

December 10, 2018

President Fred Pestello
Saint Louis University
One Grand Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63103-2097

Dear President Pestello:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on assessment.

The Higher Learning Commission requires that the institution submit an additional interim report on several areas of learning outcomes assessment. The interim report is to be embedded in the Assurance Filing of the University's AY2021-2022 Comprehensive Evaluation and should include, at minimum, the following: **1)** Evidence that the Institution's Core Curriculum and the Core Curriculum SLOs have been established; **2)** That the Core Curriculum learning outcomes are being assessed according to an established format or cycle; and **3)** That all SLU's instructional programs have completed at least one full assessment cycle, have made recommendations for improving student learning based on assessment data, and have action plans or procedures in place for reviewing and, where appropriate, implementing the recommendations.

Embedded monitoring is to be addressed by the institution in the applicable core components of its Assurance Argument. The review team is to ascertain whether the institution has satisfactorily addressed the monitoring issue(s) and will document its findings in the conclusion section of the team report.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2021 – 2022.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Jeffrey Rosen (jrosen@hlcommission.org); (800) 621-7440 x 139.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: December 10, 2018

STAFF LIAISON: Jeffrey Rosen

REVIEWED BY: Steven Kapelke

INSTITUTION: Saint Louis University, St. Louis, MO

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. Fred Pestello, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 9/4/2018 on assessment.

Report should establish: a) all learning outcomes are published and transparent; b) learning outcomes and assessment plans are available for all schools/colleges and for general education; c) data collection as evidence of student learning; d) samples of direct and indirect evidence of student learning across the University.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2016 Assurance Review, which includes the following observation:

Although the institution has improved its assessment profile, there are substantial areas where assessment processes lack full development and implementation. In particular, annual collecting and reporting of assessment data at the program level remains inconsistent and many programs provide no evidence of the use of assessment results in program improvement. A substantial number of programs do not have annual assessment reports posted on the assessment website. University-wide measurement of learning outcomes is still in its infancy and relies on a voluntary submission process for student portfolios that has a response rate much too low to allow meaningful conclusions from the data. Core curriculum assessment, which is relegated to the colleges and schools is essentially nonexistent, with several schools lacking learning outcomes for their core curricula.

In addition, part of the expectations for the peer review team include a review of the components of the progress report on assessment required by the previous team. The expectations for the progress report specifically indicated that the institution should: Publish Student Learning Outcomes ("SLOs") for each degree program and major. Any university-wide learning outcomes that are developed should be published on the University Website and in the Catalogs. Program SLOs should be shown on the main website for each program and major, and should also be included in the official Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs.

As of this visit, this component of the progress report is incomplete.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The Saint Louis University interim report on learning outcomes assessment is clearly written and organized effectively around the four items identified in the Team Report of the institution’s 2016 Assurance Review. In addition to the report narrative, the document contains extensive supporting materials pertaining to assessment, including the University Assessment Plan template.

REPORT SUMMARY: Following a brief introductory section (“Context”) that provides background to the issues identified in the HLC Team Report, the document’s narrative is presented in four parts, each one addressing one Report Requirement. These are numbered in the report and addressed in order in the following summary.

The first Report Requirement pertains to the establishment of learning outcomes for all instructional programs and the publication of these outcomes in relevant documents and on the program websites. The University’s notes that program-level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are developed by program faculty and reviewed regularly by these faculties and assessment leaders; the *University Assessment Plan Template*, an excerpt of which is shown below, provides a guide to the development of program outcomes.



Program Assessment Plan	
Program:	
Department:	
College/School:	
Date:	
Primary Assessment Contact:	

Note: Each cell in the table below will expand as needed to accommodate your responses.

#	Program Learning Outcomes	Assessment Mapping	Assessment Methods	Use of Assessment Data
	What do the program faculty expect all students to know, or be able to do, as a result of completing this program? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note: These should be measurable, and manageable in number (typically 4-6 are sufficient). 	From what specific courses (or other educational/professional experiences) will artifacts of student learning be analyzed to demonstrate achievement of the outcome? Include courses taught at the Madrid campus and/or online as applicable.	What specific artifacts of student learning will be analyzed? How, and by whom, will they be analyzed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note: the majority should provide direct, rather than indirect, evidence of achievement. Please note if a rubric is used and, if so, include it as an appendix to this plan.	How and when will analyzed data be used by faculty to make changes in pedagogy, curriculum design, and/or assessment work? How and when will the program evaluate the impact of assessment-informed changes made in previous years?
1				
2				

The report notes further that systematic feedback on the SLOs is provided in various ways, including academic program reviews, self-study processes for program that hold specialized accreditation, and annual assessment reviews conducted by the University Assessment Committee, which employs a rubric “aligned with our University

Assessment Standards.” *The Assessment Committee was formed in Fall 2017*” with the following purposes: [to]

- *provide internal faculty peer feedback*
- *expand the number of assessment champions and experts throughout the colleges/schools*
- *significantly increase the capacity for assessment review and feedback...*

According to the report, virtually all instructional programs have posted their student learning outcomes as one feature in their program assessment plans. This was facilitated by the use of two new technologies—a new web content management system installed in AY2017-2018, and the implementation of CourseLeaf, “*a web-based curriculum and catalog management system that governs how curriculum and learning outcome data is presented and updated on the web.*”

The second Interim Report Requirement seeks assurance that learning outcomes and assessment plans for general education “*have been established for all colleges and schools serving undergraduates within the university.*” Here the report acknowledges that, although each college/school that serves undergraduates possesses its own core curricula, there has not been one common set of student learning outcomes that can be assessed within those core curricula.

Employing the Vision Statement developed by the “*Task Force on Becoming a SLU Baccalaureate,*” which was formed in Fall 2015, the institution made the decision in 2016 to begin to develop a “*new, true, University-wide core curriculum.*” This delayed the “*meaningful core curriculum assessment,*” being employed under the old model, but the institution believed that the value of a common core was of greater importance and significance over time.

Here the report provides a timeline of processes describing how the new University Core SLOs were developed, beginning in AY2015-2016 with the “*Development of a Governing Vision Statement for the SLU Baccalaureate,*” and culminating in Fall 2022 with the “*Implementation for All New First-Year Students*” of the common core. At this point, the report cites several points that confirm its commitment to assessment as the design and implementation processes continue. These include the “*attention to assessment of student achievement*” noted in the drafts of the new core curriculum outcomes published for feedback in Fall 2017.

The third of the Report Requirements articulated in the HLC Team report made specific reference to the collection of assessment data and the use of these data (“*evidence of student learning*”) in the improvement of the University’s instructional programs. In response, the document notes that “*Today, over 95% of our approximately 230 academic programs (majors and certificates) have assessment plans...,*” many of which used the format presented in the *University Assessment Plan Template*, noted earlier. Proposals for new instructional programs must include assessment plans, which are reviewed by the undergraduate (UAAC) or graduate (GAAC) curriculum committees.

Citing continuing improvement in the percentage of programs that have submitted updated assessment reports as of Fall 2018, the interim report notes that the *Template* seeks specific responses to various aspects of assessment procedures, including what data/artifacts of student learning were analyzed, and how assessment data was used for the purposes of improving student learning, among other items. Currently, according to the report, “*approximately 50% of programs have, in the past year, reached the point in their assessment cycles that they have begun using their assessment data to either substantiate current practices and/or inform meaningful change.*” The institution recognizes that many programs have not reached this point yet, but anticipates that by AY2021-2022 all instructional programs will report meaningful use of assessment procedures.

The report then lists a wide range of “*institutional factors and initiatives*” that have been instrumental in making progress in the University’s assessment practices, and more specifically, in the using assessment data for improving student learning. These factors include, most notably, the emphasis placed on assessment by the Provost and the President, who maintained assessment in the forefront of institutional discourse. Other items in the list include SLU’s participation in the HLC Assessment Academy, beginning in 2017, and the large number of University programs that hold specialized accreditation.

The last of the four Report Requirements makes specific reference to the importance of including “*a reasonable sample of direct and indirect evidence of learning and the use of such evidence for improvement.*” Citing its response to Report Requirement #2, above, the University notes that the new University Core Curriculum, which is aligned with the University Assessment Standards, emphasizes the use of direct measures of student learning. These are also stressed in curriculum development templates employed by the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Affairs Committees (UAAC and GAAC) and are addressed in evaluations of program assessment plans.

REPORT ANALYSIS: Materials presented in the Saint Louis University interim report show that the institution has made significant improvements each of the areas noted in the 2016 HLC Team with regard to its assessment practices and systems. The University’s interim report provides an effective overview of the institution’s efforts and supplies a vast range of pertinent supporting documentation.

With respect to the specific requirements described in the HLC Team Report, the institution reports that all instructional programs—both graduate and undergraduate—have stated learning outcomes and that these are publicized in appropriate documents and on the program websites. Review of a large sampling of program websites confirms the University’s assertion; the review verifies that the program learning outcomes are articulated clearly and easily accessed through the plainly delineated “*Majors and Programs*” link. Moreover, the outcomes are, generally, stated effectively in terms of both student learning/knowledge and student performance, keyed by phrasing such as, “*Graduates will be able to demonstrate...*”

The University has also provided a stronger “infrastructure” to its assessment practices, with the formation in 2017 of the Assessment Committee, the development of documents such as the University Assessment Plan Template, and the implementation of key technologies, such as CourseLeaf, noted in the Report Summary section above.

The report acknowledges that the development and implementation of the new University Core Curriculum and the Core Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), which were approved by the governance bodies of the SLU schools/colleges that contain undergraduate programs, has delayed the institution’s ability to assess general education to the extent it believes appropriate. The new Core will not be fully implemented for new first-year students until Fall 2022 according to the timeline presented in the report. While the timeline is reasonable as articulated, the delay in general education assessment is unfortunate, if understandable. This will certainly remain a point of emphasis in future HLC evaluations.

It is apparent that the University is committed to employing assessment data for the purposes of improving student learning and, more general quality improvement. Noting that, by 2018, most of its instructional programs had submitted “*updated*” assessment reports, the document indicates also that many of these programs are currently reviewing and using these data to “*either substantiate current practices and/or inform meaningful change,*” as noted above. Although the University’s programs had not reached full compliance with regard to this stage of assessment, the institution has established a system that is “repeatable” and sustainable; indications are that its target of having 100% program compliance by AY2021-2022 is realistic.

Finally, the report notes Report Requirement #4, which addresses the need for inclusion of both direct and indirect measures of learning in the institution’s assessment plans and practices. In the University’s response, it cites the *University-Wide Assessment Standards*—shown below--and the *University-Wide Assessment Standards: Evaluation Rubric*, an excerpt of which is included below.

Both documents make explicit reference to direct and indirect measures of learning, placing emphasis on those that “*are intentionally designed to directly evidence student achievement of a particular learning outcome(s).*” Further, the documents cite standards for “*Methods,*” “*Analysis of Assessment Data,*” and “*Use of Data,*” and, in the *Evaluation Rubric*, measure progress in individual assessment plans in terms of University standards.

University-Wide Assessment Standards

	Unacceptable	Significant revision/improvement is needed	The SLU standards that all programs should be achieving annually, and fully
Learning Outcomes What the faculty expect students to know and be able to do as a direct result of completing a particular UG major/minor, UG core, certificate, or graduate program.	No outcomes (regardless of quality) developed.	"Outcomes" are really tasks or assignments students will "do" – not learning outcomes resulting from having done a task. Outcomes are either too broad or vague, and therefore unmeasurable; Outcomes are too specific to be program level outcomes. Outcomes are "double- (or triple-...) barreled."	Outcomes are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the educational result of tasks, experiences or assignments • program-focused • clear, specific, and observable
Methods The specific evidence of student achievement collected; how and when the program collects it; and whether or not the methods are manageable for faculty.	No plan developed.	Disproportionate use of data that only <i>indirectly</i> reflects student achievement of program learning outcomes (such as student course evaluation data, graduating student or alumni surveys, grad school admission rates, certification rates, etc.). Lack of artifacts evidencing students' most advanced work related to an outcome(s). Not all data planned to be collected was actually collected. Too many outcomes assessed each year to ensure quality and manageability.	Assessed artifacts of student learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are intentionally designed to <i>directly</i> evidence student achievement of a particular learning outcome(s). • include students' most advanced work toward the learning outcome. All data planned to be collected was collected. A few outcomes are assessed each year; a reasonable cycle ensures meaningful assessment and manageability.
Analysis of Assessment Data What the program does to analyze and evaluate the student achievement data to identify ways to improve student achievement.	No analysis conducted.	Analysis does not address all data collected. Data is reported or re-stated, but no conclusions drawn. Conclusions drawn don't inform curricular or pedagogical remedies.	Analysis of student achievement data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addresses all data collected • identifies learning gaps and possible curricular or pedagogical remedies • identifies successful student achievement of outcomes and associated strengths of curriculum and pedagogy
Use of Data How the analyzed data is used by faculty to make and implement recommendations for changes in pedagogy, curriculum design, and/or assessment work.	No use of data for program improvement.	Curricular and pedagogical changes to bridge learning gaps (as informed by assessment data analysis) have not been implemented.	Curricular and pedagogical changes to bridge learning gaps (as informed by assessment data analysis) were implemented. The program studies the impact of those changes on future student achievement.

University-Wide Assessment Standards: *Evaluation Rubric*

Standard	Below the Standard	Meets the Standard	Comments & Recommendations
Learning outcomes are program-focused.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend evident <input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend not evident	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learning outcomes are clear, specific, and observable.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend evident <input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend not evident	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learning outcomes are the educational result of tasks, experiences or assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend evident <input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend not evident	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Assessed artifacts of student learning are intentionally designed to <i>directly</i> evidence student achievement of a particular learning outcome(s).	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend evident <input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend not evident	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Assessed artifacts of student learning include students' most advanced work toward the learning outcome.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend evident <input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend not evident	<input type="checkbox"/>	
A few outcomes are assessed each year; a reasonable cycle ensures meaningful assessment and manageability.	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend evident <input type="checkbox"/> Positive trend not evident	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Analysis Concluding Statement: Saint Louis University has responded to stated HLC concerns pertaining to its assessment practices with well-considered actions, starting with the establishment and publication of learning outcomes for all instructional programs at SLU. The comprehensive revision of what have been disaggregated

pockets of general education outcomes and curricula are in the process of being unified into the University Core Curriculum with common outcomes (SLOs). It is evident also that many programs have begun using assessment data for the purposes of improvement, and that current assessment documents/templates require use of both direct and indirect measures of learning.

Despite these very clear and measurable improvements, many of the activities described in the institution's report are in early or mid-stages of development or implementation. This is evident particularly in the institution's ongoing efforts to complete work on its core curriculum and core learning outcomes and the institution-wide use of assessment data to improve student learning, both of which the report acknowledges as works in progress. This is not intended as criticism; the HLC recognizes SLU's efforts to date with respect to learning outcomes assessment, which are commendable.

Nonetheless, the Higher Learning Commission will require an additional interim report on two aspects of assessment, the report to be embedded in the Assurance Filing of the institution's AY2021-2022 Comprehensive Evaluation. (Please note the Staff Finding designation.) The specifics of the embedded report are described in the Staff Action Section below.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): Core Component 4.B

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on assessment.

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programs have completed at least one full assessment cycle, have made recommendations for improving student learning based on assessment data, and have action plans or procedures in place for reviewing and, where appropriate, implementing the recommendations.

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