Ursinus College

College Assessment Resource Guide

*Student Learning and
Institutional Effectiveness Assessment
Structures and Processes*

*Working Document
2018-19*

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I.   Introduction

A.   Assessment of Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness

"The effectiveness of an institution rests upon the contribution that each of the institution's programs and services makes toward achieving the goals of the institution as a whole."
(excerpt from Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, p. 25)

The Ursinus College Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Plan supports our campus community in developing and maintaining an organized and sustainable program of assessment that improves the quality of the student experience. The assessment plan outlines the guiding principles set forth in our mission and strategic plan as well as the structure, coordination, resources and support for assessment. The plan is a flexible and living document, reviewed and updated annually to reflect the current state of our planning and assessment processes.

The purpose of assessment is to improve, inform, and support student learning and to achieve the mission and strategic goals of the college. As assessment in higher education has increasingly grown in response to external accountability and transparency demands, our true desire is to use assessment for the benefit of our students and the college. Assessment data, translated into useful information, is the basis for making better decisions.

The collaboration of our faculty and staff in reviewing, analyzing and improving the educational experience of our students through assessment leads to a comprehensive understanding of institutional effectiveness. Assessment of institutional effectiveness includes all aspects of the college that either directly or indirectly contributes to student success. The student experience includes experiences in the classroom, as well as in our co-curricular and residential life programs. The student experience is also supported by administrative areas that carry out the business aspects of the college.

B.   What is the value of assessment?

Assessment in the context of student learning and institutional effectiveness is designed to answer the question, "is the college fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals?" Assessment enables informed planning and decision-making that benefits our academic programs as well as our academic support and administrative services. Assessment can help review the effectiveness and alignment of curricula; improve program outcomes; understand impact of program changes; highlight program successes; provide evidence when requesting resources; and inform students of the intended learning outcomes. Assessment also enables student support services and administrative functions a mechanism to identify areas where services excel and areas in need of improvement.

II.   Ursinus Guiding Principles

Ursinus College assessment processes and practices endeavor to be grounded in our mission, vision and the Ursinus 150 Plan Strategic Objectives.

A.   Ursinus College Mission Statement

The mission of the College is to enable students to become independent, responsible, and thoughtful individuals through a program of liberal education. That education prepares them to live creatively and usefully, and to provide leadership for their society in an interdependent world.

> Link to Mission Statement:
> https://www.ursinus.edu/about/basic-facts/mission-statement/

B.   Vision

Ursinus College will be the first-choice learning institution for students, for faculty and staff, for our surrounding community, and for philanthropy. The Ursinus Quest: Open Questions Open Minds helps us accomplish this vision by empowering all members of our campus community to exchange ideas, challenge assumptions, build mutual respect and learn from our individual differences.

C.   Ursinus 150 Plan

Ursinus 150 emerged from a collaborative and transparent process in which the views of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees were incorporated. The pillars represent the fundamental ethos of Ursinus College.

Read more about the Ursinus 150 plan.

Ursinus 150 Plan

Ursinus College stands firm in the belief that liberal education is an engine of individual change and social mobility, capable of transforming students into leaders. Grounded in this conviction, this strategic plan will guide decision making at the College through the sesquicentennial. Ursinus 150 emerged from a collaborative and transparent process in which the views of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees were sought and incorporated into the final product. The pillars below represent the fundamental ethos of Ursinus College. Building upon the pillars, the seven strategic objectives--supported by tactics that will evolve over the life of the plan--inspire our community to realize its full potential. Through collaborative, bold, and imaginative efforts, we will keep the promises we have made to generations of Ursinus students: to provide students multiple paths to success; to make them architects of their own education; and to prepare them for leadership in an increasingly diverse, interconnected, and globalized world.

Pillars

Learning: Ursinus College is a liberal arts institution rooted in a commitment to inquiry. We learn by questioning deeply held assumptions about ourselves and our world, instilling a passion for lifelong learning in all members of our community. Faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees inculcate the value of ongoing learning in students by embodying in their own lives*.*

Living Together: Ursinus College is our students' home throughout their college experience. In an environment shaped by trust and concern, all community members learn to consider their own beliefs and experiences from the perspective of others. Our residential culture nurtures both exploration and cohesion, inviting students to develop the skills of self-reliance and interdependence in tandem. By cultivating citizenship on campus, we prepare students for citizenship in a world beyond Ursinus.

Building Lifelong Connections: The Ursinus community is undergirded by strong connections—among alumni, trustees, parents, retirees, faculty, staff, and students. These deep roots allow every member of our community to thrive. Taking pride in both past and present, we work together to write the next chapter of the College's history.

Strategic Objectives

Strengthen our program in liberal education, cultivating the habit of lifelong learning.
Liberal education is the bedrock of our mission, and each member of our campus community plays a critical role not only in enrolling our students, but in engaging, nurturing, and sustaining their intellectual development. Supported by a rich curriculum and faculty and staff committed to helping students excel, students will build their own educational experience in preparation for their future as innovators, entrepreneurs, leaders, and creators.

Promote a vibrant and inviting campus environment.
We will position Ursinus as a destination campus, capitalizing on the wealth of cultural opportunities our community has to offer. Showcasing the abundant creativity and intellectual richness of our faculty, staff, and students, Ursinus will function as a high-caliber social and cultural resource throughout the region and the state. Joining forces with our Collegeville neighbors, we will work to make the campus more inviting to visitors, even as we continue to support exciting activities and opportunities for all of us who make Ursinus our home. This invigorating campus culture will foster intellectual curiosity and robust conversation, offering all community members opportunities for learning.

Intensify our commitment to diversity and inclusion.
While diversity marks a starting point, inclusion is an ongoing process. As part of that process, all members of our community will continue to develop a thoughtful, reflective, and empathetic understanding of others. We insist that our campus community champion the humanity of all of its members; we commit to breaking down the barriers faced by marginalized people, recognizing the particular constraints and pressures that affect members of underrepresented groups on this campus and in our world. A nuanced appreciation of diversity is a cornerstone of our educational philosophy, a moral imperative, and an essential part of twenty-first century citizenship. By devoting our resources and energy, we will build an inclusive culture, in which every individual, regardless of background, is poised to excel and to find respect for one another at Ursinus.

Champion risk taking.
We strive to be a community unafraid to test boundaries, recognizing that crossing disciplinary, social, and cultural frontiers can lead to great achievement. Through its emphasis on experiential learning and interdisciplinarity, Ursinus College encourages students to challenge boundaries in conjunction with faculty and staff. As students, faculty, and staff venture into new fields and explore new professional interests, they model ongoing growth and change for one another. As they learn to embrace risk rather than to fear it, students will pursue creative solutions to difficult problems; create their own opportunities and learn from failure; and develop the habits of independence and responsibility.

Celebrate Ursinus: past, present, and future.
We will improve internal and external recognition of the excellent work we do at Ursinus, both in and out of the classroom. We aim to build upon old traditions and craft new ones; to celebrate achievements with pride; to increase philanthropy to support our students' success; and to embrace innovative approaches to engage alumni, parents, and friends. It is incumbent upon all of us to be ambassadors for Ursinus College as we shape our next 150 years.

Invest in the people of the college as our most important asset.
Ursinus College will recruit and retain high-quality students, faculty, and staff who are committed to promoting the college's mission. As a high-performing institution, we will serve as a magnet for a modern, diverse, and innovative workforce. We will foster a culture of shared governance, balancing collaborative decision making and open discussion with resolve and action. By expanding access to professional development and learning opportunities for faculty and staff, we will support all employees in their endeavors to excel.

Ensure long-term financial sustainability.
To position Ursinus College as a national leader in the liberal arts, we will secure and use resources optimally to ensure long-term financial stability. We will prioritize resource allocation to maximize the college's assets: people, programs, buildings, technology, and investments. Ursinus will design a modern campus infrastructure that adapts to the changing needs of students; improves the college's reputation; serves as a benchmark for liberal arts campuses nationally; and engages our local, regional, and national partners.

III.   Assessment Structures and Processes

A.   Campus-wide Assessment

From the college's mission statement to the individual student learning outcomes and administrative objectives of each department, the goal is to promote the value of assessing how each area contributes to the achievement of our success. Assessment is integrated into all areas of the college (academic programs, academic support programs and services, and administrative departments).

The assessment of programs and services within academic support and administrative areas is coordinated via an annual report and outcomes assessment. This process is sustained at the departmental level with support and coordination from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness.

In addition, the college has developed a College Assessment website that links to student learning outcomes, current core and departmental assessment processes and templates, information disseminated by the Outcomes Assessment Committee, a FAQ, as well as links to external assessment resources.

B.   Student Learning Assessment

Student learning focused goals and outcomes are found in both the academic curriculum and in co-curricular programs and services. The development, planning and implementation of student learning assessment occurs through the following main mechanisms/structures:
- Open Questions Core Curriculum
- Academic Majors
- Academic External Review
- Academic Support and Administrative Outcomes Assessment

1. Open Questions Core Curriculum

The college faculty in spring 2018 approved a question-based revision to the core that will ask students to consider the following four questions as they progress through their educational experience: *What should matter to me? How should we live together? How can we understand the world? What will I do?*

Phased implementation of the core revisions began in the 2017-2018 school year, with the four questions being incorporated into CIE and the creation of a pilot senior capstone course addressing the question "What will I do?" Full implementation of the revised core, when its requirements will apply to all new students enrolling in the college, started in the 2018-2019 academic year.

As the Open Questions core is still in development, an intranet site has been developed for more information on the process. It contains information useful to advisors, to those developing new aspects of the Core, to those applying for a course to be included in the Core or who are teaching a Core course, and to those explaining components of the Core to others.

The full list of requirements can be found in list form in our [2018-2019 catalog](). As with the previous core curriculum, oral and written communication are developed beginning with CIE, and extending through the writing-intensive course and oral presentation requirements in the major. Technological competency and information literacy are reinforced across the curriculum, including in the major.

2. Academic Majors

Academic majors are in the practice of completing an annual assessment review along with summaries of student and faculty achievement. The Outcomes Assessment Committee (OAC) each year reviews the [reporting template]() and makes revisions as necessary. The OAC also provides guidance and support to the academic departments in development of goals and assessment methods. The assessment portions of the reports are reviewed by members of the OAC using the rubric below as a guide. The OAC members then meet with departments to discuss strengths and weaknesses and plans for assessment.

2018-19 Rubric – Review of Department 2017-18 Annual Reports

Learning Outcomes/Goals Rating
1 – Student Learning Outcomes not present
2 – SLOs present but not measurable or thorough or challenging
3 – SLOs present and, for the most part, measurable, thorough, and challenging

Indirect Assessment Rating
1 – No indirect assessment done in 2017-18
2 – Indirect assessment done, but designed or executed in a way that could provide data of only limited usefulness
3 – Indirect assessment done, and designed and executed in a way that could provide data useful for improvement

Indirect Assessment Analysis and Use Rating
1 – Indirect assessment not analyzed; no changes implemented; no changes planned
2 – Indirect assessment analyzed but resulted in limited or no changes
3 – Indirect assessment analyzed and resulted in meaningful planned or implemented changes

Direct Assessment Rating
1 – No direct assessment done in 2017-18

2 – Assessment done, but designed or executed in a way that could provide data of only limited usefulness

3 – Assessment done, and designed and executed in a way that could provide data useful for improvement

Direct Assessment Analysis and Use Rating
1 – Direct assessment not analyzed; no changes implemented; no changes planned
2 – Direct assessment analyzed but resulted in limited or no changes
3 – Direct assessment analyzed and resulted in meaningful planned or implemented changes

Curriculum Map Rating
1 – No curriculum map present with annual report.
2 – Curriculum map present and basic.
3 – Curriculum map present and detailed.

Writing Intensive Requirement, Oral Presentation and Capstone Courses

The guidelines, prepared by Academic Council and Committee on Outcomes Assessment and adopted by Faculty May 18, 2012, outline the on-going expectations of courses designated as writing intensive, the oral presentation requirement, and capstone courses.

https://www.ursinus.edu/live/files/1336-writing-intensive-requirement-oral-presentation

The guidelines below are provided to assist departments and faculty in conceptualizing and designing courses that fulfill these three requirements. Departments will differ in the ways that they implement the guidelines because of disciplinary differences and practical issues such as the number of students in capstone courses. Faculty within each department should design departmental criteria for uniform implementation of the capstone, writing requirement, and oral presentation requirements in departmental courses that address these requirements. In addition, faculty within each department should design uniform departmental criteria for assessing how successfully students have met the goals of the college and department with regards to the three requirements.

I.   **The Ursinus Writing-Intensive (W) Course**
Writing must be conceptualized as a mode of thinking and learning as well as proof of a student's acquisition of knowledge. Thus, writing is not just an end-product but is integrated into the course as the process of learning. In W courses students should practice skills common to good writing in any context but also learn the conventions of discourse and research in a chosen discipline.
Goals for Writing Intensive (W) Courses:
- Students should be instructed in the type of writing required in the course.
- Students should be made aware of the criteria on which they will be assessed.
  - Each W course should help each student create an adequate subject position as a scholar in a particular field of study by giving each student the proper conventions of discipline-specific discourse, e.g., proper use of vocabulary, ways of expressing an argument, and ways of critiquing an argument. To develop an adequate subject position, one must know how to adequately perform and display research.
  - Each W course should include discipline-specific writing assignments: lab or research reports, summaries of scholarly articles, critiques of /or responses to the research of other authors, interpretations, proposals, and other thesis-driven arguments.

- Each W course should require assignments that emphasize information literacy (research, knowledge of research tools, citation format, and assessment of sources).
- Each W course should require revision for most, if not all, formal writing assignments.
- Each W course should require informal writing assignments as well as formal writing assignments.

Suggestions for Departmental Implementation:
- Ideally a W course should be taken in the major in the sophomore year.
- Instructors are strongly encouraged to maintain a consistent partnership with Myrin Library and the Center for Writing for W courses.

Assessment of Student Work in the Writing Intensive (W) Course:
The CLA and AACU have general criteria that can serve as guidelines for writing assessment. However, those criteria should be seen as models that can be modified based on departmental values. Therefore, we strongly suggest that each department create its own criteria for writing effectiveness.

II. **Oral Presentation Requirement**
The oral presentation requirement is intended to foster students' ability to speak to audiences in a range of situations, including presentation of scholarly work within their discipline. The requirement helps prepare students for the world after Ursinus.

Goals for the Oral Presentation Requirement:
- Students should be instructed in speaking and accessory skills such as research.
- Students should be made aware of the criteria on which they will be assessed.
- Students should learn the conventions of speech in their discipline and utilize them in their presentations before faculty and other students.

Considerations for departmental implementation:
- Ideally students will complete the oral presentation requirement within the major in the capstone course.
- The oral presentation should be delivered to an audience of students and faculty.
- The capstone oral presentation should account for no less than 10% of the students' final grade.
- Students should have an opportunity for multiple oral presentations with instructor feedback in their major prior to the capstone oral presentation.

Assessment of Student Achievement of Oral Presentation Requirement Goals:
Every department should foster uniformity among courses that fulfill the oral presentation goal within the department by developing a set of uniform criteria to help guide and assess students work.

III. **The Ursinus Capstone Course / Experience**
All students are required to complete a capstone course in their major(s). The Capstone should provide challenging opportunities to put the skills of the major to use in situations similar to those students may encounter after graduation. The Capstone is the culminating educational experience in the major.

Goals for Capstone Courses:
- This course/experience should offer an opportunity to apply, refine, synthesize, and consolidate the core competencies, information, and principles of the discipline.

- The capstone should permit students to develop and showcase their talents through participation in discussion, analysis, writing, problem-solving, presentations, and/or other experiential tasks that embody the discipline's approach to scholarship or performance
- The capstone experience should enhance the student's confidence in their ability to do the work of their discipline by putting its methods and language into actual practice.

Considerations for Departmental Implementation:
- Ideally students will have been introduced to the conventions of both written and oral discourse in the major prior to taking the Capstone.
- The Capstone is ideally taken at or near the conclusion of work in the major and only when all prerequisites for the Capstone are met but no earlier than the junior year.

Assessment of Student Achievement of Capstone Goals:
Every department should foster uniformity among Capstone courses within the department by developing a set of criteria to help guide and assess students' Capstone project work.

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Assessment of courses in meeting these three requirements:
The effectiveness of courses in helping students to meet these goals will continue to be part of departmental assessment and departmental external reviews and Middle States Accreditation studies. The data collected from these assessments will continue to be analyzed by the Ursinus College Outcomes Assessment Committee and presented to the appropriate departments and committees.

3. External Review

Academic departments participate in an external review process that is completed by each department on a ten year cycle. A report is prepared by departments for an external review committee that includes assessment of their academic programming. The response from reviewers is provided to departments and the Dean of the College. The data and information collected through the department self-study, and the feedback from the external reviewers provide a wealth of assessment finding that can be used to improve both the curriculum and departmental operations.

4. Academic Support and Administrative Departments

Student learning occurs not only in the classroom, but also, outside the classroom through co-curricular experiences. Departments that sponsor programs and services that contribute to student learning articulate and assess their learning outcomes on an annual basis through a newly created assessment process. More detail on this process may be found in Section 3 of Institutional Effectiveness Assessment below.

C.   Institutional Effectiveness Assessment

In addition to assessment of student learning described above, assessment of the effectiveness of college operations, programs, and services is also taking place campus-wide. The planning and implementation of institutional effectiveness assessment occurs through the following main mechanisms/structures:
- Strategic Plan
- College Core Strategic Indicators
- Academic Support and Administrative Outcomes Assessment and Annual Report
- Institutional Assessment

1.   Strategic Plan

Initial methods to report on the progress of the strategic plan will include progress reporting on divisional goals and objectives as well as through the department annual reports.

2.   Core Strategic Indicators

At the institutional level, core strategic indicators and metrics are identified and tracked for use by the Board of Trustees and senior leadership. The indicators focus on Enrollment, Faculty, Student Outcomes, Financial Aid, Finance, and Advancement. The Core Strategic Indicators dashboard is also shared with faculty and staff via the institutional effectiveness website. These trends are also reviewed in context to comparison institutions to benchmark our standing in comparison to peer and aspirant groups.

3.   Academic Support and Administrative Departments

An annual report and outcomes assessment process for academic support programs and administrative departments was implemented in the 2014-2015 academic year. This process included assisting departments in refining existing or developing new goals and measurable outcomes or objectives that are directly linked to the mission of the college and strategic plan priorities. The template for the first year of the Annual Report and Outcomes Assessment process included a section that stepped departments through the articulation of an assessment method for the outcome or objective, the criteria for success, the timeline anticipated, and a plan for how the department was going to use the results. This report process has been completed by departments and programs at least once and most are in their second cycle that will require departments to report on assessment results. The reporting template and guidelines may be found on the College Assessment website.

4.   Institutional Data and Assessment

A number of departments across campus engage in assessment activities that may be helpful in other departments and institutional improvement efforts. In addition, the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, in collaboration with Outcomes Assessment Committee, manages the administration of the following surveys about our students and faculty that can be used for indirect assessment of student learning. Results from these surveys have been used to inform progress toward the strategic plan recommendations, progress toward student learning goals, and progress toward operational objectives.

- Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (Fall 2018 first year cohort)
- National Survey of Student Engagement (Spring 2018 – 2017 cohort first year students & Class of 2018 seniors)
- Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium Senior Survey (Spring 2017 – Class of 2017))
- Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey (Spring 2017)

Regularly tracked institutional data are posted on the [Institutional Research website](#):
- First-Year Student Admission Trends
- Enrollment Trends
- Student Demographics
- Retention Rate Trends
- Degrees Awarded Trends
- Graduation Rate Trends
  - 6-Year Graduation Rates by Race-by Gender (HEOA)
  - 6-Year Graduation Rates by Federal Aid Category (HEOA)

Institutional data are also reported to [external audiences](#) that campus constituencies may find helpful:
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) - College Navigator: Ursinus College
- University and College Accountability Network -UCAN: Ursinus College
- College Affordability and Transparency Center -College Scorecard: Ursinus College
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education -MSCHE: Ursinus College

IV.   External Review and Accountability

It is part of our institutional responsibility to not only work to achieve the academic standards set by Ursinus College for our students' success, but also the standards of academic quality set by our regional accrediting body, [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#).

A.   Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Ursinus College is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Middle States is a regional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).   MSCHE is a voluntary, non-governmental, membership association that utilizes peer evaluation for quality assurance and improvement. Middle States looks at the college as a whole and how all programs, departments, and administrative functions work together to achieve our mission and goals. Accreditation is required for the college to have access to federal and state funds.

B.   MSCHE Standards of Accreditation

In 2014, Middle States member institutions approved revised *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*. Our 2018-19 self-study will utilize these revised standards. The seven standards are listed below and the full descriptions may be found in the publication at the link below:
https://www.msche.org/standards/

Standard I: Mission and Goals
The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.

Standard II: Ethics and Integrity
Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions.   In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.

Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience
An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence of all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences,

regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.

Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience
Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.

Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment
Assessment of student learning demonstrates 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.

Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement
The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures 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 VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration
The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purposed, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

As part of the self-study process, the college also must demonstrate compliance with the fifteen "Requirements of Affiliation" that may be found at the following link:
https://www.msche.org/standards/#requirements