

We the members of the Academic Standards Committee of Chemeketa Community College would like to express our concern about the process used to develop common course outcomes. While we are aware that JBAC is under pressure to resolve issues of coordination of course content between community colleges and universities quickly before action is taken by the legislature, we find that the decision-making process used for developing the set of basic outcomes to be poorly designed and shockingly inadequate for solving problems in higher education. In order to address coordination issues, JBAC wishes to develop a list of basic outcomes to be used by all college faculty in order to influence the selection and content of distribution-area courses for the AAOT . Academic freedom issues aside, if these outcomes are constructed properly, this sounds like a workable solution. But when it came to developing these outcomes, JBAC lumped disciplines into large groups and used the following method to develop basic outcomes for these large groups:

1. Brainstorm Phase: A small group of faculty brainstorm for several hours about the important aspects of their discipline.
2. Reduction Phase: The same group, on the same day, reduces these ideas from step one into a set of “key ideas.”
3. Formulation Phase: The same group, on the same day, attempts to formulate a sentence or two stuffing as many of the key ideas into these sentences as possible. Of course, not all key ideas can be included and still have the content make sense, so some are omitted.
4. Rewrite Phase: The sentences are then rewritten by a facilitator who attempts to make these naturally convoluted sentences more readable, but sometimes at the expense of content and meaning.

What is missing from this procedure are the mainstays of academic decision-making: numerous cycles of reflection and readjustment, and the inclusion in the decision-making process of a broad range of those who will be affected. The standard academic decision-making process is by its very nature a maddeningly slow process, but in most cases it yields a solution that truly solves the perceived problem, and has the acceptance of a majority of the academic community.

We are alarmed at the prospect that if JBAC’s process goes unchallenged, this type of inadequate decision-making may become the rule, undermining the institution of higher education that we hold dear. We feel it is imperative that JBAC understand that the above decision-making process is unacceptable, and we suggest that JBAC start the process over from scratch to determine basic outcomes for the state's higher education system by using an appropriate method of making serious and lasting educational decisions. If JBAC presses forward with its plans without including more faculty in a recursive process of feedback and revision, we believe that it will encounter a great deal of resistance next fall as faculty around the state stonewall the process in dissatisfaction over both the basic outcomes themselves and the method by which these basic outcomes were determined.