ABSTRACT

THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

AT A CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE: INSIGHT

FROM FACULTY IN A SINGLE DEPARTMENT

By

Paul Joseph Creason

May 2015

In 2002, the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) revised its accreditation standards and mandated institutions to implement assessment of student learning outcomes (SLO) for all courses and programs. Effective assessment of SLO provides a mechanism for faculty to analyze, discuss, and use data to improve instruction. This process has been integral to meeting and maintaining standards required for accreditation. However, assessment should instead be aimed at improving teaching and learning and providing instructional consistency that results in a better experience for students.

Data from this qualitative study indicated key components to consider in implementing SLO assessment. The study examined faculty perceptions of a single department's process and provides leaders with a road map to consider for implementation of SLO assessment. The study used a qualitative, single-site case study design to address the research questions through collection of data via in-depth interviews

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with 11 of 13 full-time faculty members in the target department who had participated in the full assessment cycle, observation of faculty meetings, and document review.

Key factors identified by interviewees were communication, knowledge of SLO, a clear plan, training, expertise, staff to assist faculty, and time to conduct assessment and analysis. Elements that were not evident in the literature emerged and indicated that department culture and faculty characteristics should be considered when creating an implementation plan.

The main obstacle to SLO assessment was the time required for comprehensive and high-quality assessment. There was a clear disconnect between tasks, required time, and institutional deadlines. Other campus-wide barriers cited were a lack of communication from campus leadership, inadequate training, and the perception that the college did not support necessary clerical and professional staff to assist faculty with the effort.

The resources and policies that were reported to assist faculty include a faculty-driven effort, an investment in the process to include compensation for the time spent, clerical and professional staff, technology to simplify the process and an examination of faculty workload.

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FROM FACULTY IN A SINGLE DEPARTMENT

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Committee Members:

William M. Vega, Ed.D. (Chair)
John P. Murray, Ph.D.
Robert Simpson, Ed.D.

College Designee:

Marquita Grenot-Scheyer, Ph.D.

By Paul Joseph Creason

M.A., 1989, California State University, Fullerton

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment of student learning has a long history at educational institutions. Because each college is different, so have been the responses to assessment (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996). According to the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), "The assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement" (AAHE, 1992, pp. 2–3). Assessment is intimately linked to an institution's mission and learning goals. Shavelson (2007) pointed out that assessment by itself is an insufficient condition for powerful learning and improvement. He continued that more and better evidence of student learning is important, but knowing what to *make* of that evidence, and how to act on it, means getting down to core questions about the character of the educational experience and the goals of liberal learning. He stated that student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment was born out of a desire to improve student learning and a response to requests from students (consumers), taxpayers (investors), and politicians (allocators) to increase accountability to provide proof that learning occurs and that there is value added for the student who participates in a higher education experience.

A local definition of assessment used on any particular campus may not work well for other campuses (Banta et al., 1996). Effective assessment is difficult to define because colleges have different priorities and each college has its own mission and

goals in relation to what they want to assess. Some colleges may assess the campus environment and students' perceptions of the services offered, while others are more interested in student learning in the classroom. However, most faculty and administrators (or colleges) recognize that assessing SLO in this era of accountability will not go away soon (Kramer & Swing, 2010). The effective assessment of SLO provides a mechanism for faculty to analyze, discuss, and use data to improve instruction. This process is integral to the institution's ability to meet and maintain standards required for accreditation.

Palomba and Banta (1999) defined *assessment* as the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. Program assessment is a process that calls on faculty to work together to articulate programmatic learning outcomes, collect data on student performance, and review the aggregated data to inform program improvement efforts (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Ewell (1990) offered an alternative definition of assessment as a unique program evaluation designed to gather evidence to improve curricula and pedagogy. This approach focuses more on the aggregate data about students and teachers, rather than on data about the individual. This method uses assessment tools such as "examinations, portfolios and student work examples" and student surveys of their experiences. Since the emphasis is on improvement, "assessment is as much about using [data] as it is about psychometric standards" (Ewell, 2002b, p. 13). Ewell also suggested that, in order for effective teaching and learning to take place, colleges must have clear programmatic learning outcomes and ways to determine how students attain

those outcomes. He posited that faculty should take responsibility for assessing learning and be held accountable for ensuring that students are learning (Ewell, 2002a).

The history of assessment of student learning goes back as far as the 1930s, when Walter A. Jessup, the Carnegie Foundation's third president, said that the central problems in improving higher education are

> first, the establishment of generally accepted standards of achievement; secondly, devising methods of measuring this achievement and holding pupils to performance; and thirdly, the introduction of a variety of educational offerings that each individual may receive the education from which he is able to derive the greatest benefit. (as cited in Kandel, 1936, p. vii)

The focus of assessing college learning has changed over the years and has evolved through four eras: (a) the origin of standardized tests of learning, 1900–1933; (b) the assessment of learning for general and graduate education, 1933–1947; (c) the rise of test providers, 1948–1978; and (d) the era of external accountability: 1979 to the present (Shavelson, 2007).

External pressure from outside agencies began to drive the assessment movement in the 1980s, although some colleges began to use assessment to improve their performance and document student learning as early as the 1970s (Alfred, Shults, & Seybert, 2007). One of the earliest efforts was in the early 1970s at Alverno College, a small women's liberal arts college in Milwaukee, where the faculty and administration reshaped their curriculum around eight crosscutting abilities, including communication, analysis, and social interaction (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Their focus was on individual student learning. This effort was at the forefront of many assessment activities in U.S. higher education designed to gauge student learning. Ewell (1985)

considered Truman State University to be a pioneer in the assessment movement. Since 1973, nationally normed exams have been administered to evaluate the integrity of its degrees. The University of Tennessee, under the stimulus of a mandated performance funding scheme, became the first major public university to develop a comprehensive multimethod system of program assessment (Banta, 1985).

In the mid-1980s, educators and the public began to recognize the need for assessment in higher education. Reports such as the National Institute of Education's *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (1984), the Association of American Colleges' *Highlights of the AAC Report: Perspectives on Teaching From "Integrity in the College Curriculum, a Report to the Academic Community"* (1985), and the National Governors Association's *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education* (1991) focused keen attention on the preparation of college graduates (Palomba & Banta, 1999). In fall 1988, Secretary of Education William Bennett issued an executive order requiring all federally approved accredited colleges to provide evidence of institutional learning outcomes (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

In addition to the assessment of student learning as an accreditation standard, colleges faced additional pressure with the approval of the federal Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. As a result, institutions have been federally mandated to compile and release graduation rates to prospective students and to report them to the U.S. Department of Education. With the wave of state mandates for assessment adopted beginning in the mid-1980s and new accreditation requirements in the 1990s, campuses began to organize to respond. Many colleges did so begrudg-

ingly and there were plenty of missteps, misunderstandings, and dead ends. However, Schneider and Shulman posited that "there were also significant examples of what can happen when educators take up the challenge to figure out and clearly articulate what they want their students to know and be able to do: the core task of assessment" (as cited in Shavelson, 2007, p. i).

Congressional probes into college costs in the late 1990s intensified focus on accountability measures (Alfred et al., 2007). The impetus for evaluation of student learning became threefold: to report the college's track record of success and graduation for potential students and parents, to provide information to taxpayers about the value of education for accountability purposes, and to meet accreditations standards.

In 2002, the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) revised the accreditation standards and mandated institutions to implement the assessment of SLO for all courses and programs, including assessment of general education outcomes (the overall skills that a student should have to receive an Associate degree). The new requirement, included in ACCJC's accreditation Standard 2, provided that colleges must fully comply by 2012, allowing 10 years to develop, implement, assess, and utilize SLO to improve student outcomes.

Four years after accrediting commissions began to ask for SLO assessment, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, also known as the Spellings Commission, issued a report entitled *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (Spellings Commission, 2006). It called for increased accountability and transparency on the part of postsecondary institutions regarding an apparent lack of student improvement and institutional effectiveness. The report increased scrutiny of

higher education institutions regarding their operational processes, with a call for remediation of perceived inadequacies, including a justification of student learning and accountability to constituents (students, families, taxpayers, and other investors in higher education). The report encouraged greater transparency regarding measuring student success and organizational efficiency and focused on institutional performance (Syed & Mojock, 2008).

"I wouldn't attribute investment in research at colleges to SLO assessment. The entire accountability movement has contributed to increased investments. Still, some small colleges barely have sufficient support for required federal and state reporting, let alone quality research that informs improvement efforts" (personal communication, Dr. Eva Bagg, Dean, Institutional Effectiveness, Metis Community College, October 4, 2014). It is important for faculty to embrace the reason that colleges assess and it is *equally* important for institutions to measure learning and create evidence that it is occurring (Shavelson, 2007). "For over thirty-five years state and federal policy makers, as well as the general public, have increasingly been pressuring higher education to account for student learning and to create *a culture of evidence"* (Shavelson, 2007, p. 1). While the current demand to establish a culture of evidence appears to be new, it has a long lineage. The future development of this culture may very well depend on how well the past is acknowledged. A culture of evidence will not automatically lead to educational improvement, if what counts as evidence does not count as education (Brock et al., 2007). "Today's demand for a culture of evidence of student learning appears to be new . . . but it turns out to be very old and there's no wishing it away" (Shavelson, 2007, p. 1). Moreover, it not should

be wished away because assessing SLO focuses on student learning and provides a mechanism for faculty to improve their craft (Baker, Jankowski, Provezis, & Kinzie, 2012; Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009).

<p style="text-align:center">Student Learning Outcomes</p>

SLO articulate the skills that a student should have upon completion of a course. In simple terms, they are what the student should be able to demonstrate to complete the course or program. SLO assessment should be a continuous process of collecting, evaluating, and using information to determine how well learning expectations are being met (ACCJC, 2002). SLO should directly and clearly describe in measureable terms what a student is expected to learn as a result of participating in academic courses or programs at the college. They should focus on knowledge gained, skills and abilities acquired and demonstrated, and attitudes or values changed (Cartwright, Weiner, & Streamer-Veneruso, 2009).

The ACCJC and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) defined SLO as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that a student has attained at the end or as the result of engagement in a particular set of experiences in college. The ACCJC (2002) defined *assessment* as methods that an institution employs to gather evidence and evaluate quality. The purpose of assessment is to use the results, positive or negative, to stimulate meaningful dialogue among faculty members about how instruction and curriculum may be modified to improve student learning (ACCJC, 2012). If this is done correctly and with a well-designed process that is best for each department, faculty will be able to examine, discuss, and make classroom and

<p style="text-align:center">7</p>

program modifications to improve student learning (Baker et al., 2012; Bresciani, 2007; Ewell, 2010; Somerville, 2008).

Colleges are constantly faced with demands for accountability from a variety of stakeholders: the public, legislators, accrediting agencies, and students. The public wants to know how valuable and effective a college education is for citizens and how outcomes can justify the expense, with tuition constantly on the rise (Moore & Shulock, 2009). Legislators want to know whether the funding for education is worth the investment (Allen & Bresciani, 2003). Rising tuition and increasing dependence on expensive personal loans for education are raising questions about the economic value of the degree, even though there is still a clear personal and societal benefit (McMahon, 2010). In addition, community colleges are facing criticism about low graduation and transfer rates in a climate where access is shrinking and achievement gaps persist (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012).

One of the challenges for educators is to define *effective education* and the *value of education*. Many scholars agree that education has intrinsic value that is not always monetary (American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2014; Heller, 2012; McMahon, 2010). Despite various definitions and controversy concerning what constitutes educational value, the accountability movement has continued for the past 20 years. In light of the many reports, such as the National Institute of Education's *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (1984), the Association of American Colleges' *Highlights of the AAC Report: Perspectives on Teaching From "Integrity in the College Curriculum, a Report to the Academic Community'* (1985), and the National Governors Association's *Time for*

Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education (1991), the Secretary of

Education decided to delegate responsibility and oversight of measurement of

colleges' institutional effectiveness to the accrediting agencies (U.S. Department of

Education, 2006). In response to these reports and the growing public concern about

the ability of higher education to meet the needs of American society, accrediting

bodies established standards for development and assessment of SLO (Beno, 2004).

In 2002, the ACCJC established new guidelines and standards for accreditation of

California community colleges. The new standards stated that colleges must integrate

assessment and evaluation of SLO into the curriculum (ACCJC, 2002, 2012).

Accrediting agencies apply standards to review a variety of important issues on

each campus (ACCJC, 2012). ACCJC has four standards that guide colleges and

provide a framework for creation of dialogue about continuous improvement.

Colleges must complete a self-study evaluation to examine their effectiveness in

accord with these standards: (a) Institutional Mission and Effectiveness, (b) Student

Learning Programs and Services, (c) Resources, and (d) Leadership and Governance

(ACCJC, 2012). SLO assessment is a key component of accreditation. Effective

implementation, evaluation, and utilization of such assessment permeate each standard

(Beno, 2004).

ACCJC Standard II requires implementation of SLO for all courses and

programs, including the college's general education programs (also known as general

education outcomes, or GEOs). In 2002, the Commission mandated that every com-

munity and junior college comply with full implementation, assessment, and evalua-

tion of SLO by 2012. This evaluation presents an opportunity for colleges to assess

continuously what works at the course level and to create a comprehensive analysis of learning that occurs in the classroom. The process has to become an integral part of teaching and is designed to stimulate dialogue to improve student success, align curriculum, improve intersegmental articulation, and ensure educational accountability (AACJC, 2002).

Since the 2002 mandate, a key component that accrediting agencies review is the institution's ability to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs. A key component of this effort is implementing a SLO assessment cycle. Many colleges have challenged the mandate, others have struggled to implement the process effectively, and some have ignored it entirely (Ewell, 2002a, 2002b, 2010).

Many articles have been written about the obstacles and challenges that faculty face in implementing SLO assessment (Astin, 1993; Bresciani, 2006; Friendlander & Serban, 2004; Maki, 2002; McClenney, 2001; Somerville, 2008). However, few have looked at a single department in a college to identify the key components that guide the process, from adoption of course SLO to collecting and analyzing data and implementing instructional changes, or "closing the loop."

According to the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC; 2010a), *closing the loop* is a term in SLO assessment that refers to completing all components of an assessment cycle. The cycle consists of creating SLO, developing assessment plans, collecting data, analyzing the data, discussing the results, and making necessary modifications to the course, curriculum, or instruction (Figure 1). Gambino (2013) offered another definition: using evidence for assessment, planning, and decision making to address instructional gaps that may occur in the classroom.

The concept is for faculty to utilize the data to make changes in the classroom to improve student learning (Gambino, 2013).
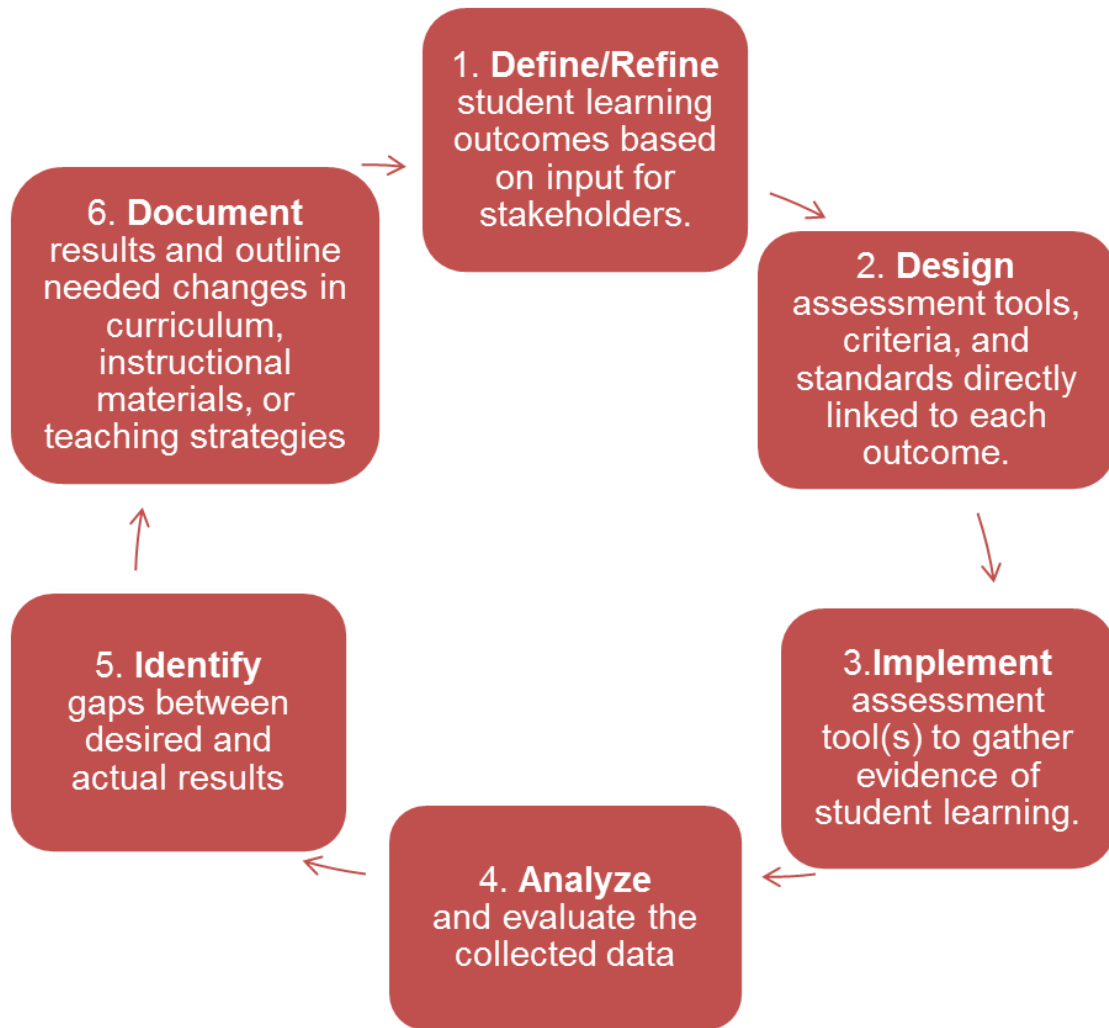
FIGURE 1. The student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment process.

According to Chambers and Wickersham (2008), colleges must integrate assessment and practices that are both comprehensive and precise to document evidence of student learning. According to Frye (1999), accountability aims at improving fiscal efficiency but is no longer unattached to issues of educational quality. Frye

indicated that assessment aims to improve the quality of education but is constrained by institutional budgets. Because of ongoing budget limitations, it is difficult for many colleges to invest in appropriate support personnel and infrastructure to accomplish the required SLO assessment. A college's focus on SLO can be a bridge that links necessary resources to assessing institutional effectiveness. Because of accreditation requirements, focusing on SLO will enable or force colleges to invest resources in assessing their effectiveness. As higher education institutions continue to build a "culture of evidence" (Brock et al., 2007, p. 6), SLO should (or continues) to develop into a key component for decision making, hiring, and even resource allocation to departments (personal communication, Dr. Bagg, October 7, 2014).

<div align="center">Problem Statement</div>

Although SLO assessment is a requirement for successful accreditation, there have been numerous issues regarding creation and implementation of SLO on many campuses. The assessment of SLO at the community colleges is significant because it has become an integral component of the accreditation process. Moreover, institutional effectiveness, when assessed properly and with teaching as the focus, is verified by examining student learning (Gurr, 2014). Among the key factors to consider when implementing SLO assessment are available resources, leadership communication, a well-defined assessment plan, and faculty buy-in (Bresciani, 2010; Dunsheath, 2010; Long, 2008; Somerville, 2008). Since SLO implementation requires extensive institutional change and involves multiple stakeholders, lack of participation or involvement by any one stakeholder during any phase of the process can serve as a barrier (Dunsheath, 2010). Since there are so many facets involved in the process and evalu-

ation is faculty driven, it is important for institutional leaders to be cognizant of the needs of faculty in order to implement best practices.

Colleges face many challenges in implementing large-scale change, but effective implementation of SLO assessment has been a requirement of accreditation for 12 years, regardless of the barriers. At many colleges, little attention has been given to this issue. SLO assessment has not been integrated into the fabric of the colleges and it has been largely ignored by faculty (personal communication, Dr. Marilyn Brock, former Vice President of Academic Affairs, Metis Community College, March 9, 2014). As a result, more than 20% of California community colleges have been sanctioned by the ACCJC (placed on warning, probation, or show cause status) in large part because of deficiencies in assessment of SLO efforts (ACCJC, 2013).

The desire to hold faculty accountable and assess learning in the classroom is not a new phenomenon (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). Evaluation of faculty in the classroom is a required activity on every college campus. However, SLO are now to be established for every course (ACCJC, 2002). The SLO assessment process has not been accepted by all faculty. Many have resisted the implied extra workload and have questioned the utility of such assessments (Hersh, 2005). There has also been resistance by faculty because colleges do not have a clear plan and infrastructure complete with adequate staffing to teach faculty how to assess SLO (Friedlander & Serban, 2004). Many problems associated with SLO have to do with the faculty perception that they are not important, valid, or critical for effective instruction (Bresciani, 2007). For the full benefits of SLO assessment to be realized on campus, faculty support is critical. Campuses must have a clearly defined process

(Bresciani, 2006, 2007; Ewell, 2010; Friedlander & Serban, 2004; Somerville, 2008).

If there is institutional resistance to SLO and confusion about the process, colleges

will be unable to create an effective SLO assessment cycle. If departments are unclear

or resistant to SLO implementation and ongoing evaluation and discussion, com-

munity colleges may be missing an opportunity to improve instruction and student

learning.

   "In particular today, assessment of institutional effectiveness is among

the most important criteria for initial and re-accreditation" (Ohia, 2011, p. 25).

"The assessment of student learning outcomes has become standard operating pro-

cedure on virtually every campus, but the driving forces for pursuing the assessments

remain primarily external" (Musum, Baker, & Fulmer, 2006, p. 1).

   Community colleges, as with most educational institutions, generally use data

and research to comply with regulations and funding requirements rather than

improving student outcomes (Morest, Jenkins, & Columbia University of North Caro-

lina, 2007). External forces often drive the motivation to implement systems of

evaluation, and there is little buy-in from faculty, who view it as "busy work." This

decreases the perceived value of assessment and provides numerous challenges for

leadership. A successful process includes development and use of SLO to *improve*

instruction and student learning with faculty buy-in. "If assessment results are not

used for improvement, the time, effort and resources used to implement assessment

processes and obtain assessment results are wasted" (Seybert, 2002, p. 61). A process

that is faculty driven, faculty embraced, relevant, and perceived as important and

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useful is uncommon at many educational institutions (Bresciani, 2008; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007).

Implementation of SLO assessment provides the opportunity for colleges to evaluate what works at the course level and to create a comprehensive analysis of learning in the classroom. The process is becoming an integral part of teaching that can help to improve student success, align curriculum, improve intersegmental articulation, and play a major role in educational accountability. However, if there is resistance to SLO, and if an effective assessment cycle is not utilized, colleges miss an opportunity to improve instruction and student learning and will continue to struggle with accreditation.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study was to identify and illustrate how a single department can effectively implement, maintain, and utilize the assessment of SLO. This research examined a single department to determine the characteristics and functions that contributed to an effective SLO assessment. This focus on the comprehensive aspects of a single department provides information to help other departments to develop and/or refine their SLO processes. Using Bolman and Deal's (1991a, 1991b, 2002, 2008) four frames for effective leadership and Nadler and Tushman's congruence model (1997b), the SLO assessment process was examined to help educational leaders to determine how a paradigm shift can occur from resistance and confusion to supporting SLO assessment. This examination includes information regarding the key components of implementing a process and, most important, how to utilize the results to improve instruction and student learning.

A paradigm from institutional assessment to evaluation of student learning occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1997, O'Banion indicated that the student learning movement was significant and very important because it represented a shift that placed student learning at the fore of all assessment. In the *New Basic Agenda: Policy Directions for Student Success* (Board of Governors, California Community Colleges, 1996) report, student learning was characterized as essential to the social and economic development of a multicultural California. The report stated that the Board of Governors' policy directions for the community college must be based on improving student learning.

For decades, researchers have concluded that the evaluation of student learning cannot be conducted solely to comply with accreditation standards; it must create a culture of evidence that is responsive to student needs and focuses on the teaching and learning that occurs in classrooms and on campuses (Beno, 2004; Ewell, 2010; O'Banion, 1997; Shavelson, 2007).

> Compliance reporting takes time and resources away from research that could benefit college operations and help to improve student outcomes. Internally, institutional research is most often used to monitor enrollments. Few colleges systematically track student progress and outcomes over time, and even fewer use this information to improve programs and services. (Morest et al., 2007, p. 12)

Regardless of the college's motivation for self-study and evaluation, an effective process for assessment of SLO is required for college accreditation. If there is institutional resistance, it is critical to ascertain faculty attitudes in order to identify the best plan of action. An effective plan must contain appropriate resources, good communication, and sound professional development to establish faculty buy-in to move

the agenda and ultimately create a process that "closes the loop" (Bresciani, 2008; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Somerville, 2008; C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004).

Faculty is best situated to create and use assessment results to improve student learning (Advisory Committee for the Improvement of Student Learning, 2011). Accredited institutions are required to evaluate student learning in order to confirm or re-affirm their accreditation status. Currently, 33 of the 113 community colleges in California are in warning, probation, or show cause status, partly because they lack a comprehensive SLO assessment model (Hittleman, 2015). It is critical for colleges to evaluate their effectiveness continuously and to concentrate on the most important end product of education: student learning (Ewell, 2002b; O'Banion, 1997). An effective "SLO assessment cycle" should create a culture of evidence, discussion, and instructional modifications to improve student learning (Baker et al., 2012; Long, 2008; McClenney, 1998).

This study focuses on faculty perception and how a single department created a culture in which they embraced assessment of student learning. It delves into specific faculty roles, responsibilities, and personal experience in the department. It describes how the department created an environment and focus on student learning and connected SLO assessment for continuous improvement of instruction. The study examines the faculty experience, departmental and campus-wide leadership, and specific issues that allowed them to establish and maintain commitment to SLO.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

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1. What do members of a single department perceive to be critical to effectively implement and utilize SLO?

2. What skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions do faculty feel are important in the SLO assessment process?

3. What resources do faculty members perceive to be necessary so that departments can engage in and commit to the SLO assessment cycle?

4. What policies and practices do faculty members believe are necessary to support SLO assessment?

<u>Conceptual Framework</u>

This research study examined the experiences of faculty who participated in SLO assessment at a large urban community college. It was designed to gauge faculty opinion regarding a major shift toward educational accountability to measure student learning. This shift occurred at most colleges around 2000 to meet accreditation standards. Some colleges had already attempted to integrate assessment of outcomes into their programs and courses, but most did not have sophisticated systems with established deadlines or an assessment cycle (Friedlander & Serban, 2004).

This study was guided by a combination of the congruence model (Nadler & Tushman, 1997a, 1997b) and Bolman and Deal's (1991a, 1991b, 2008) four frameworks for organizations. The congruence model of organizational behavior suggests that, in any organizational system, there are three primary inputs to the process of change: environment, resources, and history of the organization (Nadler & Tushman, 1997a, 1997b). The model is based on how well these components fit together— that

is, the congruence among the components. The effectiveness of change using this model is based on the quality of these "fits" or congruence.

In 1984, Lee Bolman and Terence Deal published *Modern Approaches to Understanding Organizations*. This laid the foundation for *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (1991b), in which they created four frames with which to view organizations. They argued that managers must be attentive to the four conceptually distinct but practically overlapping aspects of organizational life: structural, human resource, political, and cultural-symbolic. The structural frame is the organization's formal (often written) rules, policies, and processes. The human resource frame refers to the needs, satisfaction, motivation, and career development of the organization's staff. The political frame is based on the premise that organizations are constrained by outside forces and beset by internal differences about ends, means, and rewards, and that these must be managed. The symbolic frame emphasizes that solidarity and transcendent meaning are constant aspects of organizational life. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggested that, because most issues and problems correspond to specific frames, successful managers move comfortably between them.

Bolman and Deal (1991a, 1991b, 2002, 2008) provided a scheme for analyzing specific innovations from such major undertakings as school restructuring to more limited efforts, such as assessing SLO. Bolman and Deal (1991b) posited that the purpose of effective leadership is not to change managerial behavior so much as "to cultivate habits of mind and enrich managerial thinking" (p. 16). They argued that leaders need to know what is happening within their organization and are obligated to think before they act. Their actions can have far-reaching implications because they

serve not only to define reality for leaders and their subordinates; the leaders' choice of action will determine "what their organization notices, what it does, and what it eventually becomes" (Bolman & Deal, 1993, p. 21). More simply put, thinking before taking action is a critical component of effective school leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Roddy, 2010).

Bolman and Deal (2002) stated that school administrators are most successful when they are able to "look at things from more than one angle" (p. 3) or through different frames. "A frame is a mental model—a set of ideas and assumptions—that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a certain 'territory'" (p. 3). A good frame makes it easier to know what challenges one is facing and, ultimately, what one can do about it. "Frames are vital because organizations do not come with computerized navigation systems to guide you turn-by-turn to your destination" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 11). Thus, Bolman and Deal (1984, 2003) have taken the major schools of organizational theory and produced a multiple perspective framework.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) four-frame model describes the orientations used to classify information. Once the information is classified, the leader can draw on experiences to choose which course of action is best suited to manage and lead the organization. Restructuring an organization is a challenging process that consumes time and resources with no guarantee of success (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Educational institutions are compelled to respond to major problems or opportunities, in this case, the assessment of SLO. Many elements and pressures, such as environments shifts, technology changes, organizational growth and leadership changes cause an effective

leader to adjust their frames. Bolman and Deal (2003) stated that the ability to use

multiple frames has three advantages: (a) Each can be coherent, focused, and power-

ful, (b) the collection can be more comprehensive than any single one, and (c) only

with multiple frames can one *reframe*. Reframing is a conscious effort to consider a

situation from multiple perspectives and then find an effective way to handle it.

Bolman and Deal's four frames provided the conceptual framework for this

study. The following is a brief description of the four frames.

The Structural Frame

Bolman and Deal (2003) provided two main intellectual roots for the structural

frame. The first root is the "maximum efficiency" work most prominently explored

by Frederick Taylor (1911) using scientific management. The second root stems from

the work describing bureaucracies by Max Weber (1922). According to Bolman and

Deal (2008), "The structural frame is a coherent set of ideas forming a prism or lens

that enables you to see and understand more clearly what goes on from day to day.

Perspective champions a pattern of well-thought-out roles and relationships" (p. 43).

Six core assumptions provide the basis for the structural frame (Bolman &

Deal, 2008):

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.

2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through spe-
cialization and appropriate division of labor.

3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of
individuals and units mesh.

4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal preferences
and extraneous pressures.

5. Structures must be designed to fit an organization's circumstances (includ-
ing its goals, technology, workforce, and environment).

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6. Problems arise and performance suffers from structural deficiencies, which can be remedied through analysis and restructuring. (p. 47)

The Human Resource Frame

The human resources frame focuses on what organizations do to empower and fulfill workers' aspirations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The human resource frame rests on these core assumptions:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.

2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent. People need careers, salaries, and opportunities.

3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or they exploit the organization—or both become victims.

4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (p. 122).

Human resource leaders lead through empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2003). By doing so, leaders attempt to "align organizational and human needs" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 16).

The Political Frame

The political frame is rooted in the power and politics of organizational theory that describes organizations as places where power is exercised in the allocation of limited resources (Durocher, 1996). The source of this power is established through authority, expertise, controlling rewards, and personal power or characteristics (e.g., charisma, intelligence, communications skills; Bolman & Deal, 1984). The political frame is based on five basic assumptions (Bolman & Deal, 2008):

1. Organizations are coalitions of assorted individuals and interest groups.

2. Coalition members have differences in values, beliefs, information, inter-ests, and perceptions of reality.

3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—who gets what.

4. Scarce resources and group differences put conflict at the center of the day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.

5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (pp. 194–195)

The Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame focuses on how humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live (Bolman & Deal, 2008). "Meaning is not given to us; we have to create it" (p. 248). The symbolic frame is most closely related to campus culture. Campus culture can be embodied in the rules and regulations, behavior patterns, and material facilities of campuses. It consists mainly of academic outlooks, academic spirits, academic ethics, and academic environments (Shen & Tian, 2012). At educational institutions, groups may have different perspectives regarding the purpose of higher education or the mission of the college.

The symbolic frame distills ideas from diverse sources into five suppositions:

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.

2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience life differently.

3. Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction and anchor hope and faith.

4. Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion.

5. Culture forms the superglue that binds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends. (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 253)

Bolman and Deal (2002) suggested that educational leaders are most effective when they employ "practical ways of thinking about schools and classrooms" (p. 2). This type of thinking recognizes the challenge of making sense out of confusing circumstances in order to determine what is happening and how to respond appropriately. These decisions are greatly influenced by experience and learning, which have shaped how one defines and frames reality (Bolman & Deal, 2002). School leaders who can view situations from more than one angle are more successful (Bolman & Deal, 2002).

It is important for leaders to study how organizational change occurs. There are many change theories (e.g., J. Black & Gregersen, 2003; Fullan, 2007, 2008, 2009; Kotter, 1996; Lippitt, Watson, & Westley, 1958) but it is critical to determine the critical components for each institution. Leaders must determine what pieces are in place and what strategies should be used to facilitate effective change. As indicated in the congruence model of organizational change and Bolman and Deal's frames of effective leadership, there are many issues for leaders to consider. The fact that original and evolving theories of organizational change have common components implies that colleges need specific structure and resources in place to integrate SLO and create a culture of evidence on campus.

In the context of assessment, the culture of the college will have an impact on the degree to which any "new" process or requirement will be accepted. Many factors influence the campus environment. Effective leaders can shape the organization's ability to adapt and embrace a new practice. Organizational change and effectiveness depend on the leader's ability to "fashion an agenda, map the political terrain, create a

network of support, and negotiate with both allies and adversaries" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 132).

The identification of required resources is another issue of significance. Stakeholders must perceive that there is a clear investment by management and appropriate resources available to support the time and infrastructure necessary to accomplish the task (in this case, SLO).

The history of the organization is an important indicator of the ability of the college to move forward with new initiatives. As Nadler and Tushman (1997a, 1997b) pointed out, there is evidence that the way in which an organization performs today is very much tied to its history. It is important for administrative and faculty leaders to understand the history of the institution and its climate and culture to develop effective strategies and plans to initiate or facilitate change. The best chances of successful change include collaboration by faculty, organizational support, administrative and academic leaders, and a firm belief that colleges are assessing student learning to improve instruction, not just to meet accreditation mandates.

Angelo (1999) stated that the purpose of assessment is to improve student learning, not to meet accountability demands and external mandates. Assessment must be an ongoing process to provide constant monitoring of student progress to improve both learning and teaching (Fenno, 2003). There can be value in assessment of SLO. However, it is important for faculty to realize and see that value (Bresciani, 2008; Fenno, 2003; McClenney, 1998, 2001). There is value in the data and a process that allows informed decision making that results in instructional improvement. There is value in the dialogue that occurs among faculty members as a result of examining

the data because the dialogue allows them to discuss teaching techniques and best practices. The assessment process can result in changes in instructional delivery, focus on specific topics, and revision of course outlines, lessons, materials, teaching methods, and in-class assessment measures.

Figure 2 illustrates the components of SLO assessment as it relates to Bolman and Deal's four frameworks for effective leadership.

- SLO's assessment is required as part of program planning and review and the faculty evaluation *process*, technology suppo and infrastructure, the p' for for SLOs on campus

Structural Frame

Human Resource Frame

- SLO assessment is an expectation for faculty (participate) and administrators (monitor) and motivated by continuous improvement *and* accreditation compliance. Staff support and expertise is necessary

Symbolic Frame

Political Frame

- A culture of evidence exists on campus. Campus leadership supports assessment

- Union issues (workload and evaluation), Board expectations on President/Administration, college and faculty buy-in (leadership)

FIGURE 2. Connecting the frames to student learning outcomes assessment.

<u>Operational Definitions</u>

<u>Academic Senate</u>

The body that represents faculty in the collegial consultation process at community colleges in California. By mandate, the Academic Senate has shared authority with local boards of trustees for academic and professional matters (ASCCC, 2014).

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Accreditation

A voluntary system of self-regulation developed to evaluate overall educational quality and institutional effectiveness. The accreditation process provides assurance to the public that the accredited member colleges meet certain standards. The education earned at the institution is of value to the student who earned it and employers, trade or profession-related licensing agencies, and other colleges and universities can accept a student's credentials as legitimate (ACCJC, 2013).

Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

The body that accredits community colleges and other Associate degree-granting institutions in the Western region of the United States (ACCJC, 2013).

Administrative Leadership

According to Gardner (1989), leadership is bringing people together to support common goals. In the community college system, the leadership responsibility is borne by the Chancellor, President, and Chief Instructional Officer or Provost of a college or district who guides faculty and staff in carrying out the vision and mission of the institution.

Administrative Support

Persons in positional leadership who provide support in terms of value statements, resources, or new administrative structures (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a, 2002b).

Alignment of Courses/Curriculum

"The process of analyzing how explicit criteria line up or build upon one another within a particular learning pathway" (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 15).

Assessment Cycle

A process in which a college or department "closes the loop" and uses assess-

ment results to improve student learning through collegial dialogue informed by the

results of student service or instructional learning outcome assessment. It is part of a

continuous cycle of collecting assessment results, evaluating them, using the evalua-

tions to identify actions that will improve student learning, implementing those

actions, and then cycling back to collecting assessment results (ASCCC, 2010a).

Best Practices

Practices in the higher education community that enhance institutional quality.

They may be shared among departments and colleges.

Classroom Assessment

The process, usually conducted by teachers, of designing, collecting, inter-

preting, and applying information about student learning and attainment to make edu-

cational decisions or to improve achievement (D'Agostino, 2009).

Closing the Loop

A term used in SLO assessment that refers to completing all components of an

assessment cycle. The cycle consists of creating SLO, developing assessment plans,

collecting data, analyzing the data, discussing the results, and making necessary

changes or modifications to the course, curriculum, or instruction (ASCCC, 2010a).

Collaborative Leadership

A process whereby the positional and nonpositional leaders on campus are

involved in decision making for an initiative or effort, from conception to implemen-

tation (Kezar & Eckel, 2002b).

Culture of Evidence

A culture reflecting the willingness to examine and rely on data for instructional improvement. It includes support from leadership so faculty members are encouraged to use data to make decisions (Brock et al., 2007).

Evidence

Information on which a judgment or conclusion may be based. It is presented in answer to questions that have been posed because an institution regards them as important. Evidence tells all stakeholders that an institution has investigated its questions and knows something about itself; it knows what it achieves. Evidence can include data—categories of information that represent qualitative attributes of a variable or a series of variables.

Faculty Leader

Any member of the faculty who is influential and who participates effectively in decision making. Faculty leaders in community colleges include the Academic Senate President, the president of the faculty union, and department heads and committee members.

Faculty Union

The organization formally adopted by faculty to represent their collective bargaining interests. There are many faculty unions across the nation. In California the most predominant are the American Federation of Teachers, the Community College Association, the California School Employees Association, and the California Teachers Association.

Institutional Effectiveness

"The systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring institutional performance against mission in all aspects of an institution" (Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges [SACSCOC], 2012, p. 16).

Mission Statement

A statement guiding all aspects of institutional function. It is required that the institutional mission statement be formally adopted, published, implemented, and made available to all constituencies of the institution and to the general public. Because the statement describes what the institution does, it is the foundation for planning and assessment processes. The outcome of these processes should demonstrate through appropriate evaluation that the institution does what it claims. The mission statement thus provides the basis and context for evaluating institutional effectiveness (SACSCOC, 2012).

Organizational Support

Support provided by any internal group or committee that functions to support academic goals. These groups may be considered faculty or administrative. Examples include the Academic Senate, bargaining units, SLO committees, professional development and training events, Flex Days, curriculum committee, research and planning staff, instructional technologies and infrastructure, databases, data warehouses, and so forth (Dunsheath, 2010).

Outcomes

Detailed and specific statements derived from the goals of an organization or institution.

They specifically are about what you want the end result of your efforts to be. In other words, what do you expect the student to know and do as a result of, for example, a one-hour workshop, one-hour individual meeting, Web site instructions, or series of workshops? Outcomes do not describe what you are going to do to the student, but rather how you want the student to demonstrate what he or she knows or can do. (Bresciani, 2010, p. 46)

Professional Development

A set of programmatic efforts to offer opportunities for people to learn certain skills or knowledge related to issues associated with the change effort (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a).

Program Goals

Broad, general statements of what the program is designed to enable students to do and to know (Bresciani, 2010).

Shared Governance

The common term for the process by which boards of trustees use collegial consultation with constituents as they engage in collegial decision making. California Education Code Section 70901(b) requires the Board of Governors to adopt regulations setting

minimum standards governing procedures established by governing boards in community college districts to ensure faculty, staff, and students the right to participate effectively in district and college governance, and the opportunity to express their opinions at the campus level and to ensure that their opinions are given every reasonable consideration.

Shared governance is a complex web of consultation, decision making, and responsibility that translates goals into district policy or action (California Community Colleges Classified Senate, 1999).

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

Knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of collegiate experiences (ACCJC, 2002).

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

A continuous process of collecting, evaluating, and using information to determine how well learning expectations are met (ACCJC, 2002). They provide a mechanism for faculty to analyze, discuss, and use data to inform improvement of instruction.

Teaching/Learning

To teach is to cause or help (a person or animal) to learn how to do something by giving lessons, showing how it is done, and so forth. Learning is the activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing something.

Assumptions and Delimitations of the Study

Although the case study is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry, many research investigators disdain the strategy (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) argued that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. This study was delimited to a single department at a California community college. However, the study can provide insight into the process within the single department. Although the results cannot be generalized even within the college, some findings may provide information that can be used by other departments or educational leaders.

The study focused on the evolution of SLO assessment in one department, specifically the challenges and pitfalls they faced and how the department moved to the current process of evaluating SLO each year by embracing a paradigm shift from *providing* learning to *producing* learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The research focused on the process and the positive and negative experiences of the faculty as they implemented annual evaluations of SLO. Throughout the study, the department referred to components in the department and in the college because both contributed to the current state, whether successful or not.

This study did not examine results of the assessments nor attempt to measure the effectiveness of SLO assessment on student learning in the department. It did not delve into faculty perceptions of SLO as an accreditation mandate. The study was not concerned with political policy or legislative actions; it was concerned solely with the process, both in the department and across the college, how faculty perceived the change, and what contributed to the change, both positively and negatively. It provides insight into how this department valued SLO assessment and its impact on teaching and learning.

While most of the faculty had been in the target department since SLO became an accreditation standard, at least two members were new to the department and had not participated in the evolution of the assessment process. However, all interviewees had participated in at least one assessment cycle and "closed the loop."

The choice of a single department for the case study allowed for in-depth study and analysis of implementation activities of SLO and may be useful to departments in the same discipline at other institutions. It is possible that the discipline lends itself to

assessment or that the participants' common training and education play a part in suc-cessful implementation of SLO assessment. It was assumed that the department was a proponent of SLO, based on the criterion that they had "closed the loop" for 3 consec-utive years.

Given the researcher's extensive background with community colleges and the fact that he holds the position of dean at the target college, a potential limitation of the study was that the faculty might not have been forthright in expressing their opinions, even though the interviews were confidential and the faculty and department that were the target of the study were from a different school within the college.

The ability to identify the discipline would have enhanced this study because the discipline may be one in which the faculty commonly embrace evaluation or are trained to create change, thereby being adept and supportive of outcomes evaluation. College campuses struggle with obtaining faculty participation across divisions. This department could be unique. However, the college is not identified to protect the con-fidentiality of the participants.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

California community colleges are currently moving toward a funding model based on student success (Rivera, 2013). Colleges that excel with student success measures will be rewarded financially. It is important that colleges assess SLO for the right reason: to improve student learning. A clear concern, and certainly the most immediate concern for most institutions, is the degree to which progress on assessment and the use of assessment results will affect the institution's prospects for reaffirma-tion of regional accreditation (Serban, 2004; Seybert, 2002).

This study can inform and guide colleges as they refine existing processes and structure to improve assessment of SLO. It is imperative that colleges create valuable and useful assessments of student learning. A truly faculty-driven effort can be achieved if educational leaders use best practices by gaining insight from faculty (Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007). Colleges should take the necessary steps toward improvement and integration of assessment of learning outcomes into the fabric of the institution. This study underscores challenges that colleges face and provides guidance and information that can serve as a road map for colleges.

The goal of every college and every faculty member should be to provide the best possible education for students. SLO assessment attempts to measure learning. A useful process provides feedback for instructional modifications to improve learning. When done correctly, this effort will benefit the students and the faculty.

<u>Implications for Research</u>

As many colleges' SLO assessments have "closed the loop" of their cycle, it is important to examine the processes, similarities, and differences that have led to success models on California community college campuses. The literature identifies many factors that can contribute to an effective process. Further research can evaluate whether those factors have had a long-term impact on institutional effectiveness and student learning. Moreover, it is critical to examine whether college decision making is influence by or connected to SLO assessment. The extent to which colleges have tied their processes to planning and allocation of resources, including hiring and budgeting, should be analyzed (as it is when accrediting bodies visit campuses).

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Other issues that influence SLO warrant additional research. The assessment of learning outcomes has implications for examining increasing faculty workloads. More must be done to provide a simplified yet robust SLO process that focuses on learning and improvement. Faculty have been asked to do more and more, including using electronic grade books, student advising, participating in early alert, and utilizing expanding technologies both in and out of the classroom. Workload issues are a significant concern and should be examined to determine whether faculty is spread too thin (Bresciani, 2012; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Somerville, 2008). Colleges may need to prioritize the roles and responsibilities of faculty and re-evaluate service hours, office hours, and other commitments that have become a part of weekly routine. In order to encourage an effective and useful SLO process, faculty workload and compensation should be considered.

It is important to examine strategies to improve trust between faculty and administrators related to program review and SLO assessment. Research that highlights or demonstrates best practices for implementation of SLO assessment that is utilized to improve student learning is incomplete.

It is important to ensure that SLO results are not blended with or influence individual faculty evaluation. The process should be directed to self-study of the college and departments as they move to improve instruction and student learning. Future studies could explore how to create faculty buy-in for SLO assessment.

More research is needed to provide information about developing an effective faculty-driven process. Studies indicate that there should be a broad representation of campus stakeholders in the process, along with a committee that guides the effort

(Gallagher, 2008; Long, 2008; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Somerville, 2008).

Research to compare and contrast best practices and model organizations would be beneficial. Quantitative research to examine student learning and the impact of SLO would be valuable and perhaps persuasive. Qualitative research to identify faculty and administrators' perspectives on the structure and process at model colleges compared to those who have faced sanctions would be useful for educational leaders. This research could focus on an entire institution rather than a single department, making the results generalizable to similar community colleges.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

An understanding of assessment of SLO is critical for California community

college leaders. Many issues are related to successful implementation of SLO on

college campuses. This chapter reviews the available literature to provide information

about the history and importance of assessment, beginning with the origin of intelli-

gence testing and standardized tests and progressing through the rise of testing com-

panies to measure potential (SAT and Graduate Record Examinations [GRE]), to

measuring institutional effectiveness in the era of accountability. This review exam-

ines the origin of higher education accountability and the assessment movement, and

addresses the role of SLO in analyzing institutional effectiveness and student learning

for quality improvement.

The benefit of analyzing SLO for instructional improvement is compared to

implementation of a process simply to comply with accreditation standards. On many

campuses, the culture of the college, the definition and reason for outcomes assess-

ment, and the plan or process (which clearly must include faculty buy-in) are critical

components of successful implementation (Astin, 1993; Banta & Associates, 2002;

Bresciani, 2006; Ewell, 1997; Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino; 2009; Maki, 2004;

McClenney, 2001; Polomba & Banta, 1999; Somerville, 2008; Suskie, 2004).

Many scholars have discussed the key components of an effective process

(Bresciani, 2012; Friedlander & Serban, 2004; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007;

Somerville, 2008). The components of successful assessments have been documented

and much has been written regarding associated challenges (Astin, 1993; McClenney,

2001; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007).

The literature review addresses the impact of SLO assessment on college

accreditation as a response to the demand for greater institutional accountability. The

review investigates the challenges that colleges face in implementing SLO, identifies

key factors for campus leaders to refine and improve SLO assessment (Bresciani,

2007; O'Banion, 1997; Somerville, 2008), and concludes with a focus on best prac-

tices, including resources and professional development (Banta & Associates, 2002;

Banta et al., 2009; Dunsheath, 2010; Ewell, 2002; Long, 2005; Waite, 2004).

Given the extensive history of assessment and the fact that SLO assessment

has been part of accreditation standards for more than 10 years, the process appears to

confirmed and permanent (Shavelson, 2007). "Unlike many initiatives and reforms in

higher education that tend to arise and then disappear relatively quickly, the assess-

ment movement seems to be gaining rather than losing strength" (Seybert, 2002, p.

55).

While many colleges have embraced evaluation of SLO, some have ignored it

or have not integrated it into the fabric of the institution (personal communication, Dr.

Bagg, 2015). As a result, more than one fifth of California community colleges are

currently under sanction by the ACCJC. Prior to 2002, when ACCJC did not include

SLO assessment in its accreditation standards, most of the research focused on the

need to assess student learning for continuous improvement. Since that time, much of

the focus has been on providing information about how to implement SLO so that

colleges can comply with accreditation mandates (Beno, 2004; Friedlander & Serban, 2004). The interest of many administrators has shifted from assessing teaching and learning to creating a process that brings the college into compliance.

The compliance mentality has had detrimental effects on the value of the assessments for faculty (Dunsheath, 2010; Long, 2008; Somerville, 2008; Waite, 2004). When faculty members think that SLO assessment is engaged just to be compliant with accreditation or administration, it is seen as busy work and there is much less enthusiasm and recognition of the real value: to improve student learning (personal communication, Lark Zunich, SLO Coordinator, Metis Community College [MCC], November 9, 2014). Accordingly, this chapter includes a review of empirical studies to determine faculty and administrators' perceptions of SLO assessment and the process in their institutions (Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Ohia, 2011; Somerville, 2008; C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004).

<div align="center">The History of Assessment</div>

The history of assessment goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. That history has changed focus over the years, based on the influence of various education and political leaders. The assessment movement has evolved through four eras: (a) the origin of standardized tests of learning: 1900–1933; (b) the assessment of learning for general and graduate education: 1933–1947; (c) the rise of test providers: 1948–1978; and (d) the era of external accountability: 1979–present (Shavelson, 2007). Figure 3 illustrates a historical perspective of assessment testing, priorities, and progress over the past century.

Standardized Tests of Learning
- 1900-1933
- Carnegie Foundation led the charge (1916)
- Tests focused on content knowledge

Assessing Learning for general and graduate education
- 1933-1947
- Era included GE colleges and the Graduate Records Exam (GRE) - needed a gauge for admisions
- Test batteries to assess cognitive achievement
- Attempted to measure personal, social and moral outcomes of education

The Rise of Test Providers
- 1948-1978
- Postsecondary enrollment increased post war
- Needed a screening mechanism to select students
- Multiple choice tests

The Era of Accountability
- 1979-present
- Political pressure to assess student learning and hold colleges accountable
- Mandatory standardized testing
- Rejection of multiple choice and a move to open-ended test

FIGURE 3. The history of educational assessment. Source: *A Brief History of Assessment: How We Got Where We Are and a Proposal for Where to Go Next*, by R. Shavelson, 2007, Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Intelligence Testing and Standardized Tests

Assessment testing in the first half of the 20th century focused primarily on measuring intelligence and the ability to complete certain tasks. There was also a focus on objectives tests to measure content knowledge. As World War II ended, many returning servicemen wanted to go to college. Colleges faced a shortfall of availability with the exploding demand. Testing providers were quick to develop tests that measured these potential students' ability. Colleges began to use these tests and scores in making decisions on admissions.

Accountability and Testing

Politics and the public's demand to know whether students were learning and getting value from a college education created the era of assessment known as the "accountability movement." Pressure on colleges to document performance and assess students has been mounting since the 1970s (Alfred et al., 2007).

One of the earliest efforts to measure learning was at Alverno College, where the faculty and administration reshaped their curriculum to refocus student learning by integrating ability development and performance-based knowledge. Faculty and staff redefined the curriculum, basing requirements not just on discipline content but also on mastery and application of eight abilities: communication, analysis, problem solving, values in decision making, social interaction, global perspectives, effective citizenship, and aesthetic responsiveness (Eastberg, 2011; Palomba & Banta, 1999). The focus was on individual student learning. This effort was at the fore of many assessment activities designed to gauge student learning (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

In the mid-1980s, educators and the public began to recognize the need for assessment in higher education. Reports such as the National Institute of Education's *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (1984), the Association of American Colleges' *Highlights of the AAC Report: Perspectives on Teaching From "Integrity in the College Curriculum, a Report to the Academic Community* (1985), and the National Governors Association's *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education* (1991) focused on preparation of college graduates (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Assessment required by accountability began in the 1980s, with discussions focusing on campus-level educational quality, undergraduate instruction, and assessment of teaching and learning. The resulting assessment strategies were internally focused, institutionally developed, and largely voluntary in nature (J. Neal, 1995).

In 1988, Secretary of Education William Bennett issued an executive order requiring all federally approved accreditation organizations to include in their criteria for accreditation evidence of institutional outcomes. He stopped short of requiring institutional assessment by the federal government and instead passed the responsibility to ensure that colleges were assessing student learning to accrediting bodies (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to J. Neal (1995), public policy makers began to seem less interested in the issue of instructional quality and more concerned with issues of productivity and efficiency. "Earlier assessment initiatives based on voluntary participation have given way to mandated systems of institutional reporting" (p. 6).

Ewell (1991) wrote that a culture of accountability had enveloped American higher education. He concluded that the higher education community has an increased interest to respond to rising demands for accountability by generating information that can inform internal planning and quality improvement efforts, as well as inform external audiences. By 1994, approximately one third of the states had some form of performance indicator system in place (Ewell, 1994).

Additional pressure to assess learning outcomes increased significantly in the 1990s with passage of the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. As a result, institutions have been federally mandated to compile and release graduation rates to the public and report the results to the U.S. Department of Education. Congressional probes into college costs in the late 1990s intensified focus on accountability measures (Alfred et al., 2007).

The release of the Spellings Commission's *Report on the Future of Higher Education* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) was a call for increased accountability and transparency on the part of postsecondary institutions regarding lack of student improvement and institutional effectiveness. The report put higher education institutions under great scrutiny regarding their operational processes, with a call for remediation of perceived inadequacies. The report encouraged greater transparency regarding measures of student success and organizational efficiency in an effort to allay concerns about institutional effectiveness and costs of a college education (Syed & Mojock, 2008). The Spellings report concluded that higher education is too often a system based on reputation rather than on performance and recommended that states

measure learning thorough standardized testing for all college students (Alfred et al., 2007).

These accountability demands became widespread, with every institution being forced to respond. Colleges had to develop broader assessment practices to document evidence of student learning (Chambers & Wickersham, 2008). Ewell, Finney, and Lenth (1990) and Ewell (1992) reported that a "culture of accountability" had enveloped American higher education. The higher education community has an increased interest in responding to rising demands for accountability by generating information that can inform internal planning and quality improvement efforts, as well as informing external audiences.

The beginning of the accountability era came with the political concern for *fiscal* efficiency, but it was substantially blind to issues related to educational quality and student learning (Frye, 1999). According to Frye, assessment was aimed at improving the quality of education but colleges were constrained by budgets, giving them a *pass* when it came to accountability. Colleges blamed their lack of assessment and evaluation on inadequate resources. However, Frye posited that assessment of SLO can be an effective bridge from resources to learning. If a college has the assessment of educational *quality* as a priority, then it must invest the resources (budget) to accomplish a comprehensive evaluation.

> As higher education institutions continue to create a "culture of evidence" and rely on data for decision-making and operational practices such as resource allocation, hiring, and program review, evaluating student learning has become central in our efforts to improve practices resulting in greater student success and higher completion rates. Community colleges across the state are using SLO assessment results to make informed decisions about hiring and resource allocation. (personal communication, Dr. Terri Long, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Metis Community College, November 22, 2014)

As higher education institutions continue to create a "culture of evidence" and rely on data for decision making and operational practices such as hiring and resource allocation, evaluating student learning has become a priority. At every college, SLO are now tied to hiring and resource allocation (personal communication, Dr. Long, November 22, 2014).

Accreditation and Accountability

As the number of students receiving financial aid increased (receiving nearly $78 billion by 2008), the role of accreditation, which served as a gatekeeper to institutions that received that aid, became more and more pronounced (A. Neal, 2008). It became increasingly important for accrediting agencies to require colleges to establish common metrics to evaluate student learning, the desired end product of a college education. This accountability became important as legislators and the public began to question the public's return on the investment of tax dollars for education. Student learning became the key component of evaluating colleges. What a student learns is the measureable output that results from attending college. Assessing this learning in the broad sense may be challenging, but it has became an educational imperative as accrediting agencies added SLO to the standards in the early 2000s.

The Role of Accreditation

According to the ACCJC (2012), accreditation is a system of voluntary, non-governmental self-regulation and peer review. It is unique to American educational institutions. It is a system by which an institution evaluates itself in accordance with standards of good practice regarding mission, goals, and objectives; the appropriateness, sufficiency, and utilization of resources; the usefulness, integrity, and

effectiveness of its processes; and the extent to which it is achieving its intended

student achievement and SLO. The first purpose of accreditation is to provide quality

assurance to the public that institutions are meeting quality standards. Accreditation

also evaluates whether institutions are achieving their state educational mission.

Another purpose, and an effect of accreditation, is to stimulate and support educational

improvement (ACCJC, 2013).

Since the late 1990s, accrediting bodies have been charged with ensuring that

colleges are evaluating their own effectiveness. These agencies have developed

standards for colleges to use when they examine themselves. The accreditation

standards currently consist of four parts: (a) Institutional Mission and Effectiveness,

(b) Student Learning Programs and Services, (c) Resources, and (d) Leadership and

Governance. According to ACCJC,

> the Standards emphasize dialogue as a means for an institution to come to
> collective understanding of what it means to be learning-focused in the context
> of a particular institution's history and mission, of what the meaningful student
> learning outcomes at the program and degree level should be, and how institu-
> tional resources and processes might be structured to support the improvement
> of student learning. (ACCJC, 2013, p. 3)

SLO and Accreditation

Beginning in the 1990s, accreditation added a requirement that colleges

provide evidence that students had actually moved through college programs and were

completing them. Student achievement data provided the required evidence that

students were completing courses, persisting semester to semester, completing degrees

and certificates, graduating, transferring, and getting jobs (ACCJC, 2013).

In 2002, ACCJC revised the accreditation standards and mandated that institu-

tions implement assessment of SLO for all courses and programs, including

assessment of general education outcomes (the overall skills that a student should have

to receive an Associate degree). The new requirement, included in ACCJC's

accreditation Standard II, provided that colleges comply fully by 2012, allowing 10

years to develop, implement, assess, and utilize SLO.

II. A. 1. c. Student Learning Outcomes

The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses programs, cer-
tificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and
uses assessment results to make improvements.

- What student learning outcomes has the institution identified for its courses,
  programs, certificates, and degrees?

- How and by whom are student learning outcomes and strategies for attain-
  ing them created? How and by whom are student learning outcomes and
  program outcomes assessed? How are the results used for improvement?

- Are student learning outcomes verifiably at the collegiate level? What
  assessments are in place for measuring these outcomes? How effectively are
  the assessments working?

- What dialogue has occurred about using assessment results to guide
  improvements to courses, programs, etc.? What improvements have
  resulted? (ACCJC, 2013, p. 16)

The incorporation of SLO into accreditation evaluation processes is the culmi-

nation of a decade-long movement in higher education to assess and improve student

learning (Beno, 2004). Because of the mandate to assess SLO, colleges must ensure

that SLO are part of the fabric of the institution, from planning to budget allocation.

Beno (2004) provided a comprehensive explanation of the use of SLO and the

tangible results, including what accrediting agencies look for to evaluate whether a

college has a comprehensive plan in place:

Evidence that an institution has set expected learning outcomes might include
course syllabi given to students, official course outlines that an institution uses
to inform faculty teaching a course, or similar documentation of the expected
learning outcomes designed for student services activities or learning support

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activities. Evidence that an institution has aligned the learning outcomes of a single educational experience (such as a course or a workshop) with the learning goals of a program or culminating degree or certificate includes records of institutional discussions, rubric, charts, or other graphics that show the summative learning goals the institution has defined. Where the process of setting or revising expected learning outcomes has involved important institutional discussion, institutions will also want to document the content of those discussions. (Beno, 2004, p. 68)

Beno indicated that community colleges will want to establish clear learning goals that speak to the content and level of learning that students are expected to achieve. These goals should be stated in writing and should be used to inform faculty pedagogy and inform students regarding what is expected of them. Community colleges should be able to present accreditors with documentation to verify that the expected SLO have been set and communicated to faculty and students. Beno indicated that institutions and accreditors alike would be wise to develop thoughtful, careful, and valid means of assessing learning, discussing the results of assessment, and using the meaning generated through discussion to improve the quality of learning (Beno, 2004).

However, Maki (2002) noted that institutions too often view the commitment to assess institutional quality with a compliance mentality rather than with eagerness to explore, with curiosity, questions that are intrinsically important to faculty, administrators, support staff, trustees, members of the public, and accreditors. Haviland, Turley, and Shin (2011) confirmed this: "Change forced upon an organization from the outside is difficult to manage and often met with a certain compliance mentality" (p. 82).

The accreditors' concern with assessment of student learning is not meant to target individual faculty members but to stimulate institution-wide engagement with student leaning and institution-wide improvement in learning (Beno, 2004). Self-

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study documents can be very constructive when they are utilized as part of an internal evaluation of institutional effectiveness and student learning; however, if the college has a tendency to "place them on shelf," the evaluation process is meaningless. As noted in various studies, faculty do not engage in the process if the results are not utilized for institutional and instructional improvement and if faculty do not see the evaluation or assessment as meaningful (Long, 2008; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Somerville, 2008). The best strategy is to keep the focus of assessment at the program level—the level at which faculty think and act most frequently—by providing data that are relevant and meaningful to the program (Haviland et al., 2011). There is evidence that faculty will support course and classroom assessment activities when these activities are focused on program improvement rather than on external accreditation (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003).

Mandating institutional behavior by including SLO in accreditation standards is not likely to result in high performance but it provides an impetus for institutions to focus assessment on student learning (Alfred et al., 2007). The inclusion of SLO in the standards has pushed colleges to share with one another, learn best practices, and provide flexibility to implement local strategies that make sense for each individual institution. There is no checklist or criterion for SLO assessment that is deemed "acceptable" by the accrediting body. Colleges have the freedom to develop strategies and approaches with little guidance from agencies (Friedlander & Serban, 2004). This is challenging because the colleges have no specific direction and must depend on their own interpretations of definitions from the accrediting bodies as to what is an acceptable practice and process for evaluating learning outcomes. This has resulted in

somewhat murky criteria and evaluation processes when accreditation teams visit colleges (Friedlander & Serban, 2004). Colleges are often sanctioned by the ACCJC for lack of clear planning tied to budget allocation, program review, and SLO (ACCJC, 2013).

SLO Assessment and Compliance With Accreditation (Here and Now)

Community colleges must move toward a comprehensive, well-integrated assessment and SLO evaluation cycle or they will continue to face sanctions based on accreditation visits. Despite the fact that the accreditation standards that address SLO assessment were put into place in 2002, colleges are still struggling to make meaningful use of assessment results (personal communication, Dr. Bagg, June 6, 2014). The inability of colleges to incorporate a culture of assessment among faculty members is one of the top reasons that colleges have been sanctioned since 2012, when the proficiency requirement was put into effect (personal communication, Dr. Bagg, June 6, 2014). As mentioned earlier, many community colleges were placed on sanction during the most recent accreditation cycle. The number has not decreased significantly in the past 4 years (ACCJC, 2013).

In the past 10 years, many colleges have bolstered their research offices in an attempt to provide support and establish a culture of evidence on campuses (personal communication, Dr. Bagg, March 22, 2015). However, this has not been the case at many colleges. Because colleges vary widely, many strategies have been used, some with better results than others (Bresciani, 2008, 2012; Dunsheath, 2010; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Somerville, 2008). However, "Colleges have had ample time to research, create, develop and implement a process that is comprehensive and useful.

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Unfortunately, many have failed to do so" (personal communication, Dr. Brock, June 8, 2013).

The Purpose of Assessment: To Improve Teaching and Learning)

From a business standpoint, it is important to assess learning because students can be viewed as "customers" who are looking for a product—"learning"—that can benefit them. According to President Ping of Ohio University,

> the measure of impact [of assessment] is an imperative of both integrity and of thoughtful planning. The value added to people's lives is, to use a very worn phrase, "the bottom line," in the success or failure of an institution. It would be as senseless for a business firm to ignore whether or not it is making a profit as it is senseless for a university to assume blindly that it cannot, or need not, understand its impact on students. (Ping, 1980, p. 7)

As Alfred et al. (2007) pointed out, organizations have reexamined their priorities and placed more emphasis on providing value to stakeholders in an environment where change is the only constant. "Once-clear lines defining individual roles in the colleges and universities have become blurred. Technology has made it easier to acquire and use information and to pursue learning opportunities in new ways, unconstrained by time and space" (p. 27). Therefore, it is imperative that colleges begin to separate themselves from the rest by placing an emphasis on student success and the achievement of students' individual goals. By focusing on student learning, institutions can demonstrate that learning occurs and continue to improve the classroom experience. This separation can distinguish the on-campus experience from the many other modes of instruction that are available. Student learning comes through a variety of means. There is no monopoly on how it is delivered successfully.

Assessment must be meaningful to be valuable. Institutions should reexamine and communicate the important educational values that define their existence and

implement strategies to assess student and institutional performance with respect to those values. Assessment must be based on what is truly important (Banta et al., 1996). One of the challenges is that effectiveness is a construct involving multiple constituencies that hold specific (sometimes conflicting) expectations about what a college should be doing.

Banta and others have posited that institutional effectiveness can be demonstrated by student achievement and learning (Banta & Associates, 2002; Ewell, 2002; O'Banion, 1997). However, some stakeholders on campus might think that institutional effectiveness is achieved by a balanced budget or robust student services. For this reason, it is difficult to define effectiveness and even more difficult to measure it without clear direction and a focus on student learning (Alfred et al., 2007). With changing and dynamic institutional priorities, assessment can mean different things to each stakeholder. It is a moving target of sorts, with each constituent group having different priorities, expectations, and interests. Long (2008) indicated that faculty and administrators can have different perspectives on SLO and assessment in general. This complicates evaluation as different groups can have different priorities regarding what should be evaluated (Long, 2008).

There is evidence that faculty will embrace effectiveness activities such as assessment when these activities are focused on program improvement rather than on external accreditation and when faculty are seen as meaningfully involved in leading such activities (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). A community college that knows the factors that affect meaningful assessment would be better able to evaluate and improve their capacity to assess learning outcomes, document student learning, and meet the

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challenges established by accreditation standards. Without this knowledge,

community colleges may be ineffective in establishing processes for meaningful

assessment of SLO (Bresciani, 2008; Long, 2008; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007).

Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning

It is widely agreed that the ultimate purpose of assessment lies not in actual

assessment techniques and methodologies themselves but in use of assessment results

to improve teaching, learning, and delivery of services to students (Banta &

Associates, 1993; Banta et al., 1996). It is clear that the main purpose of SLO

assessment is to improve teaching and learning. Improvement can occur if adequate,

timely, and systematic feedback is provided to all who are involved in assessment,

including faculty, students, counselors, and administrators (Serban, 2004). "Student

outcomes assessment is the act of assembling and analyzing both qualitative and

quantitative teaching and learning outcomes evidence in order to examine their

congruence with an institution's stated purposes and educational objectives"

(Volkwein, 2003, p. 4).

Reporting assessment results should allow for feedback and facilitation of the

practitioners' understanding of the linkages among their actions, the environment, and

student outcomes. In other words, assessment should facilitate explanation of causal

relationships among various policies, practices, methods, and specified student out-

comes (Serban, 2004).

Articulation and Common Objectives Within Departments and Across Colleges

Assessment of SLO can facilitate articulation between 2-year colleges and 4-

year colleges and universities.

States should encourage, if not require, faculty from community colleges and four-year institutions to work jointly in developing standard student learning outcomes for each lower-division course in each major for which articulation agreements exist. Developing common student learning outcomes, methods for assessing the attainment of those outcomes, and standards of achievement should result in stronger articulation of courses and programs, easier student transition from community colleges to transfer institutions, and a greater degree of sharing and collaboration among faculty on best practices in pedagogy and assessment. (Friedlander & Serban, 2004, p. 106)

C. L. Miles and Wilson (2004) analyzed curriculum mapping, an SLO concept in which colleagues develop a rubric of GEO and map components of their course to the overall educational outcomes for those who receive a general education degree at a community college. This can be an effective way for faculty to determine and refine whether their courses include material that is salient to goals and objectives. It can be very beneficial for educational systems that share students through transfer and articulation agreements. The GEO process aligns courses and creates common objectives and consistency within and across institutions.

Currently, the California State University system CSU and the community college system have implemented SB 1440, a California act that provides for articulation between the higher education systems and guaranteed admission for students who have complete designated programs of study in the community colleges. This legislation simplifies the transfer process between the CCC and the CSU, increases efficiency for students in the transfer process, and saves time and money for students. SB 1440 established the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, which guarantees a community college student who completes an Associate degree in a defined field of study the right to transfer to the CSU and be admitted as a junior. The CSU gives priority admission to community college transfer students to a major or program of

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choice. SB 1440 prohibits the CSU from requiring these transfer students to repeat

courses similar to those taken toward the Associate degree. Articulation and common

goals for specific courses and programs are benefits of creating and standardizing SLO

for general education courses. This effort can help faculty to align curriculum and

provide consistent outcomes for members of the CCC and CSU.

<div align="center">What is Effective Assessment?</div>

The most common guideline for key components of assessment was created in

1992 by the AAHE Assessment Forum. The document, entitled *Principles of Good*

Practice for Assessing Student Learning, was developed by 12 prominent scholar-

practitioners of the movement (AAHE, 1992). The principles are that assessment of

learning (a) begins with education values; (b) is most effective when it reflects an

understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in per-

formance over time; (c) works best when the programs that it seeks to improve have

clear, explicitly stated purposes; (d) requires attention to outcomes but equally to the

experiences that lead to those outcomes; (e) works best when it is ongoing, not epi-

sodic; (f) fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational

community are involved; (g) makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and

illuminates questions that people really care about; (h) is most likely to lead to

improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions; and (i) allows educators to

meet responsibilities to students and the public (Astin, 1993).

Many studies have explored the key components of assessment and, spe-

cifically, implementation and assessment of SLO. According to Fenno (2003), the

goal of assessment must be an ongoing process to provide constant monitoring of

student progress to improve both learning and teaching. Kellough and Kellough (1999) highlighted five purposes of assessment: (a) to assist student learning, (b) to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, (c) to assess the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy, (d) to assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum programs, and (e) to provide data that can assist in decision making.

Formative assessments include assessments that happen during instruction. They help faculty to determine how their students have progressed in the course and whether they have mastered specific skills. This type of assessment allows faculty to modify and improve instructional approaches (P. Black & William, 1998a, 1998b). A summative assessment summarizes student learning and the effectiveness of the instructional program. It is usually administered at the end of a unit, the end of a course, and or at the end of the year (Bookhart, 1999).

SLO Models

Huba and Freed (2000) developed a second learning outcomes model that is based more on systems than their previous model. Their model shows alignment or links among all levels of the system or institution, from individual lesson outcomes to institutional outcomes. They use the phrase "design backward and deliver forward" (p. 107). This indicates that, when individual learning outcomes for lessons are designed, they are a part of the outcomes related to the course, the program, and the institution (Dove, 2008).

Warren (2003) described four models for assessing SLO: the outcomes model, the grassroots model, the mandate model, and the institutional effectiveness model. The outcomes model is based on the mission of the college. Individual student

learning is assessed and becomes an integral part of demonstrating institutional effectiveness. The grassroots model measures student learning at the course and program levels. This assessment contributes to assessment of institutional outcomes and is a part of institutional effectiveness in one part of the college's mission. The mandate model arises from the need for accountability to outside stakeholders. In this model, documentation of student learning is often anecdotal. The institutional effectiveness model assesses the college and its goals rather than individual student learning.

Schilling and Schilling (1998) described six approaches to assessment at six institutions and identified their influence on faculty roles. They found that each school culture contributed to the school's approach to assessment. The six approaches are (a) assessment as part of the institution's culture, (b) assessment for accountability, (c) assessment as an administrative service, (d) assessment as scholarship, (e) assessment as an opportunity for teaching, and (f) assessment as an added faculty responsibility (Schilling & Schilling, 1998).

Montgomery College's *Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Handbook* (Cartwright et al., 2009) defined the SLO assessment process as a focus on knowledge gained, skills and abilities acquired and demonstrated, and attitudes or values changed. However, the authors pointed out that these are the outcomes that are of most interest to educators but they are also the most challenging to measure and may require several iterations before the collected data are deemed valid and reliable. Their approach identifies seven major factors for success:

1. Faculty are best suited to determine the intended educational outcomes of their academic programs and activities, how to assess these outcomes, and how to use the results for program development and improvement.

2. Ultimately, every academic unit should be expected to engage in Outcomes Assessment. Outcomes Assessment should not be performed only in selected academic areas of the College.

3. The results of Outcomes Assessment should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs and activities, and student services, and not the performance of individual faculty or staff.

4. Outcomes Assessment should be as simple and manageable as possible. The process cannot become so onerous that it hampers or interferes with the delivery of the educational experience that it attempts to assess and improve.

5. Faculty must use the information collected to develop and improve academic programs, that is, they must "close the loop." If Outcomes Assessment is used primarily as a reporting tool, then this effort will have been deemed a failure.

6. Central and campus administrators must provide leadership and accountability to the process.

7. Outcomes Assessment must be ongoing and performed on a regular basis within each academic area; it cannot be episodic. In essence, it must become an academic habit. (Cartwright et al., 2009, p. 3)

The Montgomery College manual states, "Assessing outcomes is simply about faculty determining whether students are learning those things they deem most important, and then using the information to make changes where appropriate" (p. 6).

Challenges

Colleges face many challenges related to evaluating institutional effectiveness, particularly SLO evaluation at the course level. Numerous researchers have discovered that the time and effort required to develop and implement effective evaluations can be onerous (Beno, 2004; McClenney, 1998; Ohia, 2011; C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004). In addition, there are many constraints on campuses, including resources such as staff and time to conduct assessments. Additional challenges

include faculty attitude toward assessment, the college's ability to provide appropriate resources, a clear plan, and support staff required for a campus-wide effort (Gallagher, 2008; Haviland et al., 2011; Somerville, 2008; Syed & Mojock, 2008).

A lack of understanding about assessment SLO exists. One significant challenge is a lack of understanding about the value of institutional and instructional assessment. McClenney (1998) described some causes underlying the motivations of demonstrating the development of learning outcomes:

> The ugly truth about the current situation in American higher education, even in most community colleges, is that we do not a have a clue what and how much students are learning—that is, whether they know and can do what their degree (or other credential) implies they have learned. (p. 23)

The challenge has been for colleges to develop sound methods of assessing student learning. If these methods are effective, outcomes assessment is valuable and can improve teaching and learning (Friedlander & Serban, 2004).

Developing knowledge [about SLO assessment] is considered to be very important for college personnel (Friedlander & Serban, 2004; Somerville, 2008). McClenney (2001) indicated that one of the major barriers to assessing SLO was a lack of knowledge about assessment. Often, faculty members do not have a clear-cut plan that includes professional development to help them to know how to conduct assessments.

Some departments have fully embraced the concept and others resist. Resistance can be attributed to a lack of knowledge about the assessment plan or lack of knowledge about how to do the assessment (Syed & Mojock, 2008; McClenney, 2001; Somerville, 2008).

There has not been ample communication about the reason to conduct SLO assessment (Bresciani, 2012). Often, the reason is unclear and the faculty is not sure whether the purpose is to improve teaching and learning or to comply with accreditation. Colleges must learn how to provide a clear path and create faculty cohesion. Faculty disagreement can be addressed by implementing a process to develop a clear, research-based definition or by implementing a systematic process for building faculty engagement (Maki, 2004).

"Faculty are most enthusiastic about assessment when they fully understand what assessment is and how they and their students can benefit. When assessment is focused on improving teaching and learning, faculty recognize it as being connected to their interests" (Volkwein, 2003, p. 9). Faculty are generally not very knowledgeable about assessment practices, which contributes to a lack of usefulness of data (Volkwein, 2003).

A good assessment yields valuable results. However, the opposite is certainly true. Bresciani (2007) cautioned that many problems associated with SLO have to do with the perception that they are not important, valid, or critical for effective instruction.

> It is extremely valuable for those gathering the date and using the results to keep the process transparent so that faculty are reassured as to how the results will be used to improve student learning . . . results need to improve student learning or at the very least inform policies. (Bresciani, 2007, p. 232)

Hersh (2005) pointed out that "there is much resistance to evaluation if there it is not clear that there is intrinsic value in the results" (p. 3). Over the past 15 years, many colleges have put considerable effort into institutional assessment but the results and value are still being debated (personal communication, Dr. Bagg, June 15, 2013).

Friedlander and Serban (2004) identified challenges, mistakes, and lack of knowledge and how these have contributed to a lack of progress in implementing SLO:

> There is a lack of knowledge about assessment processes, tools, and models. Generally, at any given college, few faculty and staff have been formally trained in developing measurable and valid learning outcomes; aligning the curriculum with those outcomes; developing assessment questions, instruments, and methods; and developing and implementing a plan for assessing those outcomes that is manageable, meaningful, and sustainable. In addition, few colleges have an infrastructure in place to provide the technical knowledge and support to assist full and part-time faculty with the design, collection, analysis, and application of assessment data. Moreover, few institutions have designated staff member(s) with the time, knowledge, and skills to link course, program, and institutional learning outcomes or to disseminate the results of the student learning outcomes efforts. (p. 104)

Most community college faculty have a tradition of failing to collaborate at the department level to develop course-level SLO and methods for assessing those outcomes. Moreover, most faculty lack training or experience to identify SLO and to determine how they should be assessed or how to determine the level of ability or knowledge that students should attain to reflect adequate or excellent learning standards (Friedlander & Serban, 2004).

There is skepticism about the value of SLO assessment. Some faculty members argue that assessment is not possible or that it already occurs by way of the classroom testing process. Many contend that assessment SLO is unnecessary. Schwyzer (2007) summarized the core of this critique in writing about education as a transformative experience that can change the direction of students' lives, concluding that it cannot be measured by SLO.

However, the problem could be a lack of understanding about the process of assessing SLO. It could be that there is no systemic way to capture and evaluate the

data or that the task seems overwhelming. Perhaps it is a perceived lack of administrative support or the college budget (which takes the blame for many things).

According to Penn (2011), the value comes from the process and participation encourages dialogue about teaching and learning and institutional strengths and weaknesses.

> Assessment of general education helps us meet expectations for accountability in several ways. First, it produces clear evidence on our students' achievement on learning outcomes that are most central to our institutions. Assessment of general education also facilitates a dialogue about what we expect students to learn in our institutions and identify core knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions that are important for all students. At the same time, assessment of general education allows us to exhibit learning and achievements that are unique to each of our institutions, highlighting one of our higher education system's greatest strengths. (p. 12)

There is resistance to assessing SLO regarding time. A significant challenge facing community colleges is the lack of time, resources, and incentives to engage in an educational reform of this magnitude. This is particularly the case when colleges re-enter an era of scarce resources, when faculty and staff feel overextended, and when institutional budgets are constrained and repeatedly reduced.

The process and cycle of SLO assessment, while flexible and unique to each college, has been challenging for many colleges for a variety of reasons. Hersh (2005) indicated that SLO assessment has not been completely accepted by faculty because many have resisted the extra workload. This has also been cited by accreditation agencies during site visits as one of the reasons that colleges have been given sanctions (Hittleman, 2015). Also, faculty have questioned the utility of assessment (Hersh, 2005). Resistance by faculty is seen when colleges do not have clear-cut plans

and infrastructure and adequate staffing to teach faculty how to assess SLO (Fried-

lander & Serban, 2004).

There is a need for faculty support for SLO. Faculty support is critical for

realization of the full effects of SLO assessment. At many community colleges,

faculty has resisted SLO assessment based on workload issues (Bresciani, 2012;

Skolits & Graybeal, 2007). Hersh (2005) pointed out "much resistance to evaluation if

it is not clear that there is intrinsic value in the results" (p. 3). "Over the past 15 years,

many colleges have put considerable effort into institutional assessment and value is

still debated because some departments have done a much better job than others" (per-

sonal communication, Dr. Bagg, June 15, 2013).

Skolits and Graybeal (2007) used a mixed-methods case study at a single

college to examine the perspectives of campus stakeholders regarding institutional

effectiveness evaluations. Two-hundred fifty-seven educators were invited to return a

survey on institutional effectiveness, and 139 participated: 61 faculty, 71 nonfaculty,

and 7 administrators). In addition, the seven administrators were interviewed. Results

indicated that the staff and faculty agreed that institutional effectiveness was not

helpful in meeting their operational responsibilities. For example, of the staff and

faculty who knew that institutional effectiveness data were available, fewer than half

used the data. They said that a lack of time to do institutional effectiveness assess-

ment was a major barrier. Administrators, on the other hand, reported that the three

major strengths of having institutional effectiveness assessment were overall utility of

the effectiveness process, strategic planning and management, and availability and

accuracy of institutional data. The results of the study indicated that some faculty did

not use the data. Moreover, many found it difficult to find time to conduct and evaluate the assessment. However, administrators agreed that the information was useful for planning and decision making.

There is mistrust regarding the use of SLO. Another factor of resistance toward SLO is that many faculty fear that the assessments will be used as an evaluation component in punitive ways (Somerville, 2008). However, effective models do not connect SLO to faculty evaluation. The assessments should exist only to improve instruction and to encourage meaningful dialogue by faculty regarding student learning. "The accreditors' concern with assessment of student learning is not meant to target individual faculty members, but to stimulate institution-wide engagement with student leaning and institution-wide improvement in learning" (Beno, 2004, p. 69). Still, the ASCCC lists as one of its guiding principles to "avoid any incorporation of SLO assessment results in the evaluation process for individual faculty members" (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 28).

> In December 2007 a Senate Rostrum article titled "Accreditation and Faculty Evaluations?" provided additional reasoning for the Senate's stance: "Placing student learning outcomes data within a faculty member's evaluation would create a downward pressure on the rigor of the outcomes and a strong motivation to create assessments that validate or justify the content, pedagogy, and assignments" (Alancraig & Fulks, p. 2). If assessment results are used to evaluate and validate individual faculty performance, assessment instruments may be developed to justify existing practices rather than to engage in authentic analysis of student learning and avenues for instructional innovation and improvement. As a result, the assessment process itself would be compromised. Thus, for reasons involving both professional integrity and academic quality, the Senate has opposed and continues to oppose the inclusion of SLO data in individual faculty evaluations. (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 26)

> SLO assessment data is not designed for and should not be used in the evaluation of individual faculty members. The Senate's 2004 paper "The 2002 Accreditation Standards: Implementation" explains the justification for this position: [U]sing SLOs as a basis for faculty evaluations (III.A.1.c)

demonstrates an egregious disregard for local bargaining authority and interjects a threatening tone into what the ACCJC claims is a collegial peer process. Moreover, III.A.1.c is particularly coercive to non-tenured and adjunct faculty; and is viewed by the Senate as nothing less than an attack on our profession. (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 12)

Placing student learning outcomes data within a faculty member's evaluation would create a downward pressure on the rigor of the outcomes and a strong motivation to create assessments that validate or justify the content, pedagogy, and assignments (Alancraig & Fulks, 2007, p. 2). If assessment results are used to evaluate and validate individual faculty performance, assessment instruments may be developed to justify existing practices rather than to engage in authentic analysis of student learning and avenues for instructional innovation and improvement. As a result, the assessment process itself would be compromised (ASCCC, 2010, p. 24)

Key Factors for Campus Leaders: Developing and Refining SLO

Workload

Sources indicate that SLO assessments require a large effort. If done correctly, they are very time consuming and labor intensive (Beno, 2004; McClenney, 1998; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004). The process of assessing student learning should lead faculty to explore a variety of forms of pedagogical and assessment strategies. Deciding on the most effective strategies for teaching and for assessing learning requires experimentation, careful research, analyses, and time (Beno, 2004). Workload for faculty is one of the most common factors associated with resistance. This, coupled with a perception that the information or effort will not be used effectively, can create resistance. This issue is important for campus leaders who want to establish buy-in to the SLO process. As Haviland et al. (2009) indicated, many faculty feel that the workload is too much and that it is just one more thing. However, over time and with adequate training and communication, faculty members begin to see the value of assessment. "A majority of faculty recognized the need for

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collaboration among faculty to gather data, interpret it, and use it to make decisions, the time needed to do so was a significant barrier" (Bresciani, 2011, p. 872).

<u>Faculty Buy-In</u>

Studies indicate that colleges should have a process in place that engages faculty, creates professional development opportunities, and provides meaningful results that are successful with their evaluation efforts (Friedlander & Serban, 2004; Gallagher, 2008; Volkwein, 2003; Walvoord, 2004). Gaining interest and support of institutional constituents, particularly faculty, is a major challenge that colleges and universities face in designing and implementing institutional effectiveness activities (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). Without an institutional consensus on the importance of institutional effectiveness activities, including faculty participation and support, successful integration of institutional effectiveness activities is unlikely (Friedlander & McDougall, 1990).

"Faculty response to program assessment can often be cautious, wary, or even negative. This is ironic, given that most faculty members assess student learning in their classrooms hundreds of times a semester" (Haviland et al., 2011, p. 70). Assessment of SLO is mired in the perception that it serves only an exterior purpose. This accountability mindset works as both an incentive and an obstacle for colleges. As an incentive, it pushes colleges to develop performance models and measures at a faster pace than would result from natural organization processes. As an obstacle, it can be a subjective interpretation of how an institution is performing, even if units within the college are conducting thorough analysis.

Specific efforts can be lost within cumulative reports offered to accrediting bodies. All too often, the criteria driving the accountability expectations may have little or nothing to do with the mission of the institution or its performance (Alfred et al., 2007). Such is the case when faculty are resistant to SLO that appear to be top-down driven and perceived to be based solely on accreditation compliance. Alfred et al. (2007) cautioned, "Direct measures of efficiency tend to dominate the thinking of policymakers and resource providers and reflect their desire to shape or control institutional behavior" (p. 32). It is important to stress to those with an influence over resource provision that effectiveness is about outcomes, not processes.

> If faculty see SLO assessment as a periodic activity that occurs only at certain times or in certain circumstances, then they likely will also see it as a chore to complete and set aside until the next time the task arises. On the other hand, if SLO assessment becomes an integrated and ongoing part of the institution's curricular program and an expected aspect of instructional delivery, then data will be collected and analyzed more frequently and more effectively. The more complete and substantive the data, the more successfully the data can inform college planning discussions at all levels. (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 14)

Studies have indicated that the process must be faculty driven to succeed and be sustainable (Haviland et al., 2011; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Long, 2008; Ohia, 2011; Somerville, 2008). Faculty members' embrace of the positive aspects of a learning outcomes approach can serve to demonstrate to students that the college offers relevant curricula, meaningful information about learning achievements, and more student control over their learning to help them to prepare for success in their professional and personal lives (C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004).

Resources and Resource Allocation

Planning and resource allocation that incorporates SLO will set institutions on a path for continuous improvement and will provide a mechanism to report to the

public the effectiveness of postsecondary education. Once colleges have the tools and an effective SLO cycle, there is a clear focus on instruction.

The benefits of the effort will assist colleges in demonstrating the effective work and learning that is taking place on the campus. They will be able to indicate to students how the college is the right choice, show the community the value of the institution, and enlighten legislators and the public about the benefits of investing in education.

C. L. Miles and Wilson (2004) discussed a three-stage approach to SLO developed at San Diego Miramar College that includes moving from the ground up: evaluating individual courses, evaluating entire programs, and making necessary changes to course and program content. The overall goal is to evaluate three main content areas: general, career and technical, and developmental education. The results of their study indicate five objectives when a college is initiating a comprehensive SLO cycle: define, develop, deliver, document, and disseminate.

<div align="center">Best Practices for SLO</div>

Change does not come easy to educational institutions. Human nature is to resist change (Ewell, 1991). It is difficult to change an organizational culture, particularly in colleges with a long history and a senior, tenured staff. Changing a college culture to a focus on learning outcomes requires long-term commitment and dedication of resources.

It is important for college leadership to understand how organizational change occurs. It is important to learn about the history, structure, and process at a college in order to facilitate effective change (Nadler & Tushman, 1997). If original and

evolving theories of organizational change have common components, then it follows that colleges will need specific structures and resources in place in order to integrate SLO and to create a culture of evidence on campus. Campus leaders can use the four frames for effective leadership and consider each component when implementing change (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Somerville (2008) asserted that a community college that knows the factors that affect meaningful assessment is able to evaluate and improve its capacity to assess learning outcomes, document student learning, and meet the challenges established by accreditation standards. Without this knowledge, community colleges may be ineffective in establishing processes for meaningful assessment of SLO. Somerville analyzed opinions of community college personnel as they related to implementation of SLO. The purpose was to examine the critical components of SLO assessment. This qualitative study used an electronic version of the Delphi process and a 5-point importance scale to measures opinions of those who were actively involved in SLO assessment at 12 community colleges. The Delphi process is a flexible quantitative method that is most often used when the primary source of information is informed judgment (Ziglio, 1996, p. 21). Twenty-two individuals from 12 colleges participated as informed panelists. Each panelist had from 1 to 25 years of experience with SLO (mean = 18.65 years, media = 8.25 years). The study was intended to provide information from colleagues with extensive experience to those who are implementing a new process or struggling with an existing process.

Somerville (2008) reported critical themes for a successful SLO process: (a) knowledge/experience, (b) experience of campus leaders, (c) trust, (d) leadership, (e)

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dialogue/collaboration, (f) faculty engagement, and (g) using assessment results. The themes from the study and examples are listed below:

1. Knowledge/experience. It is critically important to have knowledgeable campus leaders who have experience with a variety of assessment methods.

2. Trust. Leaders must be respected and accepted by campus personnel groups and evidence must not be used in a punitive fashion

3. Leadership. The focus on respected faculty leaders was evident; however, it was as important to have administrators who support the assessment, give it credibility, and demonstrate how they can and will allocate personnel and financial resources to the effort.

4. Faculty engagement. "Engagement of faculty, including adjunct faculty is a driving force behind meaningful assessment. This engagement is characterized by a willingness to learn about assessment, analyze data, use results, and share what is learned" (p. 115).

5. Administrator engagement. Participation by administrators was extremely important because they provide necessary resources.

Four more extremely important themes that emerged from the Somerville (2008) study were building campus knowledge about SLO, communication strategies, administrator engagement in the process, and a well-thought-out and documented assessment plan. The study identified factors to consider when colleges begin to implement a process for effective assessment of SLO.

Somerville's (2008) study may have been limited in that some factors that are important to SLO assessment were not identified. The author stated that there may be

additional components of the SLO process that are, in fact, important. The findings

support the assertion that each college is unique and may have different priorities or

issues, which could change the structure and goal of the assessment.

<u>Institutional Support: Faculty Leaders, Staff, and Research Experts</u>

The presence of a core team that is broadly representative of the college and

the continuity of dedicated staff having lead responsibilities for assessment have been

judged to be important. This type of leadership is critical and serves to provide

assistance with the work, highlight the importance of the assessment, and provide

symbolic support to demonstrate institutional and administrative commitment. With-

out staff and administrative support, it is difficult to implement assessment at the

institutional and program levels. Institutional support and resources are critical to

successful programs. Colleges need leadership to communicate the priority of SLO

and research staff with expertise to guide the effort (Bresciani, 2007; Heiland &

Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Somerville, 2008).

> Colleges must provide staff and expertise for entering, cataloging, and
> extracting data and presenting that data in a manner that supports analysis at
> levels higher than most individual faculty members would be able to achieve
> without such a system in place. (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 23)

While assessment should begin by addressing the important questions embod-

ied in the institutional mission, it does not imply that educators should assess

everything all the time. Instead, faculty and administrators must consider the various

resources available for assessment (for example, time, money, and staff) and develop

assessment strategies that are best able to measure student learning fully, given these

constraints (Banta et al., 1996). Even though many colleges have invested heavily in

research staff and technology to provide data, institutions remain on very different

footings with respect to allocation of resources and institutional support toward

assessment. This can create additional challenges for colleges that do not invest in

research infrastructure (personal communication, Dr. Bagg, November 21, 2014). If

institutional governance allows more flexibility in the allocation of resources, then the

idea is to make available certain resources for the improvement and refinement of

strategic priorities (Bresciani, 2010). In other words, if the results of the assessments

are connected to resource allocation and the data support attention to specific SLO,

then it follows that the assessment can help faculty to acquire necessary resources.

> Clearly, the assessment of SLO requires staffing and support for faculty:

> Although faculty hold primary responsibility for the development and assessment of student learning outcomes, faculty cannot meet this responsibility without adequate support. In order to promote the design and implementation of appropriate SLO assessment processes, colleges must be willing to provide resources in a number of areas. Effective outcomes assessment requires technical resources such as software programs, human resources such as support staff, training and professional development opportunities for the faculty who develop and assess the outcomes, budgetary support to enable all of the various aspects of the process and to allow participation by adjunct faculty, and sufficient time for analysis of results and dialogue among faculty to decide how to respond to the results. (ASCCC, 2010a, p. 22)

> Heiland and Switzer-Kemper (2007) revealed that, within the past 6 years, few

colleges and universities had offered a specific office or a single point of contact for

SLO. Their study highlighted Central Arizona College, which established a

Curriculum, Learning, Assessment and Support Services Office that developed three

distinct stages of a successful SLO process: (a) development of stringent guidelines,

both clearly stated and widely disseminated; (b) frequent faculty and staff training

sessions; and (c) accountability standards. The authors noted that these three steps

worked together to establish an atmosphere of faculty empowerment and buy-in.

<u>Effective Leadership</u>

The importance of institutional leadership has been addressed in many studies (e.g., Long, 2005; Somerville, 2008; Suskie, 2004; Volkwein, 2003). Best practices include a combination of administrative and faculty support (Gallagher, 2008). This is best achieved by providing ample professional development and information about the value of the process, in particular, how it can improve student learning. Serban (2004) emphasized that community colleges require knowledgeable leadership in the assessment of student learning. Several authors (Serban, 2004; Seybert, 2004; Suskie, 2004; Walvoord, 2004) have suggested that capturing the necessary knowledge and experience is best achieved through a team or committee approach.

Some studies indicate that the process should be faculty driven, with little administrative interference (Bresciani, 2012; Diaz-Lefebvre, as cited in Rouseff-Baker & Holm, 2004). However, other studies indicate that administrators can give assessment institutional credibility and make allocation of financial and personnel resources more likely.

Without leadership, assessment programs may be weak and wither from lack of resources (Somerville, 2008). Somerville concluded that leadership from both faculty and administrators was important because each group fulfilled a distinct function in a meaningful assessment process. The engagement of the chief executive officer, the chief instructional officer, and program deans was extremely important. However, more important were engagement and leadership by faculty (rated as critically important). Further, both administrative and faculty leaders must have knowledge and experience with assessment. The data from Somerville's study

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suggested that, if assessment of student learning was to be successful, faculty must be among the campus leaders. Participation by administrators was extremely important because they position assessment as an institutional priority and provide the necessary personnel and financial resources to manage the work of assessment.

Assessment professionals have cited the importance of the chief executive officer (Maki, 2004; Morante, 2002; Nichols & Nichols, 2005) and the chief instructional officer (Morante, 2002) to a successful student learning assessment process. Somera (2007), in "The College President's Critical Role in Modeling Assessment," gave an example of a college president who conducted an evaluation across campus on himself to start a culture of assessment on campus:

> Do not be afraid of assessment data. . . . I felt I was stripped naked and very vulnerable but setting the example was imperative to drive home the point that I was dead serious about assessment. . . . One must always keep in mind that good assessment practices often produce very frank results, sometimes brutally so. (p. 16)

The President reminded his colleagues that sustained institutional betterment begins when the college's stakeholders confront harsh realities and work toward making appropriate changes to improve the teaching and learning process at the institution (Somera, 2007). The above description is an example of leadership and communication that provided an avenue to create a campus culture that accepted assessment and evaluation.

Communication

Analysis of the literature reinforces the importance of communication and understanding prior to assessment. Kanter, Stein, and Todd (1992) pointed out that good, two-way, ongoing, honest, accurate communication is the lifeblood of a

successful change process. This communication and a campus that embraces a culture

of evidence provide a springboard for successful SLO evaluation if there is ample

communication at the onset and if the implementation plan is clear (Bresciani, 2012;

Somerville, 2008). It is more successful if this type of assessment is implemented

where there is an established campus culture of evidence.

It is very difficult to move a large college toward full understanding and par-

ticipation until there is a clear reason for assessment. It is preferable that campus

leadership ensure that assessment of SLO is not administratively mandated or based

on meeting accreditation requirements. Haviland et al. (2011) posited that assessment

is more successful when influential individuals articulate a vision and offer compelling

reasons to undertake the assessment activity, as well as facilitate a process that places

assessment into a frame of scholarly inquiry rather than accreditation mandate. Most

important, however, is a way to determine how the college can implement the SLO

process in a way that results in lively discussion, positive change, and improvements

in student success and understanding. This process and cycle should be part of every

college's everyday routine.

Professional Development

A lack of knowledge about assessment processes has been identified as a key

reason for difficulty in implementing SLO (Bresciani, 2012; Ewell, 1985; Friedlander

& Serban, 2004; McClenney, 2001; C. C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004; Palomba &

Banta, 1999). As early as 1985, Ewell concluded that involvement did not guarantee

success and stressed that it is imperative for campus leaders to find persons who are

the right mix of expertise and skill to develop assessment programs. There must be

frequent faculty and staff training sessions and colleges must invest in a

comprehensive professional development plan for effective assessment (Heiland &

Switzer-Kemper, 2007).

Faculty and staff should be given professional development opportunities to

learn how to assess well and they should be rewarded for using data to improve

instruction (Bresciani, 2010). ASCCC (2010a) declared that faculty and staff must

receive proper guidance and training regarding SLO assessment. Haviland, Shin, and

Turley (2010) indicated that educational leaders who use clearly defined ongoing pro-

fessional development and clear plans to promote faculty ownership may find it easier

to elicit faculty support and engagement. ASCCC (2010a) indicated that a thought-

fully and thoroughly developed professional development program will help faculty to

understand their SLO assessment process and the tools by which the process is real-

ized; it will also allow them to participate in that process more efficiently and effec-

tively. Bresciani (2011) said that participants in her study "talked about needing time

to learn how to engage in outcomes-based assessment and to learn how to access data

that they were sure the college had collected." (p. 872). She concluded that it was

important for colleges to

> provide professional development for faculty and staff to understand the
> purpose of the data collection process so that they can design the most mean-
> ingful process, and . . . provide professional and technical support for
> collection, evaluation, and reporting of results. (p. 873)

Bresciani (2012) posited, "A college must invest in the education of its faculty

and staff in order for them to be able to learn how to meaningfully engage in this

process, particularly given all the demands of the various roles in their work" (p. 410).

Somerville (2008) concluded, "An aggressive system of professional development and

training could prove useful providing institutions accountable for student learning and providing documentation of their progress" (p. 107). Bresciani (2012) recommended that colleges implement a systemic, college- or district-wide faculty and staff development program so that each college has the means to address the many barriers that arise when conducting SLO assessment.

A Clear-Cut Plan

A clear-cut plan is imperative for success with SLO assessment. There must be an institutionally and divisionally agreed-on strategic plan from which to work (Bresciani, 2006; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009). A clear direction and plan for any assessment is critical (Banta & Associates, 2002; Bresciani et al., 2009; Suskie, 2004). Long (2008) indicated that the plan must have broad-based involvement of all stakeholders representing all major areas across the college.

In order to have a clear plan, there must be clarity of what will be assessed (Banta & Associates, 2002). The program or course must be clearly defined so that appropriate assessment techniques can be identified and applied (Volkwein, 2003).

Schilling and Schilling (1998) suggested, "Faculty generally do not understand what more is being asked of them by those calling for assessment. Yet, few assessment policies provide a straightforward statement of the difference between other evaluative processes and assessment" (p. 18). Angelo (1999) stated that one reason assessment efforts in the United States have been less successful than desired is that people had various concepts of assessment. Some view it as a tool for accountability, while others use it to improve teaching and learning. Angelo contended that, in order

for assessment to be successful, a shared working definition of assessment should be developed.

Once the definition is established, a clear plan for assessment should be established. It must be clear to the faculty how they will conduct the assessments (McClenney, 1998). One of the criteria for effective assessment is a written plan with clear purposes that is related to the goals that people value, to a larger set of conditions that promote change (Banta & Associates, 2002). Banta indicated that assessment is only a vehicle for improvement, not an end in itself. Assessment works best when the programs and the process have clear, explicitly stated purposes (AAHE, 1996).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provided a history of assessment, the role of accreditation, and the relationship between college accreditation and the assessment of learning outcomes. The chapter outlined the challenges and best practices that emerged from the literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to conduct this study.

The study employed a case-study design to understand how faculty in a single depart-

ment implemented the assessment of SLO. The findings of this study identify best

practices to help faculty in other college departments to implement an SLO assessment

cycle. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) statement of purpose,

(b) research questions, (c) research design, (d) population and sample,

(e) instrumentation, (f) data collection procedures, (g) data analysis procedures, and

(h) assumptions and limitations of the study.

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

The purpose of this study was to explore how faculty experiences in their

department helped them to become proponents of SLO assessment. Examining

faculty perceptions of SLO assessment in a single department provided information

for higher education leaders who wish to create a process and strategy to engage

faculty in the assessment of SLO.

The reviewed literature revealed many components of a successful process to

assess SLOs, including leadership, faculty buy-in, a culture of evidence, communica-

tion, professional development, and policies and resources (Beno, 2004; Bresciani,

2008, 2012; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; McClenney, 1998; Ohia, 2011;

Somerville, 2008; C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004). In addition, many challenges

constrain effective implementation and utilization of SLO (Friedlander & Serban, 2004; McClenney, 2001; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Volkwein, 2003). These constraints include resources such as staff and time to conduct assessments (Bresciani, 2012; Haviland et al., 2011; Somerville, 2008). Challenges such as faculty attitude toward assessment and the college's ability to provide appropriate resources, a clear plan, and adequate support staff for a campus-wide effort have left many colleges on "warning" or "show cause" status and have put accreditation in jeopardy (Gallagher, 2008; Hittleman, 2015; Somerville, 2008; Syed & Mojock, 2008).

The conceptual framework for this study incorporated the concept of congruence (Nadler & Tushman, 1997a) and Bolman and Deal's (2008) work on reframing organizations. Both acknowledge the importance of learning about key components of an institution before implementing a significant change or "reframing" the organization, institution, or department. This study was guided by these two concepts of "getting to know" key facets of the institution prior to implementing major changes and how a good process can help educational leaders to utilize best practices. This framework guided the study and the literature review and the SLO assessment work in a single department. The findings of this study identify strategies and processes to help departments to use assessment to improve practice and "close the loop." The study can be replicated to implement and improve the SLO assessment and provide departments and leaders insight regarding the inner workings of one department's process.

<u>Research Questions</u>

This study was guided by the following research questions:

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1. What do members of a single department perceive to be critical to effectively implement and utilize SLO?

2. What skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions do faculty believe are important in the SLO assessment process?

3. What resources do faculty members perceive to be necessary so that departments can engage in and commit to the SLO assessment cycle?

4. What policies and practices do faculty members believe are necessary to support SLO assessment?

<u>Methodological Design</u>

This study used a qualitative, single site, case study design to address the research questions. Three methods of data collection were utilized: (a) in-depth interviews, (b) observations of faculty meetings, and (c) document collection. Each method is explained in this section.

Qualitative research is a process of inquiry based on natural understanding of the context of the research. It is the key to understanding the process used by faculty to adopt outcomes assessment (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991).

> We . . . conduct qualitative research because we need a complex detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell their stories unencumbered by what we expect to find and what we have read in the literature. (Creswell, 2007, p. 40)

The umbrella concept of qualitative research covers several forms of inquiry that explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 2001). Merriam (2009) posited that researchers are interested in understanding the meaning that people have constructed, that is, how they

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make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Qualitative

research "implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'under-

gone'" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 7).

A qualitative methodology allowed the researcher in this study to capture the

perceptions of faculty regarding what worked in their department. This type of

inquiry and process provided the faculty with an avenue to tell their story of how they

had used SLO and whether they had improved instruction in their classrooms and

department.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) agreed with the use of qualitative methodology to

study perceptions:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the World.
> . . . This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural set-
> tings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the
> meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Patton (1985) explained qualitative research in relation to lived experiences:

> Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as
> part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an
> end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the
> future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means
> for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on
> for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular
> setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others
> who are interested in that setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of under-
> standing. (p. 1)

Merriam (2001) assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences

and that this meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions. Mer-

riam indicated that the key concern is to understand the phenomenon of interest from

the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's perspective. The underlying idea

behind qualitative methodology is that there is not one set of objectives and universal

truths that the researcher can readily gather and confirm (Creswell, 2007; Mousakas, 1994; Patton, 1985; Seidman, 1991).

According to Schramm (1971), "The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (p. 27). The single case study method is valuable when a researcher examines the lived experiences of a person or group (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009).

The goal of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of faculty in a single department in a California community college where they had created, assessed, implemented, and utilized SLO. At its most elemental, basic qualitative inquiry offers the opportunity to understand the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009) and is extremely useful for exploring areas where limited research is available (Creswell, 2009), such as the experiences of faculty in evaluating SLO in their department. Gathering data from interviews, observations, and document analysis, researchers look for patterns and themes that give meaning to common experiences, as well as distinctions among faculty members. There is ample research about the challenges of conducting SLO assessment (Beno, 2004; Bresciani, 2007; Friedlander & Serban, 2004; Gallagher, 2008; Somerville, 2008) but there is limited research about those who have done it well over time. As limited research exists regarding best practices, this study has an appropriate rationale for qualitative inquiry.

As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2003). Research case studies should be rigorous and present empirical

facts in a fair and accurate manner (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2003). Merriam (2001) indicated that a case study design is employed to gain in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than the outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. A case study was deemed to be the best qualitative method for this study because the study was designed to examine a single unit or bounded system, such as a department (Merriam, 2001; Webster, 2001; Yin, 2009).

This qualitative study used a single-case study design for several reasons, including the research questions, the type of participants and their position as faculty members, and the fact that there is an ongoing inquiry about a process: the assessment of SLO. It is clear that the research questions ask for insight from faculty in a single department, which was one of the reasons to use a case study design. Yin (2009) argued that a case study design is the preferred method when (a) "how" or "why" questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over the events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (p. 13). SLO is a contemporary educational issue; this study was designed to gain insight regarding the debate about assessing SLO in the classroom. The inquiry was focused on the effects of SLO assessment on teaching, the curriculum, and student learning, as well as ramifications for colleges in terms of accreditation and the quality of teaching and learning. A case study design is a solid method to study the perceptions of faculty from a single department regarding the effects of SLO assessment and to have them

describe the process and provide insight about the skills, resources, and policies that are necessary to support best practices.

The researcher was the "key instrument" (Creswell, 2009, p. 175) in that he gathered most of the data via interviews, as opposed to relying on survey data. Several informed decisions altered the research plan after entering the field, reflecting the emergent nature of qualitative design (Creswell, 2009). The conceptual framework included the idea that leaders must be aware of key components of change and they must find congruence or a fit for progress to occur (Nadler & Tushman, 1997b). This research was intended to provide information to gain insight into the positive or negative elements of SLO assessment and the climate, resources, and policies that leaders can and should facilitate.

<u>Research Site and Participants</u>

This section describes the site and provides a background about the type of community college that was studied. In addition, the department and characteristics are explained and general information about the faculty is presented based on the demographic survey that was completed by each participant.

<u>Site</u>

MCC (a pseudonym) is one of 112 campuses of the CCC and is located in southern California (Metis is the Titaness of wisdom and deep thought in Greek Mythology). MCC is one of the oldest and largest of California's community colleges. It is located in the greater Los Angeles area in a large urban community. MCC is one of the most diverse community colleges in the state, a reflection of the

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fact that the city in which most of its students reside is considered one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the United States.

The college has always been an integral part of the community, providing specialized training in career and technical fields, as well as a transfer curriculum. Transfer education and occupational training are the two main functions at MCC, but the college also offers many basic skills courses and general education programs. New programs and services are continually being developed to meet the needs of the community and an increasingly diverse student population, as well as business and industry. The college has added cultural and ethnic studies, developed computer-assisted instruction, expanded multimedia efforts, created a series of student learning communities, and increased collaborative efforts with the local unified school district and 4-year public colleges. In addition, it has several special training partnerships with area corporations.

<u>The Department</u>

The target department was selected because it has more than 10 full-time faculty members who have participated in SLO assessment for more than 5 years. This department has "closed the loop" for 4 consecutive years and has made changes to both the curriculum and their respective teaching practices (evidence of these changes was well documented in TracDat, the institutional database to monitor/track program review and SLO assessment). New department members who were interviewed had participated in at least one full assessment cycle.

Participants

In qualitative case study research, much emphasis is placed on selecting appropriate participants, emphasizing that they must be relevant to the purpose of the research (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Gray (1997) stated that "the unit of analysis for success of an assessment program . . . should be the faculty within a unit (for example, a department, program, school, or college)" (p. 6). Faculty is a critical component of the SLO process and the literature indicates that successful programs are faculty driven (Banta & Associates, 2002; Ewell, 2005; Somerville, 2008).

The researcher interviewed 11 or 13 full-time faculty members in the target department who had participated in the full assessment cycle and agreed to participate (Appendix A). A demographic survey gathered information about the participants. Institutional support was provided by the Dean and Department Head in charge of the target department (Appendix B), the faculty-appointed Student Learning Outcomes Coordinator, and the Dean of Institutional Effectiveness.

Data Collection Strategy and Tools

Three methods of data collection were utilized for this study: interviews, observations, and document collection and review. These data sources are commonly used techniques to obtain rich, holistic description and analysis (Merriam, 1998). This project was delimited to one department, so it was important to use multiple methods of information collection and to triangulate the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure credibility (Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Two instruments were used in the study: a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) and an interview protocol (Appendix D). Participants completed the

demographic questionnaire prior to the interview. The questions were designed to gather consistent data across all participants related to gender, age, education, and work experience.

The unstructured interviews followed a protocol based on the conceptual framework and research questions. Interview questions were asked in the order in which they were written; however, follow-up questions were asked as appropriate. This open-ended approach ensured a conversational flow during the interviews (Yin, 2009).

The interview protocol was adopted from instruments by Long (2005) and Dunsheath (2010). The semistructured in-depth interviews lasted approximately 1 hour each. The interview protocol was pilot tested with a faculty member from another department that had just completed a departmental review of the SLO process and had entered information into TracDat, the database where departments report progress, changes, and actions. Feedback from this persons, as well as review of the demographic survey, interview process, interview responses, and discussion with the doctoral committee led to instrument modifications. Questions that seemed redundant were eliminated, one question was added to improve clarity, and some questions were reorganized and reworded.

Observations

Additional information was gathered by participating in two department meetings. At these meetings, the researcher took notes and observed the interactions among faculty members, keeping a keen eye on the SLO process and how the faculty

communicated regarding the data and course modifications or suggestions for improvement. Appendix E contains guidelines used as the observation protocol.

Document Review

Fourteen comprehensive documents were reviewed for this study: *Institutional Self-Study Report* (MCC, 2002), *Institutional Self-Study Report* 2008 (MCC, 2008), *Institutional Self-Study Report* 2014 (MCC, 2014), *Accreditation Report* (MCC, 2002), *Accreditation Report* (MCC, 2008), *Accreditation Report* (MCC, 2012a), *Midterm Accreditation Report* (MCC, 2010), *Estimated Total Investment in SLO Assessment at MCC* (MCC, 2011), *Annual Report for 2012* (2012b), *Chronology of SLO Work at MCC* (2012c), *Institutional Self-Study Mid-Term Report for 2010* (MCC, 2010), annual reports for 2013, 2014, and ACCJC's letter to the college with regard to current accreditation status (granted full accreditation).

In addition to those documents, the college maintains an assessment web page that contains multiple articles about SLO assessment and more than 30 links that provide information, examples, and best practices.

The college uses a commercial database called TracDat that provides transparency of information and results regarding SLO assessment across all departments. This database allowed the researcher to gather documents over time regarding the SLO that were developed and track modifications. In addition, the database has a log of instructional changes that are implemented after each assessment cycle. This information was analyzed to determine the number of instances in which faculty made modifications to the SLO or to their instruction based on the results of the assessment.

Department meeting minutes on the database were reviewed to determine how often the departments discussed SLO assessment.

The other significant factor in the SLO process is the extent of resources that a college invests in the SLO assessment effort (Bresciani, 2012; Dunsheath, 2010; Somerville, 2008). The SLO budget for the college was analyzed to determine the amount of funding the college allocated to the effort and whether faculty were given release time or whether specific staff were assigned to the SLO assessment effort. Appendix E contains guidelines used as the document protocol.

Observations

Observations occurred during four meetings of the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO) Committee to clarify the many components of the process that the researcher learned about during interviews. It was anticipated that many interviewees would refer to processes at MCC and the ASLO committee that holds responsibility for guiding the process and policies. These observations provided indications of current practice or reliable samples of district practice or policies, including critical components of successful assessment identified in the literature, such as communication, professional development, and staff resources. After the interviews, the researcher reviewed ASLO committee minutes to determine whether there were themes that supported those that emerged from the interview transcripts and coding process. These themes were coded into categories to determine whether they matched faculty interviews. The results were used to support the findings where appropriate.

Procedures

This study began in December 2014, after approval of the study design by the college's Institutional Review Board, and concluded in May 2015. The department was contacted in November 2014 and was asked whether all of the faculty would be willing to participate in the study to highlight best practices for SLO assessment. The Interim Dean of Language Arts and Communication served as the gatekeeper for the department and the Department Head helped to facilitate the study. At this college, it is noteworthy that the Student Learning Outcomes Coordinator was part of the department at the time of the study. The interviews, document collection and review, and observations occurred throughout the study period.

Interviews

In order to learn about outcomes assessment through the eyes of faculty members, in-depth semistructured interviews were conducted. Each participant was interviewed one time face to face; follow-up questions were asked by electronic mail or by telephone. Each interviewee had the opportunity to review the transcript and provide changes in content or context. Semistructured interviews are used when specific information is desired from participants, but the exact order and wording of questions varies according to the conversation that is occurring (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam, "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 74). This type of interview aligns with the case study approach and the focus of the research. Researchers deMarrais and Lapan (2004) stated, "Interviews are one of

the richest sources of data in a case study and usually the most important type of data to be collected" (p. 229).

Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed as soon as possible after they were conducted. Data analysis began after the first interview and was ongoing. Ely et al. (1991) emphasized the importance of ongoing data analysis, starting at the beginning of data collection. The process of continuous analysis was used to look for trends and emerging issues that might lead to refining interview questions. For example, the question concerning whether SLO assessment had an impact on teaching was posed toward the end of the interview and designed to elicit follow-up questions.

Observations

The researcher attended two department meetings (fall 2014 and spring 2105) to observe the faculty as they interacted regarding SLO assessment and to take notes on their interactions. As recommended by Saldana (2013), coding began immediately and the data were formatted to facilitate future coding of themes and categories.

Document Collection and Artifacts

Some faculty chose to share artifacts, such as rubrics and syllabi, to demonstrate progress in the SLO cycle. Interviews were not always conducted in the person's office so they were not able to locate some of the documents immediately but later sent electronic mail with attachments. Other documents were department meetings where SLOs were discussed and specific meetings to discuss SLO assessment and actions. The researcher had access to the college's SLO data management system to locate reports indicating the status of various courses, SLO, and departmental actions. The college makes these data available to the college community so the assessment

effort is transparent and other departments can learn and or replicate methods. These artifacts were used to confirm data obtained in the interviews.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed for common patterns and grouped into codes, categories, and themes based on theories (Saldana, 2013) that corresponded to the research questions. A review of the literature yielded six key components that were described as essential for an effective SLO assessment and provided a framework of initial themes to analyze and compare the data. The categories that were most frequently cited were leadership, professional development (knowledge and expertise), communication, faculty engagement or buy-in, use and utility of the assessments, and administrator engagement and institutional culture (Bresciani, 2008; Long, 2008; Somerville, 2008). Much of the literature provided case studies on entire colleges and the critical components of SLO assessment but did not address the department level specifically. It was important to evaluate the data and determine whether the themes for a department were similar to or different from those that were mentioned for an entire college.

Inductive data analysis facilitated development of themes and incorporation of participant feedback (Creswell, 2007) through member checking to learn about faculty experiences and department outcomes. Observations of department meetings and reviewed documents were used to triangulate the data and lead to comprehensive and accurate inferences. This approach allowed the researcher to code themes that pro-vided insight into the necessary components of an SLO assessment cycle.

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This study used descriptive coding. Saldana (2013) described descriptive coding as summarizing, in a word or short phrase, the basic passage of qualitative data. He suggested starting with a first coding cycle that includes basic coding methods in the order listed as a "generic" approach to data and analysis: (a) structural coding or holistic coding (for all data as a "grand tour" overview), (b) attribute coding (for all data as a management technique), (c) descriptive coding (for field notes, documents, and artifacts as a detailed inventory of their contents), and (d) in vivo coding, initial coding, and/or values coding.

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist and reviewed by the researcher. Minor changes included assigning pseudonyms and specific identifiers to promote confidentiality of participants. All interviewees were invited to review their transcripts and make comments regarding accuracy and intent of specific statements.

Data coding was ongoing and used both structural and in vivo coding. Structural coding allows the researcher to apply a conceptual phrase to represent a topic of inquiry to a segment of data. This was used to categorize the data based on previous research that had indicated the various key components of effective outcomes assessment (Saldana, 2013). In vivo coding, or "literal coding" (p. 91), was used to recognize actual terms used by the participants to describe their experience. This type of coding provides larger thematic categories and subsumes other codes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The interview transcripts were decontextualized into meaningful chunks of coded materials. This iterative process allowed the researcher to synthesize

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and clarify the themes and results of the interviews. The researcher then examined the data for similarities and differences with the literature.

Data were collected employing an emergent inductive design. Using the literature as a basic guide, patterns, categories, and themes emerged from the data. Some primary codes were tagged with another subcode. Saldana (2009) described subcoding as a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry. M. B. Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to the general code as the "parent" and its subcodes as "children." Once all coding was completed, patterns and themes emerged and the researcher used a storyboard diagram to cluster the themes.

Protection of Subjects

Institutional Review

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) and was approved by the Board. The purpose of this review is to assure, both in advance and by periodic review, that appropriate steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating in the research. To accomplish this purpose, the Board reviews research protocols and related materials (e.g., informed consent documents and investigator brochures) to ensure protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects of research conducted by or under the aegis of the university (CSULB, 2014). This study was also submitted to the research office at MCC and all procedures were followed.

Confidentiality

All participants in this study are identified by pseudonyms. In attempt to receive honest answers from faculty, the nature of the study was described to them and

they were assured that the data collected would remain confidential throughout the study. Informed consent (Appendix F) was obtained from all participants. The interviews were conducted throughout the fall 2014 semester at the location of choice for participants to ensure confidentiality. Participants, the department, and the college were assigned pseudonyms.

<div align="center">Reliability, Credibility, and Positionality</div>

This section examines measure for reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness of the research design, as well as the positionality of the researcher in the current study. These concepts ensure that the observations and results of the study are accurate and that they connect with the proper methods and rigor involved with qualitative research.

Reliability

Reliability in a qualitative study can be interpreted as whether "given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable" (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). One method to determine reliability is member checking (Saldana, 2013). Merriam (1998) stated that credibility is established when systematic procedures of data analysis occur, such as analytic memo writing, a research log, and triangulation of data. Each serves to capture alternate or multiple perspectives on social reality (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Methods of Credibility

"Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Merriam (2001) suggested six research strategies to increase internal validity of a study, including triangulation of data. In an attempt to

ensure that the interpretation of the data was valid, data were collected from three sources and the results were compared. Interviews were initially analyzed, as well as the artifact documents. The results of observations were also analyzed for codes or themes and best practices that matched with the literature.

Peer examination was suggested by Merriam (2001) to ensure validity. Cohort colleagues familiar with case studies and outcomes assessment commented on the coding and interpretations as the case study reports were written.

Triangulation of the data increases likelihood of construct validity (Saldana, 2013), in other words, checking multiple datasets and turning observations into theories about the phenomena under study. Triangulation improves the construct validity of the study because the researcher is reviewing more than one set of data to determine whether there are similar results. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), "If two methods come up with the same finding, this serves to enhance the validity of the research results" (p. 51). Triangulation of the interviews, documents, and observations served as a more systematic practice to enhance rigor and trust-worthiness in the research process so that it had a broad, thick and deep understanding of the interpretation of the results (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

<u>Researcher Positionality</u>

I am a Latino male who has worked at a community college for more than 22 years. I began as a classified Research Analyst and I held the position of Director of Grants prior to my current position as a dean. I am currently Dean of the School of Health, Kinesiology, Science, and Mathematics; I have held this position for more than 6 years. I have extensive experience with research and evaluation and I am a

member of the Student Learning Outcomes Committee. As a dean, I am responsible for ongoing analysis of SLO for the School. Although this is a faculty-driven activity, a database tracks progress for each area and reports are distributed to the Vice President and discussed at meetings of all deans. I am ultimately responsible for assessment and completion of the SLO cycle for the School. I seek to institute and enable good processes that are valuable for faculty.

I am a proponent of SLO assessment. I maintain that the "requirement" of SLO assessment instituted by accrediting bodies is beneficial for students and creates a culture of evidence and instructional improvement. I assign value to creating and providing SLO assessment for students and maintain that the process is important and can improve instruction and student success. My faculty colleagues often resist assessment, asking "Why are we wasting our time?" or capitulating simply to "comply with accreditation." I firmly believe that SLO assessment and evaluation is an important part of the instructional process.

Because I am a dean and in this study I interviewed faculty, I recognized that there might be challenges associated with getting faculty members to disclose their true opinions about SLO. There is a view that SLO are being required by administration, even though the faculty for this research were not from my School. However, since 2002, when SLO became a standard in the accreditation process, the college has taken a position that the process should be faculty driven. Every effort was made to ensure that the interviewees realized that this was not a personal or personnel evaluation and that the interview was designed to gain insight into possible ways to improve the SLO assessment and evaluation process.

To support efforts for interviewees to be honest and forthcoming, they were assured complete anonymity in the study. The researcher emphasized his role of researcher, not enforcer. Although the researcher has longstanding relationships with many faculty members on campus and has worked with them on a variety of projects, it was assumed that they would accept these assurances and express their honest opinions in a common effort to support what is working and change what is not working.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents a detailed description of the SLO process that is used in a single department at MCC. It begins with the chronology of SLO assessment at MCC and how the campus implemented the process. This process is reflected in the work that the department did since the inception of SLO assessment.

The first research question was designed to understand how this department effectively implements and utilizes SLO assessment and provides information from department members to shed light on specific components that have helped or hindered the process. The second question focused on faculty members' attitudes and dispositions and examines the characteristics of the department that have yielded positive influence in contributing to SLO assessment. This chapter is organized to explain the department characteristics and background first, and the next section describes what has helped to make an effective process and explains how the process has been guided. For clarity, the corresponding research questions are listed at the beginning of each section. The first two sections describe various attributes in the department that help to make an effective process and explain how the process has been guided.

The third section was concerned with the institutional and departmental resources, practices, and policies that help to create an assessment-friendly environment. This section addresses the next two research questions and offers suggestions regarding the critical structure, training, and resources that should be provided to

imsplement effective SLO assessment. The information has been coded to create a road map for departments that are interested in creating an effective plan of action that includes necessary practices, policies, and resources.

The concluding sections use all the research questions and the qualitative interview information to provide a summary of the challenges that the department (and college) faced. The final section offers suggestions by the interviewees regarding effective implementation of SLO assessment.

This final section also offers suggestions by the interviewees regarding effective implementation of SLO assessment.

The data are organized around the following research questions.

1. What do members of a single department perceive to be critical to effectively implement and utilize SLO?

2. What skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions do faculty believe are important in the SLO assessment process?

3. What resources do faculty members perceive to be necessary so that departments can engage in and commit to the SLO assessment cycle?

4. What policies and practices do faculty members believe are necessary to support SLO assessment?

Each of the research questions is examined to determine whether the conceptual framework has emerged and can be applied to the results. Bolman and Deal (2008) posited that an effective leader must view things using four frames: political, symbolic, human resources, and structural. Nadler and Tushman's (1997a) congruence model indicates that a leader must be knowledgeable about the various components of

an organization in order to make the best decisions when implementing change. These two theories formed the conceptual framework for this study.

The target department considers their process to be exemplary and they recognize that several factors have contributed to successful implementation and utilization of SLO assessment. Throughout the interviews, themes emerged for each research question. Each of the themes was a result of coding by the researcher to cluster the most commonly occurring responses and create the results, which are discussed here.

A total of 29 elements emerged from the data and were coded (Appendix G). These codes were organized into three themes: department characteristics and culture to promote SLO assessment, effective implementation, and necessary resources and policies and procedures. Each theme addresses a research question. Those elements that were mentioned by most of the faculty members or those that the faculty said were the most important are discussed later.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Three sources were used to collect data for this qualitative case study: interviews, observations, and document collection. Multiple data sources serve to triangulate data and support findings. Eleven of 13 full-time faculty members were interviewed for this study. One faculty member, who was the former department head, had recently taken the position of Interim Dean; however, her interview was focused on her role as a faculty member while in the department (just 2 months prior to the study). All faculty members categorized themselves as White and the age range was 30 to 65 years. In addition to the faculty members, one administrator, the Dean of Institutional Effectiveness in charge of campus-wide assessment, was interviewed to

establish timelines and discuss processes at MCC. This interviewee served as fact

checker and provided additional information about the training and budget for SLO

assessment at the college.

Observations at MCC were conducted in fall 2014 and spring 2015 and con-

sisted of attendance at the ASLO committee meetings. These meetings occurred twice

monthly for 2 hours. The ASLO committee is a subcommittee of the Committee on

Curriculum and Instruction, which is a standing committee of the Academic Senate.

The ASLO subcommittee is dedicated to improving student learning at the course,

program, and institution levels. The ASLO committee is charged with serving as a

resource for activities related to assessment of SLO, developing outcomes for general

education, and creating a comprehensive college-wide plan for the implementation of

SLO assessment.

> Faculty and staff at [MCC] are committed to thinking critically about how stu-
> dents learn and how each component of the college influences the learning
> process and subsequently, student success. Our outcomes assessment process
> stimulates discussion among faculty members and directs activities that can
> improve instructional delivery and support systems. (MCC Outcomes
> Assessment web page, 2015 [not listed in References to preserve anonymity of
> the college])

The primary purpose of attending these meetings was to learn about the

culture of the college in relation to SLO assessment and to determine the cur-

rent college-wide communication and processes. The results of those observa-

tions are not discussed in this document; however, they provided the researcher

background knowledge prior to the interviews.

Other methods of data collection were employed, such as analysis of documents.

This collection of documents assisted in triangulating the data. Fourteen

comprehensive documents were reviewed for this study. In addition to these documents, the college maintains an assessment web page that contains multiple articles about SLO assessment and more than 30 links that provide information, examples, and best practices. This web page was recently given an award and has been recognized as one of the best by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). The availability of the documents on the college assessment web page denotes the culture at MCC and the information is readily accessible. The comprehensive web page and supporting documents provide guidance, am FAQ, examples, and best practices for college faculty.

<div align="center">Chronology of SLO Assessment at MCC</div>

The first work toward implementing SLO at MCC coincided with adoption of new accreditation standards in 2002. The standards mandated that colleges assess SLO and MCC led the Academic Senate to form a faculty group to explore the assessment of SLO. After the faculty attended conferences, consulted with the statewide Academic Senate, and learned about SLO assessment from literature and colleagues, they recommended that the Senate create a committee to begin the process (this became known as the ASLO Committee). The Committee had campus-wide representation, resource staff, and administrators. The focus of the committee was to create training opportunities, a plan for assessing SLO, and a timeline (the accrediting commission gave colleges 10 years to implement a full assessment cycle).

Over the years, faculty members have served as chair of the committee and have been given 20% to 60% reassigned time for their responsibility. The role of the chair changed often and the focus of the committee continued to be dynamic as the

college determined how best to meet accreditation requirements with minimal guidance. Progress was slow at MCC and the administration stayed hands off so that the process could be faculty driven. In accreditation site visits in 2002 and 2008, ACCJC found insufficient evidence to support comprehensive use of SLO to inform instruction and for planning and resource allocation (ACCJC, 2014, Evaluation Report). Therefore, the ASLO Committee created General Education Outcomes for the college and began a process to assess them by mapping courses to each of them in 2008. In addition, departments were told to "create" assessments for each of their courses and a plan was put in place after the 2008 visit, when the college was put on "warning" status.

After 2008, the college focused on SLO through training and information sessions. In addition, the college created and funded SLO Officers (a faculty liaison for each department). Significant efforts began to track SLO assessment, entered into TracDat, a database and repository of SLO results by department. In addition, the planning process and hiring priorities began to use the successful assessment of SLO as criteria for hiring and resource allocation. The college was removed from warning status in 2012 and has recently had its accreditation reaffirmed after a mid-term visit in 2014. Even though the college has been "cleared" by ACCJC, it was recommended that there be more focus on assessment of SLO to improve instruction.

Factors and Conditions That Promote SLO Assessment in the Department

Theme 1: Department Characteristics and Culture Promote SLO Assessment

Research Question 2 asked, *What skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions do faculty feel are important in the SLO assessment process?* The first theme was that

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the faculty and department characteristics provide a positive culture and expectations regarding SLO assessment. The following elements emerged from the data: cohesive and collaborative, discipline and training and education, meeting often, a focus on students, and a positive attitude toward SLO assessment (buy-in because they are useful and valuable).

Departmental attributes and culture. "We have more than participated. I think that we have gone above and beyond" (Lauren). The department's culture creates an environment conducive to SLO assessment. Many factors contribute to the successful process. The characteristics and dispositions of the faculty in the department contributed to a positive attitude that permeated the department. Eight of eleven faculty members interviewed indicated that they worked in a very collaborative department, including comments such as, "We're very collaborative, we're much all on the same page," and "I can't speak for other departments but I think we are pretty unified." This sentiment was confirmed by the department head: "The department is very collaborative and have always worked well together. Want to get the work done. Very unified. There are no . . . or have not been any outliers." The department is very cohesive. One faculty member said, "We do everything together." A key factor is that they are very proud of the work that they have done and they enjoy knowing that they are on top of the task. A leader in the department commented on how the department operates regarding SLO: "In my department I feel great. I feel like we know what we're doing. We've got it all down."

Another significant factor is that the department did not reject the notion of SLO assessment and mentioned a variety of reasons for departmental buy-in for the

process. One faculty member commented, "I think the whole department equally has been a champion for SLO. We just all collectively agreed and it made sense." Another said, "We're very collaborative, we are very much all on the same page when it comes to SLO." Perhaps the most telling comment came from a faculty member who spoke about change: "I'm not saying that change isn't uncomfortable for certain people, but I think it's embraced [in our department] within the context of student learning outcomes."

This viewpoint was confirmed as 10 of the 11 interviewees mentioned that their department's attitude about the SLO work is very positive. One new faculty member's comments exemplified the departmental culture:

> I think I'm jaded because of my department. I think that . . . it's a part of the culture, so it's always been a conversation . . . for me since Day 1 . . . . When you interview for a full-time position, there's supplemental questions and they're asking about SLOs; there are interview questions and they're asking about SLOs, so you have to know what you're talking about when you're talking about SLOs. They are just part of the department.

A senior member of the department who has been part of SLO assessment since the inception indicated,

> We've always been open to SLOs and assessment . . . we know that they are kind of a work in progress. It's not a means to an end. It is a means to better instruction and having clear articulation of our courses and our outlines and using that information to help our adjunct faculty know what they need to do . . . and give them some feedback, too. I think it's very valuable for everyone. So it's really being used in a more global sense, not in a narrow way . . . "Now we're done for the semester." That's really not the way the department operates. We go for it and we do it right.

This was confirmed by a faculty member who said,

> It really comes down to how you're thinking about SLOs at the beginning. What you decide is your perception of them. Your attitude, whether you embrace them or not. It also helps to have a collaborative department. We didn't resist, we just got to work.

Clearly, the department has embraced SLO assessment for a variety of reasons. It is the culture of the department and their willingness to create a successful process has contributed to a positive and supportive environment. Nine of the 11 faculty members mentioned that the department did not resist the effort. One faculty member said,

> So I think we're aware of that and, instead of dragging our feet around, we think of it in a more positive way. At least that's my impression as a new-comer. It's not, "Ugh, we have to do something." We've heard other people say it is in the contract or all this kind of grumbling. Is it good for your students? Then do it. That's how we kind of think.

Another interviewee indicated that it was their positive attitude toward students and continuous improvement:

> We really care about our students. I think all of us know that this is really good . . . and care about the institution and so I think we know that this is a good thing for them, that this will respond perhaps to some of their [students'] needs and that it would be really nice to know that we're doing. The moment that you are complacent you're dead in the water.

Discipline, education, and training. "We've been schooled to be teachers" (Christine). One of the components that was commonly cited by the interviewees was the discipline in which they teach. All of the faculty members have master's degree (none with a doctoral degree) in a discipline that focuses on continuous evaluation. Their graduate training included teaching techniques and how to be effective instructors. One faculty member said, "As part of our master's program, we're all taught how to teach." In contrast, many disciplines in the community college contain content experts (with master's or doctoral degrees) but they do not have any formal education in teaching in the classroom. One person said, "I'm thinking the discipline

really does lend itself to our supporting SLO assessment." Another summed it well

when she said,

> I feel fortunate to have been a member of the Reading Department because the majority of us have educational backgrounds in education, and so curriculum development, creating lesson plans, all those things make student learning outcomes very familiar. It didn't seem like something unusual for most of us.

Another interviewee said,

> [In] graduate work in reading instruction, there are really a couple of ways that traditionally it's kind of taught or imparted, a whole to parts and a parts to whole. My initial background in graduate school was parts to whole, so kind of discrete skills leading to a holistic. I've come around to where I'm looking at it as a global process, that these things that work together globally. So SLO assessment is like that: assess at the course level the various parts and it can help you improve the whole.

Also, the discipline in which they teach is based on continuous evaluation and

improvement and includes a cycle that the students go through to improve. Each

interviewee acknowledged that this has had an impact in their reception and support

for SLO assessment. The process is not a foreign concept. In fact, using results to

improve is what is expected of their students and it is a key for effective faculty in this

discipline. This is best exemplified by the following quote:

> The majority of my colleagues and I have backgrounds in education. Whether we taught in the K-12 system or not, in order to teach reading, the grad schools for reading instruction all come out of the school of education. And so that's kind of built in. My master's, for example, is in curriculum and instruction, so it's the idea of developing curriculum. It's always looking at your objectives and your outcomes. Having that background and that foundation has been very beneficial.

Another interviewee said, "I've taken a lot of 'how to teach' classes versus

content experts that know tons in their field." One faculty member was supportive of

SLO assessment but wanted to change the process. She was concerned that the

students do not take the SLO assessment effort seriously because it is not a graded

activity:

> I think what's important to students, and this is what I read from research that I've done in graduate school and since. Students respond to learning that's apparent and obvious, and I think this is a type of learning to them that's not evident. It is not clear. So maybe something that we can do to improve the process is to make the learning apparent. Obviously, it's more work, it's more time or energy; but even doing a base assessment at the beginning of the semester and having them do the same assessment at the end [to] show them the growth—I think that would have a larger impact.

> Department meetings. "We meet regularly, I think that is key" (Stacey).

Department meetings are a priority. The Reading Department meets often and SLO

are discussed at each meeting. One of the significant characteristics of this department

is that it meets weekly. Every 2 weeks, the faculty has a meeting where they conduct

their business and SLO assessment is a standing item. On those weeks when the

department does not meet as a whole, the work groups meet to work on department

business and assignments. All 11 faculty members confirmed that they met often and

that each meeting had a focus on SLO. "We meet often; last semester we met every

other Tuesday to discuss it and see how it was going. What were the results from the

previous semesters, and were there things we needed to modify?" Another faculty

member supported this:

> The meetings were specifically SLO. We would talk about closing the loop and going over the results, collecting the data, working on making the objectives more clear, working on the questions. They were specifically SLO. Sometimes a little department business would seep in, but only because things happen. They were . . . for the last two academic years definitely targeted."

> A new faculty member who had been with the department for just 1 year had

been talking with other new faculty;

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I picked up that not a lot of departments meet regularly and that they don't have to. I'm not saying to put it in the contract to force people to meet, but give them topics to meet about. I don't know, maybe deans give them topics to meet about and say, "Get back to me." I always think back to my K-12 days. When the principal gave us a job to do, we met to get the job done.

The college SLO Coordinator resides in the department. "She had expertise. She knew things that we didn't know" (Sandi). Another significant thing that helped the department to focus on SLO is that they had an abundance of information and encouragement from the college-level SLO Coordinator, who has resided in the department for the past 2 years. One person mentioned, "Lola is the best and she has been terrific in that position. She really gets the whole thing. I think that's really good." Another faculty member said that her influence has been strong because she understands it and has answered all of the questions and kept them on track. "She has been a wealth of knowledge that may be lacking in other departments." Another faculty member confirmed this:

> Because she [Lola] was in our department, and she understood it, she had a good grasp of it, I think she was able to get us all on board. We then understood. We call it in our department "prior knowledge." If you lack prior knowledge on any topic, you can't deal with it efficiently. So once we could see what the purpose was and why we were doing it, there was very little resistance. I don't think there was ever resistance in our department for it. It was just everybody had this disjointed view of it. I think once that cloudiness went away, we were able to focus more on it.

Information and direction did not seem to be far away and the department used the Coordinator as a resource:

> Because the SLO officer has been in our department, that was pretty easy, I could always ask Lola. I still can, and she's amazing, and there's still going to be someone in our department in that position as a facilitator when she steps down. Someone with real expertise has always been close by.

Student-centered department teaching and learning improvement. "It benefits the students because it makes us better teachers, better-informed teachers" (Lydia). All of the participants in this study indicated that they were motivated by student success. Eleven of eleven participants indicated that they try to improve their instruction every single day. This attitude and personal goal for continuous improvement inspired them to conduct SLO assessment and to "close the loop" by making modifications in their classrooms. One participant commented "We're motivated to do this because we want the best for our students, we want to always improve on ourselves, right? We want to make sure we assess what we teach and that we're doing that well."

Each department member mentioned how faculty members and the department focus on student success. The whole concept of reading well at the college level has shaped an attitude of the department. This disposition to support students who are struggling and to work with them to improve is analogous to faculty trying to improve in their classrooms. The faculty had a passion to improve both their performance and the performance of their students. One participant asserted that students should take control of their learning:

> I always start my classes with, "What do you hope to gain from this class?" Then we revisit it in the middle and at then at the end of the semester. So they start to learn how to monitor their own learning, their progress, and they start to be a little more mindful about the whole learning process. They learn that learning isn't autopilot. You don't sit in a class and do this. You sit in a class and you do this and you're interacting with everything in order to learn.

Another interviewee indicated that she could do improve every day. She commented that SLO were important because they affect the experience of the students.

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For the students, it is having a faculty member that's energetic, not compla-cent, interesting, and getting an interesting classroom experience. I'm getting something that is beneficial to me that I can . . . I'm getting the education that I need. I'm taking responsibility for my education, but I'm also getting it in an interesting way, something that I need. I'm walking away from here with something with value added and being able to move on. Being able to do it once, not having to repeat. I'm getting what I paid for.

Another faculty member spoke about her motivation to participate in the

assessment process:

It gives you energy as a teacher because it keeps you on track. . . . It's a lot of clerical humdrum, icky stuff. . . . And the moving target [the college's plan] was like nailing Jello to a tree. However, if you're not on the edge of your frontier as a teacher, if you are not vulnerable and feeling like you can get better or that you bombed a lesson . . . if you don't feel like you're out there at least a couple of times a week, then you're not doing your job, in my estima-tion.

The inherent belief was that students are the priority and that their success was

a main motivator for these faculty. It was clear that their participation was to improve

their own instruction to benefit the students. They did not sit back and believe that

they had it "all figured out." The attitude was that SLO provided an opportunity to

improve and would help them to do become better teachers.

SLO are valuable for faculty and students. "It's very exciting to talk with your

colleagues about teaching" (Sarah). It is critical that faculty learn that SLO are valua-

ble. This is best communicated using an approach that MCC began to utilize in the

past few years. The idea is that SLO assessment is not born of a need to comply with

accreditation standards but that it is critical element of teaching and learning. In the

ASLO meeting there was a push in fall 2014 to begin a campaign that shifted the

mindset on campus from one regarding SLO assessment as a task related to accredita-

tion and compliance to one focused on improving student learning. The SLO

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Coordinator indicated that the "campus should begin to move from a perception of compliance and into intentionality. Departments should intend to conduct the assessments to improve teaching and learning."

Every faculty member who was interviewed indicated that SLO were valuable. This was the most common reference in the interviews. They discussed how they used them and the discussions created excitement. They were excited about the process and the outcomes and mentioned ways in which the process was beneficial for students. The positive comments referred to using data to look at tangible results and to have factual information to share and learn about best practices:

> It's been an interesting journey, and I think it's one that we enjoy. We now have some data to look at, not just the outcomes, but the instrument itself. It has generated a lot of discussion. It's actually kind of exciting.

The process is clearly dynamic in the department and the process has been successful in the eyes of the participants. Another member in the department indicated, "I think it's a great process. I don't have any criticisms of our process. I think it works for us, and I think we are gaining the information, maybe even other information that we didn't expect to."

One of the most useful things mentioned by every department member was that SLO spurred discussion about teaching and learning. It allowed the faculty to talk to one another about teaching. This was supported by Sarah:

> We put the data upon the board and we sit and let it percolate up there for a little while and then we just start looking at it question by question. We try to make sense of it and then we start just sifting through it and make suppositions and just start talking about it, and pretty much that's it.

One faculty member was ecstatic that she was able to learn from her colleagues. "It is so cool. We talk about what are our best practices, how can we help

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them [the students] achieve the outcome and it informs our instruction because then

we know what to focus on more."

Having data to look at and discuss was exciting for each interviewee.

I just like the data a lot. . . trends that we are finding with students, and so forth. I definitely like that. We have to have a starting point and real data or else we are just assuming everything is or is not happening. It is now data driven.

Another commented that

it's being an informed educator, and really looking at your pedagogy, and looking at what your result is with your students and individually and as a department. We're just basing everything on assumptions. If we don't really look at an instrument, then we're not getting feedback from our students.

Another interviewee expressed her excitement about the evaluation;

I think it is invaluable. I think any good instructor looks at what do you want your students to know by the end of the semester and how are you going to see if they learned it. For me, I think it is great.

Another positive aspect that was mentioned was the ability to offer more con-

sistent instruction across various faculty members who teach the same course, partic-

ularly among full timers and part timers. The use of SLO allowed the full-time faculty

to demonstrate learning objectives and priorities for the part timers. Often, the part

timers are not given much training and they may not be teaching the same components

and may not know what the department considers to be a priority. An interviewee

said,

It's a means to better instruction and having clear articulation of our courses and our outlines and using that information to help our adjunct faculty know what they need to do you know and giving them some feedback, too. I think it's very valuable for everyone.

Another faculty member said,

I think that Student Learning Outcomes and the assessment process has been helpful. It has been helpful in terms of identifying sticking points with

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students, so they have helped the student experience. They have helped us as a department to reexamine our course outlines and in noticing gaps and being able to deal with them. The best part is they have acted as a catalyst for discussion and conversation about how we're teaching in the classroom.

One instructor offered her opinion of how SLO assessment affects the "big picture." "It helps me become a better instructor, and all around I think students become better students, and I will even take it further . . . better citizens, better community members." Another interviewee indicated that the college benefits. "I think it's important for the college because it lets everybody see if each department is meeting those outcomes and if we are teaching them and students are getting what they need in each department and in each class."

Conceptual framework for characteristics and culture. The following results align with the congruence model and demonstrate that the culture and environment in this department are conducive to change. It is a positive environment and the faculty members work well together. In relation to Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames, the human resources frame is evident in that the department has hired faculty who are a good fit for SLO assessment. As Bolman and Deal posited, "A good fit benefits both [the employees and the organization]. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and the organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed (2008, p. 122).

Theme 2: Effective Implementation and Utilization of SLO

Research Question 1 asked, *What do members of a single department perceive to be critical to effectively implement and utilize SLO?* The second theme was the effective implementation and utilization of SLO. Five critical components emerged regarding the process: communication, a clear plan, faculty buy-in, knowledge and

expertise to create SLO, and analysis (including professional development, training, and shared best practices), and the belief that SLO can improve teaching and learning.

Communication. "I think the most important thing is there has to be clear communication" (Joleen). In its most recent accreditation visit, MCC received a recommendation from the visiting team that indicated that there should be improvement in the way the entire college communicates (ACCJC letter to the college with regard to current accreditation status: granted full accreditation). In this study, it was clear that this department communicated effectively regarding SLO. There are three main reasons why communication was cited by 10 of the 11 interviewees as the key to the implementation of SLO assessment and "closing the loop."

First, the department, with full participation, meets twice a month and sometimes more often to discuss issues, college business, tasks, and SLO assessment. This allows for of communication and everyone sees the value of these meetings, so they make them a priority. This was confirmed by all of the interviewees. One commented that it worked well:

> In the past year the way it was structured was we would meet every Tuesday. One Tuesday would be department business and the next Tuesday would be SLO. We spent more of our department time making sure we were focused on SLO assessment.

Another faculty member conveyed how interdepartmental communication could be beneficial. "I think our department is in good shape. I think we do a good job. I wish that we could duplicate it across campus. I wish somehow we could communicate that with the departments that want or need help." The sentiment in the department was conveyed by the Department Head: "I think that when people are informed and they understand, then there is going to be less resistance to it."

Second, the college-level SLO Coordinator is a reading faculty member, so she has offered her expertise and helped to move the department in the right direction and keep them on task. However, the faculty indicated that the most significant thing that the Coordinator brought to the table was her ability to communicate the reasons that SLO are important. She convinced the department that they would benefit both students and faculty. One faculty member commented, "I would say it is clear, very clear because of Lola." Another said, "We fortunately have Lola and she has just been just a wonderful resource." This was the sentiment across the department and it was a large part of how initial communication took place, with a knowledgeable and trusted person communicating with the faculty.

Another reason the department is so well informed is that they all participate on college-level committees. One participant stated, "So many of us in our department are involved in institutional committees. So we constantly bring back all of this information." The department is connected to the campus and participates on a variety of institutional committees where they become informed about what is happening across campus. The key is that they share the information with one another often and have a forum to do so in their frequent meetings.

A clear plan. "Yes, the process is clear. Very clear" (Julia). According to the data and related to the communication that occurred, a clear plan existed in the department. They knew how and why to execute the assessment of learning outcomes. This effort continued to be supported by the Department Head and the process and procedures were designed by the faculty. The fact that the department developed the plan with full faculty participation created an excellent understanding of how to

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implement assessment of SLO and the frequent meetings and discussion provided an

avenue to discuss results and share best practices. The process to get to a clear plan

was exemplified by one faculty member:

> I think we understand it now. But at the beginning, oh boy! We all get it now. I've been really working hard to educate my department. So we have every-thing we have completed, not only all of our SLOs are on our syllabi, they go to all of our classes, including our adjunct. When we do an assessment for a course, it's everyone who teaches that course as long as we can get them scheduled into the [computer] lab.

> Another faculty member supported how far the department had come in

implementing the plan:

> We figured out the key items. We figured out the bumps in the road. We started teaching. We assessed. We've started to close the loop to adjust our teaching. Now we're starting to look at what is our teaching? What are our materials? Do we have the right texts? I think we're just beginning to get there.

> It is clear by the above statement that it takes time and that there were chal-

lenges along the way. Some of the challenges encountered by the department included

a lack of communication and a clear plan in the beginning and for about 6 years after

the effort began in 2002. Then some key faculty members took charge and helped the

department to develop a plan. Then, when a member of the department was selected

as the college-level SLO Coordinator, things became clear and momentum was

gained. An interviewee who had been connected to other departments communicated

that it is difficult when there is not a plan:

> If there is resistance in other departments, it's going to be because they don't understand the process, had a negative experience, didn't know why it was important, like a student with difficulty in reading or who had a negative expe-rience. I don't want to do it. I mean, even educated people can say, "I do not want to do Student Learning Outcomes" because 10 years ago it was a rotten process.

A clear plan existed in 2008 but things have blossomed since 2012 and the faculty is using results to inform instruction and realizing the value of SLO assessment. All of the interviewees agreed that it is working well. One faculty member clearly articulated the success of the plan:

> The model that is set up works. I would say that it works at a high level. I think that the fact that you get so many faculty members to do it . . . really 30 plus people full and part time are getting it done. I think that says something about it working.

Faculty buy-in. "Everybody is committed to the process" (Rachel). In order for SLO to be effective, the MCC community decided that it had to be faculty driven. In order for it to be faculty driven, there had to be buy-in regarding the initiative or effort. Throughout the process, the Academic Senate was driving the process; however, there was resistance from the faculty union. Union issues campus wide created some dissension. It was difficult to get faculty buy-in in some departments, which stifled efforts. However, there was clear buy-in by the faculty in the Reading Department. Nine of eleven faculty members mentioned that there was buy-in in the department. One remarked, "I think the whole department equally has been a champion for SLO. We just all collectively agreed that it made sense. Another person indicated, "I'm not saying that change isn't uncomfortable for certain people, but I think it's embraced within the context of student learning outcomes." This type of thinking permeated the department because they had a good grasp of the concept of SLO assessment and they had a clear plan. Because they had knowledge and communication, they agreed that the effort was valuable and they resisted the negative influences on campus. They decided that they wanted to own the process. This was articulated by the following comment:

So we never, the Reading Department never resisted. Really, it's like we saw the writing on the wall and it was explained to us, you know, if we do resist, then somebody will impose these things upon us. We said, "Let's do it ourselves, let's do it ourselves."

 A faculty member explained buy-in by commenting that a positive attitude helped the department to embrace the process:

It really comes down to how you're thinking about SLOs at the beginning. What you decide is your perception of them, your attitude and whether you embrace them or not. It also helps to have a collaborative department. We didn't resist, we just got to work.

Even though some other departments were resisting the effort at MCC, the Reading Department forged forward and implemented the plan, created the SLO, assessed the courses, and gathered the data. Many interviewees indicated that the department supported SLO because of their students. One member of the department conveyed why they had bought in:

I think that you have to start with your attitude, not negative like, "I'm not going to do this because I don't like the administration and I'll show them!" You are a teacher for a reason. The reason should be your students.

They also took pride in doing quality work when it was assigned. One faculty member commented, "We are mostly Baby Boomers, so you give us a task and we'll get it done." The culture of the department is to do things well. It is to take pride in their work. It is to examine what is expected of them and to do their best. One of the newest members of the department demonstrated the culture of SLO and the department when she observed, "I think as a department, everybody's pretty committed to SLOs, and I don't know where that came from; I don't know the origin of that." It is part of the fabric of the department. It exists in everything that they do, from planning and hiring to the weekly department meetings. For this department, the SLO effort

has created an effective and useful process that informs instruction and provides an avenue for faculty to share best practices.

Professional development, expertise and sharing best practices. "And so the goal was to give people background, give them training" (Lola). The largest criticism of MCC by the faculty is that they did not know what was going on with SLO for the first 5 or 6 years. The plan was not clear. Moreover, it kept changing as the leadership tried to figure out the direction they wanted to take. The faculty were told that they could assess "anyway they wanted." This was an attempt to keep the process faculty driven. However, lack of direction and adequate training paralyzed the effort. One faculty member commented, "I never felt really comfortable moving into it because I don't have a strong background in statistics." A lack of training in the beginning was mentioned several times and was exemplified by this comment:

> I think professional development, conferences, in data analysis or in the software even, just how to use the machine, would have been nice. That kind of stuff, you know . . . those little things. This is our magical machine; this is how you use it. Honestly, that [would have been] fantastic.

Another criticism was that the college did not invest in training and activities to support the assessment. One faculty member confirmed this:

> The institution has to put that financial commitment to provide inservices for people. We are kind of stingy in that way. I understand the monetary thing, but we are stingy. My grandmother used to say that it was penny wise and pound foolish. That's what we are as an institution.

Another faculty member supported this: "If you don't have training and information, then you're going to have more resistance . . . because they don't understand it."

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The need for professional development and training was cited by all of the faculty members. Each interviewee mentioned how important it was to have someone who communicated and explained the importance of SLO. In addition, they had a faculty coordinator who had expertise and who knew how to guide the effort and explain to the group how to assess and, more important, how to use the assessment results. One colleague said, "She [the SLO Coordinator] taught us what to look for and to talk about the data and use it." The plan was clear. Ten of 11 interviewees mentioned that they had a good grasp of the plan because they had an internal contact and an SLO figurehead in the department. The within-department training and information were excellent, according to all sources who were interviewed. This had a major impact on the success of the effort. The faculty felt informed. One interviewee commented, "She has put in a tremendous effort in getting people on board and helping them figure out how you do this [use the results], so I think her support has been monumental." Another mentioned, "Someone with real expertise has always been close by. We knew what to do and why." They knew why the assessments were being conducted and they knew how to use them. The key thing for them was that they believed that the effort would improve their instruction and their students' success. The faculty members considered this professional development to be the most important component to the process. Once they were well informed and trained, they "got to work." The professional development and attention that they received from an expert, the SLO Coordinator, whom they respected, was the single most important factor for them. One noted, "I got direct professional development through my department from her, but I've also gone to workshops and flex day presentations."

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This professional development was not limited to full-time faculty. A practice that may have had a very positive impact and showed the department's commitment to SLO was mentioned by every faculty member interviewed. "We had a Saturday workshop for *all* faculty twice each semester." This training was designed for both full-time and part-time faculty. However, each full timer who was interviewed (and some who were former part timers) agreed that this training was beneficial and that including part-time faculty was critical. It not only helped to communicate the plan but it brought cohesion to the department while demonstrating the importance of SLO assessment. One faculty member observed, "It not only fostered collegiality between part-time people, but it answered questions." One of the newer faculty members who was previously a part timer offered:

> In my department we were trained. We were invited to come to trainings to get flex credit for learning different policies and procedures, and it's always been a priority of the department to make sure part timers were included in learning about the SLO process.

Expertise. "I think once that cloudiness went away, we were able to focus more on it" (Julia). Having access to expertise regarding assessment and the process as a critical factor that contributed to the department's ability to effectively implement the process effectively. The department had a faculty leader and utilized institutional research staff when they needed consultation and advice. One interviewee indicated, "Someone with real expertise is critical." Many faculty members mentioned the need to have experts to assist them. It was clear that the faculty agreed that the campus leaders and administrators should be well versed in the assessment and should be able to provide solid information and a clear plan for faculty. This should always be part of the initial training for faculty. *How* to do the assessment is as important as *why*. One

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faculty member added, "I think it's important for individuals in leadership roles at the college to have a solid grasp of what student learning outcomes are and how they can be used in meaningful ways."

Several interviewees mentioned that it was important for administrators to be knowledgeable about SLO assessment and be connected to the process. "I would say learning more about what is really happening in the trenches, you know, educating themselves as to what is really going on with the process, how the gears are moving." Many still believed that it should be faculty driven but some of the faculty mentioned that the effort might be more effective if administrators were more hands-on and helped to implement the process. One faculty member commented, "I think meeting with the dean as a department is helpful to keep us on track and learn about the process." Many faculty agreed that the administration should fully support the effort with resources and staff but also should provide knowledge and expertise in assess-ment. Another person supported this notion: "The Dean of Institutional Effectiveness is helpful because she has a grasp of what SLOs entail and how we can use them meaningfully."

One participant mentioned that

it's important for individuals in leadership roles at the college to have a solid grasp of what student learning outcomes are and how they can be used in meaningful ways. I think that's very important because I believe in having conversations, but I don't think you can have meaningful conversations if everyone doesn't start from a similar place, if there's that disconnect between everyone calling it student learning outcome, but people's understanding or perception or what they envision is completely different, then it's very chal-lenging.

Eight of 11 faculty members mentioned the importance of having a faculty SLO Coordinator who is well respected. Many of the interviewees noted that they had

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someone who knew about the process and how to do the assessment well. The

department members indicated that the process worked well because they had some-

one with expertise in their department who was respected, not only in the department

but across campus. "She was infectious," one faculty member said and indicated that

> the training that I was at last spring in 2014 was outstanding. She was great
> . . . passion is the word . . . and you see her enthusiasm for SLOs and how the
> data speaks to us and what we can take from the data, and she's really good at
> making that connection and making it really clear.

The interviewees agreed strongly that the person who coordinates the effort

should be a true advocate and expert. One faculty member indicated that the initial

message is very important. "I think that if departments could look at it as not a criti-

cism of their teaching but maybe a clearer way for them to manage their teaching, that

is key, the initial message."

The faculty members perceived the administrators' role as different but agreed

that it was important for them to know about SLO and the process:

> I would say learning more about what is really happening in the trenches, you
> know, educating themselves as to what is really going on with the process, how
> the gears are moving. . . . The other thing would be allotting some resources,
> asking what resources would possibly help to grease the wheels.

One faculty member summed up the administrators' role by commenting that it

helps if they are well versed in the college SLO process and can explain it and become

facilitators and provide necessary resources:

> I think it's really important for campus leaders to understand what they are in
> the context of using them for instructional purposes and for courses for the
> student experience. Not because accreditation is breathing down our neck, not
> because the ACCJC has said, "You're going to do this or else." I think campus
> leaders need to know what they are and what they look like, the process from
> the beginning and closing the loop, having a solid grasp of it. Once people
> know what they're talking about, then you can have an informed discussion.
> . . . Their role is communicating with faculty members, entire departments,

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support staff. "How is it going? What are you doing? What are you noticing? What do you need? How can I help?"

Some of the faculty in this department perceived the administrators as facilitators, and one mentioned that an open conversation created a level of trust that was necessary for implementation and buy-in:

> The practice that [the Dean] comes to our meetings, that [the Dean] had come to some meetings, was excellent. . . . It makes you feel like you are being heard. If you have a problem you can bounce ideas off [her/him], and if deans were to ask us every semester, "Hey, I'm looking into this or what do you think about that?" it would be good, not a "gotcha" thing but like a helpful thing.

Best practices. "It's always valuable to see what somebody else is doing" (Sarah). All of the interviewees concluded that assessment was useful and valuable. More than half indicated that their favorite part was the way in which the department shared best practices as a result of examining the data. They identified areas where the students struggled based on the course SLO and they discussed how they could change instruction to improve student success. This was the most exciting part of the process for many of the instructors. The process of "closing the loop" included sharing best practices to address deficiencies.

In the beginning, the department struggled to find ways to address the deficiencies that they found in the data. Their discussions were fruitless because they were unable to determine how to make changes. Then, as one faculty member observed, "A light when on, and we decided to share our lecture rather than talk about it." Another interviewee mentioned this process and said,

> So we thought, "Let's do some in-house tutoring. Let's teach each other what we do for this deficient topic," which was really kind of clumsy. It seemed contrived. I think the idea was noble but I don't know that anybody really

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changed any sort of teaching. Then, we decided to do the lecture in front of each other.

Once they learned from one another, they tried various techniques and lessons in the classroom. Most reported this to be very useful activity. One faculty member stated,

> So we started by having people who I think are good with inference teach their best lesson to everyone. And just like we're good teachers, one of the things you do is you steal ideas from other people. So when we taught our best lesson, people could see other ways to teach it and other ways to do it.

Another added, "It was really fun. But we loved watching each other teach and seeing what the other one does and admiring each other."

What emerged was a process that helped the faculty to learn something new. They shared techniques and talked about teaching and shared how they "did it." They were excited to try new techniques learned from colleagues. One interviewee explained, "I showed them my way, Sandi showed her way, Lola showed her way, and a bunch of us instructors modeled our best practices for each other for an area that the SLO identified as a weakness."

The process of sharing best practices and lectures requires some degree of vulnerability. It is very valuable but it requires a very cohesive department of faculty members with mutual trust. The culture of this department is very supportive and they want to improve. One participant indicated,

> It really took a while before we got to talk about instruction [after data collection and analysis]. You feel like you need to be a little careful because you don't want to go ordering people around. People teach the way they teach and we're all eager to share with each other and to know what the other person does. But when you do share something, you hope that people think it's worthwhile. . . . You kind of worry that you're holding up your end and if you are doing it as well as that person. So it's a little bit tough, you know, you're kind of putting your whole self out there.

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However, the trust was there. The faculty members let down their guard and realized that there is always room for improvement and that they had common struggles.

> [The process] makes me look at it again and go, "Oh, I wasn't clear enough or this was not deep enough," and I actually evaluate myself . . . but then it makes me feel normal when I hear them [colleagues] say "I'm stuck, too."

This experience created energy in the department that translated to the classroom. This opened dialogue and the SLO process began to work for the department. One faculty member noted, "As a department, we started to share what we're doing. We had presentations, lessons where a faculty member would present lessons on how they teach inferences. So it's really opened up a dialog about that." Another added, "Talking about good practices created energy to take back to your classroom. You want to come to work and you're excited about coming to work."

Improvement of teaching and learning. "Not because it's mandated, but because it's actually good for instruction and good for students" (Julia). One of the significant factors for buy-in is that the assessment of SLO is useful. This department indicated that their interest in SLO was not about "checking a box" for accreditation or keeping the administration "off our backs"; the value is that it improves teaching and learning. Ten of the 11 participants agreed that the main reason the department does it well is that they have established a culture that promotes improvement to increase student success and understanding. One faculty member indicated,

> Teaching reading is invigorating. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing a student say, "I got it." I just think student learning outcomes fuels that because it allows us to focus on what we are all doing in a more organized way.

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The theme of instructional improvement and continuous improvement emerged in several comments. One faculty member expressed the following philosophy: "Reflection is the most important thing as a teacher. You have to reflect on your practices. . . . Otherwise, you're just going through the motions." This idea was supported by another faculty member, who said, "I think that student learning outcomes can be a powerful tool to help you better reflect on what you're doing as an individual instructor and what your department is doing in terms of your program." Another interviewee supported SLO assessment "because our goal is to make sure our students have what they need to be successful in their careers or in their college studies." It was clear that the faculty embraced the assessments because they improved teaching. "I think our students benefit from it, as I said, my teaching benefits. And when my teaching benefits, I'm giving it back to the students."

SLO were considered to be excellent way to maintain instructional consistency across courses in a large department. The Reading Department has 13 full-time and more than 30 part-time faculty. It is a priority that the courses be similar in content so a student can take a course and move to the next level. SLOs provide a tool to maintain course alignment and have students progress to the next level with the necessary skills and abilities. This was mentioned by several interviewees. One said, "The good part about that is it makes for a consistent teaching across all levels, and evaluation. It makes evaluations of part timers easier, as well. To make sure they're doing the right thing." This evaluation is a major concern across all departments because many of the sections are taught by part-time faculty. More important, however, is that reading skills are learned and students must have the requisite skills to succeed in the next

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course. One participant confirmed this: "It's about teaching objectives. Where we expect our students to be in the very end. The good part about that is it makes for a consistent teaching across all levels. Everybody's not doing their own thing."

The assessment cycle of "closing the loop" to improve instruction was exemplified by the following comment: "You teach to it. You test, you find out if the students are getting it, you adjust, make adjustments and I think that's what teaching is. Monitor and adjust, monitor and adjust." Another mentioned closing the loop by indicating, "At the very least you get a little shakeup about either you're doing something well or you're not [and the assessment cycle is] how do you approach that."

Overall, the faculty embraced the concept because they believed that it helped them to become better teachers. It was clear that they thought that students benefitted from the process because performance in the classroom was not static; rather, it continued to be dynamic with each assessment cycle.

Theme 3: Resources, Policies, and Practices to Support SLO Assessment

Research Question 3 asked, *What resources do faculty members perceive to be necessary so that departments can engage and commit to the SLO assessment cycle?* Research Question 4 asked, *What policies and practices do faculty members sense are necessary to support SLO assessment?* These research questions correlate with the congruence model as results indicated that the college must provide appropriate resources to support a structure on campus that provides training for faculty and professionals to assist with the evaluation process and analysis. For the research question regarding effective implementation of SLO, Bolman and Deal's structural frame resonates from the data. In order for the process to be effective, the college must provide a

structural framework that provides communication, training, time for meetings and priority for assessments by investing in the process.

The third theme addresses Research Questions 3 and 4 and is concerned with resources, policies, and practices that support assessment of SLO. Five critical components emerged regarding resources: time, compensation, staff support, leadership, and professional development (knowledge and training, providing models, and sharing best practices). Four categories emerged regarding policies and procedures for SLO assessment: (a) assessment should be faculty driven, (b) technology should be used to simplify the process, (c) faculty workload should be examined, and (d) assessment should not be related to faculty evaluation.

The interviewees made recommendations about the resources necessary for SLO assessment. By contrast, they did not offer much regarding policies that would promote or encourage SLO assessment. They reported that they were not very connected to policy and they did not offer suggestions for policy. Some indicated that they just paid attention to what was happening in their department. They offered no suggestions about a specific policy and were not aware that the college had one that related to SLO assessment (Policy 4005 is presented in Appendix H). This is consistent with the results of the interviews and, when the researcher applied the theoretical framework, the two main areas from Bolman and Deal's four frames were connected to human resources (staff and time to do the work) and structural (technology, process, communication). While they did not have specific policy recommendations, three things emerged that would be important when setting a policy:

communication, a faculty-driven process, and a separation of SLO assessment and evaluation.

In addition, every interviewee offered suggestions about resources for SLO assessment: compensation for faculty, staff to assist (both professional and clerical), and faculty workload (time to conduct the assessments).

Faculty driven. "Part of that value is that you get to own it, and you get to drive it" (Sandi). It was apparent that the faculty wanted to own the assessment and have it be a faculty-driven process. Eight of the eleven faculty members suggested that the entire process should be faculty driven. When policies were discussed, a faculty-driven process was supported. However, the faculty did not mention that it should be a policy at MCC (perhaps because it was already a faculty-driven process). One of the key motivators for the department was the ability to create their own assessments based on their expertise rather than having them dictated by the state and or the college administration. Every faculty member agreed that the process is best left in the hands of the faculty and that they owned the appropriate expertise to create the assessments.

> The nice part about the SLOs at MCC is that the teachers were able to provide input. I think that's really important. Even though it came from the state, the fact that we were able to design it for our specific levels and our specific department is really important.

A positive attitude permeated the department because the initial message was that SLO assessment was an opportunity to control the effort and have autonomy to create their own assessment. One faculty member offered, "It is not something that's being done to us. We have agreed that this accountability makes our department strong. We are very committed to it." Another said, "It's something we are choosing

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to do for the right reasons." This faculty-driven process and philosophy helped to create acceptance in the department.

In contrast, three members indicated that the process might be more effective if the administration was more hands-on with training and follow-up and provided continuous direction and timelines to keep faculty on track. "We got some [support and direction] from administration but primarily they have been extraordinarily hands off. It has been a faculty-driven process and that's actually been one of our problems." One faculty member remarked, "We really thought we needed to take care of business and this was our chance to own it."

Time. A critical issue regarding an effective process was the time required to conduct and discuss assessments. Every interviewee indicated that having adequate time was a major problem. All were concerned about extra things that "crept onto their plate" and had an impact on the time that they could dedicate to classroom instruction. Even though they considered SLO assessment to be important, met about SLO often, and had streamlined the process using technology, it was very difficult to manage with all of their other responsibilities.

> I feel like we as faculty are always given tasks to do and there's not enough time. If you want to do something well, like the SLOs, it takes time and effort. A lot of times, administrators forget that we still have to teach, correct papers, and meet with students.

Another faculty member indicated, "I think most teachers prefer to just concentrate on their teaching, their classroom experience, unless they're moving up." Another was adamant about the problem of inadequate time for successful assessment:

> Time [is a problem]. This is what causes resistance to the idea. It is time. I wish we had more time to do it. Two hours a week is insufficient. However,

the pressure for doing it well is great. I think time is the biggest thing for us because we could talk teaching all day long.

The department is willing to continue the effort and continue to do it well but there is a feeling that it is just too much. Something will have to give and the sentiment in the department can be summed up as, "It really is a lot, and I think it is ambitious. We need to look at how our workload is organized."

Resources: Compensation. "If it is an institutional priority, then invest in it" (Rachel). Compensation for faculty is an issue that should be addressed, according to the interviewees. For effective assessment of SLO, there must be enough time to design and conduct assessments and analyze and discuss the data. Many interviewees saw this as additional workload that warranted additional compensation or a review of the current workload as required by the existing union contract. Ten of 11 mentioned that resources for SLO assessment are critical and eight stated there should be funds dedicated to faculty compensation. There is a perception that the college does not invest in SLO assessment. One faculty member commented,

> We are kind of stingy in that way. I understand the monetary thing. The college doesn't have a lot of money. But we are stingy. My grandmother used to say it was penny wise and pound foolish. That's what we are as an institution. Make it a priority.

Another interviewee indicated that an investment in fair compensation for the work shows that the college values the process and effort and that it gives it credibility:

> I think the allocation of resources to support faculty is a demonstration that the administrators value, not just the faculty members, but the process. If we are going to do this, in addition to all these other things, it needs monetary support.

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One faculty member reported an excessive workload. Her comment was in support of re-examining faculty workloads and setting new priorities. "If you don't want to pay people to do it, or you can't because of the budgetary constraint, then something has to go. We have to prioritize things."

Many of the interviewees indicated that they had excellent participation in their department but noted that other areas might have better participation if there were a compensation structure that monitored and rewarded participation and effort. "I think you might have maybe a little better participation if you offered pay to people."

Resources: Staff. "We originally had clerical help and that was a big thing" (Lola). The interviewees indicated that staff support for SLO assessment is very important, mentioned by 10 of the 11 interviewees. One interviewee said that many departments spend most of their time collecting data but have no time to talk about them. This process is in direct conflict with the end result of SLO assessment, which is to "close the loop." Many departments spend an inordinate amount of time collecting data, which becomes overwhelming. One interviewee commented, "The collection time takes away from the real value of the assessment, which is to talk about and improve instruction. That is why we use the computer to collect data, it is just faster." Another faculty member conveyed that classified staff help is critical:

> "It is really important to have a person who is full time. A full-time support person whose only job it is to help faculty create assessments, to look at the data, to help do the research part, then we can talk about the results.

Lack of support was reported as problematic by one interviewee: "There has been a lack of clerical and professional support to help us manage the data and to reach out to faculty and help guide them. Those conversations that need to happen." Another

indicated, "I would ask for additional SLO point people [faculty] in departments."

She added, "It would be wonderful to have other people besides people in your

department do the tabulation." The department head indicated that MCC has recently

invested in some staff. She discussed the importance and impact:

> When I came in, there was no administrative assistance. Now we have a position. That's huge. Someone who is there to help us cut down on our time spend collecting data. And, the classified research expert. I think these two resources are really going to be excellent this semester, now that they're both in place.

> Technology to simplify the process. "Technology makes it a breeze to collect

data. And if it's painless, you buy in more" (Camille). In the department study, the

SLO leaders decided to utilize technology to simplify the process. The use of technol-

ogy provides a simple and effective way to assess SLO and provides immediate

results. The faculty agreed that they wanted to spend less time collecting data and

more time discussing the results, focusing on instructional changes rather than data

collection. Thus, the Reading Department decided that the best approach was to use

technology to collect the data.

> It [technology] makes it a breeze to collect data. And if it's painless, you buy in more. . . . I think that it makes it manageable. I know not all classes on campus could do it that way, like an art class, but if there's any way to make it electronic, do it. I think it's been great for us.

The documents that were reviewed demonstrated that use of technology was

widely supported across the campus and that software was purchased that provided a

repository for assessment results and instructional changes. Many participants in the

study agreed that it might be expensive or that it would mean that the college would

have to invest in infrastructure, but they also agreed that it was worth it. "I think tech-

nology costs money, but it's so awesome. I've had experience doing amazing things

with that kind of data." Another faculty member talked about the advantage of technology:

> We use Survey Gizmo. The advantage of technology is that it cuts down on clerical time. It allows students to work in a computerized setting. It allows them to work at their own pace. A teacher can take a class into a computer room and allow students to work at their own pace. It is anonymous and confidential. Nobody is going to see it. We are getting results. We can see the results by class. It tallies everything for us. It is a real advantage.

One faculty member was emphatic: "Keep technology coming! Teachers love it when it happens so fast."

Faculty evaluation and SLO assessment. There were only a few comments regarding policies. The most common comment was that the assessment of SLO should never be used as part of the faculty evaluation process. Seven of the 11 faculty members expressed concern that SLO assessment would be used to evaluate them. One faculty member put it succinctly: "Don't tie it to my evaluation." Another indicated, "Some of the resistance is a lack of seeing the big picture and [the resistance is] driven out of fear. Fear that the results are going to be used against us."

The concern was that too many factors must be considered when evaluating the learning that occurs in the classroom. In addition, tying evaluation to SLO assessment could compromise the process and faculty members might be compelled to make them easy or water them down to ensure positive results. This would affect the integrity, utility, and value of the assessments. As long as they are free from the faculty evaluation process, they would not be perceived as punitive. Assessment should be honest and the results should be clear and the results should be true. If they are part of an evaluation process, all three of these components could be compromised. This notion is supported in *Guiding Principles for SLO Assessment* (ASCCC, 2010b):

If assessment results are used to evaluate and validate individual faculty performance, assessment instruments may be developed to justify existing practices rather than to engage in authentic analysis of student learning and avenues for instructional innovation and improvement. As a result, the assessment process itself would be compromised. Thus, for reasons involving both professional integrity and academic quality, the Senate has opposed and continues to oppose the inclusion of SLO data in individual faculty evaluations. (p. 24)

One faculty member was very clear about the use of SLO for faculty evaluations:

SLO assessment should never become something other than what it was intended to be. It is important that it doesn't become punitive. I think that's a fear amongst faculty. That's an underlying fear that's always present. Even though our department has been very positive and supportive and we totally get it, the administration cannot use it as a weapon instead of something that is supposed to support instruction and better the experience for students.

Problems exist in attempting to assess classroom learning because it is not always completely reliable. Things happen in every classroom that the faculty cannot control. This was apparent when a faculty member said that the teacher is not the only one to be held accountable in the classroom:

I don't think I should be evaluated on student outcomes if they don't attend class, if they don't buy the book, if they don't do the work. You know, I do my part, but when does the student come into play?

Faculty workload. "It would be nice to have some release time to work on SLOs and really focus on them" (Jessica). Time and workload are inextricably related for this study. Many faculty cited a lack of time to meet multiple deadlines. The main theme with faculty workload is that it should be reexamined. Faculty members are being pulled in more directions than ever and deadlines for multiple projects are becoming untenable. In the opinion of some faculty, in order to balance various initiatives, the time that they are able to dedicate to teaching is suffering.

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I think that is the bigger issue is the college needs to look at the workload. Wherever it's coming from? It could be coming from Sacramento, it could be coming from Washington, DC, but it's actually pushing teaching to a back burner, and we will not let that happen in this department.

Another added,

So I end up doing more outside from my teaching, and more of what time I have here that I could be doing more in terms of teaching and learning. There are more computer programs and online things to learn. These are things that benefit my students and my teaching. But we have to do so many other things, too. It is a lot.

One faculty member said that something has to give:

When are we supposed to do this? When? I mean, we are on committees, we have office hours, we got this, we got that, and we actually teach, too, so it is an issue. I think that is one of the bigger issues. I'm putting in a lot of hours!

"To teach the students is my primary job," mentioned another faculty member. "I feel like sometimes people, administrators, forget that we still have all this time that we really need to spend with our students."

Challenges for SLO assessment in the department and at MCC. Even though this department has created an exemplary environment and dedicated time for SLO assessment, it has not been without challenges. The challenges include the initial leadership and approach that resulted in a negative culture, communication, lack of understanding, inadequate time to conduct the assessments, and insufficient resources invested by the college. The following comments give specific examples from the interviewees.

Leadership and approach. Many of the criticisms had to do with communication and the initial approach that was taken by the administration. One person indicated, "Our department wanted communication and a plan. But because we never got

that big picture, we never got told at the beginning, 'This is the plan and you will start here and end up here.'"

In addition, there is a perception that SLO assessment was introduced as mandated and that there would be punishment or consequences if the faculty did not comply. It was not introduced as something that would benefit students and faculty and improve instruction. One faculty member confirmed this:

> There was so much pressure initially when it started, and I felt like every time I left a department meeting that I had been beat up about it because there was always an individual coming to cram it down your throat. It could have been done differently, I think. It felt very oppressive. Unfortunately, that frames something that can be very meaningful into something very negative and very punitive, and I thought that was really unfortunate.

The perception of SLO assessment as punitive was supported by the following comment: "At first it was handled as a big stick and not a carrot and that doesn't work. That was a problem." This comment was followed by, "Accountability is the origin of it all. It was always kind of presented in a fearful way . . . that we might lose our jobs if we are not going to be truly be held accountable." Another interviewee noted, "It seemed like I was in the principal's office for something that I did not know I was supposed to be doing or we were supposed to be doing as a department. It was very frustrating."

<div align="center">Summary of the Data</div>

General conclusions can be drawn regarding the key components of SLO assessment and its importance based on the faculty's perceptions. The most important components of SLO assessment from a cultural standpoint are the department's attributes (such as collaboration, buy-in, communication, and high priority). These components connect to Bolman and Deal's human resource and political frames and the

resources (human) and environment (culture) components of the congruence model. One clear characteristic that emerged is that the department members were very collaborative and driven to do things well, especially if the task(s) will have a positive impact on their students. The collaborative nature of the department allowed them to share best practices, offer suggestions in a safe environment, and discuss teaching and learning without being intimidated and without holding back. This cohesive group clearly supports SLO and agrees that SLO can effect positive change in the classroom.

The most important aspects of an effective process for SLO assessment is knowledge of SLO, a clear plan, expertise and staff to assist faculty, and time (both to conduct the assessments and frequency of department meetings to discuss the data). This category matches the structural component of Bolman and Deal's four frames of effective leadership. One of the key factors that emerged across all interviewees was that the department was well informed about the process and plan. One contributing factor was that the college SLO Coordinator resides in the department. The use of technology to simplify the process helped the faculty to spend time in analyzing and discussing the data rather than collecting it. The department put a high priority on SLO assessment, recognizing its value and meeting twice each month to discuss the results and strategies for instructional improvement.

The least cited reasons to conduct the assessments were recognition, administration, and accreditation. Although the participants offered many suggestions for campus leaders, they were not driven to conduct the assessments because of an internal or external mandate. They also had little interest in receiving individual recognition, although they agreed that it was important that all departments participate equally

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and with due diligence. Support by administrators was important but was not mentioned as critical because this is a faculty-driven process. If a solid faculty leader and appropriate resources are assigned to the effort, the administration is not perceived to be important.

Most of the components of effective SLO assessment were identified in the literature. Characteristics that surfaced during the interviews that were not identified in the literature were departmental attributes (cohesiveness and collaboration), frequency of meetings to discuss the data, and the specific discipline and background of the faculty. These components are considered to be local to the department and may not emerge in larger studies with a broad base of participants. Since this was case study, these findings are specific to this department at this college.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In 2002, the ACCJC revised its accreditation standards and mandated institu-

tions to implement assessment of SLO for all courses and programs, including

assessment of general education outcomes (the overall skills that a student should have

to receive an Associate degree). The new requirement, included in ACCJC's Accred-

itation Standard 2, provided that colleges must comply fully by 2012, allowing 10

years to develop, implement, assess, and utilize SLO to improve student outcomes.

Effective assessment of SLO provides a mechanism for faculty to analyze,

discuss, and use data to improve instruction. This process is integral to the institu-

tion's ability to meet and maintain standards required for accreditation. However,

accreditation should not be the reason that colleges conduct assessments. Assessments

should be aimed at improving teaching and learning and providing instructional con-

sistency that results in a better experience for students.

Although SLO assessment is a requirement for accreditation, there have been

numerous issues regarding the creation and implementation of SLO on many cam-

puses. Assessment of SLO in community colleges is significant because it has

become an integral component of the accreditation process and a major focus for

ACCJC, which has found many colleges to be out of compliance.

According to the literature, the key factors to consider when implementing

SLO assessment are available resources, leadership, communication, a well-defined

assessment plan, and faculty buy-in (Bresciani, 2010; Dunsheath, 2010; Long, 2008; Somerville, 2008). Implementation of SLO assessment requires extensive institutional change and involves multiple stakeholders, so it is imperative that institutional leaders be cognizant of the culture and history of the organization, as well as the politics and resources available to implement or improve the process. Many facets are involved but it is important that the process is faculty driven because faculty are in the classroom and they create and conduct assessments.

Data collected from the interviews, observations, and document analysis collectively support these findings. The data were sorted and coded into main themes and divided into subcategories. To ensure credibility, the researcher used honest reflection, member checking, coding with peer expert review, peer debriefing, and guidance and advice from the dissertation committee.

<u>Summary</u>

Data from this qualitative case study indicate components to consider when implementing SLO assessment. The faculty reported the key components to be communication, a clear plan, professional development, expertise, and staff support for the assessment of SLO. In addition, the faculty provided insight into the policies and practices that are significant when implementing SLO assessment: a process that is faculty driven, an examination of faculty workload, use of technology to simplify the process, and provision of time to conduct quality assessments.

This study of a single department provides information to illustrate the characteristics and culture of a department that has embraced the process and utilized the results to make modifications in their classrooms. The attributes were a cohesive and

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collaborative department, a focus on student learning and success, and taking time to meet and discuss instructional improvement and to share best practices.

The components mentioned by the faculty in the study department are consistent with the findings in the literature: communication, knowledge of SLO, a clear plan, training, expertise, staff to assist faculty, and time to conduct assessments and analysis (Bresciani, 2011; Heiland & Switzer-Kemper, 2007; Serban, 2004; Skolits & Graybeal; 2007; Somerville; 2008; C. L. Miles & Wilson, 2004). Elements that were not evident in the literature included the importance of specific departmental attributes, including cohesiveness and collaboration, in addition to individual faculty characteristics such as the discipline and faculty educational background and training. Another positive element that emerged was that the SLO Coordinator resided in the department and was able to communicate effectively and provide expertise and guidance.

In addition, the faculty attitude toward SLO assessment is significant. Interviewees indicated that faculty buy-in is gained when faculty conclude that assessment of SLO is useful and valuable. It was reported that it is important to perceive the effort to be an institutional priority and that adequate resources be provided to help faculty to accomplish the task. Resources include expertise such as research staff, faculty, and administrators who are knowledgeable about SLO assessment and who can help to create effective assessment strategies and assist with analyzing the data and creating reports for the faculty.

One component of many previous studies is the problem that SLO assessment is perceived as necessary only to comply with accreditation mandates. This mindset

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can be detrimental to faculty buy-in. While the faculty members in this study knew that SLO assessment was a requirement, it clearly was not their motivation. From the very onset, the department had decided that SLO assessment was beneficial for students and learning. The department adopted a philosophy of intentionality rather than compliance. That is, they conducted SLO assessments because the assessments were perceived to be valuable, not because they were mandated. This attitude contributed to their positive attitude toward SLO assessment.

The resources and policies that can assist faculty include a faculty-driven effort, an investment in the process to include compensation for the time spent, clerical and professional staff, technology to simplify the process, and an examination of faculty workload to demonstrate that SLOs are an institutional priority.

The data revealed that the largest obstacle to SLO assessment was the amount of time required to conduct a comprehensive and high-quality assessment. There was a clear disconnect regarding the tasks, the time required to carry them out, and institutional deadlines. This structure did not allow the faculty to conduct the analysis within the allotted time frame; the perception in the department was that this would inevitably cause them to cut corners and diminish the value of the assessment. Other campus-wide barriers cited were a lack of communication from campus leadership, inadequate training, and the perception that the college does not support the necessary clerical and professional staff to assist faculty with the effort.

The Conceptual Framework: The Congruence Model and the Four Frames of Effective Leadership

Bolman and Deal's four frames for effective leadership and the congruence model guided this study, and the findings confirmed that these models were appropri-

ate. This was supported by the faculty interviews and was exemplified by this comment: "If any of the components are missing, it is going to be less valuable for us." Table 1 identifies the components that were mentioned by the interviewees and the category of the theoretical framework that each supported.

The data demonstrated that this department had identified human resources issues (such as time, faculty workload, compensation, and staff support) as important. In addition, they recognized necessary structural components, such as communication, faculty buy-in, a clear plan, professional development, and frequent meetings in the department.

Two components of Bolman and Deal's four frames were not strong, according to the interviewees. Politics was not mentioned as important because the department is not concerned with the college-wide politics regarding SLO assessment (e.g., it not required by the union contract). The department embraced the assessment and there was faculty buy-in, so the larger faculty union issue was not important to the depart-ment. As one faculty member put it, "We didn't care, we just got to work because we saw the value of it." The other component is the symbolic frame, to which the same logic applied: The department did not need to see a figurehead embrace assessment, as mentioned in some of the literature, and they did not need the threat of accreditation problems in order to participate. This department, guided by their SLO Coordinator, created a valuable process and were motivated by the ideas that their students might have a better experience if the faculty continued to try to improve their craft.

Nadler and Tushman's congruence model indicates that effective leaders should take three things into consideration in order to effect change in their

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TABLE 1. The Four Frames and the Congruence Model in Relation to Interviewee Responses

Code/Result	Bolman and Deal's Four Frames of Effective Leadership				Nadler and Tushman's Congruence Model		
	Human Resources	Political	Structural	Symbolic	Environment	Resources	History of Organization
Accreditation							
Challenges	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaboration		X		X	X		X
Communication	X	X	X				
Coordinator	X					X	X
Department Attributes					X		
Discipline			X		X		
Faculty Buy-in		X		X	X		X
Improvement of Teaching and Learning					X		
Instructional Priority					X		X
Instructional Consistency			X				
Knoweldge							
A clear plan and guidelines			X				
Professional development	X					X	
Leadership	X		X				
Faculty	X		X				
Administrative	X		X	X	X		X
Meetings and Activities			X		X		
Recognition	X			X		X	
Resources				X		X	
Staff	X		X	X		X	
Funding	X	X	X	X		X	
Students and Student Centered					X		
Technology			X			X	
Time	X		X		X	X	X
Useful and Valuable				X	X		X

organization: the environment, resources, and the history of the organization. Table 1 indicates that the factors identified by the faculty fit well within this framework. The results indicate that a leader should be concerned with the environment on campus. These factors include collaboration, faculty buy-in, and a philosophy that embraces student success as the top priority. Equally as important for SLO assessment is whether the organization considers itself student centered and includes a supportive and nonthreatening environment for outcomes assessment.

The second component is the resources available to the organization (both human and financial). This is a critical factor at community colleges, given the fact that they often operate in budget crisis. The factors identified by the faculty included appropriate investment in professional development and training, adequate compensation for participants, time to conduct the assessment, and professional and clerical support.

The history of the organization is also important. This is evident in the philosophy of the organization and how it has embraced past initiatives, particularly related to assessment and accreditation. If the college has made assessment a priority, demonstrated faculty and administrative support, and embraced the effort across constituent groups, this can lead to successful implementation of SLO assessment.

This study was guided by the conceptual framework and the theory that campus leaders must acknowledge key components of their institution in order to effect change. The results of this study support this concept and indicate that leaders must have a good grasp of the institution's human and financial resources, the environment, and the culture and history of the organization. Bolman and Deal's four

frames approach to leadership can help SLO leaders to produce an effective process
for implementing SLO assessment.

Discussion

This department created an effective SLO assessment process even though
many other departments on campus struggled. Even though the same training and
resources were available (or not available), this department executed a plan that
yielded successful results and the faculty found the effort to be useful and valuable.
The department did not get caught up with internal or external politics nor did it resist
the concept of SLO assessment. The department had a key person who was a well-
respected campus leader who helped them to understand the reason for SLO assess-
ment, they created a faculty-driven process, they created their course and program
SLOs, they designed their assessments, they made time for training and implementa-
tion, and they shared best practices.

Findings That Address Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, *What do members of a single department perceive
to be critical to effectively implement and utilize SLO?* Communication is a critical
factor for successful assessment (Beno, 2004; Bresciani, 2008, 2012; Heiland &
Switzer-Kemper, 2007; McClenney, 1998; Ohia, 2011; Somerville, 2008; C. L. Miles
& Wilson, 2004). One of the key factors for this department was excellent communi-
cation about SLO. Even a decade ago, faculty members took the lead on SLO assess-
ment and developed expertise and knowledge of the process and value of the assess-
ment. The departmental liaisons went to every training session that the college offered
regarding SLO. The information was clearly communicated to faculty members. For

the past 3 years, the college SLO Coordinator has resided in the department. She became the campus-wide expert and the department had immediate access to her (she was available to all other departments, as well).

Communication occurs frequently in the department because each of the faculty members is connected to the campus through various college-wide committees and all regularly meet and report back to the department. Everyone is very well connected and they communicate well. A key factor, albeit obvious, is that the department dedicates time to meet and each individual makes it a priority. It is part of the culture of the department. During the bi-monthly meetings, SLO are a standing priority and discussion topic.

The department had a clear plan and executed it. They created opportunities to develop and discuss SLO and they integrated the part-time faculty into the discussion. One significant event that occurs twice per semester is a Saturday SLO day, when full-time and part-time instructors discuss SLO, get directions for implementing assessments, and hear about best practices that have been implemented from past assessment results.

A grasp of the concept of SLOs is important, as one faculty member pointed out:

> It is important for individuals in leadership roles at the college to have a solid grasp of what student learning outcomes are and how they can be used in meaningful ways. I believe in having conversations and communicating. If there is no communication and guidance, then it is very challenging.

Another indicated how initial communication is critical: "I would recommend a lot of face-to-face interaction and less emails." Other studies have confirmed that better communication can improve implementation of SLO assessment (Bresciani,

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2010, 2012; Long, 2008; Musun et al., 2006; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Somerville, 2008).

The stages of communication are key factors to build knowledge about SLO assessment and faculty buy-in. The initial stage should include a focus on why SLO assessment matters. Second, campus leaders must meet directly with departments and provide a plan that is clear and that matches with each individual department. It is recommended that the meetings be facilitated by a trusted faculty leader with expertise in SLO assessment. A trusted faculty member with expertise to communicate with the departments was supported in similar studies cited in the literature (Bresciani, 2006, 2010; Long, 2008). Once the plan is clear and results are collected, an expert with data collection and analysis should be available to help the faculty to tabulate the results. The most important aspect is discussing the results to enable the faculty to discuss the data and reflect on their teaching. The ability to remain consistent with the results and communicate about the use of the results builds trust in the process (Kezar & Eckel, 2002b). This approach creates an opportunity for the faculty to focus on improving teaching and learning rather than collecting data.

<u>Findings That Address Research Question 2</u>

Research Question 2 asked, *What skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions do faculty believe are important in the SLO assessment process?*

<u>Discipline, Education, Cohesiveness, and a Focus on Student Success</u>

Each faculty member in the department has a master's degree in education with an emphasis in reading. Each recognized that training had influenced attitudes and dispositions toward SLO assessment. Training in education creates a thorough

knowledge of the learning process. The focus on teaching reading is building on prior knowledge and assessing students' progress. It is a natural fit that supports the notion of assessing instruction to improve student learning. The results indicate that knowledge of educational theory and practice will influence faculty buy-in and that backgrounds shapes opinions about assessment in general. One faculty member summed the attitude in the department: "We have a constant desire to improve our instruction and improve our own teaching skills."

Each faculty member indicated that the department is very cohesive. The group appears to work well together and they genuinely like one another. Many department members spend social time together and talk about teaching and SLO. The mindset in the department is to do the best job possible with any task that is a priority. One faculty member commented, "We have a strong work ethic because a lot of us are Baby Boomers." Their collaborative nature, desire to excel, and willingness to embrace SLO have contributed to the positive aspects of the process.

Each faculty member mentioned that reading instructors exist to improve students so that they can succeed in college. The department is very focused on student learning and student success. The primary reason for reading instruction is to improve students' skills so they can excel in all disciplines. This focus on learning and success creates an attitude that is ripe to embrace SLO assessment. The depart-ment sees SLO as a tool to improve teaching and learning and each faculty member who was interviewed expressed a positive outlook and recognized the value and utility of the assessments. Once it became apparent that this was a way to improve as indi-viduals and to help students, there was immediate support for SLO.

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<u>Culture, Communication, and Value</u>

The concept of SLO assessment must be clearly understood at the onset. In order for the process to succeed and to be effective, there must be a culture within the department that embraces assessment. The members of this department learned about SLOs, realized that they could inform their teaching, and fully supported the process.

One faculty member speculated about the difficulty in other departments related to culture and communication: "I think that that was really hard for some people to process [SLO assessment] because it's not the culture in their department. But we just got to work."

The culture in the department created an environment to support SLO assessment. Faculty members embraced the concept and participated in development of the entire plan, creating faculty buy-in. The department succeeded because the members "took control" of the effort and "got to work." They did not get caught up in workload issues nor stop participating when they were told that the union did not support SLO assessments. The area embraced SLO because the overriding philosophy was that they were good for the students and they could improve instruction. There was a mindset that there was value and utility and each faculty member agreed that they had room for improvement. In addition, the department devoted the time that is necessary for an effective assessment process that "closes the loop." In order for the effort to be successful and useful, departments must make SLO assessment a priority.

<u>Time on Task: Focus on SLO and Instruction</u>

Another key component was that the department integrated SLO into frequent meetings to discuss them. Departments can benefit from meeting to discuss teaching

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and learning and SLO assessment. This department met every week and, twice each month, SLO were the primary focus: interpreting data, talking about instructional gaps, aligning courses, or sharing best practices. Department meetings can get caught up with operational issues such as program planning and course scheduling (and faculty schedules). While these are important, department meetings are best utilized to discuss instructional improvement and key issues that affect student success. All too often, committee meetings do not focus on instruction.

<div align="center">Findings That Address Research Questions 3 and 4</div>

Research Question 3 asked, *What resources do faculty members perceive to be necessary so that departments can engage and commit to the SLO assessment cycle?* Research Question 4 asked, *What policies and practices do faculty members believe are necessary to support SLO assessment?*

Faculty Driven

Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) and others have indicated that having a faculty-driven process is very important (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Somerville, 2008; Volkwein, 2003). Faculty members were in agreement that assessment should remain in their hands (Bresciani, 2011). Having a faculty-driven process is critical and fits within Bolman and Deal's (2008) political frame. The political frame views organizations as having many competing interests. The faculty members are interested in teaching and the administration has responsibility to ensure that rules and regulations are followed (e.g., accreditation). SLO assessment is necessary for accreditation and it is critical to have faculty involved or the concept will flounder. From the onset, the

process should include faculty leadership in developing a plan (or modifying a plan) to address SLO assessment.

A firm commitment to the faculty-driven process starts with education and training. It is recommended that key faculty leaders be involved in recruiting and selecting the SLO leader(s) for the campus. Optimally, this should be a person who is well respected by the faculty and who has expertise (or learned expertise) in SLO assessment. The person who is selected becomes the ambassador and point person for working with departments. Some colleges may elect to have SLO department liaisons that are part of a larger faculty-led committee on SLO assessment.

Resources: Staff, Compensation, and Technology

It is critical that faculty be provided necessary support to make SLO assess-ment a priority. This support should be both clerical and professional and should include a person or position that provides assessment expertise and assistance. This support will allow faculty the time to focus on the most important part of the analysis: analyzing and discussing the data. Friedlander and Serban (2004) recommended that accrediting agencies identify persons who are trained and certified in SLO assessment so that colleges could call on them for assistance. However, this has not occurred, and colleges have been left to find their own internal or external experts. According to the data in this study, a person with SLO expertise is very important for the effort to be successful. Colleges must identify and support an internal person who can be trusted by the faculty to help drive the process.

Continuous support by a faculty coordinator who has time to address the myriad needs from multiple departments is imperative. All too often, colleges do not

provide adequate reassigned time for these positions. The lack of support for SLO

assessment and training can have a deleterious effect. One faculty member suggested,

"We need more than one Coordinator. I really think we need ambassadors."

In addition to adequate staffing, support for the faculty members' time should

be acknowledged and they should be compensated. The college or district should con-

sider making SLO assessment a priority. In order to do that, they must consider

investing in the effort and realize that the money invested is well spent. Time to

conduct assessments was the largest challenge for the faculty who participated in this

study. One faculty member emphasized the time required to administer SLO effec-

tively: "I don't think administration realizes that if we're going to do this right, if it's

not going to be perfunctory, they [administrators] need to how much time we are

spending and we're not spending on our students as a result."

If faculty members are compensated for this work, they will be able to give

SLO assessment a high priority. They will be able to spend time required to conduct a

comprehensive evaluation that will effect instructional changes and improvement.

Faculty Workload

One way to address the lack of time to perform adequate assessments is to

modify the faculty workload. Time must be reallocated from other activities so that

instructional and service staff can learn how to engage in the process meaningfully

(Bresciani, 2012). Faculty workload should be examined by the administration. If

faculty members are being asked to do SLO assessment in addition to their established

workload, they should be compensated with money or time. Faculty load should be

examined and adjusted so that time for assessment and analysis is built in to the regular workload.

<u>Technology</u>

The use of technology had a positive effect in the department because it simplified the process and made the process more manageable, reduced labor and time, and provided immediate results. It has definitely contributed to the successful utilization of SLO assessment data in the department.

Technology and the training to use it is a critical structural component to be addressed by campus leaders. It will necessitate an investment in resources and training but the result may be beneficial. It provides simplicity and the ability for faculty to examine results rather than spend an inordinate amount of time collecting data. With technology come infrastructure and training. Faculty should have both available if they are to be effective with SLO. A comprehensive training and professional development plan that focuses on individual departmental needs is the most effective way to address this issue. Departments are different and one size does not fit all. However, a clear plan with examples and the support of technology could prove to be very beneficial. Colleges may want to invest in the technology to facilitate simple and effective SLO evaluation. SLO leaders should consider working with technical staff to utilize current technology and create examples for faculty. In addition, it is important to have professional technical staff who are dedicated to SLO assessment and who are experts in SLO methods, analysis, and the use of technology to simplify data collection.

Even in the department that participated in this study, there has been some resistance to SLO based on concern that it will be included in faculty evaluations. One faculty member commented, "From Day 1, there has always been a fear that SLOs will be an evaluation tool, people will lose their jobs based on their SLOs." Another said bluntly, "I think it is a horrible idea to tie it to our evaluation." There was a general sense among the department faculty members that students must take responsibility for their own learning and that student success is directly related to the effort exerted by students, regardless of the teaching skills of the faculty member.

According to the documents reviewed, SLO assessment results at MCC are not tied to faculty evaluation but participation in the process is a component of their evaluation. If SLO results are tied to faculty evaluation, the integrity of assessment may be compromised. It is possible that faculty would be more concerned with their individual results and simplify the questions or teach to the topic to garner favorable results. The whole process could suffer. This notion is supported in *Guiding Principles for SLO Assessment* (ASCCC, 2010b):

> If assessment results are used to evaluate and validate individual faculty performance, assessment instruments may be developed to justify existing practices rather than to engage in authentic analysis of student learning and avenues for instructional innovation and improvement. As a result, the assessment process itself would be compromised. Thus, for reasons involving both professional integrity and academic quality, the Senate has opposed and continues to oppose the inclusion of SLO data in individual faculty evaluations. (p. 24)

This is an issue of trust on campuses. It is imperative that campus leaders be aware of the potential negative impact have. More important, a campus cannot introduce SLO as a nonthreatening concept for instructional improvement and then switch

from this philosophy to include them as part of the faculty evaluation process. Administrators might consider sharing with the faculty that SLO assessment results are not part of faculty evaluation. Any policy or faculty contract that includes SLO assessments to evaluate faculty may compromise the intent and effectiveness of the process and results.

However, SLO are a valuable part of the *department's* program review and the results can contribute to a valid and useful self-study where changes in the curriculum or courses are recommended. In order to integrate the process into the fabric of the institution, inclusion in department and program planning is useful and recommended.

<u>Challenges for Campus Leaders</u>

The initial approach is important and may set the tone for the faculty regarding their perceptions of SLO assessment. Absence of clear communication about the purpose of SLO and how and why they will be used could create a negative attitude. SLO assessment requires significant professional development for faculty; the college should have a clear plan and expertise available to help faculty members to implement assessment. Campus leaders may have difficulty in securing necessary resources to provide faculty with compensation for their time and effort. There may not be a clear understanding of the time required to implement an effective and comprehensive plan. A campus-wide commitment from faculty and administration is important.

An additional challenge that SLO leaders might encounter is lack of support for SLO by the faculty union. This resistance is likely based on the perception that SLO assessment is one more thing in their workload without compensation or a firm understanding of the time required. Departments may also have different levels of

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buy-in that could affect cohesiveness and collaboration. Across the institution, some departments may be farther along than others in the assessment process. This could make a "one-size-fits-all" approach difficult; training needs should be varied based on the departments' specific needs.

<div align="center">Implications for Practice</div>

Implications for Faculty and Administrators

Using the conceptual framework, it is evident that faculty and administrators who are attempting to implement SLO assessment should examine the culture and mission of the institution before developing a plan. This study demonstrates that the knowledge, beliefs, and backgrounds of faculty can influence their reaction to SLO assessment. Campus leaders should provide faculty with a clear plan, continuous and comprehensive face-to-face and electronic communication, professional development, a trusted faculty expert, staff support, and time to conduct assessments.

SLO Assessments Require Knowledge and Communication

Knowledge of SLO assessment at the outset is crucial to get the faculty to buy in to the process. It is very important that the information that is conveyed is not tied to an accreditation mandate or an administrative initiative. If the faculty perceive it to be a top-down effort, there is likely to be resistance. This study indicated that the department first learned about SLO assessment as an opportunity for improvement. SLO provided freedom to design assessments that would help to improve student learning. This approach proved to be essential for faculty buy-in. The department embraced the effort immediately.

Communication and a clear plan are fundamental for successful implementation of SLO assessment. Communication begins by providing the background and knowledge about SLO and how it can be a tool to improve instruction. This communication should be ongoing and should provide guidance for faculty to develop a clear plan for the department. Communication can occur in a variety of ways; the department in this study preferred face-to-face communication. However, multiple avenues should be used, including email and web resources.

Colleges Should Invest in the SLO Assessment Process

In order for colleges to have an effective SLO assessment process, they should consider investing in the key components that require resources. Providing appropriate resources indicates that the effort is a priority. Administrators should allocate resources to support professional development, staffing, and technology. All of the key factors identified by this study require financial resources.

An investment in ongoing campus-wide professional development may be critical to execute the SLO assessment plan properly and provide dedicated time to participate in and improve the process. Professional development should occur frequently and should focus on department needs. Each of the many departments on campus has different needs. Administrators should consider providing the staffing and reassigned time necessary for the departments to receive individual attention and consultation from an expert. This may require more than one SLO Coordinator or that the person be granted 100% reassigned time.

It is clear that an expert "who is close by" is important. The Reading Department benefitted because the campus SLO Coordinator is part of the department. Her

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availability and knowledge of the SLO assessment clearly helped the department to reach their objectives and continue to address SLO as a priority. The department trusted her and utilized her expertise often.

SLO assessment is labor and time intensive. Campuses must invest in staff and technology to assist the faculty. Clerical staff is necessary to assist with data collection, paper work, and schedules for computer assessments. Professional staff with expertise in research and assessment are critical to provide guidance and assist with the assessment process (providing data for analysis and expertise in interpreting data).

Technology should be used as a tool for collecting data and providing reports. It helps to simplify the process. This allows faculty to spend time in analyzing the data and discussing instructional changes. Making modifications to improve instruction is the goal of SLO assessment, and technology can provide instant data and reduce the labor and time involved in the assessment process.

<p style="text-align:center">Recommendations for Further Study</p>

Assessing SLO and the Impact on Student Learning

This study did not focus on measuring student learning; the focus was on the process of assessing SLO. SLO are designed to help faculty to improve their teaching. The process exists so that faculty can analyze what is happening in the classroom, use data to identify gaps and address deficiencies by making instructional modifications, and share best practices. However, additional research should be conducted to determine the impact of SLO assessment on student learning.

The demands of educational accountability created a need to assess colleges and universities and measure their effectiveness. In response, accrediting bodies

adopted standards to include SLO as part of the accreditation process. In order to

comply and maintain accreditation, institutions focused on creating a process to assess

SLO. The agencies verify that there is a process in place and that the plan is being

followed and that data are being collected. The accrediting body seems to be more

concerned with checking on the process than determining whether SLO assessment

has an impact on teaching and learning.

It may be difficult to measure the impact of SLO assessment on student learn-

ing. Some problems that complicate the research may include poorly designed

assessments, faculty apathy, and confounding variables in assessing learning such as

maturation, student motivation, and faculty grading variation. However, more

research should examine the impact of SLO to determine whether time and effort are

yielding the desired result: an increase in student learning.

Informing Planning, Policies, and Institutional Priorities

Many colleges have integrated SLO assessment into resource allocation and

faculty hiring decisions. Research should focus on how data collected through the

SLO effort is used to inform strategic planning on campuses and how an effective

process can contribute to helping decision makers to set institutional priorities. The

results of SLO assessment can inform classroom instruction and allow departments to

identify gaps and needs that may require resources such as technology and profes-

sional development or training. Value could be added to the effort if SLO assessment

provides information for policies that focus on student success. Planning and resource

allocation could be influenced by policies that include use of SLO data to allow

increases in department budgets, set instructional priorities, or with enrollment man-

agement and faculty hiring.

Additional Case Studies on Various Departments and Disciplines

This study was limited to a single department in one college. Further research

may be warranted to determine whether the results of this study may be similar at

other colleges and for other departments. This case study focused on a department

that may have unique characteristics. Research that includes multiple departments,

more colleges, and various disciplines would be valuable.

Intentionality or Compliance

The intent of SLO assessment varies across colleges. One of the challenging

aspects is that institutional priorities can be different at each college. Colleges have

different locations (i.e., urban and rural), different student demographics, and a variety

of programs that serve the local community. Examining the motivating factors for

implementing SLO assessment is necessary. Research could compare colleges where

compliance and accreditation drive the effort to colleges that have embraced SLO

assessment to improve instruction and learning. If there is variation among depart-

ments at one college, it would be helpful to determine why some departments are

supportive of SLO assessment while others are not.

<div align="center">Final Comments</div>

The target department was selected because the researcher had heard from sev-

eral persons at the college that they the department does exemplary work with SLO.

However, defining *exemplary* with regard to SLO assessment is difficult. Many things

are related to SLO assessment but cannot be clearly measured. The idea of assessing

student learning is clearly a sound idea; however, actually assessing learning can be very challenging. Improving instruction is an excellent goal and all faculty members should embrace the concept. However, it is difficult to create a process in which all faculty members see the value of the approach and methods selected.

Colleges have given faculty the freedom to create SLO assessments as long as the results are valid. Colleges have tried to provide appropriate resources, training, and expertise. However, there has been no standard process or road map. A lack of a standardized process has been both a blessing and a curse. The freedom provides colleges with flexibility, a critical and important part of the success of community colleges. However, lack of guidance by accrediting bodies has created anxiety and uncertainty on some campuses. In addition, there is still confusion about SLO, and many faculty members continue to question their value.

Many departments do not have a good process in place and they do not take the time to discuss instruction and best practices. SLO are designed to create dialogue about teaching and learning. They are designed to bring faculty together to talk about what occurs in their classrooms. SLO assessment, when done properly, requires extensive effort and resources. If it improves learning, the money and time are well spent.

The department that participated in this study has many specific characteristics. They have a desire to help students and strive for continuous improvement, which motivated them to embrace SLO. The components identified in this study serve to provide a road map for campus leaders as they grapple with SLO assessment. The department could be similar to many others on community college campuses and the

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key factors that the faculty participants have identified are useful and valuable for campus leaders who wish to implement the SLO process. Measuring student learning is not without its challenges but it is imperative for educators to have a process to evaluate the results of an educational experience.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: Please help me with my dissertation research [The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at a California Community College: Insight from the Faculty in a Single Department]

Dear [Recipient's Name]

I am in a doctoral program in educational leadership at California State University at Long Beach. I intend to focus on a single department and research how they assess student learning outcomes. My research study will be qualitative and I will be examining how the Department has implemented the assessment of student learning outcomes.

You are invited to participate in the study because of your current position as a faculty member in the Reading Department. I will be conducting one-hour interviews with full-time faculty members and all of the information will be confidential and anonymous. During the interview, I will ask you to fill out a demographic questionnaire and after I will ask about your experience with student learning outcomes assessment at the college and in your department.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at creasons@cox.net and I can provide you with more information about the study as well as answer any questions and/or concerns that you may have. Thereafter, if you agree to participate, I will contact you to set up the location and time for the interview that is convenient for you. We could possibly conduct the interview in your office or any other location that is quiet, safe, and comfortable for you. I will also send out a consent form detailing your rights as a participant of this study, the steps I will be taking to ensure confidentiality of your participation, and your permission to have the interview recorded. In addition, I will be offering a $30 Visa gift hard to each participant to thank you for your time and willingness to participate.

I sincerely hope that you will participate in this research study and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Creason

Subject: REMINDER: Please help me with my dissertation research [The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at a California Community College: Insight from the Faculty in a Single Department]

Dear [Recipient's Name]

This is a gentle reminder that I would like you to participate in my dissertation study. As I mentioned before, I am focusing on a single department and how they have assessed student learning outcomes. My research study will be qualitative and I will be examining how and why the Department has been successful in the implementation and utilization of student learning outcomes assessment.

Again, you are invited to participate in the study because of your current position as a faculty member in the Reading Department. I will be conducting one-hour interviews with full-time faculty members and all of the information will be confidential and anonymous. During the interview, I will ask you to fill out a demographic questionnaire and after I will ask about your experience with student learning outcomes assessment at the college and in your department.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at creasons@cox.net and I can provide you with more information about the study as well as answer any questions and/or concerns that you may have. I am trying to "recruit" each full-time faculty member from the department to strengthen the methods and results of my study. I am also offering a $30 Visa gift card to participants for their time. If you agree to participate, I will contact you to set up the location and time for the interview that is convenient for you. We could possibly conduct the interview in your office or any other location that is quiet, safe, and comfortable for you. I will also send out a consent form detailing your rights as a participant of this study, the steps I will be taking to ensure confidentiality of your participation, and your permission to have the interview recorded.

I sincerely hope that you will participate in this research study and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Creason

APPENDIX B

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

Subject: Permission to conduct dissertation research [The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at a California Community College: Insight from the Faculty in a Single Department]

To: Dr. Jennifer Rodden, Interim Dean, Language Arts and Communications

I am in a doctoral program in educational leadership at California State University at Long Beach. I am requesting your permission to conduct my study and use faculty from the Reading Department as the participants. I intend to focus on a single department and research how they assess student learning outcomes. I would like to use the Reading Department as the single department for my research. My research study will be qualitative and I will be examining how the Department has implemented the assessment of student learning outcomes.

I will be conducting one-hour interviews with full-time faculty members and all of the information will be confidential and anonymous. During the interview, I will ask about their experience with student learning outcomes assessment at the college and in the department.

This study will be confidential and I will ensure anonymity by using pseudonyms for both participants and the college.

Please send me an email response that indicates "you have my permission to conduct the study with the Reading Department." Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Creason

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at a California Community College:
Insight From the Faculty in a Single Department

1. What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. _____
   d. Decline to state or other
2. What is your ethnicity?
   a. Asian
   b. Black
   c. Hispanic
   d. White
   e. Filipino
   f. Native American/American Indian
   g. Pacific Islander
   h. Two or more races
   i. Decline to state
3. Which category below includes your age?
   1. a. 21-29
   2. b. 30-39
   3. c. 40-49
   4. d. 50-59
   e. 60 or older
   f. Decline to state
4. What is your position on campus?
   a. Faculty – Full-time
   b. Faculty – Part-time
   c. Non-Academic Manager/Director/Dean
5. What is your level of education?
   a. Bachelor's Degree and work experience
   b. Master's Degree
   c. Doctoral Degree
6. How long have you been a faculty member including all institutions?
   a. _____
7. How long have you been working as a faculty at [MCC]
   a. _____
8. How long have you been working as a faculty member in the department?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Program Title – The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at a California Community College: Insight From the Faculty in a Single Department

Research Questions:
1. How does your department effectively implement and utilize student learning outcomes?
- What skills, knowledge, and attitudes does faculty feel are important in the SLO assessment process?
- What resources support departments so that they can engage and commit to the SLO assessment cycle?
- What policies and practices are necessary to support departments and faculty?

Pseudonym: Position:

Background at [MCC]: (years teaching, etc.)

Introduction and General Questions
1. How long have you taught at [MCC]? At a community college? What is your educational background? Your teaching background?

2. What committees and activities do you participate in your department? And on campus?

3. What courses did you teach this past semester?

About SLOs
4. What do you know about SLO's at [MCC]? What is the origin of why we are doing them, etc.?

5. Do you have any history or background with SLO's at [MCC] Explain.

6. Do you know where to get information about SLO's on campus? In your department? Where?

7. Who are the SLO leaders on campus?

8. How has your department been involved with Student Learning Outcomes Assessment?

9. Tell me about the process?
   a. Where are you in the process in your department? Timeline? Changes? Improvement?
   b. Is the process from creating, assessing to "closing the loop" clear? What is it?
   c. Is there a particular person(s) in your department who has been a champion for SLO assessment? How did that evolve?

d. Is there a standard meeting to discuss SLO's

e. How are you assessing SLO's in your courses?
f. Is that a standard for your department? Any flexibility?
g. Do you use on-line or electronic data collection? And how does that work?

10. Have you had departmental discussions regarding SLO's? a.
   a. How do you evaluate the SLO's?
   b. What changes have been made by the department?
   c. By you?
   d. What are the challenges in your department?
   e. In your opinion, why does it work so well in your department?
   f. Can you name and describe two or more things that make it work?

Overall Perception and Opinion

11. How do you feel about student learning outcomes assessment in your department? What is working? How is the assessment of SLOs being used? Implemented?

12. How do you think the effort can be improved campus-wide? What are some of the things your department does different? Better?

13. Do you find it to be a valuable activity for faculty? How so? What do you do?

14. Do you think it is beneficial for students? What benefits have you observed? What have you heard from students?

15. What is the end result of this type of inquiry/process?

16. Has the assessment of learning outcomes made an impact on your teaching?

17. Have you made any classroom or departmental changes as a result of the analysis or discussion?

18. In your opinion, how does the process impact teaching and learning?

19. How does the on-going assessment of SLO's benefit the
   a. students   b. faculty   c. college

20. Do you have any final thoughts about SLO assessment and your department?

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENT PROTOCOL GUIDELINES

Observation and Document Protocol Guidelines

Observation Protocol
1. The physical setting
2. The participants
3. Activities and interactions
4. Conversations
5. Topics/Issues
6. Subtle Factors
7. Your own behavior or your impact on the group

Document Protocol
1. History (Compliance/Improvement of Teaching and Learning)
2. Budget/Resources
3. Process/Plan
4. Policies
5. Topics/Issues

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at a California Community College: Insight from the Faculty in a Single Department

Consent to Participate in Research

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Paul Creason, AA, BA, MA, and a doctoral student from the department of Educational Leadership at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). The results of this study will contribute to his dissertation requirement for an Ed.D. degree from this institution. You were selected as a possible participant for this study because you meet the following criteria: a) you are employed as a faculty member at a California Community College; b) you have been working in this capacity in the Reading Department at [Metis Community College] and your Department has over ten full-time faculty members and has participated in the assessment and utilization of student learning outcomes.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out about faculty experiences with student learning outcomes assessment at a California Community College. This case study will help gather information and gain insight into how faculty in a single department has experienced the process of creating and assessing student learning outcomes and how they use the process to inform and improve instruction. It will also explore their perception of the resources necessary to implement an effective and useful student learning outcomes model.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will do the following things:

Agree to meet with the researcher for an approximately 1 hour interview that also includes filling out a demographic questionnaire. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed location that is convenient and safe for you. Please reserve the time and date for the interview with the researcher.
Agree or not to have the interview taped. While I prefer having the interview taped, I will take handwritten notes if you want to participate but do not want to be audio taped.
Agree or not to review the interview transcripts for accuracy.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

The possible risks to you are that you will have to recall student learning outcomes assessment experiences that you have had working in the community college and in the Reading Department. Some of these experiences may involve conflicts or difficult situations that occurred in your Department. Another potential risk of your participation is that your comments could potentially be linked back to you and they may have adverse implications for your reputation or relationships with colleagues or supervisor(s) at your institution. Another potential risk is that the recorded interview files are heard by someone else besides the researcher and the professional transcriptionist.

To minimize the risks indicated above, you have the right to decline to respond to any questions and may stop your participation in the study at any time. With regards to the second potential risk, I will make sure that we meet at a quiet and private location to maintain your confidentiality and comfort. In addition, you will be given a pseudonym from the beginning of the study so that only I, the researcher, will have information that links you to the study. With regards to the third potential risk, the researcher will ensure that the transcriptionist sign a confidentiality agreement before releasing the files to be transcribed.

The audio files will be kept in a password protected home computer and the home computer is protected under firewall and virus protection software. The demographic questionnaire will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's private residence (home). Only the researcher will have access to the locked file cabinet. Any hard copies will be stored and locked in the researcher's home office in a file cabinet. These files will be kept for three years after the research is completed. Thereafter, the files will be destroyed.

Your participation in the research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time during the study.

Potential Benefits to Participate in Study

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the research study. However, the potential benefits for higher education is tremendous. The findings will contribute to the literature on student learning outcomes assessment and can potentially be used to improve the process and utility at other colleges and in other departments.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

The demographic questionnaire will be locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home and only the researcher will have access to it. The recordings from the interviews will be transcribed by a transcription professional. A confidential agreement between the researcher and professional will be signed before releasing the audio files. Once the transcripts from your interview are completed, you have the right to request a copy to review or edit the information you provided during the interview. The only individuals with access to your interview transcripts are the transcriptionist, yourself, and the researcher. The original audio files and final transcripts will be kept for three years after completion of the study. Thereafter, the files and documents will be destroyed.

Rights of Research Participant

You can choose to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participation or non- participating will not affect your employment or any other personal consideration or right you usually expect. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, CSU Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-8147 or email at IRB@csulb.edu

Researcher Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Paul Creason at (xxx) xxx-xxxx, creasons@cox.net or Dr. William Vega, CSULB faculty and dissertation chair of this study at (562) 985-2447 or william.vega@csulb.edu.

Signature of Research Participants

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

If you agree to audio-recording please sign your name below:

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Researcher: _____

_____ I believe the participant is capable of making an informed decision about participation in this study (initials of researcher).

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

CODES AND CATEGORIES FROM THE

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Accreditation/ACCJC
Challenges
Collaboration
Communication
Coordinator
Department Attributes
Discipline
Faculty Buy-in
Improvement of Teaching and Learning
Instructional Priority
Instructional Consistency
Knowledge
  A clear plan and guidelines
  Professional development
Leadership
  Faculty
  Administrative
Meetings and Activities
Recognition
Resources
  Staff
  Funding
Students and Student Centered
Technology
Time
Useful and Valuable
Challenges
Suggestions or Approaches Recommended
Other

APPENDIX H

POLICY 4005 REGULATIONS

Policy 4005 Administrative Regulations on Curriculum and Instruction (section 5 - Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Committee)

5. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes a. Membership:

. (1) The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Subcommittee Chair

. (2) Two faculty members from each of the instructional schools and Counseling; one from each Student Success and Library Technology

. (3) One faculty representative from each subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee: Associate Degree/General Education, Program Review, Course Evaluation and Academic Policy and Standards

. (4) One faculty representative from each of the following groups: Academic Senate, Department Heads and PCC

. (5) Two faculty representatives from Student Support Services

. (6) The Dean, Academic Services

. (7) The Associate Dean, Institutional Effectiveness

. 8) One instructional dean

. (9) One student member to be appointed by the ASB

(10) One part-time faculty member to be appointed by CHI

b. The Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Committee shall:

(1) Survey the educational programs at Metis Community College for current use of student learning outcomes and update this information annually.

(2) Serve as a resource for activities related to the assessment of student learning outcomes by assisting faculty to articulate student learning outcomes, develop strategies to assess the accomplishment of those outcomes, and use the findings from student learning outcomes assessment to further improve teaching and learning.

(3) Review the MCC principles of assessment of student learning outcomes, modify as necessary, and present them to the Curriculum Committee for adoption.

(4) Develop student learning outcomes for general education, after consideration of student learning outcome statements in MCC Program Plans and other sources, to take to the Curriculum Committee for approval. Implement an assessment process and utilize the findings to improve general education.

(5) Craft a comprehensive, college-wide plan for student learning outcomes assessment that may include such areas as background research, assessment procedures, timelines for pilot programs and assessment activities, resources for materials and instruments, and utilization of assessment results.

(6) Provide an annual report that summarizes, analyzes, and evaluates the past year's student learning outcomes assessment activities and accomplishments. Use the report to make necessary improvements and adjustments to the assessment effort.

6. All faculty members serving on standing subcommittees of the Curriculum Committee, except the Program Review Subcommittee and the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes Committee, shall be members of the Curriculum Committee.

. The chairs of the standing subcommittees shall be faculty members elected by the members of the standing subcommittee, shall be selected from the elected faculty members as listed in 4005.6, Section D.1, and shall serve three-year terms. The Program Review Subcommittee Chair shall be elected from the faculty members serving as their department representatives on the subcommittee for a three-year term.

. The chairs of the standing subcommittees and the Curriculum Committee shall meet on a regular basis throughout the academic year to discuss curricular issues and exchange information about upcoming meetings.

I. Ad Hoc Committees: Ad hoc subcommittees of the Curriculum Committee or the standing subcommittees may be established and assigned to special topics or tasks.

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