



# TEN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SLOS

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# SLO Frequently Asked Questions Database Research Project

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- Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment and linked to it calls for accountability has been a contentious topic among faculty in community colleges in California for quite some time now. Many recently published texts on the topic point to confusing and murky picture of SLO implementation. Lack of specific guidelines for faculty has also been identified as a source of frustration and uncertainty between faculty responsibilities to assess student learning and administrators' demands for accountability and compliance with accreditation standards.
- To address the perceived lack of guidance and to develop a tool designed to help SLO coordinators, the team of researchers has designed a survey to find out from practitioners in the field what issues they struggle with, what questions they are being asked and most importantly how those questions can be answered. The purpose of this research project is to develop a database of Frequently Asked Questions to support SLO coordinators, faculty and administrators at community colleges in California.

# Three Rounds

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- **Round 1:** A survey with one question was sent out to SLO coordinators at community colleges in California - What are the questions about SLO assessment that your faculty bring to you? The purpose of this question is to generate a list of questions that faculty ask of SLO coordinators.. Once the questions are collected, the research team will analyze the responses for patterns and put questions in a form of a list of questions to be sent out in the following round.
- **Round 2:** A list of top questions generated as a result of analysis done after Round 1 will be sent to those who responded to the first round. This time, respondents are going to be asked to respond to the questions to the best of their ability. After this round, the research team will analyze the responses and identify patterns in the responses to the questions.
- **Round 3:** A list of questions with answers will be sent out to those who participated in Round 2 for their approval. This would be the final step to give SLO coordinators final opportunity to evaluate and make changes to the final version of the database with SLO questions.



# ROUND 1

## Round 1 Results

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- Invitations to participate sent to 114 Community Colleges in California and six in Hawaii
- California (n=114)
  - Responses: n=80. Response rate: 70%
  - Colleges represented: n=74. Representation rate: 65%
  - Responses (n=285)
- Hawaii (n=6)
  - Responses: 4. Response rate: 67%
  - Colleges represented: n=3. Representation rate: 50%
  - Hawaii (n=14)

## Round 1 Survey Question

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- Please list at least three most commonly asked questions about SLO assessment that your faculty bring to you as an SLO coordinator?

Activity:

**List three questions that you think faculty are asking of their SLO coordinators.**

# Round 1: Response Samples

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1. Why can't we use grades? I mean, that's how I gauge whether students have learned what they need to learn.
2. I still don't understand the difference between an Objective and an Outcome. (Teaching vs. Learning)
3. Why is this necessary?
4. What is required in an SLO assessment?
5. Software related "how do I . . ."
6. How do I access my eLumen account?
7. How much longer do we have to keep doing SLO assessment?
8. How many SLOs are needed per class or program?
9. Why do we have to report on SLO's?
10. Why do we have to assess SLOs when there is no evidence that this process improves instruction?
11. How many SLO's do I need?
12. How do I get into Curricunet? (This is not a joke.)

# Round 1 Analysis

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1. How do I log in and enter SLO assessment data into the local assessment management software? N=65
2. What is the purpose of SLO assessment? N=42
3. How often are we supposed to assess SLOs? N=25
4. What happens with the SLO assessment data? N=23
5. How do I assess SLOs? N=21
6. What's a difference between SLOs and grades? N=16
7. What's the difference between outcomes and objectives? N=15
8. How many SLOs do I need? N=10
9. How does SLO assessment relate to faculty performance and compensation? N=9
10. Are there any standards governing SLO design? N=8





# ROUND 2

# End of Round 1: Questions for Round 2

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1. What is the purpose of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment?
2. How often do faculty need to assess SLOs?
3. What happens with SLO assessment data?
4. How are SLOs assessed?
5. What is the difference between SLOs and grades?
6. What is the difference between outcomes and objectives?
7. How many SLOs are needed in a course?
8. How does SLO assessment relate to full time and adjunct faculty performance and compensation?
9. What are the standards on your campus that govern SLO design and assessment?
10. How do Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) differ?

## Round 2 Results

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- Invitations to participate sent to 74 Community Colleges in California and three in Hawaii
- California (n=47)
  - Colleges represented: n=47. Response rate: 64%
  - Responses (n=470)
- Hawaii (n=3)
  - Colleges represented: 3 Response rate: 50%
  - Responses: 30 (n=14)

## Question # 1: What is the purpose of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment?

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- accreditation (n=9)
- evidence of learning for institutional improvement (n=18)
- continuous improvement of teaching and learning (n=26)

Memorable quote:

Improve teaching and learning, maintain accreditation, improve curriculum.

## Question # 2: How often do faculty need to assess SLOs?

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Results:

- Annual cycle (n=6)
- 2 year cycle (n=5)
- 3 year cycle (n=9)
- 4 year cycle (n=2)
- 5 year cycle (n=3)
- 6 year cycle (n=1)
- Once per Program Review cycle (n=2)
- As often as necessary (n=2)
- Each course, each semester (n=17) (15%)

**Memorable quote:** SLOs have been assessed for every section of every class every semester, but that is too much. We are moving to a schedule in which SLOs will be measured once every two years.

## Question # 3: What happens with SLO assessment data?

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nothing, data in higher ed is misleading	(n=1)
student success	(n=1)
decision making	(n=1)
planning	(n=2)
online publication and reporting	(n=3)
faculty analysis	(n=4)
instruction	(n=5)
curriculum review	(n=5)
resource allocation	(n=6)
accreditation	(n=6)
improvement of learning	(n=7)
stored in a database	(n=9)
program review	(n=13)

Memorable quotes:

It is utilized to fine-tune instruction and is used for planning and resource allocation justification.

SLO data goes online on a website called CurriCUNET.

It is collected and archived so that we can demonstrate to ACCJC that we are doing this required work.

Assessment data is collected is disseminated to the instructors who teach the course so that they can discuss the results among themselves.

## Question # 4: How are SLOs assessed?

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- variety of methods (n=29)
- by faculty, they are the discipline experts (n=25)
- eLumen or TracDat (n=6)
- by SLOAC Chair (n=1)

### Memorable quotes:

- Not sure what is being asked with this question. Method? Platform? Process? Each department has the freedom to assess their SLOs in a method that is best suited for their field of study. We are transitioning from a fillable form to using eLumen as our platform. As a result, the process has shifted from department-generated feedback to instructor-generated feedback that is then noted in department meeting notes.
- not on paper any longer, now we have eLumen

# Question # 5: What is the difference between SLOs and grades?

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Memorable quotes:

- SLOs are the skills that students acquire upon completion of a course. Grades reflect both mastery of subject matter as well as other specific course expectations such as participation and completion of work.
- Grades assess the students; SLOs assess the teaching (with a HUGE SIGN that points out that it is not meant to be an evaluation of the instructor).
- SLOs measure learning while grades measure performance.
- **Students care about grades.**



## Question # 6: What is the difference between outcomes and objectives?

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Memorable quotes:

Outcomes are broader and course objectives are like mini-outcomes for units/modules that lead up to the outcome.

Objectives are the ingredients and the recipe. The outcomes are the final product, "the cake".

Outcomes- student centered; Objectives- teacher centered

Outcomes are themed clusters of course objectives identified in the course outline of record.

Based on what I've seen, many educators use these terms interchangeably, and then there are others who don't.

## Question # 7: How many SLOs are needed in a course?

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Memorable quotes:

- 3
- We do not have a "magic" number for this. It is a faculty decision. However, on average most of our courses have between three and five.
- This is up to the department. Many have two or three, yet some only have one. The departments that have only one SLO are actually measuring three or more outcomes in one SLO.
- more than 1 and not too many. SLOs are like salt, you want some, but too much is bad also. The correct amount is between 3 and 5 in my opinion, but again some areas/disciplines may have as few as 1 or 2, while others have 6 or 7.

Example: we have a support for math course, it has one SLO : Students will succeed in their current math class. The whole point of the class is to encourage students to do better.

## Question # 8: How does SLO assessment relate to full time and adjunct faculty performance and compensation?

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- Part of full-time faculty job responsibilities (n=3)

- Not part of evaluation process (n=8)

*Faculty are required to participate in the outcomes assessment process. The actual achievement of student learning, as measured by SLO assessment, is not a component of faculty evaluation.*

- Compensation for adjuncts (n=9)

- No relationship (n=10)

*It doesn't and shouldn't HOWEVER faculty should have the understanding that if a majority of students are not meeting their SLO's something needs to be changed.*

- No pay (n=11)

*SLO assessment is expected from both full time and part time instructors. There is no additional pay for doing it.*

## Question # 9: What are the standards on your campus that govern SLO design and assessment?

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- Department (n=2)

- Meaningful (n=2)

*Simplicity and purpose. We want the cycle to be as easy as possible so that instructors are not burdened with learning new programs or software to complete their assessments. We also strive to emphasize the discussion portion...*

*SLOs must be meaningful, manageable, and measurable.*

- None (n=5) *No one has ever asked this question. Standards?*

- Curriculum Process / Committee (n=5)

- Handbook / Manual (n=6)

*Our SLO Handbook encourages faculty to consider the "College Philosophy on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment" as well as the "AAHE Nine Principals of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes."*

- Assessment Committee (n=10)

## Question # 10: How do Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) differ?

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- Feed into each other (n=12)

*SLOs are at the course level, PLOs are for programs (instructional and support), and ILOs are the broad goals of the college linked to the college mission. While they differ in focus and form, they all link to and support the college's mission.*

*They should be stacked so the information and skills build as the student progresses through program (degree, certificate, GE).*

- SLOs=courses; PSLOs=program; ISLO=graduation (n=29)

*Student learning outcomes are used to determine if the student has mastered the material. Program Learning Outcomes are used to determine if the student is in line with the learning objectives and goals of the specific program students are taking classes in. Institutional learning outcomes are linked to student outcomes because they are the overall objectives and learning goals of the college or university. Students should recognize if the program they are taking classes in is following the ILOs by asking questions on what they are learning and how it relates to the ILOs.*



# ROUND 3

Consensus on answers

## Round 3 consensus on questions and answers

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1. What is the purpose of SLO assessment?

Improvement of teaching and learning

92%

2. How often do faculty need to assess SLOs?

As often as necessary

64%

3. What happens with the SLO assessment data?

It is used to improve instruction

82%

4. How are SLOs assessed?

Faculty assess SLOs with variety of methods

## Round 3 consensus on questions and answers

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5. What's the difference between SLOs and grades?  
SLOs measure specific outcomes, grades are much broader

77%

6. What's the difference between outcomes and objectives?

Outcomes are broader, objectives are smaller steps

82%

7. How many SLOs are needed in the course?

There is no set number and it's up to the faculty

56%



## Round 3 consensus on questions and answers

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8. How does SLO assessment relate to evaluation of faculty performance and compensation?

There is no relation

80%

9. What are the standards that govern SLO assessment?

Standards for SLO design and assessment are locally determined by faculty

93%

10. How do SLOs, PLOs and ILS differ?

SLOs are for courses, PLOs programs and ILOs

## Conclusions:

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What are the implications of these surveys?

How should professional development be structured?

Who should take the lead?

What's next?

## Contact

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