

# FACULTY SENATE TASK FORCE ON ESSENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES (ELOs) REPORT

May 19, 2023

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## **CHARGE OF THE COMMITTEE**

On September 9, 2023, the Provost's Office called for the formation of a Task Force charged with reviewing Stockton's Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) and other undergraduate degree requirements, specifically asking whether or not the faculty would consider collapsing, simplifying or refining the ELOs.

The Senate Executive asked for a clarification of the scope of ELO assessment alongside all undergraduate degree requirements. The Provost's Office responded by limiting the charge of the Task Force to ELO review only along with developing "a strategy for reviewing our undergraduate and degree attributes, in order to best align, remodel, or create additional ELOs." (There is currently a separate Senate Task Force being formed for examining subscripsts and attributes.) The ELO Task Force was given these two central questions:

- Would the Faculty Senate consider reaffirming the value of the ELO's?
- Do the current ELO's continue to meet the needs of our academic programs, our students, and the communities we serve?

In reviewing and reflecting on the development and efficacy of ELOs, and through consultations with faculty, Dean's Council, Provost's Council, and the Office of Academic Assessment, the ELO Task Force Committee presents the following report and preliminary recommendations on ELOs at Stockton.

## **BACKGROUND ON ELOs:**

In 2010, Stockton University began a multi-year effort to implement institution-wide Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). These efforts were based on guidelines established by the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, and related research on AAC&U/LEAP's assessment model, Valid Assessment in Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE). With a goal to improve assessment and accreditation processes at Stockton, and guided by similar initiatives at peer institutions, Stockton administrators convened groups of faculty, staff and administrators, via committees, workshops and other venues, to shape a distinctive set of ELOs representing the core skills, values and knowledge Stockton students would attain before graduation.

The ELOs emphasized student preparedness for success in a changing world and changing economy; thus, some ELOs accounted for skills and qualities that hitherto had not been formalized in Stockton teaching and learning – such as "Adapting to Change" and "Teamwork and Collaboration" – while others broadened existing learning outcomes represented in General Studies objectives, program learning objectives, and attributes and subscripsts such as A-Arts, V-Values/Ethics, I-International, and H-Historical Consciousness, and the W1/W2-writing and Q1/Q2-Quantitative Reasoning requirements. (The R1/R2—Race and Racism Education requirement was not yet in existence.) The ELOs initially were intended to provide a framework for teaching and learning goals across the university, with later consideration

occurring as to whether or not they could be formalized as general education objectives, and/or possibly replace existing attributes and subscripts.

**Figure 1: Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) at Stockton**

Essential Learning Outcomes	Description of Abilities
Adapting to Change	The ability to successfully engage and navigate new or unfamiliar circumstances or create opportunities.
Communication Skills	The ability to create and share ideas and knowledge effectively with diverse audiences and in various formats.
Creativity and Innovation	The ability to generate ideas, take risks, and recognize opportunities in problem-solving, relationships, or self-expression
Critical Thinking	The ability to formulate an effective, balanced perspective on an issue or topic.
Ethical Reasoning	The ability to consider alternative viewpoints and their potential consequences.
Global Awareness	The ability to appreciate diversity and cultural interconnectedness.
Information Literacy and Research Skills	The ability to locate, evaluate, analyze, and use information to solve problems or to produce an argument.
Program Competence	The ability to use and to integrate concepts, theories, and principles in one's major field of study in a masterful way.
Quantitative Reasoning	The ability to understand and to work confidently with numbers and mathematical concepts
Teamwork and Collaboration	The ability to join with others to achieve a common goal.

By AY14-15, conversations were occurring among administrators and faculty about formalizing the ELOs as coverage requirements for students. A Stockton team attended an AAC&U Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments, two AAC&U consultants visited Stockton, an ELO Director was appointed, and a steering committee was convened working toward implementation of ELOs.

Implementation proceeded at a deliberative pace, with several steps taken toward institution-wide integration of ELOs. Faculty-led groups refined the definitions of each ELO and calibrated rubrics to reflect benchmark achievements in each of the ten ELOs areas. The ELO webpage was established, program mapping efforts began, and faculty were encouraged to select ELOs in course scheduling processes and to map ELOs to existing learning objectives on syllabi. A pilot assessment project was conducted in General Studies and, after the pilot, the Provost's office determined that ELOs would become part of institutional assessment. Annual review templates for programs were revised to include a section on ELOs.

However, full implementation of ELOs did not occur. Confronted first by the complexity of the task, the primary challenge remained how to institute a systematic change of significant scope through shared governance processes, and how to ensure that courses were offering, balancing, and calibrating learning outcomes consistently across the curriculum at various levels (e.g., General Studies 1000-4000 levels, program courses 1000-4000 levels, beginning and advanced graduate courses). The challenge of assessment also loomed: How could we ensure that each student's academic experience with ELOs at Stockton was consistent, and included exposure to ELOs through a wide variety of courses conforming to mutual understandings of their particulars and gradients? How could we evaluate and measure

student learning vis-a-vis the ELOs, including metacognitive growth, self-awareness and ownership of their learning over time?

The initial idea to assess ELOs through student portfolio development was hopeful, but ran into questions about expectations for the form and content of portfolios, questions of how to instruct students in portfolio development, questions about what portfolio management options might be used, and ultimately further questions about how a large number of individualized portfolios would be evaluated, how students would receive feedback adequate to their work, and how individual achievement in portfolio development could be recognized. In 2015, a pilot assessment project was conducted via Blackboard and via the Digication online portfolio tool, with results published in a Stockton newsletter and in other venues (see Bibliography).

Preparations for further assessment were made in 2019. A broad framework was developed for assessing nine ELOs over three semesters, using various standards and methods ranging from standardized tests to self-reflections (depending upon the ELO). However, direct assessment of ELOs institution-wide could not occur until at least 50% of courses selected ELOs in the course scheduling process. This threshold at the time was not reached, and today the percentage of courses at Stockton denoted as ELO courses stands at less than 5% (see Appendices). This may be due to a combination of factors including a lack of imperative to make ELO selections in Banner, the lack of a norming or vetting processes similar to other attributes and subscripts to guide faculty in making ELO selections, and the lack of a set of stable assessment instruments for ELOs, and a sense among some faculty that existing learning goals and outcomes at program levels are sufficient in evaluating and assessing student learning. Despite the dearth of ELO attributes in the Banner system, many faculty list or map ELOs on their individual syllabi, and programs have aligned courses to ELOs while not consistently indicating those ELOs in Banner.

Administrative realignments amid the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted prioritization of ELO implementation and assessment. The formation of the ELO Task Force in fall 2022 is a direct result of the need to re-examine the role and function of ELOs and how they have been working at Stockton over time. In the next section, we consider whether or not the ELOs are serving their purpose and meeting the needs of the institution, academic programs, students and communities of Stockton, and present a preliminary recommendation for realigning, remodeling or recreating the ELOs to bring them into line with such needs.

### **PRESENT ASSESSMENT OF ELOs:**

There has been value in developing the ELOs over the years. ELO development and efforts to implement and assess them helped faculty develop vocabularies, pedagogies, and self-consciousness around learning themes, several that had not been previously recognized across the curriculum at Stockton (e.g. Teamwork and Collaboration and Adapting to Change). ELOs helped expand definitions of communication skills to include oral communication and more inclusive genres of composition and expression. Professional development institutes and workshops were organized around ELO themes.

Overall, faculty members increased and improved their teaching in areas reflected by ELOs, and ultimately this improved the educational experience for students. In aligning program and course objectives to ELOs, many programs were able to reflect consciously on the ways their curricula and courses addressed broad skills and abilities that are part of an interdisciplinary, liberal arts education. Furthermore, a range of scholarship published by faculty members pertaining to ELOs advanced field-specific inquiries as well as institutional understandings of ELO frameworks, implementation processes and assessment measures.

However, while the ELOs contributed to faculty development and impacted student learning in a variety of ways, the question of whether the ELOs continue to serve their purpose and meet institutional needs is more problematic. While the positive effects of ELO development at Stockton are noted, below we offer our assessment of the state of ELOs at the present time, cover some ambiguities and complications in understanding their institutional purpose and Stockton's institutional needs, and offer some reasons why we conclude with a recommendation to realign, remodel or recreate the ELOs.

### **ELO OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES:**

1. *ELOs are numerous:* At present, the ten ELOs represent a layer of learning outcomes superimposed over program-based outcomes, General Studies outcomes and learning outcomes associated with various attributes and subscripts. With the addition of ten ELOs, faculty and programs encounter additional layers of learning outcomes added to already-complex layers of program-based and general education requirements, and outcomes related to the W/Q/R/HIVA requirements. The number of ELOs by itself represents challenges in terms of assuring sufficient coverage and offerings at various levels across the curriculum to ensure students would experience each ELO in increasingly complex ways across their education.
2. *ELOs are (in many cases) duplicative of other learning goals:* ELOs are also duplicative of many existing requirements, in different programs in different ways. Particular overlap is noted between some ELOs and existing learning requirements – such as between the Quantitative Reasoning ELO and the Q1/Q2 requirement, and also between the Ethical Reasoning ELO and the V-Values/Ethics attribute. The Communication Skills ELO arguably aligns with W1/W2 requirement *and* broadens it, but the W2 committee also has evolved to recognize a wide range of genres and forms of composition. The Program Competence ELO may be seen as fully duplicative of program-based outcomes. One ELOs – Adapting to Change – is so broadly defined as to complicate alignment, scaffolding, and direct assessment. Notably, in the past year, AAC&U initiated a revision and reduction of the number of its primary Essential Learning Outcomes to four.
3. *ELOs are not currently directly (or consistently) assessed at the course level.* This means our institution has a range of learning outcomes pertaining to courses that are *not* directly assessed, but assessed only in relation to other goals via mapping/alignments. The term *outcomes* in education research represents *specific and measurable* knowledge, skills and values which

students develop over the duration of their education. Courses, programs and the institution generally would be compelled to directly assess the ten ELOs if they were to be continued in their current form. This would necessitate ensuring courses are tagged as ELO-bearing via Banner at a level far above the current <5% rate. It would also mean norming and characterizing ELO development at various levels of competency from exposure, to basic to advanced levels, and also assessing ELOs at these different levels consistently and deliberately in individual courses over time.

4. *ELOs are unevenly selected/used/applied at the course level and program level:* While ELOs may be selected by faculty in the course scheduling process, with selections visible to students in Banner during course registration, the ELOs are *not university requirements* and, therefore, are not reflected in Degree Works. This creates confusion among students about how to understand Banner notations of ELOs. Many faculty use ELOs to guide their teaching but nevertheless do not specify ELOs during course scheduling, and therefore their courses may “carry” ELOs even when not noted in Banner. Because ELOs are not directly assessed at the course level, and not noted reliably in Banner, we lack a full understanding of how the ELOs are constructed, construed, applied, and measured in distinctive courses, disciplines, programs, and General Studies.
5. *We do not have consistent ELO standards:* As noted earlier, absent a norming process, we lack understanding of the basis and rationale for ELOs selections and alignments – which may be defined differently according to different faculty members. This problem feeds back into the assessment problem. With broad and potentially uneven definitions and applications of ELOs, we face significant challenges to any effort to disaggregate and assess essential learning outcomes consistently across the curriculum.
6. *ELOs are not used in teaching evaluations:* While faculty may be evaluated by program and IDEA-based outcomes, there is not currently a mechanism to use ELOs as a basis for assessing teaching effectiveness. Faculty targeting ELOs specifically not aligned to program-based outcomes risk investing energy into pedagogies not necessarily valued as highly by chairs and deans in programs. Thus, arguments for tenure or promotion rooted in ELO teaching effectiveness are not necessarily tethered to teaching standards in programs.
7. *ELOs in their current form are not fully integrated for co-curricular and other activities.* Because ELOs have been defined and mapped largely to academic endeavors, they have offered frameworks to guide co-curricular programs and activities only fairly loosely. The original ELO mission states that “students encounter opportunities to develop ELOs in all Stockton majors, career preparation, professional experiences both on and off-campus, and academic as well as social activities.” While co-curricular units did map to ELOs in some cases, and assessment efforts concerning ELOs in Residential Life and other Student Affairs programming did occur, these have not extended to other co-curricular units that we know of.

## **THE PURPOSE OF ELOS:**

Most universities have some form of institutional learning outcomes assessed at the institutional level. At many universities, these essential outcomes often serve simultaneously as general education requirements. As such, they are structured in such a way to facilitate measurement of students' cumulative learning progress, and often are connected to meeting formal university requirements. At Stockton, we have an academic division dedicated to General Studies, and a program and faculty mandate for interdisciplinary liberal arts education that serves the general education mission alongside (and beyond) professional learning. It makes sense that programs focus their assessment on learning outcomes and objectives defined by programs themselves. In a significant sense, program outcomes, GENS outcomes, and the attribute and subscript outcomes, already serve as our general education learning objectives through curricular requirements assessed at the course and program levels, and used in teaching evaluations.

The purpose of the ELOs when initially conceived may have been to pilot an eventual replacement model for subscripts and attributes, and even some General Studies objectives, but a series of smaller evolutions – some responsive to internal and others to external factors – resulted in the ELOs coming to serve as a more aspirational set of ideals, perhaps imperfectly aligned to program outcomes, and not understood completely, but nevertheless valuable for pedagogical purpose and direction. However, we are not convinced the ELOs as currently implemented and assessed are understood well by students, or effectively facilitate their metacognitive awareness of their development of ELO-based skills as essential, integrative parts of their educational pathways.

## **RECOMMENDATION: REALIGN AND REMODEL ELOs:**

To preserve what is valuable about the ELOs, to follow the AAC&U in reducing the number of ELOs, to provide a means for institutional assessment across the curriculum (including General Studies), and to relieve programs of ambiguities surrounding ELOs mapping and assessment, the ELO Task Force is recommending to realign and remodel the ELOs.




The Task Force is recommending the adoption of three Integrative Learning Themes (ILTs). These Integrative Learning Themes (ILTs) – Communication, Community, and Competency – will permit the collapsing of the ten ELOs into new categories designated as themes rather than outcomes. These reflect, independently and together, a broad range of knowledge, skills and values which may be integrated across the curriculum and represented throughout co-curricular and other campus activities.

These ILTs are intended to resituate ELOs not in terms of learning outcomes but instead in terms of *institutional themes* to which all programs contribute, including modalities of learning beyond or outside the classroom. These themes reflect the university mission to “develop engaged and effective citizens with a commitment to lifelong learning and the capacity to adapt to change in a multicultural and interdependent world,” and make the overall purpose of the Stockton education more legible for stakeholders and more manageable for programs. We envision programs attending to assessment of

program-based learning objectives and outcomes which, aligned to the three themes, permit institutional assessment while helping to distinguish between General Studies, subscript and attribute, and program-based learning outcomes and the (former) ELOs. The figure demonstrates how the (former) ELOs will continue to be broadly represented by the new themes, but the themes can be simply stated: Communication, Community, and Competency.

The figure below represents one draft model for reducing and combining the number of ELOs into new Integrative Learning Themes (ILTs):

**Figure 2: ILTs: Communication, Community and Competency**

<b>Communication</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Competency</b>
		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>ELO Alignment</u></b>            Communication skills            Information Literacy            Critical Thinking/Reading</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Plus:</u></b>            Professional Communication            Media Literacy            Interpersonal Communication</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>ELO Alignment</u></b>            Global Awareness            Teamwork and Collaboration            Adapting to Change</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Plus:</u></b>            Active, integrative,            significant, social, service,            and engaged learning</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>ELO Alignment</u></b>            Ethical Reasoning            Creativity and Innovation            Quantitative Reasoning</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Plus:</u></b>            Scientific Literacy            Digital/Data Literacy            Financial Literacy            Cultural Literacy</p>

**OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Revisit General Studies student learning outcomes and attribute and subscript student learning outcomes to ensure inclusion of Teamwork and Collaboration goals and potentially other learning outcomes indicated by ELOs which are not accounted for in existing frameworks.
- Revisit program-level student learning outcomes to retain value gained by ELOs which would be more generalized in the ILTs.
- Create a team of representative faculty, administrators and staff members to refine and develop the ILTs and provide stakeholders a sense of the purpose of ILTs in relation to university mission and assessment.
- Design a plan for introduction and messaging of ILTs to students on an ongoing basis.



- Develop a strategy and support mechanism for integrating ILTs into learning and experiences across the university, and provide recommendations for assessing ILTs in consultation with the Office of Academic Assessment.
- Pending further development of ILTs, use programs' existing ELO curriculum maps to reorganize alignments within the framework of the ILTs. This could be done at the Academic Affairs level by translating existing curriculum maps into the three ILTs.
- Create strategy and support mechanism for integrating ILTs into extracurricular and other campus activities.

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## APPENDIX A

### Percentage of Courses Carrying an ELO by Course Acronym Academic School\*

	Fall 2022			Spring 2023		
	<u>ELO</u>	<u>All</u>	<u>% ELO</u>	<u>ELO</u>	<u>All</u>	<u>% ELO</u>
ARHU	30	206	14.6%	45	218	20.6%
BUSN	0	195	0.0%	0	196	0.0%
EDUC	3	103	2.9%	3	122	2.5%
GENS	15	504	3.0%	4	396	1.0%
HLTH	0	139	0.0%	0	135	0.0%
NAMS	0	474	0.0%	0	463	0.0%
SOBL	0	203	0.0%	0	214	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>1,824</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>1,744</b>	<b>3.0%</b>

\*Includes all active undergraduate level courses except those with an acronym of ENGN and WASH.

**APPENDIX B**  
**Count of ELOs Assigned to Courses\***

	<u>Fall 2022</u>		<u>Spring 2023</u>	
	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>
Adapting to Change	5	3.9%	8	6.0%
Communication Skills	22	17.3%	22	16.4%
Creativity and Innovation	26	20.5%	25	18.7%
Critical Thinking	18	14.2%	13	9.7%
Ethical Reasoning	4	3.1%	5	3.7%
Global Awareness	12	9.4%	7	5.2%
Information Literacy and Research Skills	5	3.9%	4	3.0%
Program Competence	22	17.3%	41	30.6%
Quantitative Reasoning	4	3.1%	3	2.2%
Teamwork and Collaboration	9	7.1%	6	4.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>		<b>134</b>	

\*Courses with multiple ELOs attached are listed multiple times above.

**APPENDIX C**  
**ELOs Assigned by Academic School**

	Fall22	Spring23
<u>Adapting to Change</u>	5	8
ARHU	4	7
GENS	1	1
<u>Communication Skills</u>	22	22
ARHU	19	20
GENS	3	2
<u>Creativity and Innovation</u>	26	25
ARHU	18	21
EDUC	3	2
GENS	5	2
<u>Critical Thinking</u>	18	13
ARHU	6	9
EDUC	3	2
GENS	9	2
<u>Ethical Reasoning</u>	4	5

ARHU	3	4
GENS	1	1
<u>Global Awareness</u>	12	7
ARHU	8	5
GENS	4	2
<u>Information Literacy and Research Skills</u>	5	4
ARHU	1	4
GENS	4	0
<u>Program Competence</u>	22	41
ARHU	18	36
EDUC	3	3
<u>Quantitative Reasoning</u>	4	3
ARHU	1	3
GENS	3	0
<u>Teamwork and Collaboration</u>	9	6
ARHU	7	6
GENS	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>134</b>



\*Courses with multiple ELOs attached are listed multiple times above.