

**QUEENS COLLEGE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
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Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Review

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Introduction

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Review (SLOAR) is an evaluation of assessment practices intended to align *program goals* and *student learning outcomes* with appropriate assessments. SLOAR involves a reflective process designed to encourage faculty to think about what works, what doesn't, and propose changes to course content and pedagogy to improve the teaching experience for faculty and the learning experience for students.

In May 2012, Queens Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) faculty attended a 3-hour workshop led by Stefl-Mabry to begin the process of aligning existing GSLIS program goals with student learning outcomes and assessments. Each faculty member was asked to choose one of the courses they had taught in the spring of 2012 and identify what it is they specifically expect students to know, do and feel after completing the course. Faculty were also asked to describe assessments currently being used that demonstrate evidence of student learning outcomes. Stefl-Mabry explained *Knowledge* as facts, understanding, analyses (Bloom's cognitive domain); *Skills*, or "*Do*" as skills, competencies, abilities, and/or technical awareness (Bloom's psycho-motor domain), and finally *Attitudes (Feel)* were described as beliefs, feelings and/or values (Bloom's affective domain) (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2001).

Data Analysis

Stefl-Mabry conducted a content analysis of the responses to open-ended questions from the seven SLOAR documents completed by the faculty. Content analysis allows one to identify core concepts and to consider the frequency with which they are mentioned in written or recorded content in order to understand better the relative importance of and attention to those concepts within a community of practice (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Stefl-Mabry analyzed the faculty responses from the spring 2012 workshop for a total of seven courses. After multiple readings, 23 categories were identified as being central to the GSLIS faculty and used to annotate the data using codes in TAMS Analyzer (Text Analysis Markup System). Coding is analysis. "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

After a careful review, several categories were modified either due to redundancies and/or failure to capture the essence of the data and finally nineteen categories remained. Table 1 presents the frequency with which each code was present in faculty responses by course number and in aggregate (the *total* column). Note that codes were defined in terms of the meaning of participants' comments, rather than by length of utterance or the presence of specific terminology. "It is not the words themselves but their *meaning* [within context] that matters" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56).

Table 1: 2012 GSLIS Code Count by Course Number

Course	LBSCI702	LBSCI700	GSLIS780	GSLIS748	GSLIS730-A	GSLIS709-K	GLS761	Total
Knowledge	8	2	5	3	4	4	6	32
Do	10	1	4	4	5	5	6	35
Feel	0	1	1	0	3	5	6	16
Assignments	3	1	5	5	5	3	5	27
Assessments	1	2	2	2	4	1	4	16
Checklists	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Written assignments	0	0	3	0	2	2	2	9
Presentations	0	0	4	0	3	0	0	7
Exams	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Real world practice	2	0	3	3	12	4	3	27
Modifications	4	3	4	0	0	2	8	21
Assessment weakness	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Strength of assignment	2	2	0	0	4	1	2	11
Student weaknesses	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	7
Student collaborations	1	0	1	0	3	1	0	6
Weakness of course	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	6
Identify key research	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	3
Students respond favorably	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Students determined success	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Totals	35	15	35	22	45	30	50	232

Results

Results will be organized according to the eight findings that emerged from the data.

FINDING 1: Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) faculty have clearly articulated program goals that reflect the vision and mission of their program

The GSLIS program goals are to:

1. Foster resiliency through critical thinking and problem solving
2. Encourage leadership through communication, collaboration and partnering
3. Create connections among theory, research, and practice
4. Foster ethical practices and outstanding stakeholder service
5. Enable students to master competencies appropriate to their career plan as specified by professional agencies (e.g. ALA, ACRL, PLA, SLA, SAA, AASL, etc.)

FINDING 2: GSLIS faculty provide students authentic learning opportunities that integrate theory and real-world practice

Clearly, attention to theory, as it relates to real-world practice, is reflected in the design of each of the seven courses reviewed in this study. Faculty work closely with practitioners and experts in their respective fields, and are intentional in the selection of course content and instructional strategies to support authentic learning experiences for their students. This includes providing students with opportunities to:

- Understand the established practices and principles that guide the discipline and/or field
- Engage with leaders and/or experts to identify current issues, concerns and challenges of the field, discipline and/or system
- Collaborate with in-service practitioners and design practical solutions and/or modifications to real-world problems
- Become aware of the daily challenges and be exposed to “professional development opportunities and expectations”
- Apply theory in real-world situations and assess results: “see if the programs work as expected”
- “Become exposed to the breadth of cultures and practices within the profession”
- Network and be exposed to internship possibilities

This focus on real-world learning provides authentic and relevant learning opportunities for students and helps students to hone their knowledge, skills and competencies as information professionals and thus, put theory into practice.

FINDING 3: GSLIS faculty provide opportunities for students to conduct primary research and develop professional proficiencies

Integral to several of the courses under review are assignments that provide students the opportunity to grow as leaders in their respective fields. Faculty intentionally structure their courses to provide students opportunities to:

- Plan, design and evaluate a research project
- “Conduct primary research and present on current topics and developments in the profession”
- “Submit proposals for article publications, panel discussions, and poster sessions”
- Encourage leadership through communication and collaboration

FINDING 4: GSLIS faculty demonstrate an ongoing commitment to modify course content based on the changing nature of information environment(s) and solicited and unsolicited feedback from students

Faculty described upcoming revisions to course content based on:

- The ever-changing nature of and availability of reference resources
- New ethical dilemmas
- Feedback from students from course evaluations
- Feedback from students collected during the semester

FINDING 5: GSLIS faculty currently use a variety of assessment measures

Faculty responses indicate a variety of formative assessment and evaluation methods currently being employed by GSLIS faculty teaching in the department. They include:

Rubrics

Checklists

Written Papers

Student Group Work¹

Class Presentations

Quizzes

Examinations

¹ Stefl-Mabry: Group work and presentations are not assessments; they are activities from which an assessment might be made. This will be addressed in the recommendation section (pp. 6-7).

FINDING 6: Students appreciate the strength of assignments

Faculty described self-reported satisfaction with many of the course assignments they currently employ. Faculty reported that students appreciate:

- *Student Status Tables* on Blackboard which publicly records whether or not assignments had been handed in on time and satisfactorily completed
- Opportunities to be creative when choosing and completing assignments
- Professional recognition of having their papers and/or posters accepted.

FINDING 7: Course content and/or assignments may not be flexible enough to address the learning needs of the School's diverse population

Faculty described some degree of frustration with assignments that seem too easy for some students and, at the same time, too difficult for others. Faculty identified a need to provide more instructional support for some students as well as opportunities to advance independently for others.

Faculty reported that some students do not seem to want to put in the effort required to produce a publishable paper — even when they have the ability to do so. The arduous IRB process was also cited as an impediment for students to overcome when conducting research.

Several faculty stated that for almost one third of the students in the program, one course in a particular area and/or discipline is simply not enough, as there is not enough time to cover all of the course content effectively.

FINDING 8: GSLIS faculty have recommendations for pedagogical and assessment modifications including instructional strategies and the development of new assessment tools to improve student learning

Faculty proposed the following assessment modifications:

1. Making rubrics transparent and available to students prior to an assignment so that students know exactly how the assignment is being assessed and graded
2. Developing rubrics and checklists for course assignments and labs
3. Developing a point system to differentiate different portions of an assignment
4. Grading students' weekly reflections to ensure higher quality responses

Faculty also suggested the following modifications to course content and instruction:

1. More explicit connections need to be made among theory, research and practice
2. Increase attention to the importance of publishing and conference participation as an avenue for professional networking
3. Create a tutorial to help students navigate the IRB process early in the semester
4. Invite alums, who have been successful grant writers, to come in and share their experiences with students in the program

5. Conduct more in-class discussion of course requirements and assignments
6. Align of course content to the learning matrix

Recommendations

1. Develop assessment strategies that clearly convey standards for evaluating critical elements of students' authentic learning experiences.

Describe the evidence that faculty will accept that students:

- Have an understanding of established practices and principles that guide the discipline
- Are engaged with leaders/experts and are able to identify current issues, concerns and challenges
- Can collaborate successfully with in-service practitioners
- Are able to design practical solutions and/or modifications to real-world problems
- Are aware of the daily challenges and are exposed to “professional development opportunities and expectations”
- Are able to apply theory in real-world situations and assess the results
- Have an understanding of the breadth of cultures and practices within the profession”
- Are able to network
- Are exposed to internship possibilities

2. Develop assessments to determine the effectiveness of group work.

Although the faculty referred to group work and presentations as “assessments” in the 2012 SLOAR documents, these are actually activities from which assessments can be developed. Such assessments should convey the *criteria* (particular categories of skills on which student product/performance is evaluated and/or *levels of performance* the ratings that differentiate between varying levels of quality in judgments about student products/performances (Dornisch & Sabatini McLoughlin, 2006).

For example for group work faculty might develop feedback forms designed to provide student-to-student feedback and/or student-to-faculty feedback. This would allow the group member and/or faculty to provide encouragement if the group was working well together/and or an opportunity to intervene if the group is experiencing difficulty. Feedback forms, collected at several different times during the semester, provides faculty with the opportunity to made adjustments to assignments (formative assessment).

3. Develop assessments to judge the quality of student presentations

Faculty are encouraged to articulate benchmark descriptions of what students' efforts might look like at different levels of performance quality and to share these benchmarks with students. Towards that goal

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- Criteria categories should be discrete from one another and outline only important elements of a task. The following categories might be considered when assessing student presentations:
 - Organization
 - Subject Knowledge
 - Elocution
 - Visual aids/graphics
 - Ability to connect to the audience

Narrative descriptors should be clear and descriptive. Readers should easily understand them and see meaningful differences across varying levels of performance for each criterion.

4. Gather SLOAR data at the end of each semester

SLOAR data should be collected twice a year— at the end of each semester— and all faculty and instructors teaching GSLIS courses should participate. In this way instructional trends and assessment patterns can be tracked to ensure that GSLIS program goals are met and courses can build appropriately on student attainment of learning outcomes in prior courses. Now that the GSLIS faculty have successfully completed their first round of reviews, subsequent rounds will be easier and even more meaningful.

5. Address ways to update course content that is too easy or not demanding enough

Faculty might consider whether students could opt out of a particular course if they already have the skill set, and/or perhaps students could choose assignments based upon their level of understanding and competencies. Perhaps some incentives could be given at the department level (such as an award and/or small stipend) to encourage students to conduct research and publish their findings.

Conclusion

As this first *Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Review* reveals, the GSLIS faculty are committed to providing students with an education that is grounded in research, informed by theoretical and practical application and is authentic and relevant to the student. I would suggest that the faculty review this report and discuss its implications as a group. Faculty's comments should be documented carefully so that future course and/or program modifications that may result are based on faculty's feedback and reflection. SLOAR is designed to be an iterative process that is continuously shaped and strengthened by faculty feedback and reflection.

I would very much like to hear the faculty's reaction to this first SLOAR review and would be willing to work with the GSLIS faculty again on this and similar assessment initiatives.

Joette Stefl-Mabry, PhD
June 5th, 2012

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