

# How to Write a GEO



**SLO** Student Learning Outcomes

**AUO** Administrative Unit Objectives

**GEO** General Education Outcomes

From the Desk of Joseph Terreri, GEO Coordinator

Odette Richardson, Editor

To write a general education outcome (GEO), you must first understand the difference between a course-level student learning outcome (SLO) and a college-level GEO. Then you need to make a series of decisions based on the way you answer a set of fundamental questions. In this paper, the focus will be on the distinction between course- and college-level outcomes followed by a number of key questions that need to be considered, including the way these questions have been answered at Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC).

The conclusions made from course-level SLOs assessment ultimately impact the department or discipline wherein that course resides. All decisions as to what the SLO is, how to assess it, and how to use the results remain within that particular department or discipline. College-level assessment is focused on activity that transcends department or disciplinary boundaries, where conclusions made are indicative of institutional effectiveness. The assessment of general education is an example of college-level assessment. The process of performing this assessment begins with the creation of GEOs. To create them, the following questions need to be considered:

- **What general education pattern do you want to assess?** The choices are that you can assess a pattern that caters to students transferring to an institution of higher learning or one that leads to a degree at your college. At Mt. SAC, we are assessing general education that leads to a degree.
- **What is a GEO?** At Mt. SAC, GEOs are statements that define the knowledge, skills, and perspectives acquired by students who satisfy our general education requirements.
- **Given the number of courses and the multi-disciplinary nature of general education, what organizing principle will you use to determine who will write your GEO?** All general education courses at Mt. SAC have been classified as belonging to one of five (5) Areas, A – E. Each Area has a stated philosophy and common theme. At Mt. SAC, we have used this pre-existing structure to determine who will write our GEOs. Area A is unique in that it is composed of only two (2) courses, English 1A and Speech 1A. The determination of their GEOs was left to their respective departments in collaboration with the campus GEO Committee. The remaining four (4) Areas were split into six (6) different multi-disciplinary workgroups, each of which was tasked with coming up with one common GEO to assess.
- **What structure will you use to ensure multi-disciplinary collaboration in the writing of your GEO?** At Mt. SAC, we used the technique of convening a two-hour workshop for each of the six (6) multi-disciplinary workgroups. The managers and department chairpersons with courses within each workgroup were contacted, giving ample advance notice about when the workshops will meet and the goals of the workshop. Coming up with a GEO was a key first goal of these workshops. Faculty members representing a course or courses within each workgroup were encouraged to attend.

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- **What sort of guidelines do you give your faculty on how to write a GEO?** To begin, workshop attendees were advised that the GEO should reflect what they believed they were doing now in the general education course(s) they were representing. Therefore, throughout the creation process, decisions were made based on a consideration of classroom activities that students were already engaged in. From there, another key guideline was that the GEO needs to be written in fairly general terms. By necessity, GEOs must have an elastic nature so as to apply to all of the diverse courses from different disciplines that comprised each workgroup. A final key guideline was that participants consider the philosophy of the Area that contained the courses within their workgroup. This philosophy articulated the common theme for why each course was placed within a designated Area. Additional considerations included the measurable objectives of each course, sample GEOs from other colleges, and reflection on the educational goals the collection of courses within each workgroup were designed to meet.

At Mt. SAC, the end result of considering the above questions and answering them in our own unique fashion has been the creation of a complete set of GEOs for all courses within the Mt. SAC general education pattern. It is a credit to Mt. SAC faculty members that they were able to come together at the workshops, bridging the divide of departmental or disciplinary boundaries, and collaborate in producing some exceptional results. To view a summary of these collaborative efforts, please visit:

[http://www.mtsac.edu/instruction/generaled/communications/progressreports/2008-09\\_geo\\_assessment\\_summary.pdf](http://www.mtsac.edu/instruction/generaled/communications/progressreports/2008-09_geo_assessment_summary.pdf)

If you have any questions regarding developing GEOs, please contact me at [jterrer@mtsac.edu](mailto:jterrer@mtsac.edu) or at Extension 4642. I would be happy to help.

