The question has been asked repeatedly, “Do we have to assess every section of every course using every SLO in one semester?” The answer is “no.” In order to assess SLOs you may use a sampling technique. The sample does need to be representative of the student population. So, the next question is, “How do we get a representative sample?”

A random sample is the best representative sample you can have. For example, if there are 6 sections of a course, you might only want to randomly sample 3 of the sections. In order to get a random sample you might want to write down each section on a piece of paper and put those papers in a box and shake. Then chose 3 papers, these will be the sections you will assess. You could even roll dice and each side would represent a section. Roll the dice however many times it takes to come up with 3 different sections.

Another good question is, “What is a good student sample size for each section?” A good rule to use for sampling size is to keep the sample to approximately 25% of the total number of students. So, if the student population for all sections were 300 students then the sample size would be 75. If you are truly inspired to assess your students a larger sample size is always the best.

Once you’ve determined the number of students to assess the next questions to ask are, “How many sections would you need to sample to get about 75 responses?” and “How do we choose the sections?” The answer to these questions is based on what you are attempting to learn. Are there any differences between students taking day courses or evening courses? Are there any differences between students who meet in classes once per week in comparison to those that meet more than once per week? The answers you come up with will help determine which sections you will want to sample.

For example, you’ve decided to sample students who attend day verses night courses. You will want to sample sections from each day and night course. If during a semester you have 6-day sections and 6 night sections of a course, you will need to look at the total number of students and decide how many sections you will need to assess to get your...
25%. Then you can randomly choose day sections and night sections.

After deciding which sections you will choose and the sample size you will need to decide how often to assess. The faculty within the department should make the decision. In order to collect relevant data that makes assessment meaningful faculty will have to decide if there is a enough difference in the student population from semester to semester to warrant assessing multiple semesters of the same SLO. So, are students different in the fall, spring or summer semesters? If so, you might want to assess multiple semesters.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at lisa.harvey@vvc.edu or ext. 2658.