AMENDMENT TO THE

SPECIAL REPORT

of the

RULES COMMITTEE

concerning

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AD HOC COMMITTEE
TO BE NAMED
THE JOINT TASK FORCE ON STUDENT SUCCESS LEARNING OUTCOMES
(JTFSSLO)

Presented at the
753rd Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
December 10, 2015

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Marilyn Billings
Richard Bogartz
Steven D. Brewer
Nancy Cohen
David Gross
A Yemisi Jimoh, Chair
MJ Peterson
James Rinderle
Susan Krauss Whitbourne
Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to be Named the Joint Task Force on Student Success Learning Outcomes (JTFSSLO)

Background:
The University of Massachusetts Amherst is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The last comprehensive accreditation review took place in 2009, with a fifth-year interim report submitted in 2013. As part of the accreditation process and as a matter of good practice, the campus participates in the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes.

After extending our accreditation in 2009, NEASC commented that they “look forward to learning of the institution’s success in assessing the learning outcomes of students” in our General Education program (CIHE letter to Chancellor Holub, 2010). The 2013 fifth-year interim report provided an update on General Education student learning outcomes including participation in the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) program as a pilot, indirect benchmark assessment through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and campus-based faculty-driven direct assessment with the new Integrative Experience (IE) General Education requirement. In the campus’s interim report to NEASC we identified gaps in the collection of information as well as difficulty in using the results of data collected to inform the design and improvement of our General Education program. With another NEASC review scheduled for 2018, it is important for the campus to revisit our General Education Learning Outcomes along with the assessment practices used and data collected on these student learning outcomes.

The national dialogue on student learning outcomes and assessment measures has intensified. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), through its Liberal Education & America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign, identified a set of “Essential Learning Outcomes” and provided a set of rubrics designed by faculty and other higher educational professionals with which their attainment can be evaluated (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education, VALUE, project of 2007-09). Students’ engagement in High-Impact Educational Practices (such as research opportunities, internships, service learning, and learning communities) is being measured indirectly through the NSSE instrument. Many campuses are taking this a step further and assessing the contribution that student involvement in these active learning practices makes to the students’ cumulative learning through direct assessment of student learning outcomes.

The campus’ Strategic Plan, “Innovation and Impact: Renewing the Promise of the Public Research University” (2013), focuses on The Complete Educational Experience (p. 8-9):

Clear learning objectives have been defined for our General Education curriculum, aligned closely with AAC&U’s Essential Learning Objectives (www.aacu.org/leap/index.cfm). These objectives complement and, in many cases, echo the learning objectives associated with specific programs of study. It is also possible to see in parts of our curriculum various themes, including enterprise, engagement, expression, sustainability, and social responsibility. And throughout the educational experience the sense of individual initiative and responsibility is strong.

The complete educational experience also includes robust co-curricular opportunities with a focus on personal development to promote mental and physical well-being, the development of meaningful relationships, facility in collaborating with others of diverse backgrounds and identities, and personal accountability and leadership.

The plan also identifies the need to do more in the area of student outcomes assessment in the section on Promoting a Culture of Evidence (p. 6):

The next generation of higher education leaders will demonstrate how they establish learning objectives, communicate them to students, express them in the curriculum, gather evidence of success, and, most importantly, use that evidence to improve curricula and pedagogy. We now make effective use of indirect measures of student achievement (student self-report), and have begun to incorporate direct measures,
based on systematic evaluation of actual student work, into selected efforts such as the Integrative Experience. The next step is building capacity for direct measures across the curriculum, and integrating direct and indirect data in performance assessment. Similarly, the campus has been developing learning outcomes and assessment techniques for co-curricular aspects of student learning, and those efforts, too, should expand.

The Strategic Plan thus endorses developing a more intentional approach to the collection of systematic evidence to assess undergraduate student learning and student experiences in a more holistic way.

The need to revisit our General Education learning outcomes along with our assessment of these learning outcomes in time for our next accreditation provides our campus with an opportunity to broaden our scope through the identification and endorsement of campus-wide learning outcomes. Though the General Education learning outcomes provide a strong foundation from which to build, they only address a third of our curriculum. We should also engage the campus community in developing a clear campus statement defining what our students acquire through the entire experience as students at our institution. This means paying attention to curriculum beyond General Education as well as to the ways that co-curricular activities can also support our learning outcomes.

Charge:
The Joint Task Force for Student Success Learning Outcomes will develop a common set of terms for the elements of its work permitting development of a collective understanding of assessment that bridges the multiple lexicons that have developed in different disciplines, and administrative units, as well as among our diverse stakeholders.

The JTFSSLO will then identify campus-wide learning goals (tentatively called “objectives”) at the undergraduate level. These UMass Amherst Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) will indicate to our students, faculty, and community at large what we value as an institution in preparing our students for their personal and professional lives.

The JTFSSLO will also examine the formative student assessment activities that are currently in place, and make recommendations on additional assessment needs. This will assist in moving the campus to a more intentional approach to the collection of evidence in the assessment of the undergraduate student learning experience being provided consistent with ongoing national and state dialogues.

The JTFSSLO will define and identify how various curricular and co-curricular activities are supportive of and contribute to desired learning outcomes. The curricular discussions should build on the General Education curriculum.

Membership:
The Joint Task Force on Student Success Learning Outcomes will consist of 13 members, distributed as follows:
The Secretary of the Faculty Senate, or designee
The Chair of the Faculty Senate Rules Committee, or designee
The Chair or one of the Co-Chairs of the Undergraduate Education Council, or designee
The Chair of the General Education Council, or designee
One member of the Faculty, appointed by the Rules Committee
The President of the Graduate Student Senate, or designee
The President of the Student Government Association, or designee
One undergraduate student representative, appointed by the SGA
The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Campus Life, or designee
The Vice Provost for Undergraduate and Continuing Education
The Assistant Provost for Assessment and Educational Effectiveness
The Director of Assessment in Student Affairs and Campus Life
One Associate Dean for undergraduate students, appointed by the Vice Provost for UCE

A Chair or Co-Chairs will be appointed by the Chancellor with agreement of the Faculty Senate Rules Committee.
Subcommittees:
At the discretion of the Chair or Co-Chairs, the Joint Task Force may form subcommittees that may include other members of the campus community.

Reporting Dates:
The Joint Task Force will issue progress reports to the Faculty Senate as appropriate. The JTFSSLO will develop a preliminary report and recommendations and present them to the campus community for consideration by April 15, 2016.

Sunset:
The Joint Task Force on Student Success Learning Outcomes is established for a maximum period of three years, subject to possible renewal by vote of the Faculty Senate. If the work of JTFSSLO is completed prior to that date, the Joint Task Force may recommend its dissolution to the Faculty Senate.

MOVED:
That the Faculty Senate approve the Amendment to the Special Report of the Rules Committee concerning the Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to be named the Joint Task Force for Student Success Learning Outcomes, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 16-018A.