

Student Learning Assessment Advisory Group (SLAAG) 2018-19 Annual Report

**Prepared for
the Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness Council (AIEC)
and the University Advisory Council (UAC)**



SLAAG MEMBERSHIP 2018-19

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a comprehensive analysis of the collective student learning outcomes assessment efforts at the undergraduate level across all academic 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 General Education Program Review Committee (GEPRC), the College of Business (CoB), the College of Education (CoE), and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) to the Student Learning Assessment Advisory Group (SLAAG). Assessment themes and results from each domain are discussed in detail. The conclusion of this report presents specific action items, corrective actions, and resource allocations.

OVERVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT AT FSU

Across the university, academic programs are engaged in meaningful assessment of student learning outcomes. This section provides a macro-level review of student learning assessment efforts, identifying areas of strength, areas of growth, and opportunities for improvement, in terms of the Four Steps of the Assessment Cycle.

Step 1: Identify and define student learning outcomes

This is an area of strength. Nearly all academic programs have formulated learning outcomes describing what students should be able to demonstrate in terms of knowledge, skills, and values upon completion

of their programs. Generally, the learning outcomes are clearly linked to FSU's Undergraduate Institutional Learning Goals and are "SMART" (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Focused, and Time-Focused).

Step 2: Select assessment measures and assess the learning outcomes

This is an area of growth. Most academic programs have systematic assessment plans and utilize appropriate assessment processes and tools, and many programs continue to refine their assessment methods and instruments. A number of programs have improved the rubrics employed for assessment. Most programs utilize direct measures of learning, but many are also looking for helpful indirect measures. A number of programs assess student learning only in the later stages of students' academic careers and/or employ post-only methods of assessment; however, many of these programs are working to develop longitudinal assessments and/or pre-/post- assessment methods.

One issue of concern in this area involves sustainability. Many programs expend significant amounts of time and energy in their assessment efforts, raising concerns about assessment burnout. Assessment coordinators should work with programs to streamline assessment processes while at the same time maintaining and, ideally, improving data quality. For example, some programs have created additional student assignments, activities, or exercises solely for purposes of assessment; these programs might be encouraged to employ course-embedded assessments, utilizing student work done as part of a course.

Step 3: Analyze and report the results of the outcomes assessed

This is an area of growth. Most academic programs are interpreting their assessment results, identifying both strengths and weaknesses in outcomes, and they are sharing their findings in prescribed annual reports.

One concern at this stage relates to the reliability of assessment findings. In some areas, there is significant variability in results among programs, courses, and/or instructors. Assessment coordinators should promote methods for increasing reliability, e.g., conducting calibration and norming exercises and having someone other than the instructor assess student work.

With respect to reporting, a number of programs continue to relate challenges with the reporting platform (Compliance Assist). Also, while assessment results are clearly reported upward (to colleges and the university), it is not clear that they are always shared with, and discussed among, faculty in the department/program.

Step 4: Adjust or improve programs following the results of the learning outcomes assessed

This is an area for improvement. While some academic programs clearly do use assessment data to make improvements and inform decision-making, many programs can do better in "closing the loop." Programs should identify and implement concrete improvements to address gaps in student learning. Potential areas for improvement include instruction, curriculum, and student support. Some changes may be minor and easy to implement; more substantial changes may require several years to fully implement. Subsequent assessments should be conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the changes. While programs should be encouraged to continuously improve their assessment efforts, changes to the assessment process are not a substitute for adjustments or improvements in programs.

THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Frostburg's current GEP student learning assessment program was implemented in fall 2016 and is managed by the General Education Program Review Committee (GEPRC). The assessment program involves one academic department taking primary responsibility for evaluating student learning related to one of six GEP Learning Objectives for a two-year period. Table 1 indicates the learning objectives being assessed and the academic departments conducting the assessments. Student work is evaluated using modified versions of the Association of American Colleges & Universities' VALUE Rubrics.

Table 1. GEP learning objectives and associated academic departments.

GEP Learning Objective	Cycle 1 (2016-18) Department	Cycle 2 (2018-20) Department
Written Communication	English and Foreign Languages	English and Foreign Languages
Oral Communication	Theatre	Communication
Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning	Math	Chemistry
Critical Thinking	Philosophy	Psychology
Appreciation of Cultural Identities	History	Geography
Values, Social Responsibility, and Civic Engagement	Sociology	Political Science

Calendar Year 2018 marked the transition from Cycle 1 (2016-18) to Cycle 2 (2018-20). In spring 2018, both the Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 Departments conducted assessments; and, in fall 2018, the Cycle 2 Departments continued the assessments. The GEPRC adopted a peer-to-peer approach to orienting the Cycle 2 Departments to the assessment program. In fall 2017, representatives from the Cycle 1 Departments met with members of the Cycle 2 Departments to discuss the assessment process, the relevant assessment rubric, assessment events (student-work that was the basis for assessment), challenges encountered, lessons learned, and previous assessment results.

A comprehensive analysis of GEP assessment results from fall 2016 through fall 2018 was conducted in spring 2019 (*General Education Program Assessment (Fall 2016-2018): Analytical Summary*, May 2019). Overall, the analysis concluded that assessment of student learning in Frostburg's GEP is a relatively stable, consistent, and sustainable process. As shown in Table 2, student-produced assessment artifacts typically meet or exceed evaluator expectations (green), but there are notable differences in rubric ratings between assessment areas and assessment cycles.

Table 2. Median and inter-quartile range of rubric scores by assessment and term.

Assessment	Fall 2016				Spring 2017				Fall 2017				Spring 2018				Fall 2018			
	N	25th	Med	75th	N	25th	Med	75th	N	25th	Med	75th	N	25th	Med	75th	N	25th	Med	75th
Quantitative	87	1.90	2.40	2.80	98	2.20	2.80	3.40	100	2.50	3.00	3.85	180	2.10	3.10	4.00	132	2.80	3.50	4.00
Written	84	2.60	3.00	3.90	99	3.40	3.80	4.80	107	2.80	3.40	4.40	97	3.00	3.80	4.40	92	3.00	4.20	4.60
Oral	53	2.60	3.00	3.40	51	2.40	3.20	4.00	61	2.80	3.60	3.80	141	2.80	3.60	4.20	123	4.00	4.40	4.80
Culture	81	2.80	3.00	3.40	87	3.00	3.60	4.00	80	2.60	3.10	3.60	161	3.20	3.80	4.20	74	2.60	3.00	3.60
Think	73	2.00	2.29	2.57	66	2.43	2.71	3.29	71	2.86	3.50	4.00	264	2.00	2.57	3.00	92	1.86	2.29	2.57
Social	81	1.75	2.25	2.75	83	1.75	2.50	3.25	97	2.50	3.00	3.75	153	2.00	3.00	3.50	90	2.75	3.25	4.00
Overall	459	2.10	2.60	3.20	484	2.50	3.20	3.86	516	2.60	3.29	3.82	996	2.40	3.00	3.86	603	2.60	3.50	4.20

The variability in rubric ratings between assessment cycles suggests that the transition from one cycle to the next may be an area for improvement. Rubric scores fluctuate more widely among the second cycle departments and are significantly different than the first cycle scores. The GEPRC will develop and implement processes to facilitate a more uniform transition from Cycle 2 to Cycle 3 in 2020.

More generally, the GEPRC remains concerned that the present structure of the assessment program—a post-only method of assessment involving a single, end-of-semester evaluation—does not allow us to definitively say that students are growing as learners and meeting the goals of the GEP at FSU. The GEPRC continues to research methods for longitudinal assessment and possible external benchmarking standards. (Members of the GEPRC attended AAC&U's 2018 Conference *General Education and Assessment: Foundations for Democracy* (February 15-17, 2018), and the Association for General and Liberal Studies' Annual Meeting (September 21-22, 2018).)

The GEP student learning assessment program faced two significant practical challenges in 2018. One issue involved Campus Labs' Baseline program, the platform used to record assessment data. This system is no longer being maintained by Campus Labs, so a replacement must be identified and implemented in 2019. A second issue involved human resources. The Office of Assessment and Institutional Research (OAIR) staff member who conducted GEP data analysis from fall 2016 through spring 2018 departed FSU, and that position has not been filled. Consequently, an external consultant was hired to analyze the 2018 GEP data.

THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

The seven undergraduate learning goals for the CoB were unchanged in 2018-2019 from the preceding academic year. These goals include skills and abilities in: 1) written communication, 2) oral communication, 3) critical thinking and problem solving, 4) teamwork and leadership, 5) ethical reasoning, 6) business core knowledge, and 7) a global perspective on business.

Assessment of these learning goals was similar to the prior academic year, except for measurement of the goal of general business knowledge. This was the result of a revision of the CoB's internally developed exam, a 130 multiple-choice question test designed to measure general business knowledge. The 131-question "old" exam was reviewed by members of the CoB Advisory Board and feedback from this process as well as results of the last administration of the exam were used to replace or alter 25 questions and delete one question, resulting in a "new" exam of 130 questions.

The CoB employs a "pre" and "post" test format for the exam of general business knowledge, administering the test to students in an orientation class to the CoB and then also in the capstone class at the time of graduation. Comparison of pre- and post- groups in Spring, 2019, revealed a 15.63-point difference in mean percent of questions correctly answered (57.53% in the post group versus 41.91% in the "pre" group), and this is significant ($p < .001$) by independent samples t-test. Since the two groups differ in the "treatment" of business instruction, the conclusion is that instruction enhances exam performance.

Given that the posttest is administered, typically, 3 to 4 semesters after students take their first business core course, some decay of knowledge is expected. The CoB desires that each student score at least 50% correct on the posttest. With reference to this criterion, only 13 of 82 students (15.85%) in the "post" group are below the 50% correct answer criterion, while 67 of 86 students (77.91%) in the "pre" group are below the same criterion. The conclusion is that instruction is effective.

Assessment of the learning goal of global perspective on business is a subset of 12 questions within the exam of general business knowledge. This goal is assessed in the posttest group. Given that the posttest is administered, typically, 3 to 4 semesters after students take their first business core course, some decay of knowledge is expected. The CoB desires that each student score at least 50% correct on the posttest. The student group sitting for the exam at the end of their undergraduate business training correctly answered an average of 67.07% of the 12 questions. A frequency distribution of student scores (as percent of 12 questions correctly answered) showed that of the 82 students, 9 failed to achieve the desired 50% correct score on the set of global perspective questions. Of the 9 students not meeting the goal, 4 are only 1 missed question away from the desired score.

The learning goal of critical thinking and problem solving is assessed through an exam-embedded essay question in MGMT 405, Business Ethics and Social Responsibility. This course is required for all business majors. The question poses an ethical scenario to students, and they are to evaluate and recommend how a manager should respond to the situation to solve the problem. The process taps the ability to identify the factors impacting the ethical dilemma, and reason for a particular course of action. The 7 assessment criterions in the rubric for the exam question are each measured with a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 3 (meets expectations) to 5 (Outstanding). The CoB desires that all students score a minimum “3” or better on the assessment, which equates to a “meets expectations” level of achievement. In Spring 2019, means for two criterions were below 3.0, suggesting a level of sub-optimal student achievement on these dimensions. Specifically, the dimension of Strategy Evaluation stands-out as the most problematic with 44% of the 25 students assessed below expectation. The finding is not altogether unexpected, as critical thinking has been identified as a problematic ability for FSU students in general.

The learning goal of oral communication ability is assessed on a 4 to 6-minute informational speech delivered in CMST 122, Introduction to Public Speaking. This is a required class in the business core curriculum. There are 10 assessment criterions for the speech, each measured with a 5-point scale. For the 25 students assessed in Spring 2019, means for all criterions are above 3.0, suggesting a general level of success. Further, no student scored below 3 on any criterion.

Assessment of the learning goal of teamwork and leadership occurs in a behavioral field exercise in MGMT 356, Leadership and Human Behavior, in an assignment that requires each student to be both follower and leader. The MGMT 356 course is part of the business core curriculum. There are 5 assessment criterions for the exercise, each measured with a 5-point scale. For Spring 2019, there were 29 students assessed and means for all criterions are above 4.0, suggesting general success in student achievement. No student was below the expectation level of 3.0 on any criterion.

The learning goal of ethical reasoning is assessed on an 8-page individual paper required in the MGMT 405 class, Business Ethics and Social Responsibility. The MGMT 405 course is part of the core business curriculum. The topic of the paper is ethical analysis of actions taken by a business leader. The student must identify the ethical issues involved, how the action would be consistent with or violate ethical norms and principles, link the action to the student’s own values and experience, and explain the implication of the action for stakeholders. There are 5 criterion dimensions for the paper, each measured with a 5-point scale. The CoB desires that all students score a minimum 3.0 or better on the assessment, which equates to a “meets expectation” level of achievement. For Spring 2019, 28 students were assessed, and no more than 7.1% were below expectations on any criterion.

Writing ability is assessed through an 8-page individual paper required in the MGMT 405 class, Business Ethics and Social Responsibility. The MGMT 405 course is part of the core business curriculum. The topic of the paper is ethical analysis of actions taken by a business leader, and this assignment also serves as the assessment for ethical reasoning. There are 10 assessment criteria for the paper, each measured with a 5-point scale. The CoB desires that all students score a minimum “3” or better on the assessment, which equates to a “meets expectation” level of achievement. For the 28 students assessed in Spring 2019, the most problematic dimension was grammar and sentence structure, with 17.9% of students below expectations.

In addition to direct assessment measures, a 2-page survey of graduating students was conducted to obtain their perceptions of learning and the learning environment. These measures are not a substitute for direct measures of learning, but are intended as a contextual complement. Results indicate that students enrolled in the undergraduate business capstone course spend an average of 15.23 hours a week studying, doing homework, or working on class projects (for all of their classes). This same cohort of students spends 13.96 hours a week working (either on or off campus). Students in the capstone course did not frequently use the CoB computer lab (86.8% checked either “seldom” or “never”). This group of students rated their faculty advisor at an average of 2.95 (where 1 = bad, 2 = fair, 3 = good, and 4 = excellent). Given a list of required courses in the business core curriculum, the perceived least “beneficial” courses were found to be MGMT 110 (an orientation course to the CoB) and MATH 109, Introduction to Probability and Statistics. Conversely, the perceived most “beneficial” course was found to be MGMT 485, the capstone course for the undergraduate business program. When asked what other business schools’ students would have attended (if not FSU), the two most commonly written-in schools were Towson and Salisbury.

THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

The **Educational Professions Department** believes that P-12 students deserve teachers who are totally committed to the profession and who display advocacy for children and their communities. The Educational Professions Department updated the Conceptual Framework to the most recent version of the InTASC standards in spring 2016. These standards provide the learning objectives which ensure that candidates across the Unit understand and apply strategies for (1) learner development, (2) learning differences, and (3) the learning environment. They demonstrate (4) content knowledge and (5) application of content knowledge. (6) Candidates are able to use multiple assessment strategies, (7) plan appropriate instruction and (8) implement multiple instructional strategies. They also (9) demonstrate professional learning and ethical practices as well as (10) leadership and collaboration. All syllabi and assessments are being 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 weakness of all candidates across the Unit. These standards provide the framework to ensure that our candidates meet the Educational Professions Department Learning Goals. The standards have also been linked to the University's Institutional Learning Goals.

In fall 2017, all of the programs in the **Department of Kinesiology and Recreation** (with the exception of the Adventure Sports Management program which was undergoing major revisions) developed an assessment plan to evaluate to what extent the students are meeting or exceeding the University's Institutional Learning Goals. Using the established plans, data was collected by all programs in spring and fall 2018. The department programs agreed to use a 3-point scale, with 1=needs improvement (students score 69% or below), 2=meets expectations (students score between 70% and 89%), and 3=exceeds expectations (students score between 90% and 100%) to assess the established Institutional

Learning Goals. The Athletic Training program decided to use more stringent criteria for not meeting expectations (students scoring 79% or below) due to the program requiring the students to maintain a B or better in all of their courses.

Consistent with and guided by the University and College of Education mission statements, as well as the Institutional Learning Goals, the College of Education identifies the following strengths and areas for improvement based upon spring and fall data collected in 2018.

Candidate strengths in the spring and fall of 2018 include: (1) Liberal knowledge and skills of inquiry, critical thinking and synthesis, (4) Values and social responsibility, and (5) Appreciation of cultural identities. Areas identified for continuous improvement include: (2) Core skills, (3) and acquisition and application of specialized knowledge. More specifically, candidates in the Educational Professions Department need to strengthen their ability to use assessment data to inform instructional decisions (InTASC 6) and plan for instruction (InTASC 7). Candidates in the Kinesiology and Recreation Department need to improve their ability to communicate ideas effectively, use technological resources to access and communicate relevant information, and improve student research skills and specialized vocabulary for critical discourse.

Closing the Loop: The Educational Professions Department has implemented the teaching performance assessment, EdTPA, for all candidates. This rigorous, performance-based, subject-specific assessment emphasizes, measures and promotes the ability of teachers to use and analyze data to improve their instruction. The Kinesiology and Recreation Department will continue to strengthen assessment plans for each program. Program specific learning goals will be more closely aligned to the University Institutional Learning Goals to assure that the data reported reflects accurate measures of those linkages.

THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

As of February, 2019, 31 of the 34 programs in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) have submitted student learning outcomes updates from the 2017-2018 academic year to the CLAS Assessment Council to be reviewed. Those programs that have not submitted include Liberal Studies (LBST), Physics, and Engineering. LBST was housed in a different college during that academic year, and there are no assessment reports available. Dr. Scott Fritz, Associate Dean of CLAS, worked on proposing curricular changes this academic year to bring the capstone course back into the LBST major so that student learning outcomes assessment can be implemented again. On February 6, those proposed changes were approved by Faculty Senate. LBST still needs to have a coordinator who is willing to do the student learning outcomes assessment. Physics and Engineering Programs are doing Program Review this academic year. Dr. Cindy Herzog, Associate Dean of CLAS, met with the department chair, Dr. Eric Moore, several times in the past year and most recently on Friday, February 15, 2019. While Physics and Engineering have changed their assessment plans to meet ABET accreditation standards and have collected data, they need to be summarizing the data and making informed changes.

After reviewing assessment updates, the Chair of the CLAS Assessment Council, Dr. Jill Morris, and Associate Dean Herzog selected three programs to highlight. All three 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 Learning Goal of ***Acquisition and Application of Specialized Knowledge***. The department worked on developing and fine-tuning the Design and Technology Assessment Plan over several years and successfully implemented it in 2017-2018. Rubric data (averages) were provided for the current and previous academic years. Faculty made changes in the curriculum as well as the assessment process. Within the curriculum, they combined several 1-hour credit portfolio classes into a 3-credit THEA 409 course (Marketing Yourself as a Designer and/or Technician). This course was offered for the first time in the spring semester of 2018. A new assessment instrument was developed for this course, and results indicated that more time should be spent helping students with the physical layout of the website portfolio since that is the most important marketing assignment for this class. In the THEA 465 course (Projects in Theatrical Design), the assessment instrument (rubric) was streamlined and made more concise. The faculty are continuing to refine the rubric since there are different design disciplines but also similar attributes that need to be measured. In the THEA 400 course (Theatrical Production), small changes were made in the curriculum to provide more direct mentoring with students and to clarify deadlines. Overall, in the Design and Technology track, faculty are now focusing on teaching professionalism, presenting work, using design basics, utilizing quality materials that are less expensive, and clear communication about the work. These changes are expected to help students in this track. It should be noted that recently one of the graduating seniors from this program was admitted to the Yale School of Drama graduate program.
- 2) The Political Science Program struggled with their assessment plan and implementation for several years. After receiving much feedback from their Program Review, the Dean's Office, and the CLAS Assessment Council, they revamped the assessment process. They now have an assessment team in place with a new assessment coordinator. Their report for the 2017-2018 academic year was much improved from previous years. They clearly articulated how the plan was implemented, results of the assessment, and how the results were interpreted so that informed decisions could be made. Their learning outcomes are tied to the Undergraduate Institutional Learning Goals of ***Liberal Knowledge and Skills of Inquiry, Critical Thinking, and Synthesis*** (research) as well as ***Core Skills*** (written and oral communication). Goal one (writing) was assessed in POSC 423 (American Constitutional Law II) using a seven-page paper that students wrote on court cases. The average score was 6.5 out of 10; therefore, the department decided that faculty should spend more time in all classes emphasizing good writing skills. Goal two (oral presentation skills) was assessed in POSC 435 (Model Organization of American States), POSC 342 (Foreign Policy of the United States), and POSC 443 (Transnational Terrorism and Counterterrorism). Rubrics with means, median scores, and modes were provided along with a summary, interpretation of results, strengths and weaknesses of students, and recommended actions that were discussed with the department. The instructors of these courses are going to spend more class time explaining standards of good oral presentations such as adhering to time constraints and modeling communication skills including good eye contact. One instructor decided to spend more time in class helping students identify good sources for assignments, while another instructor increased the value points for class presentations. Goal three (research) was assessed in POSC 250 (Research Methods) using a project. Means were included and compared to previous years. There was a discussion of student strengths and weaknesses, interpretation of results and recommended actions. The department is going to "place greater emphasis on understanding levels of measurement and their relationship to interpreting summary stats, especially measures of central tendency." Overall, the department

adopted common rubrics for goals one and three. The department is now working on creating a common rubric for oral presentations (goal two). The department met, discussed the results, and made changes in courses and the assessment process itself. The CLAS Assessment Council is anticipating receiving more data on goal one in the future and seeing how the changes in the courses will improve student learning outcomes.

- 3) In the History Department, learning outcomes are assessed in HIST 299 (Writing and Research in History) and HIST 485 (Seminar in History). The outcomes are tied to the Institutional Goals of ***Liberal Knowledge and Skills of Inquiry, Critical Thinking, and Synthesis*** (tech fluency and information literacy) as well as ***Core Skills*** (writing). The History Department Assessment Committee members read final papers (blind) from the two courses and completed rubrics. While no changes were made in the assessment plan itself, the department consulted ahead of time with the Chair of the CLAS Assessment Council, Dr. Jill Morris, to make this student learning outcomes review process consistent with the way that the GEP History Departmental assessment is done. Also, Dr. Morris worked with the departmental assessment committee to complete norming exercises to ensure that all reviewers had good inter-rater reliability. Overall results as well as student strengths and weaknesses were discussed at a departmental meeting, and faculty were most concerned about plagiarism. The instructors for the HIST 299 and 485 courses decided to incorporate class assignments on paraphrasing information accurately without using “patchwork” plagiarism.

In conclusion, significant progress in student learning outcomes assessment was achieved in several programs in AY 2017-2018, but just three were highlighted in this report. While all of the programs in CLAS should be revising their assessment process and plans as well as curriculum based upon assessment outcomes, the council will continue to make it a priority to work with those few programs that are still struggling to implement their assessment plans. It is of utmost importance to help all programs improve their plans, courses, and curriculum in order to improve student learning outcomes.

SLAAG RECOMMENDATIONS TO AIEC AND UAC

Based on its review of university-wide student learning outcomes assessment activities this past year, SLAAG makes the following recommendations to AIEC and UAC:

1. Assure continuing opportunities for professional development and training related to student learning outcomes assessment.
2. Ensure that staffing and technology resources in the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research are aligned with FSU’s commitment to high-quality student learning outcomes assessment.
3. Investigate the integration of FSU’s learning management system (Canvas) and an assessment management system such as Portfolium.
4. Examine alternative reporting platforms (possible replacements for Compliance Assist).
5. Urge academic departments, colleges, and faculty governance to examine existing reward structures for faculty work related to student learning outcomes assessment.
6. Encourage and support the development of student learning outcomes assessment in co-curricular activities.