4.B - Core Component 4.B

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

Argument

Good assessment practice requires an effective assessment process and support structures, which in turn enable programs to identify and assess achievement of learning goals and then to use that assessment evidence to improve student learning.

To establish and sustain an effective process and structures for assessment, in October 2012 WSU licensed assessment software (Compliance Assist) for consistent documentation of program-level assessment planning, and in September 2014 appointed a Director of Assessment charged with expanding, managing, and supporting program assessment across campus.

The Director of Assessment is advised by the University Assessment Council (UAC);UAC membership includes the Director of Assessment, the Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, representatives of each school/college, and representatives of the student services and co-curricular programs. In consultation with the Director, the UAC provides guidance, support, and feedback on assessment of student learning and the use of assessment results to improve student learning. UAC members inform the campus about assessment processes, resources, and opportunities, and encourage participation in assessment. The UAC has institutionalized the process of assessment by developing:

- Guidelines for program assessment planning
- A standardized timeline for the assessment cycle and
- A centralized reporting system

The following initiatives have contributed to more effective assessment processes and achievement of learning goals, including:

1. Delivery each semester of structured **faculty and staff workshops** on program assessment to complement the work of the Office for Teaching and Learning. Between

September 2014 and December 2016, the Director of Assessment offered 66 university-wide and department- or program-specific workshops and presentations, which 455 faculty and staff attended. The Office for Teaching and Learning offered 26 workshops related to assessment, with 162 attendees.

2. **Development and launch of the Assessment website**. The site provides a mission statement, multiple professional development resources for learning about program assessment, support for documenting assessment, a university assessment timeline, and progress reports from college, school, and student services/co-curricular units. In November 2015, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) promoted the university's Assessment website as that month's NILOA Featured Website, a service "intended to point others to promising practices in innovative and transparent online communication of student learning outcomes assessment."

3. Identification or creation of college/school/division and department **assessment committees** and department-level program assessment coordinators. These were created with the goal of providing feedback, monitoring, and communication in support of program assessment.

4. **Creation, piloting, norming, and use of an assessment plan feedback rubric**. The feedback rubric was piloted in program reviews for several units, including Education; Fine, Performing and Communication Arts; Honors; Medicine; Pharmacy and Health Sciences; and Student services. It was then used to score 40 AY14-15 assessment plans and 37 AY15-16 assessment plans as part of the institutional process for understanding campus-wide assessment practices. **Reports of the AY14-15 and AY15-16 results** of the rubric reviews showing growth in use of good assessment practices were presented to the Provost, the deans, and the individual programs in winter and fall 2016. University Assessment Council members met with representatives of reviewed programs in fall 2016 to provide feedback from the reviews and support good assessment practices. All programs and units are encouraged to use the rubric to improve their assessment processes.

5. **Development and implementation of a plan for assessing the state of assessment**. Complete reports of the AY14-15 and AY15-16 assessments are accessible to the public online through the Assessment website homepage.

6. **Standardization of monthly reporting of assessment plan documentation**. Monthly reports are sent to the provost, deans, University Assessment Council, and other groups as relevant. Each report specifies which elements of the assessment plan have been completed to date. Reports are provided at the *university, college/school/unit, and program* levels.

7. **Opportunities for peer-to-peer support.** In winter 2016, 25 faculty and eight staff members from 27 programs were invited to present their assessment work in campus-wide peer-to-peer forums. Of those, 26 faculty and staff representing seven schools and colleges and 23 academic and co-curricular programs presented their assessment plans in a series of six forums between March and May 2016. An additional 14 presenters have spoken at four forums during AY16-17. Some presenters also provided abbreviated versions of their presentations, which are posted on the Assessment website to extend both the recognition and the availability of positive examples across campus and beyond.

8. **Establishment of recognition events.** Beginning in 2015, the President and Provost publicly recognize faculty and staff assessment efforts at an annual recognition luncheon.

The inaugural event (October 2015) was followed by a second annual event in October 2016 which included posters and table tents highlighting the effective use of assessment data to improve student learning in 24 programs. More than 60 faculty, staff, and administrators participated on each occasion. In addition, the Provost prepared individual recognition letters for the presenters at faculty development events and attended the 2016-2017 peer forum events.

9. **General Education Program Assessment**. In discussion with the Provost's Office, the General Education Oversight Committee (GEOC), and the General Education Reform Committee, the Director of Assessment presented potential uses of existing data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and from supplemental questions on the Student Evaluations of Teaching, as a means of more formally assessing the General Education program; and proposed piloting of course-based assessments. Based on concerns about the existing indirect measures, the GEOC decided to continue reviewing existing data, and to pilot the use of course-based assessments for one learning outcome in fall 2016 and winter 2016. Due to the departure of a key faculty member, the planned piloting of oral communication was not feasible. The Director of assessment has also participated in General Education Reform Committee discussions of well-devised learning outcomes statements and integration of assessment throughout the program's design and implementation.

10. **Better integration of program assessment and APR**. In 2015, APR instructions to programs, and internal and external reviewers were updated to incorporate a longitudinal review of program assessment data and an explicit section asking programs to identify how they have used assessment data in programmatic decisions. This mirrors longstanding practices in many periodic self-studies for accredited programs.

As a result of these initiatives, documentation of program assessment has increased substantially since the 2012-2013 adoption of Compliance Assist, and most notably since the AY14-15 appointment of the Director of Assessment and establishment of the UAC. The documentation that each academic and co-curricular/student services program submits in their annual assessment plan includes:

- Program mission
- Program learning outcomes (Outcomes are posted online annually and are accessible to the public.)
- Assessment methods
- Results
- Action plans
- Timeline for implementing each action plan
- Plan for reporting assessments to stakeholders

Templates for documenting each item and guidelines for best practices are provided on the Assessment website and are presented at workshops. In addition, a policy effective starting in 2014-2015 requires academic departments to ensure that all syllabi explicitly state course learning outcomes.

Almost all programs have developed an assessment plan to improve student learning. As of January 2017:

- 96% of programs have clearly-stated program learning outcomes, which are articulated by faculty in academic programs and by staff in co-curricular and student service programs.
- 98% of programs articulated at least four learning outcomes in 2016-2017, compared to 12% in 2013-2014.
- 88% of programs gathered evidence of student learning in 2015-2016, compared to 22% in 2013-2014.
- 89% of programs identified action plans based on the evidence gathered in 2015-2016, compared to 20% in 2013-2014.
- 83% of programs established a plan for reporting assessment activities to their stakeholders in 2015-2016, compared to 0% in 2013-2014.

Program faculty and staff determine how to assess outcomes using a range of assessment methods, such as course-based assignments, local and national tests, essays, evaluations of clinical experiences, performance juries, portfolios, and surveys of students and employers. Program faculty and staff are encouraged to utilize direct measures of learning outcomes (e.g., exam questions, essays, projects, clinical evaluations) on a regular basis and to determine whether their action plan has the desired effect on student learning. Indirect measures are recommended as complements to build a more robust understanding of student learning.

The university-wide General Education program, like all other programs, includes student learning outcomes, which are assessed through supplemental questions about student learning appended to each semester's Student Evaluation of Teaching. The General Education Oversight Committee is responsible for reviewing the results and establishing an action plan for program improvement.

As a result of assessment efforts, faculty and staff report a wide range of changes in support of student learning. Faculty and staff responding to the fall 2015 and 2016 assessment surveys reported they have made changes to curricular content or requirements; more clearly defined their program mission or learning outcomes; improved their pedagogical approach to instructional delivery, course content, or assignments; and/or increased consistency across sections of the same course, and more.

A sample of specific examples from academic and co-curricular/student services programs reveals a range of improvements that parallel the changes reported in the survey data:

- Bachelor of Music faculty introduced strategy training in aural skills to overcome a common obstacle to student development and retention in the early stages of the program. Results indicated an improvement in the first cohort's aural skills and success in the key introductory courses, but a decline in the AY15-16 cohort. As such, faculty plan to investigate additional factors that might have an impact on student success in AY16-17.
- B.A. in English faculty identified lower than expected performance on close reading among students in their analysis of senior seminar and Writing Intensive essays. In

response, they have identified multiple strategies for increasing students' opportunities to develop this skill across the curriculum as well as in extracurricular activities.

- B.S. in Biomedical Engineering faculty's course-based assessments of students' skill at design indicated a need for more instruction in risk assessment and design, leading the program to introduce Food and Drug Administration case studies into one course and increase mentor interactions with design team participants.
- Housing and Residential Life, using Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (EBI) survey results, identified a need for additional training for resident assistants on providing academic support and building rapport. Training sessions on both were implemented in fall 2016. Another round of assessment is planned to evaluate the effectiveness of that training.
- Learning Communities staff use survey responses from faculty and student participants to enhance program design and participants training efforts annually.

All programs' assessment plans are available for review (part 1; part 2).

Evidence that WSU's assessment processes and structure are building good practice in assessment is found in the substantial number of faculty and staff that participate in ongoing, cyclical assessment of student learning, in the growing body of assessment leaders, and in the quality of assessment planning over time:

Substantial faculty and staff participation: Although the Office of the Provost oversees the entire assessment process, the university considers faculty and staff to be experts in their curricula, so each program is responsible for its own assessment planning, design, and implementation. Several data points from the AY14-15 and AY15-16 WSU Assessment annual reports indicate a high level of participation:

- In 2014-2015, 98% of the 370 campus programs involved in assessment had at least a partial assessment plan, and 83% had complete assessment plans. In 2015-2016 those figures rose to 99% and 87% respectively.
- Approximately 650 individuals in AY14-15 and 934 in AY15-16 participated in some form of professional development in assessment, either an assessment workshop, meeting, forum, or individual consultation with the Director of Assessment.
- At least 376 faculty and staff served on assessment committees or as assessment coordinators in AY15-16, up from 157 in AY14-15.
- 233 faculty and staff involved in documenting programs' assessment plans as active Compliance Assist users in AY15-16, down slightly from 259 in AY14-15 due in part to a reduction in the total number of open programs and in part to consolidation of responsibilities.

Assessment leaders: Faculty and staff are increasingly serving as assessment resources for their colleagues. Peer-to-peer program assessment forum presenters, program assessment coordinators, and workshop presenters provide colleagues with examples and expertise in assessment. In addition, University Assessment Council members provides leadership and support across campus for assessment, and some of the schools and colleges have their own committees or groups responsible for addressing assessment across their departments and

programs. Examples of particularly active groups include Fine, Performing & Communication Arts' assessment coordinators and the College of Education's Assessment Committee.

Quality of assessment planning: Evidence from a review of a sample of programs comparing those whose faculty had participated in professional development to programs whose faculty had not suggests that professional development has a positive impact on both the quantity and the quality of assessment planning. University survey data from fall 2015 and fall 2016 indicate growth in knowledge about the assessment cycle and its purposes, confidence in individuals' ability to develop and implement an assessment plan, and the benefits of assessment, all of which suggest a maturing culture of assessment.

The WSU Director of Assessment and the University Assessment Council continue to gather annual evidence of assessment practices and use that information to guide future actions. For example, in response to the *"assessment of assessment"* results, the Director of Assessment and the UAC developed an action plan to improve professional development efforts, increase opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction around assessment, advance the timeline for UAC review of assessment plans to provide more timely feedback, and promote the use of the assessment plan feedback rubric within the schools and colleges.

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