

Integrated Planning and Institutional Effectiveness: Improvement and Renewal at The University of Scranton

Office of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

This document describes the University of Scranton's approach to integrated planning and the assessment of institutional effectiveness. Planning refers to those conscious processes used to develop goals and strategies for growth and improvement at all levels of our institution. Assessment of institutional effectiveness describes the coordination of a portfolio of activities that evaluate and demonstrate the achievement of these goals, our overall [mission](#), and the quality of our programs and services. A process for demonstrating accountability to internal and external stakeholders, it seeks to explore and answer the questions, in the context of our mission:

- What is it we hope to achieve as a University? What are our goals?
- Are we doing the things we want to do well? Are we identifying our priorities, and effectively resourcing those areas?
- How are we using what we learn about ourselves to improve?
- How are we communicating the outcomes of these activities?

This work is facilitated largely through the activities undertaken both individually and conjointly by the [Office of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness](#) (OPIE) and the [Office of Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics](#) (OIRDA). However, success requires the commitment of leaders of administrative and academic departments and programs across campus. This plan outlines this common commitment and framework for the development of goals & outcomes and assessment of the degree to which they are met at the institutional, administrative division, college, and department and program level, all in the context of the University's mission. Particular effort is made to connect the assessment of institutional effectiveness to assessment of student learning where such overlap is appropriate.

CONTEXT, COMMITMENT & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Regular and sustainable processes for self-evaluation in the spirit of improvement are hallmarks of any efficient and effective organization. Within higher education, "assessment" is the umbrella term for this type of activity, and there are two particular types – the evaluation of the institution, its mission, organizational goals, structures and processes (institutional effectiveness assessment), and the assessment of student learning goals/outcomes (educational assessment).

Over the past three decades, best practices have been established by professional and peer organizations in the triad of planning, assessment, and institutional research disciplines,

creating a higher education community dedicated to supporting their institutions through continuous improvement. Regional and disciplinary accreditors, as well as federal legislative reporting requirements, set additional expectations for assessment and its use at the institution and program levels.¹ Scholarship and practice both agree: for any assessment activity to be useful for improvement, it must be incorporated into ongoing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal.

Assessment helps us to go beyond describing *what* we do and *how* we do things, showing *how well* we do them, and creating intentional pathways to use what we learn to improve and renew. In our case, this renewal is explored through both the foundational and aspirational attributes of our Catholic, Jesuit mission, and the ways in which we apply our resources to making them real for our students and broader campus community. Assessment identifies both opportunities to improve, but also serves as a process that can identify areas of success and impact.

In 2001, the University recommitted itself to integrated planning and assessment with the adoption of a new [Planning & Institutional Effectiveness Model](#) (the “*Model*”, *attachment A*), and again in 2004 with a then-new Comprehensive Assessment Plan, which described both student learning and institutional assessment activities.² Since then, the *Model* has been reviewed and adjusted throughout the years to assure it enables the University to meet internal needs and external expectations, most particularly with Middle States accreditation standards as they evolved; its current version was reaffirmed in 2014. Also in 2014, the University embraced a new [Comprehensive Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning](#) (the “*Comprehensive Plan*”), which outlines a new structure and processes for educational assessment. Taken together, the *Comprehensive Plan*, the *Model* and this document describe the University’s holistic approach to continuous improvement.

Both the *Model* and the *Comprehensive Plan* ground student learning assessment strategies in the Ignatian Educational Paradigm, institutional planning and effectiveness assessment utilizes these same elements of the Paradigm: context (Context – gathering evidence on the current state of the University, its stakeholders, and its environment to generate knowledge about strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and challenges from outside the institution, in light of our Mission); experience (moving beyond this assimilation of information to analysis and examination of how we wish to shape our future); reflection (the application of this analysis to the setting of goals for improvement), action (the pursuit of goals); and evaluation (the assessment of the success of goals and related activities). The paradigm completed leads to renewal – the use of assessment results and application or resources for the improvement of our programs and services.

Accreditation Context

The University of Scranton is regionally accredited by the [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#) (MSCHE). In its 2014 *Requirements for Affiliation and Standards of Accreditation*, and through a number of other policies and practices, MSCHE outlines expectations for assessment. Two particular standards set the pace:

¹ Mostly, but not exclusively, through the Higher Education Opportunity Act (as amended) and related U.S. Department of Education requirements.

² Replaced by this document and its companion, the *Comprehensive Plan for Assessment of Student Learning*.

- Standard 6: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement sets expectations for integrated planning and improvement. It requires institutions to have in place “*planning processes, resources, and structures [that] are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.*”
- Standard 5: Educational Effectiveness Assessment, sets expectations for assessment of student learning outcomes, requiring institutions to have processes in place to demonstrate that the “*institution’s students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their programs of study, degree level, the institution’s mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.*”

Other standards address the application of planning and assessment in unique contexts, and each MSCHE standard includes a requirement for the “*periodic assessment of the effectiveness*” of the activities and fundamental elements of that standard. We must also continually evaluate and reflect on our assessment practices themselves, ensuring that they meet our current needs, are structured and organized appropriately, are manageable and sustainable, and perhaps most importantly, useful and used. As described in other Middle States documents, the Commission expects that all assessment activities – both institutional and student learning focused – are “useful, cost effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, carefully planned, and organized, systematic, and sustained”. For academic programs, a number of disciplinary accreditation standards likewise guide planning and assessment work.

Institutional Commitment

The University of Scranton’s Board of Trustees, President, Administration, and faculty and staff are dedicated to an integrated approach to planning, effectiveness and renewal that utilizes a meaningful variety and breadth of tools - direct and indirect, qualitative and quantitative, formative and summative. This approach is guided by and designed to support the University’s mission, vision, goals, and other institutional priorities, and create a shared sense of ownership and space for creativity in assessment activities at all levels of the University. Within a number of academic programs, disciplinary accreditation also requires active planning and assessment of programs, processes and services. The following *Guiding Principles*, which were developed conjointly by the Offices of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness, Institutional Reporting and Data Analytics, and Educational Assessment, and are also included within the *Comprehensive Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning*, guide this ever-evolving work:

- 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.

ASSESSMENT AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

As illustrated by the *Model*, continuous improvement activities occur at all levels of the institution, and are intentionally conducted in such ways as to link them to resource planning & allocation (including human resources, technology, and facilities) and other decision-making processes. Assessment and evaluation play a vital role, ensuring that appropriate practices are in place to measure achievement of those goals, and that data and information gathered from that assessment is used to (1) report progress, (2) inform decision making, including resource requests and allocations, and (3) make needed improvements or adjustments. Levels of planning and institutional effectiveness assessment include:

The Strategic Plan & Strategic Planning Principles: The [Strategic Plan](#) sets broad institutional goals that are supported by a set of [planning principles](#). More than just philosophical statements, these principles provide important grounding context for what we intend to build and develop through infrastructure and processes necessary to successfully addressing the strategic plan's goals. The construction of each strategic plan, roughly every five years, is coordinated by the OPIE with the University Planning Committee. This committee works closely with other constituencies to draft and provide means for review and input by all constituencies, ultimately recommending a final plan to the President's Cabinet and Board of Trustees. Progress is monitored on a regular basis, reported at annual, mid-point, and final points through the OPIE.

Strategic Financial and Enrollment Planning: The University engages in ongoing strategic financial and enrollment planning, processes that are guided by the tenets of the University's strategic planning principles. These plans, along with other institutional efforts, including University Advancement, seek to ensure that the University has the necessary resources to fulfill its mission and planning goals. Like strategic planning, advisory groups and institutional assessments play an important role in shaping these plans and evaluating their progression.

College, Divisional and Departmental Planning and Assessment: To create collaborative and broad implementation for the strategic plan, the University establishes support plans across its administrative divisions and colleges. With their faculty and staff, the deans of each college and divisional vice presidents/provosts and associate vice presidents/provosts review the strategic goals and planning principles, interpret how their unit may best support and help implement those goals, and connect their plan's goals to planning, assessment, and resource allocation within their units. College- and division-level planning progress is reported each year through each plan's scorecard and the University's Annual Report process. Faculty and

leadership of academic departments and programs as well as administrative department heads review the strategic goals and planning principles, interpret how their unit may best support and help implement those goals, and connect the department plan's goals to planning, assessment³, and resource allocation within their units. These plans and reports are also captured via the Annual Report System. The University's institutional accreditation cycle informs the processes for planning-related evaluations, including the choice and timing of supplemental institutional studies of administrative and academic areas as needed. Table 1 describes particular continuous improvement activities associated with each level of planning. To learn more about planned institutional surveys noted in the table, see the [OIRDA Survey Schedule](#).

Other institutional planning activities may also help to coordinate University efforts and activities. For instance, special topics planning that may be outlined within the Strategic Plan or other planning level.

Table 1.

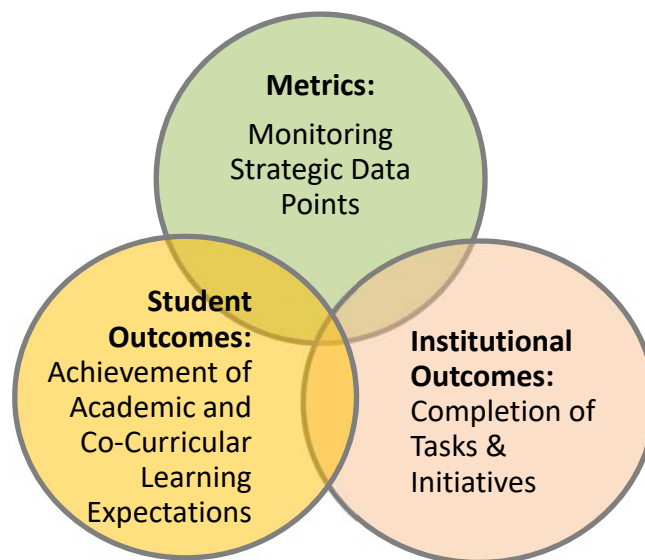
Level of Planning/Goals	Institutional Effectiveness Assessment & Reflection	Assessment & Continuous Improvement Activities	When
Strategic	<p>What: Mission, Strategic Plan and Strategic Planning Principles; Strategic Financial and Enrollment Planning; other institutional special topics planning (e.g. diversity & inclusion)</p> <p>Who: Planning & Institutional Effectiveness Office; University Planning Committee and Metrics Team; OIRDA; Cabinet Officers; assigned stewardship groups</p>	<p>Strategic Metrics Tracking; Strategic Plan Progress Reporting; Strategic Financial and Enrollment metrics and reporting</p> <p>Planned and ad hoc institutional assessments, including national survey cycle for students, faculty, others; MSCHE accreditation assessment & analysis activities</p>	<p>Annual cycles and periodic activities; Use of results for improvement through annual strategic reporting. Institutional accreditation cycle serves as key point for reflection.</p>
College/Division	<p>What: Divisional and College Plans, Goals</p> <p>Who: Vice Presidents, Deans, Other Administrators; College Dean's Conferences and other committees; Strategic Financial Planning; Strategic Enrollment Planning; OIRDA, Others</p>	<p>Divisional and college plans and associated reporting; Annual Report System and other annual reporting of planning and assessment; program review and accreditation activities; Other planned and ad hoc surveys, studies, benchmarking</p>	<p>Annual cycles and periodic activities; Use of results for improvement through annual divisional, college reporting. Accreditation and program review activities per program/college cycles.</p>

³ Note that each academic department/program submits a separate report and plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes under the *Comprehensive Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning*. See www.scranton.edu/assessment for more information.

Department	<p>What: Departmental Goals (Academic and Administrative)</p> <p>Who: Academic Department Chairs and Program Directors; Administrative Department Heads</p>	<p>Annual Report System and other annual reporting of planning and assessment;</p> <p>Academic Program Review; Accreditation studies; Other planned and ad hoc surveys, studies, benchmarking</p>	<p>Annual cycles and periodic activities; Use of results for improvement through annual divisional, college reporting. Accreditation and program review activities per program/college cycles.</p>
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ASSESSMENT AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The OPIE develops and coordinates progress monitoring and reporting processes for the Strategic Plan that are reviewed by advisory groups and shared with the campus community each year. Information from annualized departmental, divisional, and college reports, together with the monitoring of strategic metrics, surveys and institutional studies, and reporting of institutional and student outcomes associated with goals within the plan, form the basis of analysis for annual, mid-point, and final strategic reporting. Strategic-level reporting is constructed using a holistic approach that values both quantitative and qualitative evidence. There are three elements of progress reporting: student outcomes, institutional outcomes, and metrics. Annual review of these progress reports is an opportunity for reflection on both goals achieved and goals still in progress, and how assessments inform need for improvements or change.



OTHER CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

On behalf of the University, the OPIE and OIRDA coordinate a portfolio of institutional effectiveness evaluation and assessment activities. Several of these connect to the work of the Office of Educational Assessment where such overlap and connection is appropriate and helpful (noted by an *). As described above, colleges divisions, and departments also undertake a number of these evaluative activities as part of their own planning and continuous improvement. Common tools include qualitative evaluations of processes and activities; benchmarking and other studies, including those through consultancy services; point of services and other topical surveys; and the tracking of performance indicators (quantitative metrics). Ad hoc studies, white papers, and other analyses and reports are prepared as needed. Where appropriate and helpful, we seek to use and balance both direct and indirect evidence, and qualitative and quantitative measures.

Metrics & Dashboards: At each level of planning (strategic, college/division, and department), quantitative metrics and other performance indicators are defined. Many of these are extant data; some are new with each planning cycle to reflect the unique nature of that plan's goals. Each college, division, and department tracks operational metrics and reports on progress through scorecards and/or other annual reporting. These data points, along with other sources, are reviewed to identify those which best reflect progress at the institutional level. These strategic metrics are tracked annually and included in yearly strategic plan progress reports. In addition to those developed related to the strategic plan, the OIRDA also coordinates the preparation of data reporting initiatives to assist in ongoing decision making and planning (such as that for retention, strategic enrollment, and other campus-wide initiatives).

Scorecards: For college and divisional plans, planners are encouraged to use “scorecards” to define metrics, benchmarks, assessment and evaluation activities, and capture the outcomes of these. A number of planning areas, including the academic colleges and units within Student Formation and Campus Life, utilize such scorecards to document and describe progress.

Institutional Surveys:^{*4} The OIRDA coordinates the administration of a variety of institutional surveys on a planned cycle. These surveys measure student, alumni, and faculty experiences and perceptions, providing valuable insights about the educational experience. Question items for student surveys are regularly mapped to strategic plan and related planning areas, learning outcomes, accreditation standards to assist with analysis and application in those areas. [Survey reports](#) are shared and reviewed with various audiences. Data from selected surveys are included amongst strategic metrics. The survey cycle is reviewed annually with various stakeholders to ensure it is addressing our evaluation and information needs. The OIRDA also maintains an inventory of other survey activities across campus, and serves as a

⁴ In addition to surveys coordinated through the OIRDA, a number of surveys and external reporting activities are conducted by other units.

consultant for those wishing to develop, administer, and/or conduct analyses of surveys.

Ad Hoc Surveys and Studies:* In addition to these planned initiatives, the OPIE and OIRDA regularly conduct and/or sponsor ad hoc studies, surveys, and data and information analyses to support institutional planning and decision making. The offices consult with senior leadership and others to determine needed evaluations at the institutional level. They also provide professional research consulting activities⁵ at other organizational levels, such as assistance with survey design, data analyses, broader research methods for framing a study, and identifying/selecting appropriate instruments.

Annual Reporting:* Through the [Annual Reporting](#) process, department leaders submit departmental plans and goals, link those goals to strategic and college/division planning initiatives; submit evaluative and assessment information; and provide narrative summary of significant achievements and future opportunities & challenges each fiscal year. In this report, financial, technical, facilities, and staffing resource requests are also made and aligned with strategic and other goals. The report is completed each spring/summer, and from year to year serves as the departmental planning process.

High Impact Practices:* Tracking our high impact practice⁶ offerings, student participation and their impact is a meaningful framework for evaluating the success of goals across multiple programs. HIPs activities are tracked annually through data and information gathered by the OPIE and OIRDA, and are included in annual strategic plan progress reports. The offices gather data about HIPs participation of currently enrolled students, as well as cumulative reporting of participation for graduating seniors. Evaluating the impact of these programs on student learning is part of the OEA's activities.

Accreditation (Institutional and Program) Activities and Program Reviews:* The OPIE coordinates institutional Middle States (MSCHE) accreditation activities. These include a variety of opportunities for institutional evaluation, reflection, and reporting, perhaps most so at the time of each University self-study. The office provides resources to assist units in understanding connections between their planning and continuous improvement activities and Middle States standards. The OPIE documents linkages between the strategic plan and college and divisional support plans to MSCHE standards.

The OPIE also maintains documentation on progress made toward recommendations from regional accreditation activities & reports, both internal recommendations made by the University and those made by peer review teams or MSCHE. Recommendations are shared throughout the University community in order that they may be addressed as needed, and are included with other analyses in planning activities at all levels of the University (in particular,

⁵ And assist with identifying external consultants and/or services as needed.

⁶ High Impact Practices are a group of ten learning activities recognized by the AAC&U Leap initiative and associated research as being particularly impactful for student success and achievement. See: <https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips> . A number of HIPs (both offerings and student and faculty participation) are identified within the University's [Strategic Plan](#), and are included amongst strategic metrics.

the development of our five-year strategic plans).

In addition, each of the three academic colleges - the College of Arts & Sciences, the Kania School of Management, and the Panuska College of Professional Studies - maintains various disciplinary accreditations. These accreditations demonstrate the quality and rigor of these programs, and the successes of their graduates. For these accreditation activities, departments & programs conduct extensive analysis and reporting, and reflect on the achievement of their goals and assessment of outcomes.

Within the CAS, programs that do not hold disciplinary accreditation complete an internal program review. Completed on a six-year cycle, these program reviews gather much of the same information, and ask departments to reflect on current and future goals, program growth opportunities, and use of assessment for continuous improvement. Other administrative departments may also take part in episodic program reviews, applying what they learn to their departmental and divisional planning and improvement.

Environmental Scanning & External Analysis: Environmental scanning is an information gathering and analysis activity used to educate those involved in planning on key external/industry issues. Scanning happens on a regular basis through literature review, examination of best practices, the production of white papers and others that study higher education trends and issues (for example, changes in demographics, trends in student support services, and internationalization), benchmarking activities, and needs analyses for new academic programs. The OPIE supports the environmental scanning process for strategic planning cycles; departments, divisions, and other areas are encouraged to regularly scan the environment to inform their own planning.

Assessment of Assessment Processes & Structures:* As part of the assessment of institutional effectiveness, the University regularly monitors and reviews its integrated model and portfolio of planning and evaluation/assessment activities, and student learning assessment processes, making and addressing recommendations for improvement where needed. Like all other departments at the University, the OPIE, the OIRDA, and the OEA complete Annual Reports each year that detail their goals, recent evaluations of their processes, and resulting improvements made or planned. These are reviewed and discussed by the departments' leadership and with the Associate Provost and Provost to identify opportunities for improvement and synergies across these units.

In addition to ongoing feedback to the planning and institutional assessment processes provided by the President's Cabinet and University Planning Committee, the OPIE conducts a formal survey related to the Strategic Plan and planning process at two points in the cycle: the first during the development of each strategic plan and the second at or near its midpoint. These surveys are used to evaluate stakeholders' perspectives of the plan's development, content, and implementation, as well as the processes used to engage their participation. Feedback is reviewed by the University Planning Committee, President's Cabinet, and others to determine how best to incorporate these results. The OPIE also gathers indirect and direct feedback related to the planning and institutional effectiveness processes at key points, in

particular as part of the review of functions and processes during Middle States accreditation activities, as well as through ad hoc studies. This includes reviews of the Annual Reporting process.

The OIRDA regularly evaluates its suite of services and products through a combination of tracking, interviews with key customers, and feedback through various advisory committees, periodically supplemented by external review. It reviews the institutional survey cycle on a regular basis in consultation with the OPIE, OEA and other stakeholders.

Student learning assessment processes and support services coordinated through the Office of Educational Assessment are reviewed through SWOT analysis conducted by the department and surveys of participants in OEA events. The OEA also evaluates faculty and staff satisfaction with the program assessment cycle and processes, and related support services on an ongoing basis, including the input provided by the Assessment Advisory Committee.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

In addition to these core functions articulated in the Integrated Planning & Institutional Effectiveness model, the OPIE and OIRDA manage other activities that inform these processes and are used to further demonstrate institutional effectiveness and address accountability needs:

Institutional Data Reporting: [Institutional data reporting](#) is led by the OIRDA. Those data plays a critical role as a foundation for many planning, institutional effectiveness, resource allocation and renewal activities. OIRDA houses the University's official, historical datasets and external reports to the U.S. Department of Education. The Office tracks key performance data such as student enrollment, graduation, and retention/completion. OIRDA partners with other units to coordinate the collection, preservation and reporting of official data from areas such as Admissions, Finance, Financial Aid, Human Resources, Advancement and Alumni Relations. Key products include annual fall census and data reporting, enrollment reports by each academic term, and annual graduation & retention rate reports. The Office also supports more advanced data analytics services and analyses.

Compliance Analysis and Reporting: An important part of the work of the OPIE is the coordination of the University's compliance with a number of external regulations, including the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). The office coordinates policy compliance [reporting & disclosures](#) as per HEOA requirements, working with other offices, programs, and committees. The OPIE manages compliance reporting required by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and in its support role for institutional governance, conducts policy analysis and coordinates policy development related to a variety of university initiatives.

ADVISORY GROUPS

A number of committees and groups (such as college dean's conferences) advise and take part in the preparation of plans at the college, divisional, and departmental level, and in using results of assessments to inform decision-making. Two committees serve as advisory to institutional planning and effectiveness processes: the University Planning Committee (UPC) and the strategic plan Progress & Impact Team, a new group launched in 2020. The University Planning Committee (UPC) is chaired by and advisory to the Provost on matters related to planning and institutional effectiveness, in particular, the implementation of the University's Planning Model. The UPC reviews and advises on annual progress reporting for the Strategic Plan. A subcommittee of the UPC, the Progress and Impact team is chaired by the Assistant Provost, Office of Planning & Institutional Effectiveness, and serves as a forum for key stakeholders to advise on the approach, process and completion of annual progress reporting initiatives, including the communication and use of this reporting and related analyses.

LINKS TO RESOURCE ALLOCATION

An important part of institutional renewal is the linkage of goals, assessments, and improvement strategies to resource planning and allocation processes. This is achieved in several ways:

- Annual reporting by departments, colleges, and divisions, inclusive of budget/resource planning, requests and allocations, linked to planning and improvement goals;
- Strategic financial planning and strategic enrollment planning, informed by the University's Planning Principles;
- The Strategic Plan and Principles' role in the framework for University Advancement, development and fundraising goals; and
- When available, strategic initiatives funding for innovative projects that support the goals of the University's Strategic Plan

ON THE HORIZON

Planning and institutional effectiveness assessment are evolving disciplines. A few areas of emerging growth:

- Building and implementing even greater linkage between strategic planning, assessment, and resource development (in particular, financial and enrollment planning);
- Continued exploration of the important partnerships between institutional effectiveness assessment and the assessment of student learning, in context of Mission;
- Assisting units in aligning planning and improvement activities, including supporting academic units in making connections between planning, assessment and related

initiatives (such as accreditation and program review) that can mutually reinforce one another;

- Greater access to data for decision-making at all levels through the use of analytic tools and data visualization;
- Greater use of tools for predictive analytics and data modeling, and related analyses, to support improvements in the effectiveness of student success practices and to inform the development and implementation of policies and procedures;
- Responding collaboratively to increasing calls for accountability and compliance with regulatory agencies through data and policy coordination and reporting

