

# How ‘One More Thing’ Can Lead to ‘Far Fewer Things’:

## Assessment as a mechanism for managing workload

*Preview of session planned for 2016 Partners In Learning*

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One common concern about the ongoing requirement to assess learning outcomes on our campus pertains to stress and schedule management. The worry, in short, is that the time spent on assessment compounds a workload that, for many faculty and staff, already exceeds reasonable expectations.

I myself am an active faculty member, and am intimately familiar with this type of worry. Successfully navigating my own responsibilities as an instructor often seems to require a highly delicate balance of time, effort, commitment, and self-care (a component that, I think many will agree, is too often sacrificed in favor of the others). The prospect of upsetting this balance is seldom attractive, and if any additional demands upon us—including the requirements to participate in outcomes assessment—threaten to jeopardize it, it seems only natural to object. In short, I suppose I’m saying, “I get it.”

With this in mind, the suggestion I’d like to make in this article may sound a bit strange. I’d like to invite our campus to consider the possibility that SLO assessment, when done *well*, can in fact help to make our workload more manageable than it might otherwise be. During an upcoming workshop at the upcoming [Partners in Learning Conference](#), De Anza’s SLO Coordinators will use examples to illustrate this possibility, and show that by incorporating serious outcomes assessment into our pedagogy, we can turn ‘one more thing’ into a more sustainable workload. Rather than taxing us further, outcomes assessment can yield work that is in many ways easier and more rewarding, both for teachers and students.

One avenue by which assessment work can make life easier for an instructor involves efficiency. In my own experience, this impact is most visible during my office hours, which tend to be much less impacted now than they were prior to discovering more effective ways of clarifying course concepts during class time. SLO assessment has often played a key role in such discoveries. I still welcome office visits from students, but find it much easier to have one or two relaxed conversations than six or seven during any given office hour. In this respect, assessment results can in a very direct way yield less work for instructors.

In other instances, authentic assessment can yield changes that may not lessen the amount of time and effort spent in our respective pedagogies, but that can nevertheless make the results of the expenditure more *rewarding*. I’m sure that most instructors can attest to the fact that effective, engaging teaching practices can be just as invigorating for teachers as they are for students. And to the extent that authentic outcomes assessment work can help to discover and facilitate these types of practices, I think it fair to say that it can play a very real role in making our lives as faculty easier.

None of this is intended to suggest that SLO assessment *always* works like this. It is absolutely possible to approach assessment in such a way as to exacerbate already difficult work demands. Instead, what I hope to leave you with is simply the suggestion that *the right kind* of assessment work—driven by a genuine curiosity about student learning on our campus—can have the opposite effect. How likely this is, and what we as a campus community might do to get there, is of course a topic that would seem to demand further discussion. And as always, your campus coordinators remain committed to the belief that it is this very sort of discussion that constitutes the ultimate value of our outcomes assessment process.