

5. Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning

Since the last re-accreditation self-study the University has developed an appropriate infrastructure to ensure institutional effectiveness as well as the documentation of student learning. The 2011 MSCHE report provided a non-binding finding for improvement, which suggested the University “create a more coordinated and systematic approach for both institutional and student learning assessment and better integrate its outcome results.” Since then, the University has committed itself to coordinating a more systematic structure for both institutional effectiveness and student learning. The leadership for these efforts began with the unveiling of the strategic plan *Building on Excellence* in 2013. Engaging in the process of developing a new strategic plan provided institutional leaders the opportunity to examine what had been done previously and explore ways to coordinate more effective processes. Beginning with the President’s office, the search commenced for a tool that would effectively report, monitor, and evaluate progress of the strategic plan. A team of individuals worked in collaboration with the President’s office as well as the Strategic Planning Assessment Advisory Council to leverage existing software to provide a coordinated and systematic way of demonstrating institutional effectiveness at varying levels.

Institutional Effectiveness

Institutional effectiveness at WCU is achieved through an intentional commitment to pursuing evidence-based decision-making in pursuit of goals found in the strategic plan, *Building on Excellence*. Additionally, there are complementary processes which support the pursuit of institutional effectiveness, including: annual reports, State System accountability reports, five-year program reviews and specialized accreditations, institutional assessments and student learning outcomes assessment.

Building on Excellence

The start of a new strategic plan enabled the University to re-examine its processes related to the data collection, reporting, and evaluation procedures. One key decision was to utilize planning software for the reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of the plan to enable better communication and decision-making. Rather than introduce a new software system across campus, which would be an added expense as well as introducing new complexity, the University used the existing student learning outcome assessment system, *TracDat*, and leveraged it for institutional strategic plan needs.

Building on Excellence is composed of five themes: Academics, Diversity, Engagement, Enrichment, and Sustainability. Each of the themes has goals that guide the development of objectives and outcome actions, which are assigned to constituents to complete each academic year. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the strategic plan themes and goals.

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Figure 5.1: Strategic Plan Themes and Goals

Building on Excellence: Education for Success					
Themes	Academics	Enrichment	Sustainability	Diversity	Engagement
Goals	Assuring student learning and academic excellence	Supporting student personal, professional, and civic development	Promoting sustainability focused on society, the economy, and the environment	Promoting and supporting diversity, inclusion, and equity	Strengthening academic and co-curricular programs with external stakeholders
	Strengthening the academic environment	Integrating and promoting enrichment activities	Developing and managing fiscal, human, and physical resources sustainably	Recruiting and retaining a diverse community of students, staff, faculty and administrators	Increasing institutional visibility and reputation
	Expanding academic opportunities		Establishing enrollment levels that sustain long-term viability and quality		Expanding local community involvement
	Supporting teaching excellence		Preserving, promoting, and cultivating WCU's long-term health, safety, and vitality		Increasing alumni outreach and partnerships

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Using the plan’s objectives as a guide, each Theme Team meets to develop outcome actions for each of three phases of the strategic plan, which are comprised of three-year periods. Outcome actions are then assigned to outcome leaders (administrators, faculty, or staff) who are responsible for inputting information into *TracDat* related to the outcome action. The institution has concluded the first phase of the strategic plan and has been successful in using results to improve programs and services and to inform planning and resource allocation decisions throughout each of the five themes. The effectiveness of this process can be attributed to the careful review of outcome actions prior to their assignment to the respective leaders and supporters so as to ensure they have been operationalized (wherever possible), which ensures that progress can be measured and tracked. In addition, the University intentionally made one of the two Theme Team leaders for each theme a member of cabinet.¹⁹ Given that each member of Cabinet has a specific portfolio of responsibilities, ensuring that they are assigned as a co-chair of the appropriate strategic plan Theme Team supports institutional effectiveness by creating synergies between daily tactical operations and strategic plan priorities.

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The President's Chief of Staff and Executive Deputy is responsible for the leadership of the strategic plan, serving as the central point of contact to the campus community and working closely with the Theme Team chairs, the Strategic Planning Assessment and Advocacy Committee (SPAAC) and the reporting coordinator. The reporting coordinator carries out the oversight, monitoring, and implementation of the plan. This work involves meeting with Theme Team leaders to ensure outcome actions are operationalized so appropriate data can be obtained and building an infrastructure in *TracDat* that allows for an easy way to monitor progress. As a result of this work, the institution is able to provide reports that demonstrate alignment of the strategic plan with the MSCHE standards² and reports that show how budget and resource allocations for the strategic plan are utilized annually.³

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SPAAC provides guidance, support, and assistance to the University community in advancing the strategic plan objectives. SPAAC presents to the President's Cabinet the progress made, issues needing to be addressed, and recommendations for the following year using the bi-annual reports that are provided in November and April for respective strategic plan objectives.²⁰ The members of SPAAC function in teams with each focusing on progress for a single theme. The strategic plan reporting, evaluation, and implementation cycle (closing the loop) is also directly aligned with the University budgeting cycle. Figure 5.2 demonstrates the strategic plan reporting, evaluation/implementation cycle and how it coincides with the university budgeting timeline (a more detailed overview is provided in section six on page 50).

Figure 5.2: Integration of Planning and Budgeting



Excellence in Action (Closing the Loop): Strategic Plan Results

Each of the strategic plan themes contains objectives with outcome actions that are reported on by assigned outcome leaders (administrators, faculty, or staff) twice per year (November and April). The November report serves as a status update so that outcome leaders are aware of what they need to do prior to the April collection date, which serves as the year-end reporting date. Following each of these dates, reports are provided to the Theme Team leaders so that appropriate modifications can be made and then given to SPAAC for their independent review.²¹ As a result of these processes, the institution has been able to track the completion of objectives and share this information throughout the institution.⁴ Significant accomplishments made during the first two years of the plan for each of the themes are highlighted below.

Academics Theme:

- Nationally, universities are seeing graduate enrollments decline. However, graduate enrollments at WCU exceeded targets last year, with an increase of almost ten percent in new graduate students. WCU's first doctorate, the Doctorate of Nursing Practice, was launched in 2014 and has out-performed initial enrollment goals with 32 students. Two additional doctoral programs have been approved in Public Administration and Education while others are in development.
- The establishment of off-campus sites such as the State System campus in Philadelphia have proven to be popular. WCU enrollment at the Philadelphia campus outdistances any of the other State System institutions offering classes at that location. Such initiatives enable WCU to build new revenue streams that are critical to future financial stability. Philadelphia tuition revenue increased from just over \$175,000 last fall (2014) to more than \$550,000 this past fall (2015).

- The University is also actively expanding academic opportunities via distance education. WCU's distance education, both fully online and blended programs involving limited campus time, has grown significantly.
- Using strategic plan funding, the University has implemented a document management system (OnBase), which provides true document workflow capabilities. This, software is being used to significantly reduce the amount of paper and time typically associated with campus processes across divisions, including tenure and promotion, financial aid processing, as well as graduate and undergraduate admissions.

Diversity Theme:

- The Office of Multicultural Affairs' Mentoring Program set a new record in 2013 with 188 multicultural participants. In 2014, 233 students were enrolled in the program.
- The Office of Undergraduate Admissions hired an assistant director of multicultural recruitment and community outreach to increase recruitment of underrepresented minorities from the local and surrounding areas. Over the last five years the institution experienced a 34% gain in African American students and an 84% gain in Latino students.
- WCU's presence at the State System's Philadelphia (Center City) campus is proving to be another important way to attract students from a variety of educational, cultural, and economic backgrounds. About 85 % of WCU students at the Center City campus are URM students.
- In 2013, the African-American and Latino Male Student Retention Task Force was established to help more of these students overcome historically low graduation rates. An initiative related to the work of this committee is the Brother to Brother program. Launched in 2014, Brother to Brother created a council of ambassadors from campus organizations, holds special events, and reaches out to teen minority males in Philadelphia and nearby towns.

Engagement Theme:

- The University has seen tremendous growth in the number of domestic students taking advantage of international programs. Study abroad participation by WCU students increased by 43 % in the last year. In 2012-13, WCU sponsored 251 international learning experiences, by 2013-14, that number had soared to 357.
- WCU has increased the number of international students on campus to more than 110 from 50 countries.
- The strategic plan calls for adding five new agreements between WCU and international partners for cultural, educational, and scholarly exchanges. Agreements were signed with Hosei University, University of Cape Coast, Ulsan University, the University of Costa Rica, and the University of the Cayman Islands. The University is continuing to forge new partnerships as part of efforts to internationalize its educational experiences and offerings. WCU is expanding its outreach to China via a program sponsored by AASCU and the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE). The goal is to recruit Chinese undergraduate and graduate students and build additional institutional partnerships with universities and high schools.

- The Alumni Relations Office has exceeded its goal to sponsor at least 60 alumni events annually by holding more than 90 events both locally and nationally during 2014-15.
- The Division of Information Services held the 19th annual RECAP Conference, a technology conference for teaching and learning in higher education with over 175 attendees from PASSHE universities, local area universities, K-12 and organizations. The conference provides a forum that fosters sharing best practices and innovations, encourages collaboration and addresses current topics of interest in the use of technology in the classroom.

Enrichment Theme:

- In 2014, the Twardowski Career Development Center and the Alumni Relations Office launched a job shadow program, pairing sophomores with WCU alumni.
- WCU also has forged internship and co-op relationships with regional businesses, nonprofits and government organizations.
- Service learning allows WCU students to take their place as productive members of society. Student hours from service learning and other volunteerism totaled more than 812,000 in service learning courses in the 2014-2015 academic year, with more than 90,000 additional hours provided through co-curricular activities, a new University record. WCU students also raised \$106,527 for local charities.
- In 2014-2015, The Office of Student Leadership increased the number of students participating in leadership development programs by 25%, and also increased the number of URM students by 64%. In addition, student participation in academic and professional/musical organizations grew by 20%.

Sustainability Theme:

- In the area of human resources, and as part of the development of a comprehensive workforce succession planning program, the University has secured software that will help to coordinate performance and talent management.
- Resource stewardship at West Chester University is being met through a variety of initiatives, robust fundraising, and efficient and sustainable operations. Over the past five years, donations to WCU have grown at twice the rate as for all Pennsylvania State System institutions. During 2015-16, the WCU Foundation anticipates raising the largest amount in University history; exceeding \$5.2 million in cash gifts and \$3 million in planned gifts. More than 9,200 alumni, corporations, foundations, parents and friends are expected to donate to WCU in 2015-16.
- As WCU seeks to diversify its resources, the West Chester University Foundation publicly launched the *Becoming More* capital campaign in spring 2013. The campaign is the largest in WCU's history and has already reached more than 85% of its \$50 million goal, raising \$42.5 million to date.
- The University heats and cools 50 percent of its square footage with geothermal energy and 50 percent with high-efficiency natural gas boilers. By transitioning to these new energy sources, the University is reducing its annual carbon footprint by 7,500 tons of CO₂. Beyond the geothermal initiative, WCU's building projects are designed with environmental

sustainability in mind. Our new construction, including the Business and Public Affairs Center, will be LEED certified.

Performance Funding Program (PFP)

Another demonstration of institutional effectiveness can be measured by the realization of State System performance funding goals. Annually the institution must collect, analyze and interpret data related to the PFP that is managed by the State System. The PFP is designed to measure the impact of the institution as it relates to the strategic direction of the System. Given new leadership in the Office of the Chancellor, the system office changed the measures and methodology in determining the performance on the measures. In 2012 this program was modified to align with three themes: student success, access, and stewardship (see Figure 5.3 below).

Ten measures are used to assess performance funding, four are mandatory (noted with an asterisk in the figure below) and institutions choose six. Each measure is worth one point and there are subpoints within each point. For example, the measure of degrees conferred is broken into two parts: number of associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees conferred (.50) and baccalaureate degrees awarded per FTE undergraduate enrollment (.50).²² All points are totaled for each university then weighted by the university's base appropriations as determined by the allocation formula. The weighted points are divided into the total performance funding pool to create a dollar per point value that is multiplied by the number of points the university earned to establish the allocation. Objectives for several themes within *Building on Excellence* align with the PFP as seen in the table, and many align with PASSHE measures that the University has not selected (the boxes in white), one more example of the ways in the goals of the institution overlap with State System goals. Over the last three years, the institution has chosen the measures that are shaded in the figure below.

Figure 5.3: State System Performance Funding Program Measures
*Mandatory State System Measure

Student Success	Access	Stewardship
Degrees Conferred*	Closing the Access Gaps for Freshman* <i>Academics 1.6</i>	Private Support <i>Sustainability 2.2</i>
Closing the Achievement Gaps for Freshman* <i>Academics 1.6</i>	Faculty Diversity* <i>Diversity 2.1</i>	Facilities Investment
Value-Added	Faculty Career Advancement	Administrative Expenditures as % of education cost
STEM-Health Profession Degree Recipients	Employment (Non-faculty) Diversity <i>Diversity 2.1</i>	
Closing the Achievement Gaps for Transfer Students <i>Academics 1.6</i>	Student Diversity <i>Diversity 2.2</i>	Employee Productivity <i>Academics 1.4</i>
Student Persistence <i>Academics 1.6</i>	Closing the Access Gap for Transfers <i>Academics 1.6</i>	

During the last two years, the institution has ranked in the top four among State System institutions in the total number of points earned in meeting performance expectations.²³ While the 2013-14 total number of points did decrease from the previous year, this shift can be partially attributed to a change in the methodology in how performance was measured. Additionally, given the growth in both majority and URM students, two of the performance measures related to closing the achievement gap for first year retention and graduation rates for URM students were impacted. The institution increased enrollment for both cohorts of students, which is a good thing, however this negatively impacted the enrollment gap. To ensure strong connections between budgeting and strategic planning processes, many of the PFP measures are included in the strategic plan, which is a demonstration of the institution's commitment to linking State System goals, institutional goals, and resource planning. The system-defined measures do not exclusively drive institutional decision-making, nor do they prescribe how the University defines institutional effectiveness, rather they provide a measure of the University's ability to meet the needs of the State System while also serving the mission and vision of the institution.

Program Review and External Accreditation

Academic, academic-support, and student-support programs that are not accredited by a specialized accrediting body participate in a program-review process once every five years according to PASSHE policy.²⁴ These reviews address program viability in the marketplace, the alignment of program content with changing disciplinary requirements, and an examination of student learning outcomes. External reviewers participate in the reviews at least every ten years (for academic programs, it is every five years); the process culminates with each program establishing goals and action steps for program improvement. Program reviews provide an opportunity for programs to assess, recalibrate if needed, and develop strategies to achieve a new set of outcomes in the intervening five years.

Academic programs with elected, specialized accreditation also require self-study on a regular basis and review by external reviewers. Specialized accrediting bodies have embraced the importance of the achievement of student learning relevant to the respective professions and expect programs to have articulated learning goals, methods to achieve these goals, methods of assessment with benchmarks, evidence of the discussion of results, and changes in curricula and/or program based on the results. West Chester University takes pride in the achievement of specialized accreditations in specific areas. More than 25 degree programs are accredited by national or international external accreditation agencies:

- The National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) accredits all degree programs in music performance and the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) accredits the theatre and dance programs.
- The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accredits both the Master of Science in Nursing and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees.
- The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredits both the Master of Social Work and the Bachelor of Social Work.
- The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accredits the Master of Public Health, and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA) accredits the Communication Sciences and Disorders programs .

- The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) accredits the Nutrition Department's Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD).
- The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) certifies the Bachelor of Science in Computer Science.
- The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Pennsylvania Department of Education accredits all teacher education programs (but are preparing for accreditation by the body that is replacing NCATE, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)).
- The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accredits the business programs in the College of Business and Public Affairs and the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) accredit the Master of Public Administration in the same college.

Institutional Assessments of Students

The University utilizes a number of institution-wide assessments to further assist in the evaluation of progress toward its goals, as well as for allowing for comparisons to peer and aspirational institutions. Several of these assessments (BCSSE, Campus Climate Survey, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Academic Advising Survey) serve as measures for outcome actions within the strategic plan. Figure 5.4 reflects all institution-wide surveys conducted

Figure 5.4: Institution-Wide Student Assessments

Instrument/Assessment Tool	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
BCSSE	U	U		U		U
Campus Climate Survey						U
Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)	U			U		
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	U	U	U	U		U
PASSHE One-Year-Out Alumni Survey				S		
Program Review Process	S,P	S,P	S,P	S,P	S,P	S,P
System Accountability Report (SAR)	S,U	S,U	S,U	S,U	S,U	S,U
Sightlines	U	U	U	U	U	U
Student Rating of Instructor Survey (SRIS), DE SRIS, STSAF, Nursing Clinical Questionnaire, Student Evaluation of Pre-Major Academic Advisor, ADP Academic Counselor*, Counselors, and Coaches Surveys.	U	U	U	U	U	U
Academic Advising Survey	U		U			
Athletic Interest and Abilities Survey	U	U	U	U	U	U
Graduating Student Survey (First Destination Survey)	U	U	U	U	U	U
Key: S=System Office, U=University, P=Program						
*There is only one ADP Academic Counselor. Therefore, ADP Academic Counselor Student Evaluation Survey is administered whenever the counselor is due for promotion. It was administered in 2014-15.						

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14751476 *Excellence in Action (Closing the Loop): Using Institutional Assessment Results*

1477 The University has administered the NSSE for the last eight years and for the first time, in 2013,
 1478 administered the faculty companion survey (the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)). The
 1479 results from each have helped provide data that inform the crafting of strategic plan objectives and to
 1480 ensure progress in this area is made. Following the 2013 administration of the FSSE, an institution-
 1481 wide “We Heard You” campaign provided faculty selected results from the survey that align with the
 1482 strategic plan.²⁵ Additionally results related to the quality of academic advising and engaging in
 1483 faculty-led research have helped shape and produce tangible outcomes related to strategic plan
 1484 objectives. Results from questions related to academic advising have aided the institution’s advising
 1485 task force in determining the state of advising, which has resulted in a just-published set of
 1486 recommendations related to the creation of college-based advising centers. Additionally, the 2013
 1487 FSSE results revealed that 75% or more of the faculty felt it was important to inform students of
 1488 important deadlines, academic support options, rules, and policies, while 2013 NSSE results indicated
 1489 that less than 50% of seniors felt as though advisors were meeting these needs on a consistent basis.
 1490 Using this information, as well as information obtained from an institutional advising survey, the
 1491 Advising Task Force created an advising website to ensure clear communication regarding timelines,

support options, as well as policy and procedures related to academic advising. This website has information for both faculty and students to enhance the advising partnership.⁶

A review of NSSE and FSSE data resulted in an action plan to start new experiential learning programs for students. In 2013 and 2014, WCU seniors were asked if they had worked with faculty on research projects while at WCU. The results revealed lower levels of engagement than the national averages in this area. In response, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) in partnership with the recently formed Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) created the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI). This program increases the opportunities for undergraduate research in all disciplines by providing a focused research opportunity for students. SURI promotes collaboration among students and between students and faculty for scholarly research, consistent with WCU's Teacher-Scholar model. Participants spend five weeks over the summer conducting research and scholarly/creative work under the direct supervision of a faculty mentor. During the last two summers, 40 WCU undergraduates and 40 WCU faculty mentors have participated.

Communication Regarding Institutional Effectiveness

Communication to campus constituencies is transmitted in a multitude of ways. The first is through the Office of the President's website.²⁶ This site provides a centralized area for members of the campus community to access information related to the strategic plan and progress towards related goals. Additionally, the comprehensive facilities plan, the President's annual report, and Council of Trustees' page can all be retrieved from here. Furthermore, the President communicates regularly to the campus community via his *Excellence in Action* and *News You Can Use* newsletters to ensure administration, faculty, staff, and students stay connected to the latest happenings throughout the institution.²⁷ A final example of communication related to institutional effectiveness are the Big Plan Days that have been discussed in prior sections. These campus-wide events encourage all constituencies to meet with campus leaders (Theme Team co-chairs) as well as Theme Team members to discuss strategic plan progress and future directions. In its first year the event proved to be a success with over 250 individuals from across campus attending.

Assessment of Student Learning

Programmatic Student Learning Assessment

The University offers approximately 118 undergraduate and more than 70 graduate programs/certificates that are distributed across five colleges. In the fall of 2012, under the direction of the Associate Provost and Faculty Associate for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, the Assurance of Student Learning initiative (ASL) was launched for all academic programs in order to create a more organized and sustainable process. Now in its fourth year, it is no longer an initiative but part of the institutional culture. The goals of the ASL are to communicate a consistent message regarding the institutional expectations and requirements for student learning outcomes assessment, develop a process for academic and non-academic programs (student affairs and student support services) to receive feedback on their plans, and allow administration (Provost office, Deans, and Associate Deans) to understand the status of student learning outcomes within and across the five colleges. For a number of years, the University has dedicated PASSHE performance funding to support assessment efforts. As a result, the ASL has provided the institution with tangible evidence

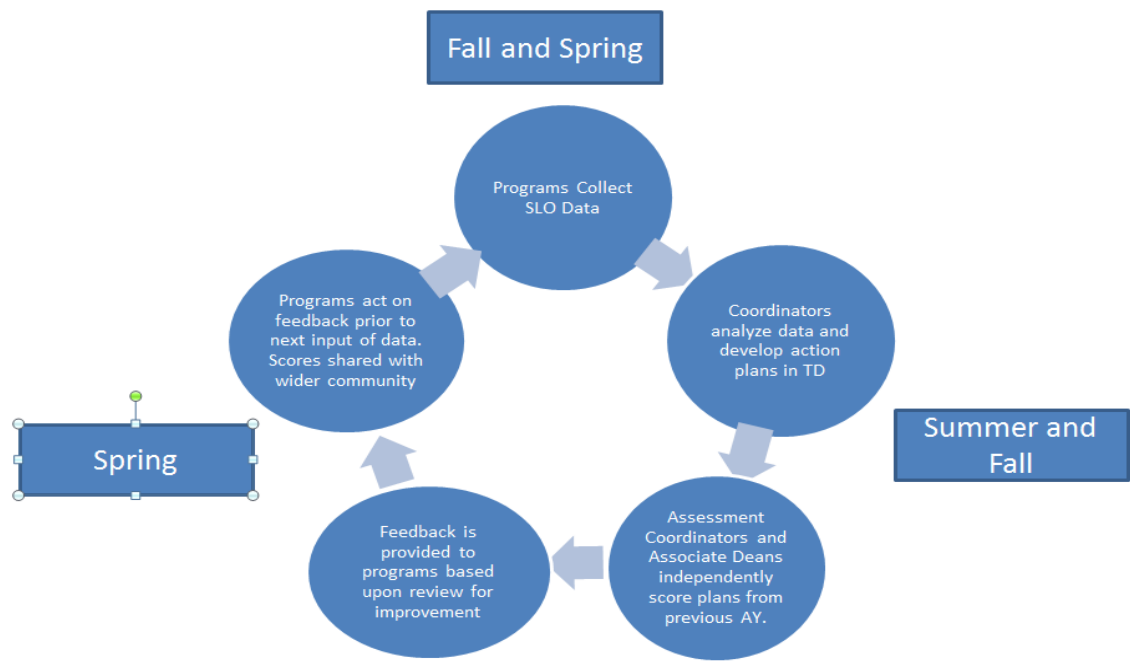
of how these financial resources have impacted improvement in student learning outcomes. In fiscal year 2014, the University committed \$xx,xxxx in funding to support the work of student learning outcomes at the program level. This funding is provided via alternate workload assignments (AWA) for faculty within the five colleges. Faculty members receiving these assignments serve as program-level assessment coordinators and are key players in ensuring consistency in the assurance of student learning throughout the University. Their responsibilities include the execution, implementation, data collection, and reporting of the respective assessment plan. Associate Deans in each college have administrative responsibility to ensure coordinators are completing work according to the assessment policy. With regard to specialized accreditation and related faculty development, the Associate Deans and the Faculty Associate work in concert with one another to ensure that those assessment needs are met. Without exception, *TracDat* planning software is used to track all assessment plans for both accredited and non-accredited programs.

Beginning in fall of 2012, all academic programs were evaluated on their assessment plans' ability to articulate several core elements. The evaluation of program plans was conducted using an institution-wide rubric. The rubric contained a four-point scale for each of the elements below:

- Program learning outcomes that are specific and direct
- Curriculum maps that indicate where outcomes are introduced, practiced, and assessed at the program level
- Use of both direct and indirect assessment measures
- Assessments measures that provide appropriate rationale for their use
- Criteria for success (i.e. benchmarking) for each assessment measure
- Appropriate reporting of results
- Action plans tied to the results

The rubric has enabled the institution to communicate the same expectation regardless of discipline or specialized accreditation so that programs understand the University's expectations related to student learning assessment. The Faculty Associate coordinates the annual assessment cycle (Figure 5.5) with assistance from the Assessment Advisory Committee and the respective Associate Deans for each college.

Figure 5.5: Assurance of Student Learning Process



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1568 The Assessment Advisory Committee is composed of faculty from each of the colleges as well as
1569 representatives from library services, student affairs, and student support services. Annually, during
1570 the first week of November, assessment coordinators upload previous year’s results and action plans
1571 into *TracDat*. The University-wide committee and the respective Associate Dean(s) using the rubric
1572 then review the respective plans. Feedback is then sent back to the programs to document strengths
1573 or areas of improvement for the next cycle.

1574 This process is mutually beneficial for both academic programs and the institution. The academic
1575 programs are provided specific feedback to document their strengths or areas of improvement as it
1576 relates to the quality of their plan while the institution is able to assess how well all programs within a
1577 college and across the institution are performing. The Faculty Associate meets annually with the
1578 Provost, Vice Provost, and College administrators to distribute heat maps.²⁸ Heat maps are data
1579 visualization tools that allow everyone to understand where programs are in the process. The
1580 University publically discusses this work on the TLA website. This practice has provided information
1581 at the institution level to improve the teaching and learning process. As a result of all programs
1582 having assessment plans, the institution is able to clearly document achievement of student learning
1583 outcomes with evidence and share effective practices. A document communicating exemplary
1584 practices related to student learning assessment for others to model was shared with the university
1585 community in spring 2015.¹⁰ Identifying and sharing this type of information was not possible before
1586 the ASL because not all programs were consistently using *TracDat*. The ASL has been an effective
1587 tool in facilitating the coordination of a systematic University-wide review of student learning
1588 outcomes. In keeping with our commitment to distributed leadership, the ASL initiative achieves
1589 excellence without dictating to programs what they have to measure. It ensures a level of quality

control in the assessment plans and better enables the University's evaluation of student learning across the institution.

Over the last three years, the University has seen a statistically significant change in each of the respective areas of the rubric, which demonstrates an effectively organized, systematic, and sustainable process to assess the achievement of learning outcomes. Several sample program-level student learning assessment plans over the last three years are provided from each of the colleges in the appendices.²⁹ Finally, in linking with institutional effectiveness, the ASL process is part of the Academics Theme goal of assuring student learning and academic excellence. The impact of this is evaluated each year through *Building on Excellence* Academics Objective 1.1: *Strengthen and support the assurance of student learning outcomes and the use of high-quality academic programming.*

General Education Assessment

Upon the completion of one full cycle of general education assessment, the institution developed action plans to further strengthen the process and engage additional faculty. The previous structure consisted of the assessment of two (of six) general education goals being assessed each year. Conducted initially by the Curriculum and Academic Policies Council (CAPC) general education committee chairperson, the process began with the identification of courses where general education goals were embedded. Identified instructors were then asked to submit one student artifact for each randomly selected student enrolled in the general education class. Selected faculty would work each summer to evaluate those artifacts using scoring rubrics (these were locally developed by CAPC representatives). This approach represented a clear and important attempt to measure the goals of the general education program. It went beyond individual courses and allowed the University to look for evidence of student attainment of goals across a broad range of approved general education courses. However, after completing a full cycle several important limitations of this process were identified:

- Course assignments were not developed with the assessment of the general education goal in mind. Faculty rarely considered using the rubric provided in the development of an artifact for the course. This resulted in an unpredictable number of assignments/artifacts addressing all of the criteria included in the University-wide rubric. Thus, the institution needed to consider ways to help faculty more closely align course assignments to general education program assessment.
- Assessing student learning in lower level general education courses was not the best way to determine if students were achieving the goals as a result of the general education curriculum. For example, WCU General Education Goal 1: Communicate Effectively was assessed via artifacts from the first year writing program (WRT 120) and from the required public speaking course (SPK 208 or 230). These courses lay a foundation for students to build upon within the general education curriculum, but they do not demonstrate mastery of those goals. Thus, it was not sufficient to measure outcomes from introductory level courses to assess general education goals.
- After several years of collecting general education artifacts, it was clear that instructors of general education courses were not always fully aware of the general education goal requirements and, therefore were not fully addressing the goals associated with those general education courses. In this context, instructors of general education courses and other

advanced courses that could be included in the assessment of general education goals needed to be directly involved in the process.

Excellence in Action (Closing the Loop): General Education Assessment

During the 2013-2014 academic year, a new general education assessment process was piloted, which provided additional guidance and professional development for faculty teaching general education courses. The pilot identified two general education goals, Goal 1, effective oral and written communication, and Goal 5, responding thoughtfully to diversity, as initial targets of the effort. Instead of measuring artifacts from entry-level writing courses, Goal 1 was measured by assessing assignments from general education writing emphasis courses and discipline-specific capstone courses that included an oral presentation requirement. Goal 5 was measured by assessing assignments from diverse communities courses. Instructors teaching these courses in spring 2014 were invited to participate in the pilot program. Faculty attended a workshop following the fall semester, which engaged them in an assessment rubric comparison of the locally developed assessment rubrics to the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics from the Association of American College and Universities (AAC&U) for each goal. Twenty-eight faculty members participated in this formative assessment.

As a result of this review, the faculty identified VALUE rubrics as being most effective for the assessment of Goal 1 (one rubric for written communication and another for oral communication) and a locally developed rubric was chosen to assess students' ability to apply a diverse communities perspective (Goal 5). In addition to selecting the optimal rubric, faculty engaged in a discussion regarding the differences between the grading of assignments and assessment of general education goals. As a result, participating faculty were better able to construct course assignments that were appropriate for measuring general education goals and outcomes. Later in the semester, faculty required students to complete these assessment centric assignments and collected them for review later in the summer. In May of that year, groups of instructors met to discuss the assessment of their goal using the artifacts supplied and the agreed upon rubric. Multiple training and coding sessions were held to ensure inter-rater reliability, which resulted in a norming process being developed. Sets of artifacts were divided among coders in each group and assessments were completed over the summer.

A majority of the faculty involved reported that the process provided valuable information and informed their approach to teaching future general education courses. Additionally, faculty reported having a better understanding of the overlapping purposes of general education assessment and course-based assessment and would revise their assignments to better align with general education goals. During the fall 2014 semester, a report outlining the results of this project and providing tips for faculty who teach general education courses was distributed to the entire campus community.³⁰ Given the positive feedback from faculty, the process was repeated for an additional year. Those who had been involved in the assessment of effective communication (written and oral) before were invited to participate again. They collected artifacts from their students during the spring 2015 semester and participated in another set of training and coding sessions using the rubrics that had been modified in light of feedback from the previous year's work. A different approach was taken with regard to the assessment of a diverse communities perspective. Despite the existence of a

faculty-approved definition of a “diverse communities” course and a specifically designed set of expected student outcomes for those diverse communities courses, the pilot phase of the project indicated varying levels of consistency across campus. Thus, it was decided to develop a set of faculty development workshops to allow instructors teaching diverse communities courses to work together to develop shared goals and practices.

Following the 2015 assessment cycle, participating faculty reported that they had a much more sophisticated understanding of the process of assessing student learning outcomes. They reported that participation in this process was, in some cases, the best faculty development experience they have ever had. Faculty reported an increased level of confidence in their teaching abilities as a result of this experience and that their students are better writers and/or oral communicators because of the improvement in their pedagogical approach. Preliminary assessment data provide support for these qualitative assertions. Administrative support for this project has been significant as “X” amount of funding from Academic Affairs has enabled this project to be successful. General education assessment follows the timeline outlined below Figure 5.6:

Figure 5.6: General Education Assessment Cycle

Goal	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
1	Year 1 assess	Year 2 assess w/participant workshops	Repeat assess w/participant workshops	Post-assessment resource development		Pre-assessment workshops	Year 1 assess w/participant workshops
2	Year 2 assess				Pre-assessment workshops	Year 1 assess w/participant workshops	Participants share w/campus + Year 2 assess
3				Year 1 assess w/participant workshops	Participants share w/campus + Year 2 assess	Post-Assessment resource development	
4	Post-assessment workshops			Pre-assessment workshops	Year 1 assess w/participant workshops	Participants share w/campus + Year 2 assess	Post-assessment resource development
5	Pre-assessment workshops	Year 1 assess w/participant workshops	Workshops thru Gen Ed Reform process	Post-assessment resource development			Pre-assessment workshops
6				Year 1 assess w/participant workshops	Participants share w/campus + Year 2 assess	Post-assessment resource development	

Participant Workshops: Pre- and post-semester sessions with participant faculty that include preparation/training for assessment, discussion of assessment rubrics and practices, and final collection of assessment data.

Pre-Assessment Workshops: Spring semester luncheon session with invited faculty who will be teaching goal- approved general education courses during following academic year. VALUE rubrics will be introduced and discussed. Faculty will be asked to develop student assignments that will allow post-semester assessment via VALUE rubric.

Post-Assessment Resource Development: Video and/or audio captures will be developed to include sample artifacts demonstrating high and low ratings on each rubric dimension as well as tips/advice from participant faculty intended for other faculty who teach similarly approved courses. Resources will be sent to faculty assigned to teach such courses and will be made widely available on the WCU TLA web-page.