

April 15, 2005

To the Learning Outcomes Task Force:

On April 4, 2005, the English department held an SLO mini-retreat. Nine full-time faculty and five adjunct faculty were present. Everyone, even the more seasoned participants, learned more about SLOs and about how they will apply to our program. Our proposal for the workshop had promised to do the following:

**Description:**

**Explain what is meant by Student Learning Outcomes**

**Focus on how SLO concepts/practice apply in our discipline;**

**Exchange ideas of how we might develop and assess outcomes in our classes.**

We began the mini-retreat with our meal. Fortified by food and good conversation, we then began with an ice-breaker: participants were asked to think of a time they knew their students either *did* or *didn't* understand a concept they were teaching and then to recall *how* they knew that. As participants shared their stories, they introduced themselves to the group.

Then Catherine Eagan gave a short talk on the basics of SLOs (packet of handouts attached). We had decided in advance to focus on English 104 rather than 1A since instructors have assignments in common in that course. We had also decided to work on writing SLOs for five assignments from that course: Essay 2, an illustration essay on the student's passion; Essay 3, an in-class essay for which the students have read an essay in advance; Run-ons; Cumulative Sentences; and the Final Exam, also an in-class essay, for which the students write on an essay they have read for the first time during the first portion of the exam period. Catherine handed out a packet including the cover sheets and other materials for these assignments (packet of handouts attached) and we also had the course textbooks at our disposal.

We broke up into five groups, including a senior faculty member, junior faculty member, and adjunct faculty member in each group, and set to writing SLOs for the five assignments. After we took a well-earned break for dessert, we shared our draft SLOs with the group (transcribed from overhead transparencies on the following pages of this memo).

**Outcomes:**

**Full-time and adjunct faculty will emerge prepared to participate in the SLO pilot project if they so choose;**

**We will build a notebook of resources (materials from adjunct and full-time English faculty) which will facilitate faculty efforts to develop SLOs for their assignments and courses (this will include, for example, rubrics);**

**We will develop an SLO (and an assessment) for five English 104 assignments. [As noted above, this was changed from the English 1A research paper in the original proposal.]**

Maureen O'Herin then wrapped up the evening with a short talk on assessment (packet of handouts attached). She explained some different types of assessment highlighted in the packet of handouts and modeled a rubric she has developed for the retrospectives students write in her Shakespeare class. She reminded participants that SLO pilot project applications are due April

15 and that Elena Cole and Catherine Eagan will be applying for money for a 100A course project and a 104 assignments project that other faculty are welcome to participate in.

Catherine Eagan has been building a notebook of assignments and rubrics, which will be on hand in the English Center for faculty who want to review sample assignments and rubrics.

The SLOs developed over the course of the evening should provide a helpful guide for teachers teaching these assignments in the future.

### **Evidence to Assess Outcomes:**

#### **Evaluations of participants**

##### **Notebook**

##### **SLOs for English 104 assignments.**

As mentioned earlier, the notebook of assignments and rubrics will be available in the English Center shortly. The draft SLOs created over the course of the evening are attached. E-mail evaluations were sent in after the mini-retreat occurred, and the following is a sample of the responses to the evening's activities:

##### *Pros:*

Felt SLOs becoming clearer, hoping for more workshops (from an adjunct).

Found resource material that was handed out helpful in understanding SLOs and as a reference guide when we did the group work

Liked hands-on practice and working with the diverse levels of instructors

Appreciated SLO Web site URLs

Enjoyed hearing about common problems we all face teaching our students

Liked positive attitude

Glad adjunct faculty invited and paid

Decided to consider applying for an SLO pilot project grant [this comment came from multiple participants]

Found the mini-retreat to be a great exercise for helping faculty learn how to put SLOs into practice and to understand the challenges in front of us

Thought it was a good idea to use specific assignments for thinking about SLOs. Made us think more about what we actually want our students to learn and what we are able to teach them

Glad the mini-retreat got beyond the exercise of finding active verbs to use in current course outline objectives

Found food "a nice touch" and fortifying for the work of the evening. Cake "yummy."

One respondent said it was a "fun" and intellectually challenging evening. Good to hear that SLOs can be fun!

##### *Cons:*

Disappointed that there were some inaccuracies on the handouts (affective domain accidentally omitted from packet; 100A final exam cover sheet included in packet instead of 104 cover sheet—former handout subsequently mailed to participants)

Wanted to spend more time on the assessment piece of SLOs  
Would have liked to discuss and develop materials or exercises that support refined outcomes  
Felt we needed more discussion of how outcomes are different than objectives  
Found group work somewhat unhelpful  
Wished we could have spent less time on ice breaker, freeing up more time for group work and section on assessment

In conclusion, the department found this mini-retreat to be a strong beginning in our efforts to integrate SLOs into our teaching and assessment. We hope for more funding to continue in this effort, whether as a department (comprised of full-timers as well as adjuncts) or as individuals. For intense working sessions like mini-retreats, we feel that food and drink is just as important as compensation for our adjuncts. Many thanks to the Learning Outcomes Task Force, to the Title III committee, and to Karen Halliday for making this event possible.

Essay 2 (illustration essay on student's passion) SLOs  
(draft)

Accurately model an organizational pattern  
Focus their writing through choice of appropriate key terms  
Sustain a focused point of view within paragraphs and an entire composition  
Generate examples to illustrate a given concept  
Examine personal behaviors in order to recognize consequences

In the discussion that followed, participants wondered if an SLO like "practice beginning writing and editing skills" should be added. This is only the second essay assignment, and their writing and editing skills will still need a lot of work. We need, then, to define what we mean by "beginning skills" in these areas and also address how this assignment might be assessed differently in 100A, a course whose students enter with even fewer writing and editing skills. It was then suggested that an appropriate SLO might be "Able to respond to comments and *attempt* to improve writing and correct errors" [emphasis added].

Essay 3 (the in-class essay)  
(draft)

Part I:

Read a sample essay and accurately identify topic sentence, main points, theme(s), and key supporting evidence.

Part II:

Accurately identify personal experience(s) that relate to the theme(s) of the reading.  
Synthesize the information in the reading with personal experience.

Part III:

Accurately summarize the reading:

Identify a theme present in the reading;  
Formulate a personal position in response to the theme;  
Support your position through using accurate evidence from the text(s) and specific personal experience;  
Evaluate the information presented and come to a clear conclusion.

Run-On SLOs  
(draft)

Demonstrate ability to recognize and correct run-together sentences.  
Demonstrate ability to recognize and correct run-together sentences in own writing.

An interesting discussion followed Michelle's description of RO outcomes. She had written "desired" at the top of her list of outcomes, which brought up an interesting point—can students really fix run-ons at this stage in their writing development? Peggy believes their cognitive development is not yet sufficient. If that is the case, should we have less ambitious outcomes? In other words, shouldn't our outcomes be related to what we can realistically expect? And if we do want to take our expected outcomes down a notch (the 104 course outline says that students should be able to proofread their own prose and use a descriptive grammar to check for correct punctuation), how should they be rewritten?

To answer these questions, people started asking **more** questions (typical of English types, right?):

What is mastery?

At what level do they need to be able to recognize and correct run-ons?

What if, perhaps, their writing is *relatively free* of run-ons?

Do we want an SLO that talks about developing analytical habits of mind that enable students to analyze their own sentences for error?

Questions for another day.

Cumulative Sentence (from Riley's *Sentence Style*)  
(draft)

Identify cumulative sentences: base clause + additional information  
Incorporate cumulative sentences into their own writing that include a variety of grammatical structures such as participial phrases, absolutes, adjective series and phrases and appositives  
Recognize and value right-branching sentences in professional writers' work and produce right-branching sentences habitually in their own writing.

When discussing this SLO, participants appreciated the group's incorporation of the affective domain in the last SLO in particular.

English 104—Final Exam SLOs  
(draft)

Assess the reading for dominant themes or ideas.

Evaluate the merits of chosen theme as they relate to own learning and experience.

Display unity and coherence in paragraphs.

Display unity and coherence between paragraphs.

Use signal phrases to introduce quotations from the reading and place them in the context of essay discussion.

Paraphrase from the reading without plagiarizing.