic Senate, Cabinet  
**Date:** 10-1-12

**Review of Other Assessment Data Relevant to Student Learning Outcomes**

1. In Spring 2012, the SLOCCCD degree earners were surveyed regarding their achievement of the Institutional Learning Outcomes and some degree-specific outcomes for the Liberal Arts degrees and for Business Administration. The IEC deems the following results significant:

   - **Reading comprehension** ("During my time at Cuesta, I developed my ability to comprehend the readings assigned by my instructors"): 77%
   - **Technological Competency** ("During my time at Cuesta, I gained the technological competencies that are necessary for my future success"): 73%

   The district is already pursuing improvement in these areas. Dr. Berta Parrish, in Academic Support, is currently leading several faculty participants in a grant project to help faculty improve student reading comprehension. In addition, the 2012-2017 Technology Plan includes as its first initiative, “The student experience at Cuesta incorporates instruction in current technology. The experience includes the necessary support resources for both online and face to face courses.” Nevertheless, additional research and dialogue might help integrate improvement efforts throughout the institution.

**Recommendations for Improving Student Learning Across the Institution:**

**Reading Comprehension**:

1. The IEC recommends that the SLOA Committee develop a plan for additional assessment in order to improve our understanding of student learning challenges in this area.
2. The IEC recommends that the faculty involved in the reading grant project (led by Dr. Berta Parrish, Academic Support) be presented with this data for discussion.
3. The IEC recommends that the following groups agendize this issue for dialogue and planning: the English Division, Academic Skills, Student Support and Success Committee, Strategic Planning Committee

**Technological Competencies**:

1. The IEC recommends that the SLOA Committee and the Technology Committee work together to develop a plan for additional assessment in order to improve our understanding of student learning challenges in this area.
2. The IEC recommends that the following groups agendize this topic for dialogue and planning: relevant instructional programs, the Technology Committee, Computer Services, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Academic Senate.

**Rationale for Recommendations**:

**Reading Comprehension**:

1. The students who completed the survey scored this outcome lower than others; however, the reasons for this result are unclear, so further assessment could shed more light on the true state of our students’ reading comprehension as well as their confidence in this area.
2. A grant project (from the Foundation) is currently underway to train a small group of faculty to improve their students’ comprehension of classroom texts. These results are directly relevant to their work.
3. In order to ensure an institution-wide effort to discuss and improve our students’ reading comprehension and confidence, the IEC recommends that all designated committees (see above)
should consider the data and how it might relate to their programs.

**Technological Competencies:**

1. The students who completed the survey scored this outcome lower than others; however, the reasons for this result are unclear, so further assessment could shed more light on the true state of our students’ ability to use technology as well as their confidence in this area.
2. In order to ensure an institution-wide effort to discuss and improve our students’ technological skills and confidence, the IEC recommends that all designated committees should consider the data and how it might relate to their programs.

**Recommended Outcomes and Timelines for Implementation:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Comprehension</th>
<th>1. By February, 2013, the SLOA Committee will propose a plan for a pilot assessment project.</th>
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<tr>
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<td>2. The participants in the grant project will discuss the survey results at their meeting on October 9, 2012.</td>
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<td>3. The designated groups will include the reading comprehension results as an agenda item by March 2013.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Technological Competencies</th>
<th>1. By December, 2013, the SLOA Committee and Technology Committee will propose a plan for a pilot assessment project.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The designated groups will include the “technological competency” results as an agenda item by March 2013.</td>
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**Recommended Assessment Plans:**

**Recommended Methods for Feedback, Distribution & Dialogue**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reading Comprehension</th>
<th>1. The SLOA Committee will provide a description of the proposed pilot study to the Academic Senate and the IEC by February 2013.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Dr. Berta Parrish will provide a brief summary of the dialogue from October 9, 2012 along with assessment results from the work that faculty participants have done through the grant project.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. By March 2013, the designated groups will provide the IEC with a brief summary of the dialogue about reading comprehension, along with a description of any improvement efforts.</td>
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Appendix A: ILO Assessment Questions

1. During my time at Cuesta College, I developed my ability to set and achieve academic goals.

2. Rank the impact of how the following experiences improved your ability to set and achieve academic goals:
   2a. Rank the impact of how the following experiences improved your ability to set and achieve academic goals:
       - Interactions with counselors
       - Interactions with peers
       - Interactions with faculty
       - Attending on-campus skills workshops
       - Other individual research
       - Experiences in courses

3. During my time at Cuesta, I developed the skills and behaviors that will enhance my professional success.

4. Rank the impact of how the following experiences improved your skills and behaviors that lead to professional success:
   - Interactions with counselors
   - Interactions with peers
   - Interactions with faculty
   - Attending on-campus skills workshops
   - Accessing online sources such as assist.org
   - Other individual research
   - Experiences in courses

5. In my courses at Cuesta College, I improved my ability to critically evaluate the quality of my own thinking.

6. The following courses most improved my ability to analyze and evaluate the quality of my own thinking:
   (use 3-4 letter course abbreviate and number code, i.e. POLS225 or BIO209A)

7. In my courses at Cuesta College, I improved my ability to critically evaluate the quality of other people’s thinking.

8. The following courses most contributed to my ability to critically evaluate the quality of other people’s thinking:
   (use 3-4 letter course abbreviate and number code, i.e. POLS225 or BIO209A)

9. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to comprehend the readings assigned by my instructors.

10. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to locate information that helps me answer questions or solve problems.

11. Rank the impact of how the following experiences improved your ability to locate information that helps you to answer questions or solve problems:
    - Interactions with librarians
    - Help from the library website
    - English 201A coursework
    - Interactions with instructors
    - Interactions with students
    - Other individual research

12. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to evaluate the quality of information that I locate or receive.

13. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to use information effectively and ethically.

14. During my time at Cuesta, I improved my ability to communicate clearly and logically.

15. During my time at Cuesta, I gained the technological competencies that are necessary for my future success.

16. Please provide any additional comments you have regarding your educational experiences at Cuesta College, or this survey.
Arts and Humanities discipline specific questions
16. During my time at Cuesta College, I have improved my ability to identify, create, or critique key elements of inspirational art forms, such as visual arts, performance arts, or literature.
17. During my time at Cuesta College, I have improved my knowledge of how history and culture influence artistic expression.

Social and Behavioral Sciences discipline specific questions
16. During my time at Cuesta College, I have improved my ability to explain how societies and social groups function.
17. During my time at Cuesta College, I have improved my ability to evaluate competing interpretations of historical events.
18. During my time at Cuesta College, I have improved my ability to evaluate my opportunities and obligations as a citizen in a complex world.

Science and Mathematics discipline specific questions
16. During my time at Cuesta College, I have improved my understanding of the methodologies of science as investigative tools.
17. A scientific theory is best defined as:
18. An experiment for a new medication was designed with the goal to see if the new medicine was effective in reducing asthma attacks. The patients were divided into two groups. Group one was given the new drug for asthma, while group two was given an herbal supplement whose label reads that it improves breathing. Describe the most significant problem with this experiment, and propose a solution.
19. Science differs from other disciplines, such as philosophy and the arts, because science relies upon...
Appendix B: A Selection of Positive Student Comments from the ILO Assessment

Constructive or critical feedback from students will be consolidated by relevant instructional or service areas and will be presented to these groups for further dialogue and analysis.

Student Comments from the 2012 ILO assessment, Cuesta College

I feel that the science department at Cuesta is phenomenal. Specifically the chemistry and biological science teachers are great. I transferred into Sac State and got into the nursing program there and I feel confident that I will do well with the preparation I received at Cuesta.

The most challenging and best course I have ever taken is my BUS218 course with Gary Rubin. He pushed us as students because he believed in our capabilities that we didn't know existed. It was a challenging course, but the most practical and fun class!

I feel I have received a quality education at Cuesta, and that any success I have, or skills and abilities I may have developed (as hinted at in this questionnaire) have been due in large part to Cuesta and the knowledge and abilities of its instructors and other staff. I feel this survey is a fairly accurate measure of my opinion or experience.

Cuesta College gave me an opportunity to achieve new goals. I am a married father starting a new career and couldn't have done it without them.

I think that those classes that offer time in the field of study, not just the classroom and those that foster an atmosphere of discussion are the most beneficial to all the students. Getting into the field, allows students to gain, practical, hands on experience in their area of study. It fosters critical thinking, not just about the area of study, but also about future educational and career choices.

I began at Cuesta while still in high school, and have completed 11 semesters since then. My experience has truly prepared me for my academic future, and I firmly believe that I will further excel in life because of the education and experiences I received at Cuesta; none of which would have been possible without the incredible professors that I was so privileged to have.

Overall I have a good, positive experience at Cuesta College, and I am very happy to have been able to complete my degree I started 40 years ago. Happy!!!!

Life Changing experience. Great school with some of the best staff.

Cuesta College has been a great educational success for me. All my professors at Cuesta College are very passionate about their subjects and have unique and successful teaching styles. I have had a great experience at Cuesta that will help me be successful in the future.

I came from another community college in the valley and coming to Cuesta was a breath of fresh air.

Thank you very much to Cuesta College for giving the opportunity of education. Thank you Mr. Snider for been such a great instructor.

Dr. Gilbert and Mr. Stone are the men!

Mathew Fleming greatly impacted my experience at Cuesta. He taught me so much and mentored me throughout my time at Cuesta. I have much respect and admiration for them both.

I have had a great experience at Cuesta and I plan on continuing my education here for my Nursing Career.
The instructors are all extremely accessible. Being able to interact with them greatly helped with my achievements. I also feel that the courses were very comparable to those that students are completing at 4 year universities. I have been very satisfied by the education I received here.

As for my experiences with professors in my three years here: Marcy Irving, Gary Rubin, Matthew Vasquez, Betsy Dunn, and Fleming all deserve a raise. They're awesome.

I am very thankful for Cuesta College, especially the Music and Visual arts departments. The instructors are awesome and it is so good to have such a strong appreciation for the arts.

Cuesta adequately helped me prepare for my upper division undergraduate classes I am currently enrolled in, while allowing me to save money, stay in my native area, and hold down a good-paying job.

Cuesta opened the door for endless possibilities for me. Not only did I come and gain a degree but I also obtained a certificate through another program of my passion. Cuesta's staff/professors helped me achieve success and get all I could out of the college. They even influenced me to join the ambassador program for Cuesta which completely changed my life and open doors I wouldn't have access to otherwise. Thanks to Cuesta for giving me a life changing experience and memories I'll never forget!!!!!!

I feel Cuesta College has prepared me for further education in my life such as attending a CSU in the years to come, compared to the previous JC I went to last year.

I received excellent instruction at Cuesta. I have attended classes at two other schools and Cuesta was a far better experience.

-Mrs Defraga is a wonderful teacher.
-The early childhood development staff is wonderful.

I just want to thank all faculty and staff. I have had such a positive experience at Cuesta College. I have grown in many ways and thank you all for your individual contributions to my personal success!!

I've had amazing instructors, classes have always been a joy to attend because the instructors present the material in a way that makes you think and they give you assignments that put application to that thinking.

Cuesta has been awesome, and it made me want to go to class to be successful every day.

Cuesta has been a great place for me to be while I struggled to find my career pathway. It allowed me to take a variety of classes that showed me all of the possible info and knowledge there is out there in the world.

Track and Field Athletics had a high positive impact on me during my time at Cuesta. Especially Teacher, coach, and mentor Jani Johnson.

High quality professors make all the difference (Katy Neidhardt is wonderful!), beautiful campus. Overall a very positive experience, I would recommend Cuesta to anyone looking to further their education.

I was very nervous going back to school after so many years - But everyone who has helped me along the way have been so wonderful.

I am happy that I chose Cuesta College as the school to attend. The Faculty was wonderful!

I absolutely love Cuesta College! It is a wonderful experience! I have gained and learned so much during my two years here. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

The great teachers were Carol Akterkirchen, Ron Ruppert, and Silvio Favaretto.
My experience at Cuesta College has been great. I have been able to figure out what path I would like to take in my career without having to be tied down to a specific major. If I would have started at a 4-year university I might have gone into a career I would not like.

Cuesta has been a great community college to attend. I have gained so much knowledge from the courses taken. I believe Cuesta is one of the best community colleges in California.

The science department, especially engineering, is an amazing program. I felt like I got a very complete education and am prepared to transfer to a 4-year university. It is obvious that the professors in the department truly care about the success of their students. I finally got accepted to Cal Poly SLO for Fall 2012 as a mechanical engineering major and I have the science department to thank :)

I felt all of the employees that I meet were very nice and helpful. They were very happy and bright hearted and made me feel very welcome when I first entered into this school.

I had a BS coming to Cuesta, and had already attended 3 colleges while in the military. I thought Cuesta College would be a piece of cake. I was wrong. I have had the most challenging and thought-provoking classes and teachers that I’ve ever had in my life. I’ve learned more at Cuesta than any other school—both from the curriculum and in terms of how to actually bust my butt to get a good grade, rather than just "expecting" one. It has been a very rewarding experience and I’m glad to have been part of it.

I want to give credit to some amazing teachers who have inspired me and encouraged me to reach for my educational goal. Nancy Mann, Dr Praveen Babu and Matt Knudsen, these faculty members went above and beyond a student’s expectations. They were always hopeful, encouraging and dedicated to their students. There was not one question unanswered and never a limitation on learning. No matter time of day or place they always have time for their students. I really just want to show gratitude for everything they have done to allow me to successfully transfer to Cal Poly as a biology major. Thank you.

I am leaving Cuesta feeling that I have had one of the best lower-division educational experiences possible. I have spoken with friends who have transferred from Cuesta to well-regarded universities, and they feel that the individual course quality was better at Cuesta.