

SLOs and the Syllabus

[Student Learning Outcomes](#)¹... they've been discussed and debated at SMC for the last few years. Definitions have been bruited about, but for the sake of clarification, let's follow the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' explanation ([ACCJC](#)²): they are "the overarching specific observable characteristics developed by local faculty that allow them to determine or demonstrate evidence that learning has occurred as a result of a specific course..." How they are determined, applied, evaluated and assessed can vary dramatically. One thing, however, is agreed upon from the state to local level: SLOs are now an integral part of what we as faculty do.

We are now being asked to add the SLOs to our syllabi. There are two compelling reasons for our compliance: external forces now mandate the inclusion of SLOs, but best practice also justifies it.

Beginning in 2008, the ACCJC began to look for course SLOs on syllabi, as recommended in our own [model syllabus](#)³. In fact, as early as 2002, the ACCJC [Accreditation Standards](#)⁴ required that "In every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies learning objectives consistent with those in the institution's approved course outline." SMC took up the challenge of SLOs at the grassroots level a few years ago, and from those sessions our learning outcomes from the College level to the course level have evolved. Now SLOs should be woven through our curriculum, with penalties if they are not, such as disapproval at accreditation or denial of departmental eligibility to hire new faculty.

At first, some faculty resisted including SLOs on their syllabi, but after using them, discovered positive results. One such positive result has been clarification for students. SLOs on the syllabi put a clear goal in front of them from the beginning of the class. It gives them straightforward information about what is expected from them, providing a focus and standard for their work. They're a bit different from course goals, which reflect the faculty member's goal for the class. The [essence](#)⁵ of SLOs focuses on the results the faculty member wants from the course, rather than what they will teach. SLOs are written from the student's perspective, which may be another way to reinforce in the student's mind what it is they're meant to take from the class.

It also serves as a reminder to faculty, bringing us back to the core results we're striving for throughout the semester. It gives us another measure of our teaching effectiveness, helping hone what we do in the classroom. On a broader note, especially in very large departments, including departmentally approved SLOs on course syllabi gives a measure of standardization across sections of the same course, without interfering with academic freedom or program focus (i.e. Adelante, Black Collegians, Scholars).

¹ <http://academicsenate.smc.edu/slo/index.htm>

² <http://www.accjc.org/>

³ <http://www.smc.edu/apps/pub.asp?Q=1639>

⁴ http://www.accjc.org/pdf/ACCJC_WASC_Accreditation_Standards.pdf

⁵ http://research.ccc.cccd.edu/SLOs_Instruction/Writing_SLOs/Writing_StudentLearningOutcomes1rev.doc

Many of us have already put SLOs on our syllabi, and have seen some of these positive results in our own classrooms. For those who haven't yet complied with this requirement, perhaps the realization of positive outcomes in their classrooms will underscore how important it is to include SLOs on their syllabi, for the College, the students and themselves.