

2018 Student Learning Assessment Advisory Group (SLAAG) Report to PACIE

This report is a comprehensive analysis of the collective assessment efforts across all programs and colleges at Frostburg State University (FSU) over the last year. It serves as a composite of the formal reports on assessment efforts, procedures, and results submitted by the College of Education (CoE), the College of Business (CoB), the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), and the General Education Program (GEP) to the Student Learning Assessment Advisory Group (SLAAG). Assessment themes and results from each domain are discussed in detail. The conclusion of this document presents specific action items, corrective actions, and resource allocations.

The General Education Program (GEP)

The validity of the University's GEP assessment process is demonstrated in this report, where attention is focused on developing a base of understanding of student learning across the GEP learning goals. Regarding overall GEP assessment, there are several important notes or caveats; one of which is demonstrated in the data. The other is absent in the data and is in fact the product of the current GEP assessment process. First, the trajectories of students' assessment scores are not consistent among learning outcomes. Performance is improving for some outcomes, decreasing for others, and relatively flat for others. Overall, the data suggest that a plateau of at or above "meets expectations" has been reached. Additionally, within each outcome and across outcomes, the trajectories of the upper and lower bounds of the inter-quartile range (the 25th and 75th percentile horizons) are for some outcomes parallel to the trajectory of the median and diverge or converge for others. In short, this suggests potentially differential patterns of learning between higher- and lower-achieving students and between learning outcomes.

Second, much of the uncertainty - and why a descriptive analysis of the GEP assessment data is recommended - is due to the current structure of assessment: as a single, end of semester event. As a high-level overall assessment of the current GEP, the current post-only method of assessment is adequate, especially in light of the achievement in fall 2017, where, on average, all students in all learning outcomes are "meeting expectations." However, for more precise analysis to inform intra-departmental self-evaluations of the efficacy of the GEP assessment and to more definitively say that students are growing as learners and meeting the goals of the GEP at FSU, a pre-test/post-test design may have merit.

The College of Business

The College of Business' learning goals are influenced by FSU undergraduate institutional learning goals, the college's mission statement, and learning goal expectations for a bachelor's degree program established by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Since the CoB is on a spring semester assessment cycle, assessment results are not available until the following May or June.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

As of April 2018, 26 of the 33 programs in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences have submitted student learning outcomes updates from the 2016-2017 academic year to the CLAS Assessment Council, and the seven remaining programs are working with the Dean's Office and are close to completion. During the past academic year, the following programs consulted with the Associate Dean to develop new plans for student learning outcomes assessment that have significantly improved overall assessment processes: General Biology, Interpretive Biology and Natural History, Wildlife and Fisheries, Chemistry, Computer Science, Computer Information Systems, Information Technology, Secure Computing and Information Assurance, and Theatre and Dance. These new plans ensure that meaningful data is being

collected, analyzed, and used to inform decision making. Additionally, the CLAS Assessment Council will continue to give feedback to programs to improve the assessment process.

After reviewing assessment updates, the Chair of the CLAS Assessment Council and Associate Dean selected three programs to highlight; all of which have implemented their assessment plans; utilized assessment as part of informed decision making; adapted curriculum, courses, and/or assessment plans accordingly; and made continuous improvement to “close the loop.”

- 1) The Theatre and Dance program’s three tracks (Acting, Design and Technology, and Theatrical Studies) each have unique assessment plans in accordance with specified learning outcomes tied to the Institutional Goal of ***Acquisition and Application of Specialized Knowledge***. As an example, the Acting track has been assessing student progress for over 10 years and making changes to its curriculum and the assessment process itself, and a detailed rubric in the Acting track is utilized to assess courses across the curriculum. Assessment data revealed that students were in need of improvement in acting techniques, stage presence, movement, and vocal aspects. Based upon these results, the department put a renewed emphasis on vocal and movement techniques in all of its acting classes and encouraged students to work on techniques outside of class. Additionally, students are reminded via syllabi, meetings, and the departmental handbook to develop and exhibit professional work ethics. The department decided to reinstate THEA 420 (Marketing Yourself as an Actor) to help students better prepare for the profession. Assessment takes place in THEA 421 (Advanced Acting – Shakespeare) so that performance techniques, collaborative work habits, and other areas of acting can be properly assessed. The department is also discussing the benefits of adding a technique class to the curriculum. These changes are expected to help students improve in several areas of acting.
- 2) The Mathematics Department implemented new pedagogies to improve student success and ensure learning outcomes are tied to the Institutional Goal of ***Core Skills***. Based on pedagogical research and past assessment results, the department is utilizing inquiry-based learning in specified courses (e.g., linear algebra) and tracking understanding and retention of concepts among students enrolled in these inquiry-based classes. Additionally, the department developed a new Learning Assistants Program in which students serve as teacher apprentices who attend assigned courses (e.g., College Algebra and Calculus), serve as second “instructors,” and hold evening office hours to tutor students. Learning assistants meet with their EDUC 290 instructor weekly to discuss experiences, conduct consultations, and make appropriate programmatic changes. While formal assessment results are not yet available, the department reports that the efficacy of the program is self-evident, with increased engagement of learning assistants and students in the classes attending faculty office hours and evening tutoring more often. Finally, in Math 491 (Seminar in Mathematics), student learning outcomes are assessed through a research project paper and oral presentation, assessment exam, and student portfolios. Based on results of these assessment activities, the assessment exam is being modified and separated into two parts: one focusing on proofs and the other focusing on basic knowledge and understanding of foundational concepts. The linear algebra portion of the assessment exam is also being redesigned. The mathematics assessment committee is sharing detailed feedback on results of the assessment process with all department faculty members who teach the core skills so that they can make adjustments in their courses accordingly. The CLAS Assessment Council is looking forward to reviewing data and seeing how course changes will improve student learning outcomes.
- 3) In the English Department, learning outcomes are tied to the Institutional Goal of ***Core Skills***. Students enrolled in the Capstone course complete a portfolio consisting of a self-statement as well as essays, poems, and short stories that have been completed in past courses and

subsequently revised. Portfolios (and readers) are anonymized. Each portfolio is read by at least two members of the Department Assessment Committee based on a rubric and each section of the rubric for portfolio review (or survey) is connected to one of four departmental learning outcomes. Additionally, students are given an exit survey on the last day of the Capstone that asks questions regarding learning outcomes and post-graduation plans. After this process is complete, scores are averaged for each question as well as each learning outcome, and a reliability study on the scorers is performed. In fall and spring 2017, 13 total graduates were assessed (N=13). Results were as follows:

- **Performance Desired:** A 3.0 out of 4.0 on the rubric is considered “Good.”
- **Results:** 1 = Weak, 2 = Satisfactory, 3 = Good, 4 = Excellent
- **Averages for the areas being assessed: Text/Contexts (3.03); Audience/Purpose (3.17); Sources (2.70); Stages (2.82)**

Although these scores represent a lower performance in two areas than in past years, they also cemented some correlations between performance areas on the rubric that the English Department is using to make curricular changes. For example, the biggest deciding factor in whether a portfolio is scored highly or not is grammar/editing. As a result, the department needs to consider how to help students improve their understanding of grammar. The English Department is considering making the Editing course required for more students (it is also a Production course for publication only required for Professional Writing students), or creating an advanced 300- or 400-level grammar and lexical theory course. Results also showed that use of sources (research) scores are low, which is largely because literacy analysis essays that many graduates put in their portfolios do not contain much research. However, students should be encouraged to do more outside research (outside of course readings) in these classes. Requiring more research in these classes would represent an internal curricular change that would support students’ development as writers.

In conclusion, significant progress in student learning outcomes assessment was achieved in several programs in AY 2016-2017. While all of the programs in CLAS should be revising their assessment plans and curriculum based upon assessment outcomes, the council will continue to make it a priority to work with those programs that are struggling to implement their assessment plans. It is of utmost importance to help them to improve their assessment plans, updates, courses, and curriculum in order to improve student learning outcomes.

The College of Education

The College of Education believes that P-12 students deserve teachers who are both committed to the profession and display advocacy for children and their communities. The theme of the Unit - *Linked Hands, Heads, and Hearts: Building Powerful Learning Communities* - incorporates the proficiencies, knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support this belief. In spring 2016, the COE updated its Conceptual Framework to the most recent version of the InTASC standards, which provides the **learning objectives for the COE** and ensures that candidates across the Unit understand and apply appropriate strategies for learner development, learning differences, and the learning environment. Candidates must also demonstrate and apply content knowledge, use multiple assessment strategies, plan appropriate instruction, implement multiple instructional strategies, demonstrate professional learning and ethical practices, and exhibit leadership and collaboration. All syllabi and assessments have been tagged to the InTASC standards. Unit Common Assessments were developed using the new conceptual framework and have been analyzed by disaggregating the InTASC standards to determine the strengths and weaknesses of all candidates across the Unit. These standards, which have been linked to institutional learning goals, provide the framework to ensure that candidates meet the College of Education Learning Goals.

Frostburg State University's Institutional Learning Goals reflect the mission of the University through a focus on five specific areas of student learning: 1) Liberal knowledge and skills of inquiry, critical thinking, and synthesis; 2) Core skills, 3) Acquisition and application of specialized knowledge; 4) Values and social responsibility; and 5) Appreciation of cultural identities. Individual departments, programs, and services provide opportunities, where appropriate, for candidates to attain the skills and dispositions identified by the University as essential to education. Also, Unit program assessments respond to the four competency areas outlined by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), as described in the 2011 Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report (SLOAR).

Consistent with and guided by the university and Unit mission statements as well as the institutional learning goals, the Unit outcomes associated with the conceptual framework clearly and consistently communicate its commitment to preparing professionals who understand the learner and build effective learning environments, are knowledgeable about content and the application of core concepts, are capable of planning and implementing multiple assessments and instructional strategies, and will continually demonstrate professionalism and leadership. The conceptual framework upon which each program rests focuses on connecting to the public schools, parents, and other community members to prepare candidates for an increasingly diverse technological and global society. Candidate strengths in the fall of 2017 include content knowledge, creating supportive learning environments, instructional strategies, and professional and ethical practice.

Recommendations for PACIE

The following recommendations emerged from the comprehensive review of all college assessment efforts and are provided to help inform the institutional assessment cycle:

1. Develop continual professional development and training that supports improving student learning assessment, including the exploration of a longitudinal analysis.
2. Further support to promote and enforce deadlines and reporting timelines is necessary to facilitate a successful assessment cycle. Consider analysis and data collection using a sampling strategy on an annual cycle to alleviate assessment fatigue.
3. Promote the use of external validation and use of advisory groups to ensure assessment results align with external demands.
4. Consider an institutional approach to assess the assessment of the assessment.
5. Identify and recognize departments for exemplar assessment practices and analysis.
6. Consider integration of assessment of learning throughout student life cycle and not solely in the capstone course.

Graduate Learning Assessment Advisory Group (GLAAG)

Report – July 2018

1. How did the student learning assessment cycle work in 2017-2018 for your college and/or general education program assessment?

The **Graduate Learning Assessment Advisory Group (GLAAG)** is the complement to SLAAG for student learning assessment practices at the graduate level. Its membership includes graduate faculty members serving as Program Coordinators for all graduate programs (Master and Doctorate level) in the three colleges, one Academic Affairs Administrator appointed by the Provost, Director of Graduate Services Office, and the Director of Assessment and Institutional Research. GLAAG is charged with monitoring student learning assessment practices at the graduate level and making recommendations to the Provost, the respective college deans, program faculty, and PACIE regarding issues affecting the assessment of student learning for individual graduate programs in compliance with the institutional graduate learning outcomes. These recommendations contribute to the University's decision-making processes for resource allocation conducted as part of the academic program review cycle.

During 2017-2018, GLAAG structured and defined a graduate assessment plan with an overarching conceptual framework that:

- defines student learning outcomes as specified by each program in their respective disciplines,
- provides a roadmap for aligning program learning outcomes to the institutional learning goals, and a system for assessing student learning, and
- ensures the use of findings for the improvement of FSU's graduate programs and student learning.

Through this process, graduate program coordinators have completed the alignment of their respective *program learning outcomes* with the *Graduate Institutional Learning Goals*, have identified key assessments that will produce evidence of assessing program's learning outcomes and meeting the institutional learning goals, and have customized the discipline-specific rubric for each program.

2. Please discuss a few of the assessments used (rubrics, assignments, portfolio, exams).

There are a variety of assessment tools that may be used for assessing student learning, including standardized tests, oral exams, final manuscripts (e.g., thesis, project papers, etc.), portfolios, and rubrics.

The reflection that occurred during the process of establishing an assessment plan, stimulated discussion and suggestions for a manageable system that would limit the challenges inherent to having multiple assessment tools, including extra grading workload for faculty who teach the courses identified for assessment, disparities in the types of assignments used for assessment across graduate programs, misalignments between the assignments and rubrics, and inconsistencies in grading practices among faculty. In order to address some of these challenges, the committee agreed on using a common activity across programs that would be evaluated by a combined rubric. This process included two steps:

- a. Identifying a common activity/ies (key assessments): The common activity was defined as a commonly addressed program theme used as the culminating program assessment (e.g., thesis, final project paper, year-long internships, oral exams, etc.). A culminating program assessment includes learning outcomes expected of all students in the graduate school, and will demonstrate achievement in program-specific learning outcomes as well as in the five learning areas of the institutional learning goals.
- b. Developing a combined rubric: A rubric was designed using the current dimensions of the five institutional learning goals as the common criteria for all graduate programs. Subsequently, each program customized the rubric into a combined rubric that would be specific for each program/discipline. Each program-specific rubric aligned the common criteria to program learning goals, and combined them by levels of performance for each institutional learning goal. The resulting product will be analytic rubrics that will have the ability to present a continuum of performance levels and to provide qualitative information on student performance.

3. Please specify some key lessons learned and/or findings that will inform next year.

As mentioned earlier, FSU did not have a graduate program assessment plan in place. As a new process, GLAAG's key priority is to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan to assess student learning, program outcomes, and alignment with institutional learning goals.

Similarly, as program coordinators are ready to start implementing the rubric through the collection of data, the committee will pay attention to the effectiveness of the rubric in limiting the challenges of increasing faculty workload of grading the assignments used for assessment across graduate programs, along with grading inconsistency, and weak alignment between the assignments and the rubrics.

GLAAG's hope is that by having a common activity and a common rubric across programs, we would establish a simplified assessment process for graduate programs at FSU.

4. What are some improvements in place for 2018-2019?

Although most graduate programs are ready to enter the process for data collection in Fall 2018, there are two programs which need closer attention. Granting such programs have demonstrated progress in setting-up their respective assessment plan (i.e., developed program learning outcomes, which did not exist in the program, and completed the alignment with institutional learning goals), they still need to complete the final steps of identifying the program key assessments, and customizing the program-specific combined rubric. The achievement of these steps not only will set the assessment process for each program in motion, but also will advance the overall effort of establishing a graduate assessment plan at the institutional level.

5. How were results/findings shared and discussed with appropriate constituents (Standard VI) within your Division/Unit?

With data collection starting in the fall of 2018, data reports will be completed and submitted to *Baseline/CampusLabs* in compliance with the Institutional Effectiveness Cycle. Progress in meeting student learning outcomes will be discussed and analyzed at GLAAG's monthly meetings. Recommendations for improvement will be presented to the deans and assessment coordinators in each department/college, and used to set up next steps. Final reports will be submitted to the Provost and PACIE as part of the division's annual report to provide basis for the following year's plan.