

**Comprehensive Plan for Sustaining Assessment
Practices
to Enhance Student Learning at
The University of Scranton**

Office of Educational Assessment

Approved by Assessment Advisory Committee, January 15, 2016

Approved by Faculty Senate, March 8, 2016

Updated by OEA, November 14, 2018

Updated by OEA, EAAC January 2024

Introduction and Background

Student learning assessment has long been part of the academic life of the University of Scranton. The University instituted a decentralized model for assessment of student learning in the late 1990s. Following an effort to centralize efforts under a Comprehensive Assessment Plan in 2004, the University returned to a decentralized model in the latter part of that decade, in which each administrative area with a role in student learning assumed responsibility for assessment: The College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), The Panuska College of Professional Studies (PCPS), Kania School of Management (KSOM), The Weinberg Memorial Library (WML), and Student Affairs (now the Division of Student Life). Following its 2013 Periodic Review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), the University launched a significant overhaul of its student learning assessment structure and processes, returning to a more centralized model that retained key distribution of areas of responsibility. The development and launch of this new Comprehensive Plan for Assessment of Student Learning and its systematic approach to academic and co-curricular learning, guided by a new faculty-led Office of Educational Assessment (OEA), and collaborative Educational Assessment Advisory Committee (EAAC)¹ are at the heart of this approach.

Purpose

This Comprehensive Plan for Sustaining Assessment Practices to Enhance Student Learning at the University of Scranton outlines a comprehensive, systematic strategy for the University's approach to student learning assessment. The plan describes processes and cycles for the development and assessment of learning outcomes, and associated reporting and application procedures. Grounded in learning outcomes at program and institutional levels, and for the general education program², improvements to student learning are thus part of a formal cycle of gathering, analyzing, disseminating, and acting upon evidence gathered. Key terms used throughout this document are defined in Appendix E.

In shaping our direction, the University community considers best practices in higher education, including those developed and endorsed by scholars and practitioners within the field of learning assessment. Our ethical commitment to reflective accountability, evaluating our programs and activities with honest candor in the spirit of better serving to our students through the best possible programming, is closely tied to our Catholic, Jesuit mission and ways of proceeding. Our practices are also designed to address external accountability obligations, including addressing Middle States' Standards of Accreditation and those of other programmatic and disciplinary accreditation bodies.

¹ First named the Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC), renamed in 2023 to more clearly communicate its role in educational assessment activities.

² As of October 2023, the University is in the midst of a multi-phase review of the general education curriculum. The general education assessment framework remains in place, though may adjust based upon the outcomes of that process.

Mission Connections

The Plan pays particular attention to the importance of the University's Catholic and Jesuit mission: namely, its dedication to freedom of inquiry and to the development of wisdom and integrity of all its members. Drawing on underlying concepts from the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm,³ the University's student learning assessment plan ensures ongoing evaluation to build a sustained, evidence-based process for assessing student learning outcomes across programs and curricula.

In 1599 the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* [*Rule of Studies*, which is largely understood to outline the educational system of the Jesuits] articulated five key elements of Jesuit Education: (1) context, through which the material conditions of the student's learning are considered, as well as the predispositions of the student; (2) experience, through which students move beyond rote learning to something more active and personal; (3) reflection, during which students apply the subject matter to their own lives and processes, and where meaning is said to be made in this paradigm; (4) action, which involves change in students' attitudes and behaviors through the application of and reflection upon knowledge; and (5) evaluation, through which students' mastery of subject matter is assessed with a view toward identifying gaps in students' knowledge, the need for alternate methods of teaching, and individualized approaches to encouraging and advising students.⁴ These same principles for evaluation of individual students can be applied to evaluation of groups of students who are enrolled in various programs and General Education. It is the last of these elements, Evaluation, with which Educational Effectiveness Assessment most closely aligns as a discipline.

Goals & Guiding Principles: Assessment and Overall Institutional Effectiveness

The University of Scranton has developed a set of guiding principles that outline our commitment and approach to assessment at the institution. The goal of *institutional effectiveness* at The University is evaluating, documenting, and communicating what the University does well, identifying areas where we can improve, and applying assessment results to guide our application of resources and realize improvements. This discipline combines both *institutional assessment* (the practices used to assess achievement of mission and goals, and evaluation of non-academic areas) and educational and *student learning assessment* (the practices used to assess achievement of student learning outcomes, both directly within academic programs, and through co-curricular and related learning and formation activities).

³ A framework describing core tenets and approaches to education and learning in the Jesuit tradition. See: Duminuco, V. J. (Ed.) (2000). *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th anniversary perspectives* (1st ed.). Fordham University Press: NY, NY.

⁴ Witek, D. and Grettano, T. (2016). Revising for metaliteracy: Flexible course design to support social media pedagogy. In T. E. Jacobson and T. P. Mackey (Eds.), *Metaliteracy in practice* (pp. 1-22). Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman. (Citation is on page 5)

At each level, goals and outcomes are monitored and measured through both formative and summative assessment strategies. Findings from these evaluations are used to inform decision making, planning and improvement, and resourcing of programs and services.

- Assessment is mission-driven, in the particular context of the Ignatian educational paradigm and our Catholic, Jesuit character.
- Assessment is integrated within appropriate advisory and decision-making processes and structures.
- Assessment is iterative, adapting to changing needs and new opportunities.
- Assessment is collaborative and participatory, engaging all members of the University community in reflection.
- Assessment is transparent, its processes and outcomes communicated clearly and frequently.
- Assessment is evidence-based, supported by quality data and evidence that show how institutional and student learning goals are being met.
- Assessment is useful, designed and pursued in ways that are practical and relevant to unit and program needs, and cycles for decision making and resource allocation.
- Assessment results are used to “close the loop,” with results applied through planning, resourcing, and continuous improvement of programs and services.
- Assessment is ongoing and cumulative, reflecting our performance over time.
- Assessment is itself assessed, its processes and structures evaluated and refined through ongoing reflection and planned cycles of review.

Institutional Goals: Our Strategic Plan and Institutional Learning Outcomes

Supporting our mission, the University’s Strategic Plan outlines our institutional goals. In addition to guiding institutional growth and development, the strategic plan also address broad aims for student learning and formation, including educational emphases in the liberal arts and humanities; ethical, cultural, social and ecological justice, and global awareness; co-curricular learning through high impact practices.⁵ A variety of institutional assessment processes are employed to monitor and reflect on the progress an impact of our mission and institutional goals.

Student learning assessment efforts are connected to this framework via the close relationship of its goals to the University’s institutional learning outcomes (ILOs), including student learning in the

⁵ “Our Core, Our Community, Our Commitments.” 2020. See: www.scranton.edu/strategicplan. As described in our planning model, each college, division, and department (including academic departments) outline goals in support of the strategic plan. Assessment results, including program learning assessment, may be used to inform goal setting and help monitor progression and outcomes.

humanities; student support and success efforts; and programming that engages students in high impact practices.

The ILOs seek to ensure all students:

1. Develop and use the intellectual and practical competencies that are the foundation of personal and professional development and lifelong learning including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency and information literacy.
2. Exhibit broad knowledge of the human condition, understanding the world in its physical and natural aspects, as well as the philosophical and theological basis for modern thought, faith and belief.
3. Demonstrate competence in their chosen field of study, using the knowledge and ability to address the most significant questions, and advancing towards positions of leadership.
4. Employ their knowledge and intellect to address situations in a way that demonstrates a devotion to the spiritual and corporal welfare of other human beings and by a special commitment to the pursuit of social justice and the common good of the entire human community.

The Office of Educational Assessment (OEA)

Overall responsibility for educational assessment rests with the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, and, as assigned by the Provost, the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs. Working together with these and other academic leadership, and with the advice and guidance of the EAAC, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) is the central hub for student learning assessment activities at the University of Scranton. As a faculty-led and driven office, it serves the institution as both a coordinating and a consultative body, developing faculty and staff expertise in methods of collection, analysis, and action so that program improvements, including curricular changes, are driven by constructive attention to evidence. The OEA oversees and documents assessment processes and cycles, developing a repository of teaching and learning information that is central to evidence-based decision-making.

The OEA is comprised of a Director/Co-Director and Faculty Fellows representing each of the three academic colleges. Through an application and selection process, the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs appoints the OEA Director and Fellows from among the full-time faculty. The OEA is responsible to the Associate Provost and, in turn the Provost/Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, for reporting on the state of learning assessment at the University.

The Educational Assessment Advisory Committee (EAAC), comprised of faculty, professional staff, and a student representative, advises the OEA. The Faculty Senate approves faculty appointments to the EAAC. In addition to the EAAC, other advisory groups included in the learning assessment process include college curriculum and assessment committees (chaired by the Dean of the college), and assessment advisory committees within the Weinberg Memorial Library and Student Life. The Assistant Provost for Planning & Institutional Effectiveness/MSCHE Accreditation Liaison Officer engages regularly with OEA leadership to provide support and build linkages between learning and institutional assessment. The Assistant Provost for Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics plays an important role in support of the technical and data needs of the OEA.

The recently launched Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC), chaired by the Assistant Provost for Planning & Institutional Effectiveness, brings together the OEA director and others responsible for learning assessment together with personnel responsible for institutional (non-academic) assessment to identify and address shared opportunities for assessment activities, processes, and the application of results, including points of collection for assessment evidence, and the use of national surveys and other evaluations.

Educational Assessment Procedures & Responsibilities⁶

1. Academic Programs

This plan requires that all academic degree programs conduct assessment of all Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) on a three-year cycle (Appendix A, Figure 1). This means that programs will: a) identify appropriate approaches and artifacts for direct assessment, which may be embedded in courses whose Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) most closely map to PLOs for the given cycle and/or b) identify and assess indirect evidence of PLOs.⁷

Academic departments and programs shall:

1. Develop learning outcomes appropriate to the program(s) of study.
2. Post and maintain up-to-date PLOs on the program and/or department web page and notify the OEA of any changes to PLOs via annual reports or other methods.

⁶ See “Assessment Roles and Responsibilities at The University of Scranton” document for additional details.

⁷ These activities, however, do not preclude programs or individual faculty members from conducting assessment at the course level for their own interest, curriculum development, or to align with expectations of disciplinary (specialty) accreditation. Dean’s Offices consult with the OEA on determining any scheduling/cycle changes appropriate for departments within their respective college.

3. Ensure that SLOs for every course are communicated in course syllabi.
4. As a recommended best practice, ensure that, for every course, one or more SLOs aligns with a PLO. Departments should also demonstrate alignment of PLOs to relevant ILOs.
5. Develop and refine a plan to assess all PLOs on a three-year cycle. The plan should include both direct and indirect assessment evidence using the Program Assessment Report (PAR) template (see Appendix A, Figure 1), or other approved reporting method(s).
6. Gather and analyze evidence collected from key assessments according to the plan.
7. Describe how evidence is used to improve student learning and promote overall program improvement. Report and describe evidence of student achievement of PLOs, according to OEA's established procedure for each college. This includes submission of annual assessment-related materials and documentation via the Annual Planning and Reporting process required of all academic departments⁸.
8. The OEA collates and maintains an active list of current PLOs, which are posted on the OEA web site.

Timeline:

Academic degree granting programs shall conduct assessment planning and reporting on the cycle developed and communicated by their Dean's Office in consultation with the OEA. Assessment reports must be submitted as part of the Annual Planning & Reporting materials submitted by the department in which it resides each spring. PLOs should be reviewed regularly as part of each assessment reporting cycle, and/or as part of program or accreditation reviews. In addition, interdisciplinary and other high impact programs may also conduct regular learning assessment activities in line with the expectations or requirements of their departments and/or college. Such assessment should also be reported to the OEA via the Annual Planning & Reporting process.

If an Academic Program Review is being conducted for a program and/or department, these Program review documents may serve as a PAR in the spring of the academic year in which program review took place. Likewise, disciplinary accreditation reports that address learning assessment may serve as a PAR

in the spring before the scheduled site visit. Departments should consult with the OEA to discuss the status of these activities.

2. Academic Deans

The Dean of each college and the Weinberg Memorial Library, in keeping with their responsibility to oversee improvement of programs in their areas, will:

1. Review assessment plans and reports for each academic program in his or her college/division.
2. Ensure that academic program learning outcomes and assessment plans are reviewed and/or updated on a regular cycle, such as with Program Review (currently every 5 years) or in accordance with an accreditation cycle.
3. Document, disseminate, and communicate assessment results throughout their respective colleges/division and, where appropriate, with other campus groups and members of the faculty, staff and administration, through committee and other meetings, annual assessment days/retreats, and other mechanisms.
4. Lead discussions related to the use of assessment data for program improvement within their college with college-level Dean's Conferences and Curriculum and Assessment committees, which will review assessment evidence reported by programs, and identify and recommend to their Dean opportunities for improvement based upon those data.
5. Provide a report to the OEA on college-wide assessment evidence, demonstrating the way in which attainment of PLOs in the college supports ILOs, and any programmatic changes or improvements made to address assessment results.
6. As part of their own Annual Report to the Provost, summarize assessment activities within the college/division, including successful outcomes, and the application of assessment results for improvement and/or resource allocation.

3. Weinberg Memorial Library

The Weinberg Memorial Library faculty are integral to student learning, especially regarding Library initiatives in assessment of information literacy.⁹ The Library's Information Literacy Program reflects the framework and the standards for information literacy developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Library faculty have representation on both the EAAC and IAC to assure their active engagement and input to our overall assessment strategies.

Information literacy is a fundamental component of the general education curriculum and is included amongst our ILOs. To support information literacy assessment,

1. Library faculty will identify direct and indirect evidence that information literacy classes, research services interactions, and other activities assist students in the achievement of one or more outcomes.
2. Library faculty will articulate changes or improvements in the methods used in instruction based on assessment results.

Timeline:

The Library conducts Information Literacy Program assessment on an annual cycle. Faculty submit assessment reports to the Information Literacy Coordinator each Spring, which are then posted on the Library's Information Literacy Curriculum and Assessment web pages. Through public posting to the Library's website, these documents are also made available to the Assistant Provost for Planning & IE and the OEA.

4. Student Life

The Division of Student Life strives to foster extraordinary student formation of mind, body, and soul through a distinctly Jesuit educational experience that prepares reflective, compassionate, courageous, and capable graduates who thrive in justice, spirit and truth. To support this goal, Student Life departments engage in a variety of learning assessment activities^[1]. These departments include but are not limited to the Roche Family Career Development, Office of Student Conduct, Office of Residence Life,

⁹ For the Library's long-standing assessment of information literacy, including their present plan and results, see: <http://www.scranton.edu/academics/wml/infolit/assessment.shtml>

^[1] Non-learning focused Student Life departments also engage in non-educational evaluation as part of departmental and divisional planning and institutional effectiveness processes.

Cultural Centers, Center for Student Engagement, Center for Health Education & Wellness, University Police, Counseling Center, and Student Health Services. The general assessment approach utilized by the Division of Student Life is as follows:

1. Departments identify relevant learning outcomes appropriate to their type of programming and intended student learning & formation.
2. Departments gather direct and indirect evidence that programs and services are assisting students in the achievement of one or more SLOs, which often map to one or more ILOs.
3. Departments articulate changes or improvements in programs or services based on assessment results. This application of assessment findings is described in annual assessment reports prepared by each department.

Departments submit assessment reports and plans to the Vice President for Student Life & Dean of Students and Director of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution each June. Based upon reporting lines, the Vice President for Student Life & Dean of Students or Assistant Vice President review and provide feedback to departments, including that related to assessment activity, following receipt of these reports. This information is also made available to the Assistant Provost for Planning & IE and OEA via the Annual Planning & Reporting system.

5. Institutional Planning, Effectiveness, and Reporting

The Offices of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness (OPIE) and Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics (OIRDA) regularly work with administrative departments to provide data and information for planning, and other improvement and decision-making needs.

These departments assist in learning assessment in the following ways:

1. Develop and maintain a calendar of institutional assessments and other surveys. Administer key surveys (e.g. NSSE, Noel Levitz), conduct analysis of survey data, and assist others in exploring the use of these surveys for their own assessment needs.
2. Prepare reports of institutional assessment and other data. Share and guide review of assessment results with members of the campus community, including the EAAC and the IAC.
3. Archive information on surveys and other evaluative tools currently in use across the University that capture indirect evidence of academic and co-curricular student learning.

4. Consult with the OEA, Academic Programs, Colleges, and Student Life for the purpose of identifying and supplying evidence for indirect assessment, including data relative to the University's ILOs.
5. Coordinate the Annual Planning and Reporting infrastructure and cycle.

6. The Office of Educational Assessment

The OEA will guide the development of effective assessment processes; gather and collate assessment documentation; and review evidence of educational effectiveness assessment in academic and co-curricular programs, including General Education. The OEA shall:

1. Ensure that PLOs are in place for each academic program and are made available to students via program web pages and other communication vehicles. Monitor changes to PLOs, and prepare an annual, comprehensive listing of all PLOs on its own web site.
2. Monitor PLO connections to the ILOs, reviewing evidence of ILO assessment provided by Deans reports and other sources. Prepare broad reporting on the state of ILO assessment, and ILO outcomes.
3. Develop and oversee templates, reporting tools, and data management platforms for collecting, analyzing and reporting evidence of student learning.
4. Review assessment evidence submitted through the Annual Planning & Reporting System.
5. Consult with colleges, departments, and individual faculty and others on best practices in assessment. Review assessment plans and other core assessment documents prepared by departments. Make recommendations for improvements to program assessment processes.
6. Identify areas for faculty and staff development with regard to assessment of student learning; plan, implement, and evaluate resources and programs for faculty and staff development. Work with other University departments, such as the Center for Teaching Excellence, to provide assessment-related skills development.
7. Host gatherings and events to facilitate broad discussion of the use of assessment results to monitor and improve academic and co-curricular programs.
8. Prepare and submit an annual report on the plans, goals, and activities of the OEA to the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs via the Annual Planning & Reporting process.

9. Report evidence of student achievement of PLOs and ILOs, as well as the use of evidence for academic programs and co-curricular offerings to the following entities:
 - i. EAAC, IAC, and Faculty Senate
 - ii. The Office of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness for communication to the Board of Trustees, MSCHE, and other internal and external stakeholders.
 - iii. The Provost and Associate Provost, to apprise academic leadership of assessment activities, their application, and
 - iv. Students, faculty, staff and others by way of internal communications and the OEA website
10. Develop and communicate resources and programming to support best practices in student learning assessment, conveying these to the University community via means that include the OEA website, www.scranton.edu/assessment.
11. Coordinate specific duties related to the assessment of the General Education Program, as described below.

General Education Assessment Coordinator

Under the leadership of the Co-Coordinators of General Education Assessment, the OEA will oversee a regular GE assessment cycle. The GE assessment coordinators will:

1. Maintain an internally available dashboard of assessment results and how evidence is used for program improvement and decision-making.
2. Promote best practices in GE assessment through information sharing, the annual Intersession Institute, and summer workshops.
3. Routinely communicate and collaborate with the GE program coordinator and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.

7. Educational Assessment Advisory Committee

In support of these efforts, the Educational Assessment Advisory Committee (EAAC) will:

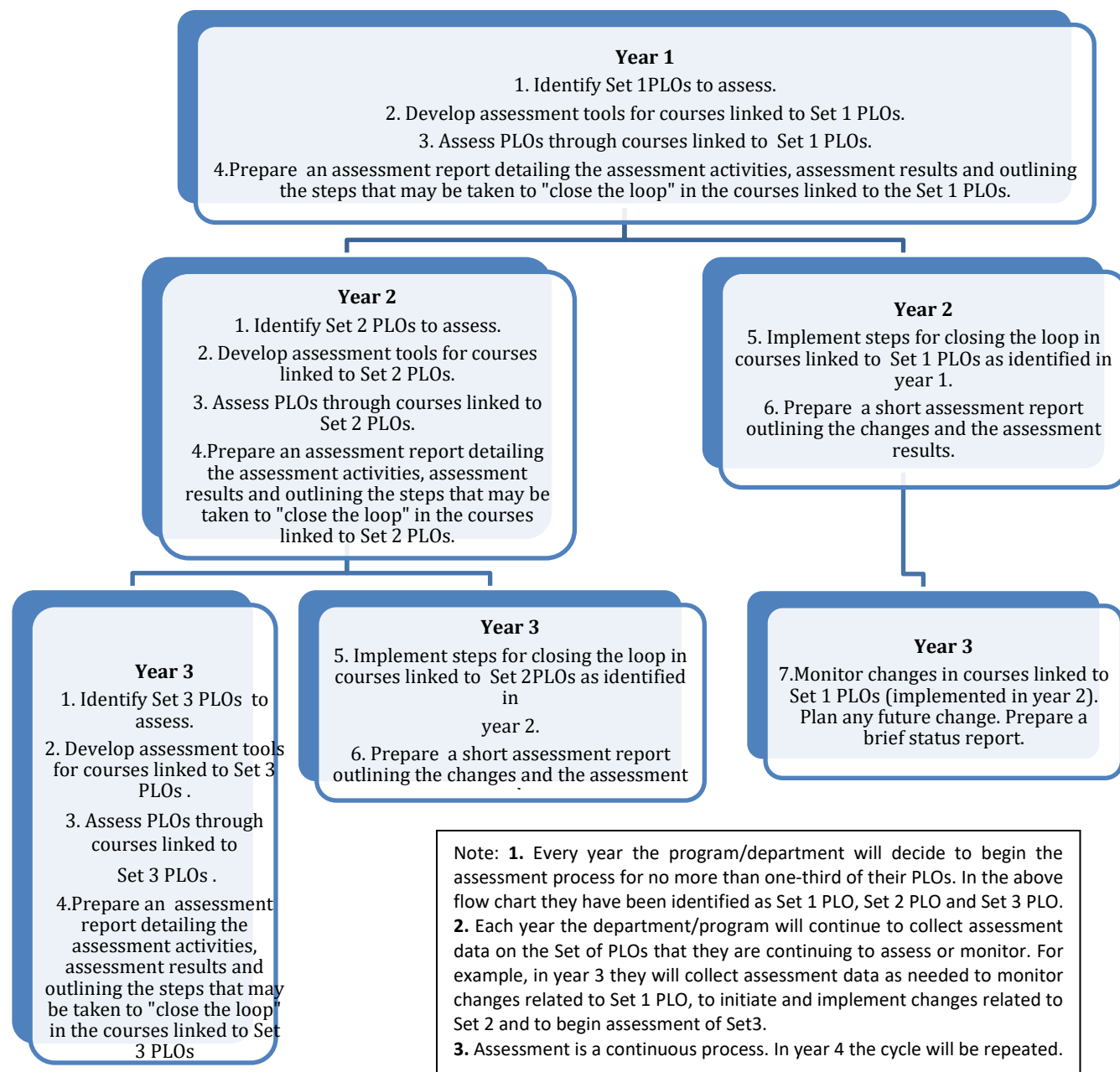
1. Advise the Director/s of the OEA on the impact and effectiveness of OEA processes. Regularly review the Comprehensive Plan and other core assessment materials to ensure they are current, understood, and appropriately promulgated.
2. Serve as a liaison between the OEA and Faculty Senate and Student Government.

3. Consider and monitor the state of assessment at the University, including reflection on the sufficiency of evidence of student learning assessment to ensure attainment of our broader assessment goals, and MSCHE standards.
4. Review assessment results, including institutional assessment materials such as student survey data, to identify, consider, and make recommendations related to indirect measures of student learning.

Appendix A

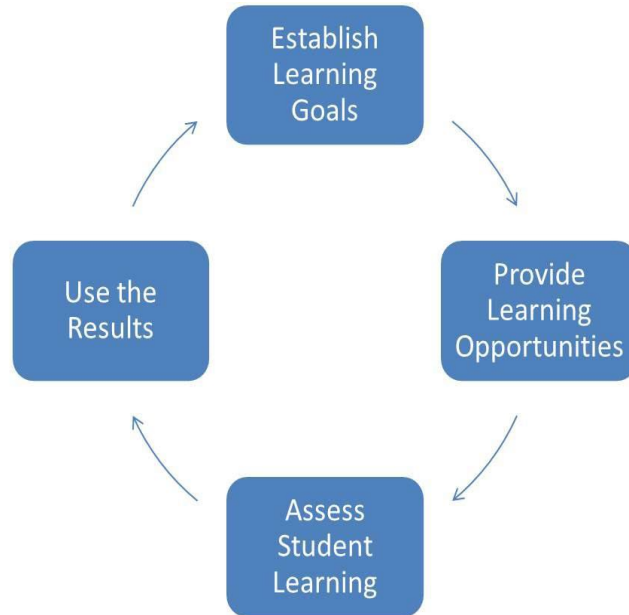
Figure 1: Cycle for Program Assessment

For general education program assessment details and cycle, see [Interim GE Assessment Plan](#).



Appendix B: Assessment Brief: A Guide for Using Results for Program Improvement

Student learning assessment is all about determining essential student learning outcomes – what we want students to know or be able to do as a result of their learning – and how well they are meeting those goals. To help illustrate this process, visuals such as the one below is commonly used:



The fourth phase of assessment planning – using results - is often referred to as “closing the loop.” Taking the time to review, discuss, and reflect on assessment results is an important part of supporting continuous improvement in our programs. To facilitate this process, it is essential to share assessment findings amongst faculty, as well as others involved in academic leadership – department chairs, college curriculum and assessment committees, deans, and governance groups. Sample questions to guide the review of assessment results:

- Do the results suggest the need to pay more particular attention to the predisposition and life experiences of the learner? What changes might be made? How and when will they be made? How and when will the effects of these changes be assessed?
- What did the assessment results indicate about the level of achievement of the student learning outcomes?
- Do the results suggest areas where improvements or changes should be made within the program, its curriculum, or its courses? Or, are there outcomes that we can celebrate – which describe success?
- Do results describe or connect to broader learning goals, such as those at the program level and/or institutional learning outcomes or other goals?

Appendix C: The Evolution of the Comprehensive Plan

Following the University's Periodic Review, in November 2013, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) issued a warning expressing concerns with the University's compliance with its Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning (now Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment). The University responded by creating a more visible and coherent infrastructure, namely the faculty-led Office of Educational Assessment (OEA). The Office operates under the supervision of the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and is closely aligned with the offices of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness and Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics. Presently it is staffed by two faculty Co-Directors and Faculty Fellows. The Educational Assessment Advisory Committee (EAAC) counsels the OEA.¹

In considering a more effective approach to learning assessment processes, The OEA undertook an analysis of structures and processes already in place in AY 2014-15. Data for the analysis included college and University documents, as well as formal and informal conversations with those involved in assessment at all levels. From this analysis, the OEA concluded the following:

- Existing assessment structures and processes operated in silos.
- Evidence of student learning was inconsistently reported and communicated.
- Program improvement was infrequently driven by evidence.
- Program assessment was more limited and inconsistent across programs that do not have external, professional accreditation requirements.

This analysis, coupled with guidance and input from Academic Affairs leadership, the Faculty Senate, and other stakeholders, guided the Office of Educational Assessment in preparing new Comprehensive Plan for Student Learning to outline a new, systematic approach to student learning assessment for the University. The Comprehensive Plan was approved by the Assessment Advisory Committee and Faculty Senate in early 2016, and has guided our efforts since that time.

Following the University's MSCHE Self-Study in 2019, the OEA began discussions with the AAC (now, EACC) and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to further improve student learning assessment processes, including opportunities for the refinement and renewal of the Comprehensive Plan. Adding to this reflection were findings from a 2022 audit of the OEA, and review of updated MSCHE accreditation standards and evidence expectations. An updated plan document was presented to the EAAC in November 2023.