

A Closer Look

January 2009

Office of Instruction & Institutional Research

On Learning

by Katie Townsend-Merino

Thank you all for the warm Foothill welcome I received last week. If I have not yet had an opportunity to meet you, I am sure we'll have an opportunity to say hello soon. I clearly have hours of listening and learning ahead of me and I certainly need to hear from everyone. Please consider emailing me at townsendmerinokatie@foothill.edu or calling at x7209 at any time.

In my first weeks here, I have spent hours discussing how Foothill has been working on the Student Learning Outcome and Assessment Cycle (SLOAC) with our outstanding faculty SLO Coordinator Rosemary Arca and Project Director Lucy Rodriguez. I am deeply impressed with the work done so far and we are now planning a highly interactive February Convocation on February 27. Given the importance of this work to our successful accreditation, I thought this would be a good time for me to articulate my philosophy on the assessment of student learning.

In sum, it is about teaching!

Reflecting upon my experience as a faculty member, not that long ago, I recall feeling offended as the new standards were announced. Faculty don't assess learning? That IS what I did for a living! Who was claiming that I was not doing my job? Would there be MORE forms to fill out? More bureaucracy? What would this data be USED for anyway? I certainly understood then exactly how faculty up and down California were feeling.

Then in January 2008, Cañada College and many other colleges were placed on Warning by ACCJC, in part because of a lack of progress in the development of a proficient Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Cycle (SLOAC). At that point in time, fewer than 20% of Cañada courses had developed SLOs and fewer courses still had assessments attached to their outcomes (although they had developed a set of six Institutional Outcomes). In order to remain accredited, they certainly had to develop a SLOAC process that would meet the requirements of WASC and the trust of the faculty. I was asked to lead, with a new faculty coordinator and committee, the development of a new process to increase the number of courses with Student Learning Outcomes and Assessments. But first I had to ask a question: Why had so little been accomplished thus far? What then to do?

I am keenly aware that faculty, as professionals, work

very hard because they do want their students to be successful. They already work hard to both assess student learning and change their pedagogy as a result of such assessment. Faculty also consistently lament the limited time they have in their professional lives to discuss teaching with their peers. And now, it seems, they are being asked by ACCJC to do two new things: 1) *articulate* how they assess the learning in their courses and, perhaps more difficult, 2) achieve some *consensus* with their department colleagues about what is essential for students to learn in each course and how to assess if students HAVE learned what each department deems essential. Still, many faculty are willing to become engaged if the process is the **least bureaucratic we can imagine and is directly meaningful to their teaching**. This essential connection to teaching defines my philosophy of learning and assessment. At its heart any assessment of the student learning cycle that I can believe in is about **providing the impetus for discussions of pedagogy and improving learning across courses and improving programs institutionally** and not about individual accountability.

It's important to note that the process that was developed at Cañada College is unique to Cañada. **No one RIGHT way exists to institutionalize a SLOAC** and each college needs to design its own process—one that fits with that particular College culture (as a Psychologist I really believe in the power of culture, and I have much to learn about our culture at Foothill).

Once we work together to describe that culture, then my office is responsible for providing adequate professional development in SLO writing, assessment development, and reflection about data. More importantly, we will provide the time for faculty to do this work. The really remarkable outcome of the Cañada process was the very high number of positive evaluations of the process—faculty LOVED having large chunks of time dedicated to discussing what was important in their teaching and how to improve learning with one another. Keeping the work close to the classroom made the dialogue, assessment and reflection personally meaningful and professionally useful.

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I will say this, and I encourage you to talk to anyone who is at a college on Warning, the workload for everyone is enormous and the only description for the pace of the work is “lightspeed”. Not fun. We have five quarters ahead of us before our accreditation visit; let’s use that time well (and, yes, have some fun doing it also!)

In the past past, I have developed workshops so I can work with faculty in small groups in **assessment training** and **data reflection** (as an experimental psychologist, I am geek enough to really love this part!). I have encouraged faculty to develop SLO assessments that are informed by how they already assess their students in their courses (why NOT kill the proverbial two bird with one stone when possible?). Thus, workshops include using embedded multiple choice questions, project based assessment, rubric development for performance in theater and art courses, using pre-post assessments, and assessing affective components of student learning and more. I already have some time set aside to work with BSS faculty and look forward to the opportunity to support your efforts. Really.

I am honored and excited about collaborating with the faculty and staff of Foothill College in continuing the development of a course, program and institutional level SLOAC that has meaning for all of us. I have spent many hours as both a faculty member and an administrator pondering the meaning and value of the SLOA Cycle in Higher Education and have developed a kind of “Core Value Manifesto” that guides me in how I choose to engage with and implement this work. I share it with you now and look forward to an opportunity to hear your thoughts also.

■ The Student Learning and Assessment Cycle can and should be used to improve programs and learning in courses. This can only occur if the process is collaboratively built with trust.

■ Only **those faculty who are discipline experts can**

design specific learning outcomes for their courses (and, in the case of student services, it is those faculty and staff who have direct responsibility for particular areas for which outcomes will be developed that will do the outcome designing).

■ I am committed to presenting SLOAC data in the aggregate to protect SLO data from being used as a faculty or staff evaluation tool. (Speaking as an individual, I would not object to asking faculty to reflect on their participation in the process as a part of their tenure and peer evaluation processes—yes, I do believe this is all negotiated!)

■ The SLOAC does not direct HOW one teaches; it does not attack Academic Freedom.

I have encouraged faculty to use the SLOAC process for two main goals: to help them determine if their students are meeting the essential learning outcomes for each course (as defined by their department); and as a formative evaluation for those areas in which students routinely struggle.

■ Quantitative and qualitative approaches to assessment are both useful and meaningful. Designing assessments that are derived from how assessment already occurs in a given course can create a streamlined process that has much meaning to individual faculty.

■ To assess institutional effectiveness Course Level SLO’s need to be linked to Program Level SLO’s which are, in turn, linked to Institutional Level SLO’s. But, keeping the bulk of the assessment work grounded in the classroom provides the most meaning and usefulness. The SLOA cycle needs to be embedded in planning processes including Program Review and Curriculum development (although how to do this may vary between campuses).

■ The ability of SLO assessment to inform faculty and students of the impact college programs and services have on learning is enhanced when substantive connections are made between Student Services and Instruction.

PIE Wednesdays

Rosemary Arca

It’s winter PIE time (purposeful intellectual exchanges). Here’s the schedule and the focus of the meetings in Room 1929 on Wednesday from 12:00-1:00PM. Bring your lunch; we’ll bring PIE and pie. No reservations needed bring your questions, your colleagues and your ideas.

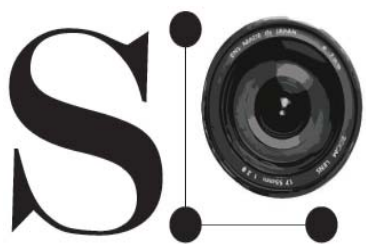
1/28	Rubrics 101: Review and Problem-Solving
2/2	Embedded Multiple Choice Assessment
2/11	Portfolio Assessment
2/18	Project-based Assessment
3/4	What your Researcher can find out for you
3/11	Assessment Design: Rubber Meets the Road



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SAVE THE DATE: The Winter Convocation

by Rosemary Arca



Focus on Teaching: Reflecting on What Works in the Classroom

Friday, February 27, 9:00-Noon*
in the Hearthside Student Lounge
across from the bookstore

Join us in a highly interactive, hands-on meeting focused on great teaching and the challenges of the classroom. Using photography and lenses as our theme, we'll talk about focusing our SLOs on what goes on in our classrooms. We'll begin the day with coffee and pastries and hear new Vice President of Instruction, Katie Townsend-Merino describe her vision for SLOs and Instruction.

Next, we'll enjoy images provided by Kate Jordahl and Ron Herman, our own photography experts. They'll explore the strategies they use to "compose" an image and discuss ways they think about focus and perspective when they photograph.

Then we begin our most important work—our Focus on Teaching—this is powered by your concerns, insights and successes. Here's how we're thinking about the morning.

The goals for the day are really simple and are derived from the "Great Teachers Seminar" philosophy that faculty are their own best experts.

- To **celebrate** good teaching
 - To **inspire** faculty to venture beyond the limits of their own disciplines and environments in search of the universals of teaching.
 - To **discover** realistic, creative approaches to teaching and learning.
 - To **stimulate** the exchange of information and ideas within the Humanities and Social Sciences Division by building communications networks among faculty.
 - To **promote** introspection and self-appraisal by providing a supportive environment in which participants may seriously reflect on their attitudes, methods, and behavior as teachers—all in a non-evaluative setting.
 - To **renew** the commitment to student learning
- To meet these goals, we'll be asking you to do TWO things:

It's all about good ideas and pesky challenges in the classroom.

1. Send one challenge you frequently face in the classroom. We'll brainstorm solutions during the meeting.

2. Share one **non-astounding** teaching idea. It could be an idea you use for dealing with the "administrivia" of the classroom/college environment. **Non-astounding** is the key phrase here. We'll collect these in a handout you'll get at the end of the convocation.

Look for an email requesting these comments early in February. This convocation is all about your teaching world. Join us for great conversations about pedagogy and good practice.

*Note the change of time and place and renewed focus on you!

FRAMES Global Consciousness & Citizenship Project

Seeking Globally Conscious Citizens to join FRAMES Rubric Team 4. You will develop a pilot rubric to assess our institutional outcome of global consciousness and citizenship. You will actively participate in one or two meetings a quarter over one year with a \$1000 stipend upon completion of the project. *Contact Rosemary Arca at x7543, arcarosemary@foothill.edu.*

- **January 28/12PM-1PM:** PIE Wednesdays
Rubrics 101: Review & Problem Solving
- **February 2/12PM-1PM:** PIE Wednesdays
Embedded Multiple Choice Assessment
- **February 11/12PM-1PM:** PIE Wednesdays
Portfolio Assessment
- **February 25/12PM:** Reflection strategies &
Organizational Models: Hands-on
- **February 27/9AM-12PM:** SLO Convocation
LENSES: Reflection on Data & What's Next?

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