

**Comprehensive Plan for Assessment of
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

Introduction and Background

The University of Scranton 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 division assumed responsibility for assessment: The College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), The Panuska College of Professional Studies (PCPS), Kania School of Management (KSOM), The Library, and Student Affairs (now Student Life). In November 2013, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) issued a warning with respect to its Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning. 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 a faculty Director, five Faculty Fellows, and a part-time Assessment Analyst. The Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC), whose faculty members are appointed by the Faculty Senate, counsels the OEA.¹

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 operate in silos.
- Evidence of student learning is inconsistently reported and communicated.
- Program improvement is infrequently driven by evidence.
- Program assessment remains isolated and inconsistent across programs without external, professional accreditation requirements.

Purpose

This plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for the University's centralized system of assessment cycles and reporting procedures. Decisions about student learning are thus part of a formal cycle of analyzing, disseminating, and acting upon evidence gathered. In many cases, the new processes represent a refinement and articulation of those already in place, thereby furthering the institution's capacity for self-evaluation with a view toward continuous improvement and decision-making.

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

¹ In November 2014, MSCHE lifted the warning with the proviso that sustained assessment efforts continue in conjunction with a manageable cycle for ongoing improvement of student learning.

and integrity of all its members. Drawing on underlying concepts from the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm,² the University's student learning assessment plan ensures ongoing evaluation in an effort to build a sustained, evidence-based process for assessing student learning outcomes across programs and curricula.

Evaluation is one of five elements of the Ignatian educational paradigm, first articulated in 1599: context, through which the material conditions of the student's learning are considered, as well as the predispositions of the student; experience, through which students move beyond rote learning to something more active and personal; 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; action, which involves change in students' attitudes and behaviors through the application of and reflection upon knowledge; and 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.³

It is in this spirit of the *Ratio* that The University of Scranton's approach to assessment of student learning is designed. In particular, the 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.

Guiding Framework & Principles

In light of the University Strategic Plan,⁴ assessment efforts are connected to this framework for engaged, integrated, and global student learning experiences that assist students to achieve the Institutional Learning Outcomes:

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

² See: Duminuco, V. J. (Ed.) (2000). *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th anniversary perspectives* (1st ed.). Fordham University Press: NY, NY.

³ 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)

⁴ "An Engaged, Integrated Global Student Experience." 2015. See: www.scranton.edu/strategicplan

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 assessment plan, alongside our overall planning and institutional effectiveness efforts, is guided by the following set of guiding principles:

- Assessment is mission-driven.
- 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, with quality data and evidence that show how institutional and student learning goals are being met.
- Assessment is useful and used, its processes providing evidence of how results of assessments are applied through planning, resourcing, and continuous improvement of programs and services.
- Assessment is ongoing and cumulative, reflecting our performance over time.
- Assessment is assessed, its processes evaluated and refined through ongoing reflection and planned cycles of review.

The Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) coordinates campus-wide assessment of learning outcomes. As a faculty-led and driven office, it serves the institution as both a coordinating and a consultative body charged with developing faculty and staff expertise in methods of collection, analysis, and action so that curricular changes are driven by constructive attention to evidence. In short, the OEA oversees the application of “the principles of academic inquiry to ourselves and what we do”⁵ so that a repository of teaching and learning information can remain central to evidence-based decision-making for Jesuit educational excellence.

⁵ Ewell, P.T. (1993). Total quality and academic practice: The idea we’ve been waiting for? *Change*, 25(3), 37-43.

The OEA is comprised of a Director and five Faculty Fellows representing each of the three 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 Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC), comprised of faculty, professional staff, and a student representative, advises the OEA. The Faculty Senate approves faculty appointments to the AAC. The OEA works collaboratively with other units that support the assessment of student learning and our approach to continuous improvement, including the offices of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness and Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics.

Procedures

Academic Programs

This plan requires that all academic programs conduct assessment at the program level on a three-year cycle (Appendix A, Figure 1; Appendix D). This means that programs will: a) identify and directly assess appropriate learning artifacts, which may be embedded in courses whose SLOs most closely map to PLOs for the given cycle and/or b) identify and assess indirect evidence of PLOs.⁶

Academic departments and programs will:

1. Ensure that SLOs for every course are communicated in course syllabi.
2. As a recommended best practice, ensure that, for every course, one or more SLOs aligns with a PLO.
3. Post and maintain up-to-date PLOs on the program web page.
4. 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 assessment plan template (see Appendix A, Figure 1).
5. Analyze evidence collected from key assessments according to the plan.
6. Describe how evidence is used to improve student learning and promote overall program improvement.
7. Report and describe evidence of student achievement of PLOs, according to OEA's established procedure for each college.

⁶ 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.

In order to meet these requirements, programs will collect and archive their own data, with the support of the OEA.

Timeline:

Every 3 years, programs in CAS (odd years) and PCPS (even years) will submit an Assessment Plan for Programs (APP) to their Dean's Office in October. The Dean's office will share copies of these plans with the OEA by November 1. KSOM will submit an assessment plan to OEA every 5 years, in accordance with its accreditation cycle.

Programs will complete assessment reporting by June 30th of every year as a component of Annual Reporting,⁷ unless the program has undergone an external accreditation or program review during the academic year. Program review documents may serve as a PAR in the spring of the academic year in which program review took place. Accreditation reports may serve as a PAR in the spring before the scheduled site visit.

Programs will be responsible for reviewing and, if necessary, updating their PLOs and curriculum maps with every APP and Program Review.⁸

Academic Deans

Academic Deans, in keeping with their responsibility to oversee improvement of programs in their colleges, will:

1. Review assessment plans and reports for each academic program in his or her college/school.
2. Ensure that academic assessment plans for programs 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/school through Dean's Conferences and other meetings.
4. With the input of the Dean's Conference and/or college Curriculum and Assessment committees, describe and document direct and indirect evidence that students in the College are meeting one or more of the ILOs (see Figure 1, Appendix B).

⁷ Every academic and administrative department submits an Annual Report every spring via the University's electronic Annual Report System. See: www.scranton.edu/planning for more information.

⁸ Each college maintains its own cycles for Program Review.

Each academic dean will lead discussions related to the use of assessment data for program improvement with their 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.

On a cycle, Deans will 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 (see Appendix B, Figure 2).

Student Life

As important partners in the student learning experience, departments within the Division of Student Life will proceed in the following manner:

1. Departments will identify direct and indirect evidence that programs and services are assisting students in the achievement of one or more SLOs, which map to one or more ILOs.
2. Departments will articulate changes or improvements in programs or services based on assessment results.

Timeline:

Departments submit assessment reports to the Vice President for Student Life via the Annual Report System each spring. Departments will report to the Director of Student Conduct & Assessment on July 1 of each Academic Year. Annual processes will represent college-wide assessment evidence, demonstrating the way in which attainment of learning outcomes within SL departments and programs supports ILOs, and any programmatic changes or improvements made to address assessment results.

Weinberg Memorial Library

The Library faculty remain 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).

1. Library faculty will identify direct and indirect evidence that information literacy classes and reference transactions assist students in the achievement of one or more outcomes, which map to one or more GE competencies and to ILOs. These are further developed and articulated by faculty in the academic departments who

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

apply for Information Literacy Stipends to collaborate with Library faculty to incorporate information literacy into their courses.¹⁰

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 a 3-year cycle. Faculty submit assessment reports to the Dean of the Library each spring, which are then posted on the Library's Web site.

Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence

The Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence (CTLE) will continue to provide a comprehensive resource center to support teaching and learning. The CTLE strengthens student learning via tutoring, reading services, and the Writing Center. The tutoring program is used by approximately a quarter of the undergraduate student population, with more than a third of the incoming new students availing themselves of the tutoring offers.

1. The CTLE will continue to collect indirect evidence of student academic achievement as a result of participation in the tutoring program, based on student disclosure via surveys.
2. The CTLE will use the results for continued improvement of the services, with significant cooperation and feedback from faculty liaisons from several academic departments.
3. The CTLE will conduct program assessment of its student services every semester via student surveys.

Planning and Institutional Reporting

The Offices of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness (PIE) and Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics (IRDA) offices regularly work with administrative departments on provision of data for Annual Reports and other reporting needs.

Specifically, the Office of IRDA will assist in learning assessment in the following ways:

1. Archive information on surveys currently in use across the University that capture indirect evidence of academic and co-curricular student learning.

¹⁰ This assessment is reflected in the final reports of those faculty who have received Information Literacy Stipends, see: <http://www.scranton.edu/academics/wml/infolit/stipends/index.shtml>

2. Administer key surveys (e.g. NSSE, FSSE) and provide OEA with data and reports that capture indirect evidence of student learning.
3. Consult with Academic Programs, Colleges, and Student Life for the purpose of identifying and supplying evidence for indirect assessment.

Timeline:

Administration, provision, and archiving of data from national student surveys and other indirect measure of assessment will occur on a cycle determined by the survey administration dates.

Consultation with departments will occur on an ad hoc basis (*unless this discussion can be combined into OEA consultations with academic and student service department*).

Office of Educational Assessment

Through the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, who oversees the Assessment portion of the Annual Report, the OEA will review evidence of educational effectiveness in academic and co-curricular programs, including General Education.

The OEA will:

1. Ensure that PLOs map to ILOs in a coherent and parsimonious manner.
2. Develop and oversee templates, reporting tools, and data management platforms for collecting, analyzing and reporting evidence of student learning.
3. When applicable, ensure that assessment reports are available to the Deans and the Provost/Associate Provost.
4. Review assessment evidence submitted in PARs.
5. 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.
7. Promote broad discussion of the use of assessment results to monitor and improve academic and co-curricular programs, including GE, and to ensure that the University can demonstrate evidence that its students and graduates are meeting the ILOs.

8. 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. AAC and Faculty Senate
 - ii. The Office of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness for communication to the Board of Trustees, MSCHE, and internal stakeholders.
 - iii. External stakeholders by way of the OEA website
9. Develop and communicate information related to best practices in student learning assessment, conveying these to the University community via means that include the OEA website, www.scranton.edu/assessment.
10. Coordinate specific duties related to the assessment of the General Education Program, as described below.

Interim General Education Assessment

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

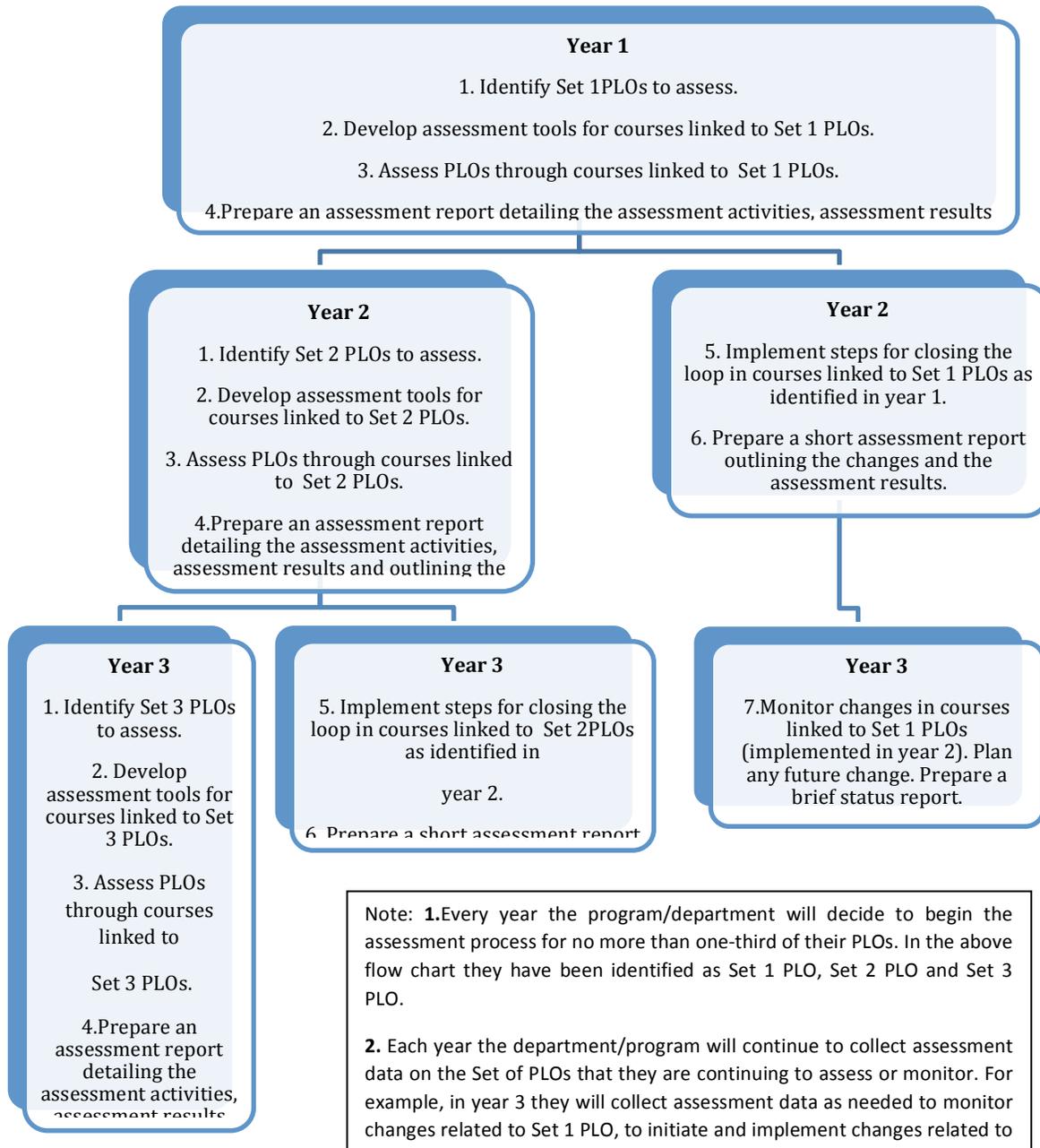
1. Maintain a dashboard of assessment results and how evidence is used for program improvement and decision-making.
2. Routinely communicate and collaborate with the GE program coordinator and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.

In support of these efforts, the [Assessment Advisory Committee \(AAC\)](#) will:

1. Advise the Director of the OEA on the impact and effectiveness of OEA processes.
2. Serve as a liaison between the OEA and Faculty Senate.
3. Link evidence of student learning assessment to institutional assessment efforts to ensure attainment of strategic goals.
4. Advise the Director of IRDA on the selection and use of instruments that provide indirect evidence of student learning.

Appendix A

Figure 1: Cycle for Program Assessment



Appendix B

Figure 1: Reporting Cycle for Academic Deans

KSOM	Spring, 2016	Fall, 2017	Spring, 2019
PCPS	Fall, 2016	Spring, 2018	Fall, 2019
CAS/Library	Spring, 2017	Fall, 2018	Spring, 2020

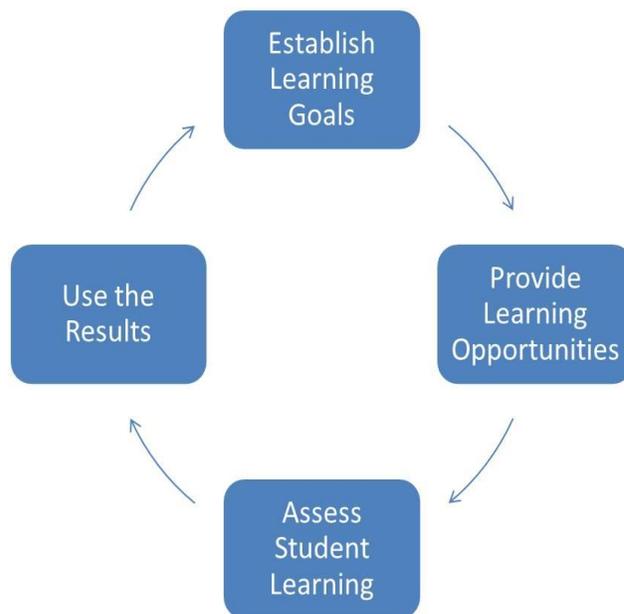
Appendix C: Interim General Education Assessment Plan

See [Interim GE Assessment Plan](#)

Appendix D: Assessment Brief

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 are 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?

The University of Scranton applies the Ignatian approach of learning to educational assessment. The approach provides a framework for student learning assessment through five focal activities: **context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation.**¹¹ The core mission and identity of the University are clearly tied to our assessment practices as they apply to the “development of the person.”¹²

¹¹ See Korth, S.J. (2008). *Precis of Ignatian pedagogy: a practical approach*. In. G.W. Traub (Ed.), *A Jesuit education reader*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press.

¹² Dumunico, V.J. (Ed.) (2000). *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th anniversary perspectives*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Appendix E Definition of Key Terms

Assessment Plan for Programs (APP): The plan for conducting program assessment over a three-year cycle.

Assessment Artifact: assignments, test questions, or other student work that can be assessed in aggregate to determine students' attainment of course, program, or institutional learning outcomes

Co-curricular: formal and informal experiences that foster student learning and development. Co-curricular activities are, typically, but not always, defined by their separation from academic courses. These experiences complement the academic program and create connections between in and out of class learning.

Direct Assessment: collection and analysis of student work (i.e. assessment artifacts) to determine students' attainment of course, program, or institutional learning outcomes

High Impact Practices (HIPS): educational practices that have a significant impact on student success (Kuh, 2008). These can be academic or co-curricular and are characterized by collaborative, active learning with a reflection component. Some high impact practices at The University of Scranton are programs.

Indirect assessment: the use of surveys or other self-report evidence to determine students' attainment of course, program, or institutional learning outcomes

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs): what we want graduates of The University of Scranton to know, do, or value at the completion of their academic program(s) and co-curricular experiences

Program: developed body of courses that receives transcript recognition

Program Assessment Report (PAR): document submitted with the Annual Report summarizing the program's assessment of student learning.