

Assessment Norming



SLO Student Learning Outcomes

AUO Administrative Unit Objectives

GEO General Education Outcomes

From the Desks of Joan Sholars, SLO Coordinator and Joseph Terreri, GEO Coordinator

Odette Richardson, Editor

When you assess student learning outcomes (SLOs) or general education outcomes (GEOs), you have an understanding of what you are looking for and the criteria you are using to assess it; however, in most departments more than one person is assessing the same outcome in different sections of the same course. When two or more people are assessing SLOs/GEOs, how do you know you are all looking at the same SLO/GEO in the same way? Norming is a process that can help you and your colleagues determine how closely you are aligned. For SLOs and GEOs, we use norming to convey the ideal of “collaborative authored and collectively accepted expectations for student learning and assessment” (Maki, P.L., 2004, *Assessing for Learning American Association for Higher Education*, Sterling, VA: Stylus).

Norming does not mean everybody must teach alike with the same exams and projects. Norming does not mean identical learning activities, emphases, or pedagogy. Norming means collaboration and consultation. Norming is the practice of having planned, regular discussions with fellow faculty members to share and combine ideas and make decisions that will be carried out by all participants within their areas.

Let’s say that each department has developed their SLO assessment tools and they would like to see how well they are using them. The key in using these assessment tools is to norm them. Participating in dialogue about SLOs or GEOs and how they will be measured at the same time enhances the coherence of courses or programs and creates opportunities for collaboration among faculty. Norming assessments encourage alignment with department philosophies and values and enables faculty to collectively identify the evidence and criteria or performance indicators they expect their students to achieve.

SLO NORMING EXAMPLE 1

1. **Student Learning Outcome** -- Let’s say that the Star Trek Department has set its SLO to read that “Students will contrast and compare different economic policies in at least three of the different planets studied.” To measure this SLO, the team can decide a common tool or each faculty member can decide an assignment or activity used in their class that addresses the SLO.
2. **Means of Assessment** -- The department decides to assess this SLO via an essay. The department faculty need to decide what is an acceptable paper and an unacceptable paper or a range of possibilities.
3. **Criteria for Success** -- At least 75% of the students writing the essay will meet department expectations on this essay as specified in the faculty-developed grading rubric.

The three department faculty members—Professors Spock, Kirk, and Worf—teaching a particular course met to develop a rubric that would outline various levels of performance demonstrated in the essays. They agreed upon the following:

An **ABOVE EXPECTATIONS** response: “The essay represents a high level of intellectual engagement with its topic. It recognizes the topic’s complexities; it understands and critically evaluates its sources; it displays a strong sense of purpose. It pursues a clear and consistent line of reasoning. It uses source material as evidence frequently and accurately.”

A **MEETS EXPECTATIONS** response: “The essay addresses the topic. It stays on topic. It handles multiple facets of the topic, though with uneven success. The essay often cites examples from source material clearly and mostly correctly to support claims.”

A **DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS** response: “The essay does not address the topic. It may be written with no clear issue or problem in view. It may simply misunderstand the topic, or “write around” it. Hypothetical statements replace actual historical citations. The essay only rarely employs source material correctly and clearly. Citations are rarely accurate, and they are poorly integrated into the argument.”

The Star Trek Department’s assessment rubric is displayed on the next page.

DEFINITIONS

- **SLOs** (*student learning outcomes*) are statements about what a student will think, know, feel or be able to do as a result of an educational experience.
- **GEOs** (*general education outcomes*) are statements that define the knowledge, skills, and perspectives acquired by students who satisfy our general education requirements.

STAR TREK DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

SLO: Students will compare and contract different economic policies in at least three (3) of the different planets studied.

Means of Assessment: Each student will write an essay. These essays will be read by faculty in the department and scored on the faculty-developed rubric. At least two (2) faculty will read each essay. If the scores are the same, the paper is given that rating. If the two faculty score the paper differently, then a third faculty member will read the paper and make a determination of the score and/or the two faculty members will discuss the ratings and come to a consensus.

Criteria for Success: At least 75% of the students writing the essay will meet department expectations on this essay as specified in the faculty-developed grading rubric.

ABOVE EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It represents a high level of intellectual engagement with its topic. • It recognizes the topic's complexities. • It understands and critically evaluates its sources. • It displays a strong sense of purpose. • It pursues a clear and consistent line of reasoning. • It uses source material as evidence frequently and accurately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It addresses the topic. • It stays on topic. • It handles multiple facets of the topic, though with uneven success. • It often cites examples from source material clearly and mostly correctly to support claims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It does not address the topic. • It may be written with no clear issue or problem in view. • It may simply misunderstand the topic, or "write around" it. • Hypothetical statements replace actual historical citations. • It only rarely employs source material correctly and clearly. • Citations are rarely accurate, and they are poorly integrated into the argument.

VERY IMPORTANT! Remember to define vague terms like "intellectual engagement" in your discussion.

What if the above SLO norming example does not work for your department? How else can you view SLOs and their assessment?

SLO NORMING EXAMPLE 2

"That's great, but my department wrote SLOs that are more hands-on. All of the work above does not address my situation. Got any ideas?" a frustrated professor might state. Well, let's look at another example and see if we can handle this.

1. **Student Learning Outcome** -- The X-Men Department wrote an SLO that states that "each student in the course will demonstrate their power in a controlled lab situation." How might the faculty in this department norm the students' abilities in this controlled situation? Suggestion—try different assignments. The team can decide a common tool or each faculty member can decide an assignment or activity used in their class that addresses the SLO.
2. **Means of Assessment** -- The department will use a lab assignment to measure this SLO. The lab will consist of a threat that the student needs to evaluate and determine a way to alleviate the threat without harming any people or property.
3. **Criteria for Success** -- The faculty in the X-Men Department strongly believe that all of their students need to meet this SLO, but being realistic and thinking that there might be a few mistakes made by some students, the department stated their criteria for success as "at least 85% of students completing the lab activity will meet the department's expectations."

Professor Cyclops states that a strong response might be that a student quickly identifies the source of the threat and then, with no residual damage to others or to property, the student uses their power to alleviate the threat. The department, after much discussion, also decided that there should be a time limit on this activity.

Professor Xavier thought that a weak response might be that a student uses their power and destroys everything and everyone in the lab.

Professor Storm, one of the few women professors in the department, was working with Professor Wolverine to decide on what a fair response might be to the situation. After much discussion at several department meetings, the entire faculty in the department decided that there was no fair response to the situation. A student either met expectations or did not meet expectations. Below is the X-Men Department's assessment rubric.

X-MEN DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT RUBRIC	
SLO: Students will successfully use their power to diffuse a threat.	
Means of Assessment: In a controlled lab activity, a student will be confronted with a hostile situation and the student must use their power to diffuse the threat with no residual damage.	
Criteria for Success: At least 85% of students completing the lab activity will meet the department's expectations.	
MEETS EXPECTATIONS	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS
Student quickly identifies and assesses the situation and then, with no residual damage, diffuses the threat. The student has a 15 minute time limit to assess the situation and alleviate the threat.	Student does not identify or assess the situation within a reasonable amount of time. If the student identifies the situation, the student uses his/her power and injures innocent bystanders and/or destroys property. Also, the student would not meet the department's expectations if he/she took too long to assess the situation and alleviate the threat.

VERY IMPORTANT! Remember to define vague terms like "quickly or reasonable amount of time" in your discussion.

But what do you do if you have to do norming on a GEO? For example, Area E in the Mt. SAC General Education pattern includes courses related to Lifelong Learning and Self-Development.

GEO NORMING EXAMPLE 1

A set of courses from a variety of disciplines can still develop a common outcome and use a rubric to assess student performance. The following is the actual assessment plan developed by faculty teaching courses in Area E during Spring 2009 and below it is the Area E General Education Outcomes assessment rubric.

1. **General Education Outcome** — Students completing an assignment in Area E courses will demonstrate meaningful self-evaluation related to increasing their lifelong personal well-being.
2. **Means of Assessment** — Participating faculty members will select an activity or assignment that addresses the GEO.
3. **Criteria for Success** — Students will meet expectations by scoring a "1" or more in at least two of the three categories (Collection, Analysis, and Application).

AREA E GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT RUBRIC			
SLO: Students completing an assignment in Area E courses will demonstrate meaningful self-evaluation related to increasing their lifelong personal well-being.			
Means of Assessment: Participating faculty members will select an activity or assignment that addresses the GEO.			
Criteria for Success: Students will <u>meet expectations</u> by scoring a "1" or more in at least two of the three categories (Collection, Analysis, and Application).			
CRITERION	PERFORMANCE LEVEL		
	0	1	2
COLLECTION: Quality of information collection	No collection	Somewhat detailed and complete	Detailed and complete
ANALYSIS: Analysis of information	No analysis	Summary of information with some analysis	In-depth/thorough analysis
APPLICATION: Application of concepts to enhance lifelong well-being	No application	Somewhat thoughtful and somewhat specific information	Thoughtful and specific application

CONCLUSION

One way any department can get started on norming is to have a “norming party.” Have everyone in the department, including part-time faculty, meet and look over the students’ work. Have more than one faculty member rate each student’s work. If the two faculty members rate the student in the same way, the work is done. But if there is a difference in the rating between faculty members, you could have the faculty members discuss their scoring and see if either needs to reassess their views or you could have a third faculty member rate that assignment and the similar score is the final result. This activity is great for faculty collegiality and collaboration.

How else have you or your department done norming? If you have an example and you would like to share it, please contact us. We can discuss an article for *The Spotlight* newsletter and/or other ways to share your experience with the campus.

If you have any questions or you would like one of us to attend your “norming party,” please contact:

- Joan Sholars, for SLOs, at jsholars@mtsac.edu or at Extension 4610.
- Joseph Terreri, for GEOs, at jttereri@mtsac.edu or at Extension 4642.

Additional contributing authors to this whitepaper are:

Priyadarshini Chaplot, Educational Research Assessment Analyst

Odette Richardson, Research Assistant

