

## **Searching for Meaning in Mundane Work A Lesson Learned from Process of Assessing Administrative and Student Service Outcome**

**Veronica Acevedo Avila**

A common critique the Student Learning Outcome (SLO) coordinators often receive is that the SLO process of defining an outcome, planning a method to assess it, conducting the assessment, summarizing the data, critiquing the results and making further recommendations, feels mechanical. The process can denigrate to simply another dull mundane task. So, this year the SLO coordinators decided to try a new bottom-up technique aimed to foster a more organic approach by examining what is most valuable about the work one does. Our hope was that this exercise would lead to the development of a relevant and substantial Administrative Unit Outcome (think SLO's for administrative divisions). We tried the bottom-up approach in two workshops this year, and the undertaking proved successful; departments developed AUO's through an innovative and efficient procedure.

Why the success? We decided to offer workshops that would include an active listening pair-share exercise in which partner A would state what was most important about their work, then partner B would do the same. Both partners would then re-state what they heard the other say. After sharing core work values with the larger group, participants were then asked how they could improve their department. For many individuals working together, they realized they had a shared common interest in regard to how they wanted to enhance their department. Their aims were not too different and therefore they were able to easily create a general outcome statement that illustrated their collective objectives. Participants were engaged, as was demonstrated by the lively interaction, and actively involved in the process. Many stated it was the most effective AOU/SSLO workshop they had ever attended. Was it because people respectfully listened to what their colleagues held in high regard about their work?

For most participants, this was the first time they collectively contemplated their core job function; in other words, they were able to discuss the essence of what they do and why they do it. Individuals reflected upon their duties, skills, and abilities, which in turn validated and legitimized their positions. The lead custodian stated that he cared most about the beauty of the campus, the vice president of business said he wanted to run an efficient system that a non-business person would clearly understand, the person in charge of college keys said she valued helping faculty navigate the campus through building access, and these constructive comments resulted in a shift to better their respective areas. In both workshops offered, staff and faculty members shared what they believed to be central and significant to their departments. This active-listening exercise fostered dignity and recognition not only regarding one's work, but also regarding the individual. Unlike most strategies, this technique delved into one's humanity; people felt recognized and esteemed. They found their voice and then created a foundation of unity. We are a large state mandated bureaucratic institution in which people sometimes go unnoticed, yet this inclusive bottom-up approach gave everyone an opportunity to

be recognized and valued. The intended consequence produced good work, and this was one outcome the SLO coordinators were thankful to note.