



## **MID-CYCLE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**

Prepared for:

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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## INTRODUCTION

The University of Providence is a Roman Catholic institution sponsored by Providence Ministries. Co-founded by the Sisters of Providence, we continue the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ as an educational ministry of the Providence System.

Our Providence Heritage inspires us to proclaim the love of God to all we serve and to instill in our students a special concern for the most poor and vulnerable of our society. Our Catholic Faith guides and informs all that we do at the University, as we minister to the educational and spiritual needs of a diverse student body representing many faith and cultural traditions.

## ACCREDITATION HISTORY AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

### Recent Commission Actions 2019

- Accreditation Reaffirmed, January 2019.
- Accept the Fall 2018 Special Report addressing Eligibility Requirement 20 Public Disclosure and Eligibility Requirement 21 Relationship with the Accreditation Commission; Probation removed.
- Accept Fall 2018 Financial Resources Review.
- Approve Major Substantive Change proposal for a change in form of control.
- Approve Major Substantive Change proposal for a change in mission and objectives.
- Spring 2019 Ad Hoc Report to address Recommendations 3, 10, and 11 of the Spring 2018 Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report; Recommendations accepted as “Fulfilled.”

### Recent Commission Actions 2020

- Mission and Core Themes Report in Fall 2019; Approved.
- Fall 2019 Ad Hoc Report to address Recommendations 1, 2, 6, and 9 of the Spring 2018 Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report; Recommendations continued as “Needs Improvement.”
- Spring 2020 Ad Hoc Report to address Recommendations 4, 5, 7, and 8 of the Spring 2018 Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report; Recommendations 4, 5, and 8 accepted as “Fulfilled,” Recommendation 7 continued as “Needs Improvement.”
- Fall 2020 Financial Resources Review (pending action).

### Institutional changes since the last report to NWCCU (Mission and Core Themes Report, Fall 2019)

#### Personnel (Director and above)

#### 2019:

- Dr. Sarah Spangler, Professor of Theology and Integrated Learning Communities, assumed the role of Academic Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.
- Greg Stivers was hired as Director of Student Support Services.

#### 2020:

- Katelyn Marsik was hired as Director of Admissions and Recruitment.
- Kari Thurston was hired as Director of Admissions Operations and SHP Programs.
- The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was reorganized from administration by three Division Chairs into five departments overseen by Department Chairs.

- Mackenzie Stick was hired as Vice President for Enrollment Management.
- Dr. Melissa Robinson was hired as Division Chair of the Division of Nursing to replace Dr. Cynthia Gustafson upon her retirement.
- Vice President for Athletics Dave Gantt assumed new responsibilities as Vice President for Student Engagement.
- Interim President Fr. Oliver Doyle became the permanent president upon a decision by the Board of Trustees.
- Dr. Gregory Madson, Director of Institutional Research, assumed Institutional Effectiveness duties when Director of Institutional Effectiveness Dr. Leslie Mills left the institution.
- Dr. Jonas Nguh was hired as Executive Dean of the College of Health Professions to replace Dr. Deborah Burton who retired as Vice President.
- Colton Schang was hired as the Director of Marketing and Communications.
- Andrew Ur was hired as Interim Vice President for Advancement to replace Dr. Lisa Flowers upon her retirement.
- Chief Information Officer Jamie Schultz left the institution.
- Director of Human Resources Kila Shepherd left the institution.

2021:

- Dennis Trotter appointed Vice President for Student and Community Engagement, February 2021.

Programs

- Approve Major Substantive Change proposal for the addition of an Executive Master of Healthcare Administration degree program, January 2019.
- Surgical Technologist Certificate closed May 2020.

## **MISSION FULFILLMENT**

Mission fulfillment is quintessential to the University as determined by our history and heritage. Our mission inundates the many facets of our community for students, faculty, staff, and administration. From the first-year experience course for freshmen and employee hiring to weekly devotionals and annual celebrations, our mission is with us.

Our mission integration office submits the following, mission-focused activities:

Spring 2018:

- Year of Mission Seminars 1 and 2 continue.

Fall 2018:

- Year of Mission Seminars 3 and 4 continue (on the topics of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition).
- Make-up seminars continue from last semester.

Spring 2019:

- Year of Mission Seminar 4 continue (on the topics of Charism, and the History of the Sisters of Providence).

Fall 2019:

- Mission Seminar led by Sister Rosalie Locati, SP (Trustee) (on the topic of charism).

Spring 2020:

- Mission professional development suspended in response to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Resources redirected to hosting weekly online fellowship opportunities for employees.
- Student/Employee Pilgrimage to Montreal (Providence Mother House) cancelled in light of COVID-19 pandemic.

Fall 2020:

- New Employee Mission Orientations Resume in online format.
- Together in Mission Series debuts online (on the topic of our Providence Mission, sponsorship structure, and Core Values).
- Guest presentation on mission statements offered by Sister Rosalie Locati, SP (Trustee).
- Charter approved for the establishment of a Providence Associates chapter at the University of Providence.

Spring 2021:

- Session 2 of Together in Mission (living our Core Values).
- Session 3 of Together in Mission will take the form of small presentations from employees across the University sharing how their programs/work/etc. live out the Providence Mission and Core Values.
- Social Justice Committee to be called to order.

As previously detailed in prior accreditation reports, one of our Core Themes is Mission Effectiveness, which is realized in one way within our Strategic Plan as Mission Alignment. The chair for this Strategic Plan workstream provides the following summary:

The Mission Workstream is responsible for tracking and reporting on metrics meant to collectively indicate the extent to which “Mission is the lifeblood that inspires and propels us forward together”, as well as to partner with appropriate departments on efforts to improve our mission focus. In the early days the group worked on establishing metrics for the outcomes assigned by the Board of Trustees in its strategic plan. Four of those metrics required also the creation of measurement tools and—in two cases—of significant new initiatives. As detailed elsewhere in this report, one of the measurement tools we had to gain access to was the CIMA survey which later we adapted into the MCIA. Much of the workstream’s efforts focused on developing and implementing these surveys.

In order to track the percentage of faculty, staff, and board members that attend mission formation activities we had to first develop and offer mission formation activities. The workstream partnered with the VP of Mission Alignment to develop a “Year of Mission” (YOM). YOM consisted of a series of five workshops facilitated by the Mission Office which focused on the ways that each member of the University community individually lives out our mission and collectively administers the providence of God. YOM ran from January 2018 through February 2019. In the fall of 2020 the workstream partnered with Mission Office once again to develop a new series of formation workshops called Together in Mission (TIM).

In order to influence hiring practices throughout the University, the mission workstream again labored alongside the Mission Office to develop a “Hiring for Mission” training that by fall 2020 has become an integral first step in most searches. The training focuses the attention of the

committee members on the primacy of character and teaches them how to formulate and ask interview questions meant to reveal the important aspects of a candidate's character and potential mission alignment. One of the current tasks for the workstream is implementing this training in faculty searches.

In the spring of 2021 the mission workstream formed several "sub streams" to more efficiently focus energy on our current goals: developing and implementing a survey of hiring managers; more intentionally heralding the great mission-related successes of the University that we have had the privilege of tracking (e.g., MCIA results, Hiring for Mission training); and increasing the quantity and quality of programming and resources for holistic employee wellbeing.

During the 18-19 academic year, the University participated in the Catholic Identity and Mission Assessment (CIMA) through the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Whereas CIMA directed the University in strategic planning metrics towards mission fulfillment, this assessment primarily led to the development of our own assessment. For several reasons including but not limited to, we found the following limitations with CIMA: 1) low response rates; 2) no ability to offer incentives for participation; and 3) inconsistencies in questions administered to freshmen and seniors. With this we developed our Mission and Catholic Identity Assessment (MCIA) that is administered to freshmen in the first-year experience course (participation incentives are part of the course) in the fall and to seniors in the spring through an on-line assessment with participation incentives. Response rates have increased and we have been able to compare freshmen to seniors. We hypothesize that seniors would exhibit greater understanding of our MCIA indicators compared to freshmen. Although no difference was found between the two classes on the University's mission (i.e., the first-year experience course focuses on the mission), statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) were found on most other indicators. For example, seniors exhibit a greater understanding of: 1) the relationship between faith and reason; 2) the relationships between the sciences and things of divine or holy nature; 3) the presence of the sacred in daily life; 4) social justice when making decisions in life and work; 5) the moral and ethical implications of personal conduct; 6) positive contributions to the broader communities; and 7) environmental stewardship. These differences are attributed to the core curriculum, program curriculums, and the University's overall focus on mission from welcoming and graduation ceremonies, campus ministry, to community messages from the President.

## **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

### **Context**

Over the years the University has been cognizant of how we differentiate from our peer institutions. As a small, private Catholic university in the middle of Montana, we often compare ourselves to Carroll College and Rocky Mountain College, both private, religious-affiliated institutions in Montana. Further to the west are other private, religious-affiliated institutions, Whitworth University in Spokane, WA and Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. And further to the west we consider Linfield University in McMinnville, OR as comparison. To the south we have considered Johnson and Wales University in Denver, CO but realize that the Denver campus closed in the summer of 2020.

These private, religious-affiliated institutions and the University of Providence have much in common such as health programs, graduate studies, and distance education. However, we would argue that it is the combinations of these academic components that make our University unique and at times make comparisons difficult.

What makes us unique are our two colleges and the varying student populations. Our University is comprised of the School of Liberal Arts and Science (SLAS) and the School of Health Professions (SHP). Table 1 details the student-demographic differences between these two colleges.

**TABLE 1**  
**College Comparisons: Fall 2020 Census**

| <b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>             | <b>SCHOOL</b>                   |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                 | <b>Liberal Arts and Science</b> | <b>Health Professions</b> |
| <b>Percent Undergraduate</b>    | 89%                             | 67%                       |
| <b>Mean Age</b>                 | 25                              | 38                        |
| <b>Percent Female</b>           | 60%                             | 82%                       |
| <b>Percent White</b>            | 79%                             | 73%                       |
| <b>Percent Married</b>          | 16%                             | 48%                       |
| <b>Percent Catholic</b>         | 23%                             | 19%                       |
| <b>Percent First Generation</b> | 21%                             | 12%                       |
| <b>Percent Student-Athlete</b>  | 49%                             | 0%                        |
| <b>Percent Distance Student</b> | 30%                             | 95%                       |
| <b>Percent Montana Resident</b> | 48%                             | 11%                       |

Source: Office of Institutional Research, University of Providence

Essentially, we have two distinct student populations. The SLAS has a traditional campus-based population with students and student-athletes primarily residing on or near campus. Students in SLAS come in as freshmen or transfer in (through athletics) from another institution. The SHP is comprised of non-traditional aged, working professionals enrolled in distance-education programs for certificate earning, bachelor degree completion, or a graduate degree. SHP students are not first-time college students but are enrolled in degree-completion or continuing education programs.

This context sets the stage for us when we compare ourselves to the above institutions. Table 2 evinces retention rates and graduation rates as common, published indicators.

**TABLE 2**  
**Institutional Comparisons**  
**Undergraduate Retention Rates and Graduation Rates**

| <b>INSTITUTION</b>                  | <b>Full-time Retention Rate 2017-2018</b> | <b>4-year Graduation Rate (Fall 2015 Cohort)</b> | <b>6-year Graduation Rate (Fall 2013 Cohort)</b> |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Carroll College</b>              | 81%                                       | 49%  | 71%  |
| <b>Johnson And Wales University</b> | 64%                                       | 38%  | 49%  |
| <b>Linfield College</b>             | 79%                                       | 65%  | 78%  |
| <b>Rocky Mountain College</b>       | 67%                                       | 40%  | 52%  |
| <b>University of Providence</b>     | 67%*                                      | 27%  | 47%  |
| <b>Whitman College</b>              | 90%                                       | 79%  | 88%  |
| <b>Whitworth University</b>         | 82%                                       | 65%  | 75%  |

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

\* IPEDS shows full-time, campus freshmen retention rate (52%).

### **Retention Rates**

Examining the full-time undergraduate retention rates from fall 2017 to fall 2018, we are not top or bottom of the class. Controlling for sub-populations of undergraduates, our retention rate for distance students was 70% for this time period and 84% of the nursing undergraduates were retained from fall 2017 to fall 2018. In subsequent years, our retention rates have increased. For full-time undergraduates from fall 2018 to fall 2019 the retention rate was 69% and 71% from fall 2019 to fall 2020. Distance students were retained at 77% from fall 2018 to fall 2019 and then 73% from fall 2019 to fall 2020. Nursing students had a retention rate of 86% from fall 2018 to fall 2019 with a decrease (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) to 82% from fall 2019 to fall 2020.

As noted, we had a low retention rate (52%) for full-time, campus freshmen from fall 2017 to fall 2018, which did not help our overall full-time undergraduate retention. We have analyzed this plunge and realized that we had a small freshmen class in the fall of 2017 (92). During the prior academic year there was a concerted effort among administration, admissions, and athletics to reduce the discount rate, adjust scholarships, and reduce athletic rosters with continuation into the 18-19 academic year. In the fall of 2018 we brought in a full-time, campus freshmen class of 132 and managed to retain 58% to fall 2019.

The incoming class of full-time, campus freshmen in the fall of 2019 began their fall term on-campus and then went on-line in March of 2020 due to the pandemic. Expecting a lower retention rate for these students, the University realized a retention rate increase to 61% for this class.

Over the last few years, an analysis of freshmen retention from their first fall term to their second consistently indicate the following:

- Retained freshmen have a higher mean high school GPA compared to those not retained.
- Those retained have a slightly higher mean ACT composite score.
- No differences are found across home states, in-state vs. out-of-state, and local vs. not local.
- No differences are observed between those residing in housing and those not in housing.
- A greater percentage of Catholic freshmen are retained compared to non-Catholic freshmen.

- No differences between race and mean age have been observed.
- A slightly greater proportion of female freshmen tend to be retained with female freshmen completing their first semester with a higher GPA than their male counterparts.
- Retained freshmen had a greater number of days between registration and the first day of class compared to those not retained.
- Retained freshmen are more likely to be athletes.

### **Graduation Rates**

As we look at graduation rates, we do not fair so well. However, we realize that these graduation rates are for a bachelor's degree-seeking cohort (i.e., a freshmen class). In a given fall semester over 40% of our incoming students are transfer students with over 80% incoming students in spring semesters. The above graduation rates do not account for these transfers. Our RN-BSN program is cohort program of transfer student in which we track graduation rates. Over the last four cohorts the RN-BSN program has an average graduation rate of 83%.

Comparing the proportion of students graduating by race and gender across the above institutions in 2018 and 2019 (Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System), reveals the University of Providence graduates a greater proportion of women. This greater proportion holds for Asian women, black women (2018), white women, and women of unknown race.

Because our SLAS is approximately 50% student-athletes we track graduation rates for student-athletes compared to other students for a given freshmen class. For the class of 2016, the student-athletes had a 4-year graduation rate of 38% compared to 24% for other students. This achievement indicates the importance athletics plays in the campus community.

### **First Destination Survey**

In the spring of 2020 the University's Career Services administered the First Destination Survey (FDS) to December 2019 and May 2020 graduates. The FDS is an assessment of graduates first destination such as full-time employment, part-time employment, continuing education, military service, or volunteer service immediately following their baccalaureate graduation. The findings show that 65% of the graduate's first destination is full-time employment with 18% continuing their education. The graduates with full-time employment or continuing education come from degree programs that are primarily women.

### **Collegiate Learning Assessment**

An additional indicator of student achievement is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) in which the University participates. In the spring of 2017, our senior's total CLA+ score was 1077, which is better than or equal to the average senior score at 20% of CLA+ schools (N=47 baccalaureate colleges). A score of 1077 signifies basic mastery of critical-thinking and written-communication skills as measured by CLA+. Again, in the spring of 2019, University seniors exemplified basic mastery of critical-thinking and written-communication skills as measured by the CLA+ with a score of 1046, which is better than or equal to the average senior score at 14% of CLA+ schools (N=61 baccalaureate colleges). Our primary issue with the CLA has been a low response by seniors. The CLA has been administered on-campus in a

computer lab with a proctor. This excludes our distance student, particularly, a large cohort of nursing students in the senior year. We were unable to administer the CLA in the spring of 2020 due to the pandemic. With the pandemic, CLA has moved to remote assessment administration, however, an on-line proctor must be assigned to each student. The University is evaluating the continuation of this assessment.

### National Survey of Student Engagement

A separate assessment of student achievement in which we have found effective in administration and findings is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE allows participation by all our seniors and allows institutional comparisons. NSSE groups us in the Rocky Mountain Privates which include the institutions above with the addition of Dominican University of California (San Rafael, CA), Pacific Union College (Angwin, CA), and Naropa University (Boulder, CO).

Table 3 summarizes the NSSE engagement indicator means for our seniors compared to the Rocky Mountain Privates. Our senior means did not exceed the Rocky Mountain Private senior means on any of the indicators in the 2017-2018 academic year. However, in the 2019-2020 academic the University of Providence senior means did exceed the Rocky Mountain Private senior means on all indicators with the exception of reflective and integrative learning. It is noticeable that the Rocky Mountain Private senior means decreased over the two-year period while our senior means increased. We attribute this improvement to our new core curriculum that contains enhanced math and writing courses and further integration of theology and philosophy courses.

**Table 3**  
**NSSE Indicator Comparisons**

| NSSE Engagement Indicators                 | Academic Year                        |                                    |                                      |                                    |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
|  | 2017-2018                            |                                    | 2019-2020                            |                                    |
|  | University of Providence Senior Mean | Rocky Mountain Private Senior Mean | University of Providence Senior Mean | Rocky Mountain Private Senior Mean |
| <b>Higher-Order Learning</b>               | 37.8                                 | 40.3                               | 40.2                                 | 38.7                               |
| <b>Reflective and Integrative Learning</b> | 35.9                                 | 38.1                               | 36.1                                 | 36.4                               |
| <b>Learning Strategies</b>                 | 35.9                                 | 38.0                               | 41.8                                 | 37.7                               |
| <b>Quantitative Reasoning</b>              | 27.3                                 | 28.9                               | 31.8                                 | 26.2                               |

Note: University of Providence senior mean scores are expected to exceed Rock Mountain Private senior mean scores

# PROGRAMMATIC ASSESSMENT

## Overview

Beginning in the 2018-2019 academic year, the University of Providence began charting a course that would, ultimately, equip the faculty in their programs with actionable assessment data, and on the way to this goal, cultivate a culture of assessment across the University. We are proud of the progress we have made. Assessment is, in practical ways that make a real difference to the University, much more a part of who we are, and how we become the institution we aspire to be. Among the most important accomplishments in Academic Affairs over the past three years is the facility that faculty and staff now enjoy in conceptualizing how assessment can improve their programs, and our students' success within them. This heightened awareness of the place of assessment was the result of faculty growing in their ownership of the program curriculum planning-implementation-assessment-analysis-planning cycle.

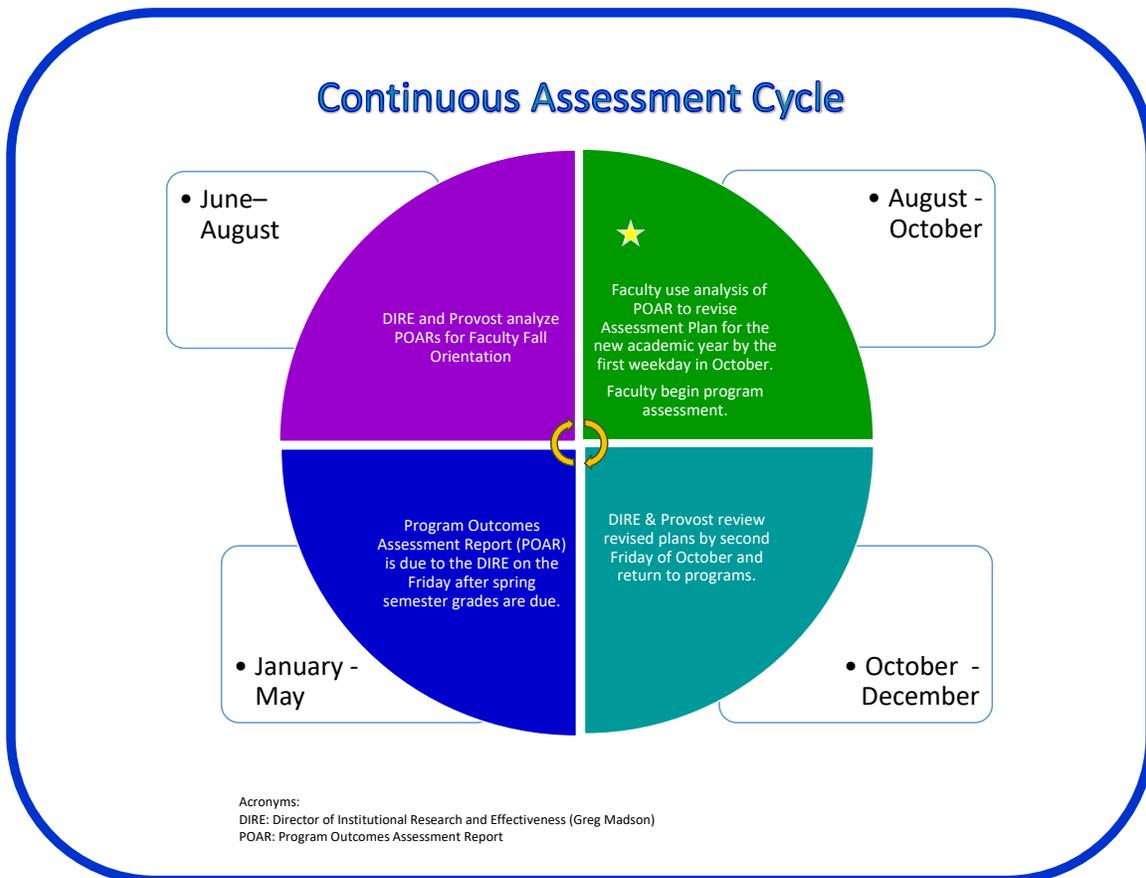
The University of Providence assessment plan outlined here is the product of collaboration faculty and staff across Academic Affairs. It involves an iterative process whereby program faculty (typically department chairs) face periodic reporting requirements. Early in the fall of each academic year, program faculty submit a program "Assessment Plan" to Provost and the Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (DIRE) that lays out the program's process for assessing student achievement (see "Program Assessment Plan template" in the "Programmatic Assessment Documents" folder of Appendix A; the Forensic Science folder includes a completed template for an example). The assessment plan aligns the program student learning outcomes with the student tasks, assessment instruments, places and times in the curriculum these assessments take place (which course or courses), and which students are being assessed for each of the program's student learning outcomes. It also includes a copy of each program's most recent curriculum map. These assessment plans are reviewed by the provost and the DIRE, who deploy an evaluation rubric that suggests constructive recommendations on how outcomes or assessments might be strengthened, or processes refined. The results of this review are shared with department by mid-fall to help guide their programs' assessment activities for the year. At the end of fall 2020, the provost conducted an informal meta-analysis of the assessment system itself and determined that the faculty in the programs needed more standardized feedback on their assessment plans. While the provost came to this realization too late for the fall 2020 cycle, a "Program Assessment Plan Evaluation Rubric" (found in the "Programmatic Assessment Documents" folder of Appendix A) will supplement the narrative feedback beginning in fall 2021 to help faculty hone their outcomes assessment practices each fall.

At the end of the academic year, program faculty are required to submit a Program Outcomes Assessment Report (POAR) with which they report on the results of the assessments laid out in their assessment plans (see "POAR template" in the "Programmatic Assessment Documents" folder of Appendix A; the Forensic Science folder includes a completed template for an example). The key elements of these assessment reports are areas in which program faculty reflect on these assessment results and engage in "Action Planning" including:

- Specific skills/ knowledge/abilities/background etc., needed for student success
- Recommended changes to materials, rotation, presentation of program curriculum
- Considerations for improving assessment process and/or tools

Over the summer, the provost and DIRE follow similar analysis processes as for the assessment plans, and the results of this analysis are returned to the program faculty at each fall's pre-semester Faculty Development sessions. Program chairs are thus able to use both the assessment

results they submitted in the spring and this analysis to refine the next iteration of their program’s assessment plans, with which they begin the annual process anew. As a result of this iterative process, the University intends that assessment of student achievement is continually reviewed, analyzed, and improved upon to assure student success in achieving each program’s outcomes.



**Figure 1: Continuous Assessment Cycle**

### **Examples of Effective Programmatic Assessment**

The programmatic assessment process described above provides the faculty in charge of academic programs with the sort of perspectives—both from within, as program faculty reflect on their own programs’ assessment results, as well as from without, as the “external” review and analysis by the provost and DIRE provide a much wider view—with which they make positive steps forward in working to assure student success. Since this process has completed its first full cycle, we are pleased to have actionable assessment data that faculty are using for program improvement. The first of the two examples below examine how one program, Forensic Science, worked through this process with results on positive changes instituted in an effort to maximize student success.

This process produces the actionable evidence that we need to work towards continual improvement in our academic programs. But it is not the only assessment process in place at the University of Providence.

The second example below examines how one program, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), has used different, yet similar, assessment processes for the improvement of that core curriculum.

## **Forensic Science**

Across the division of Academic Affairs, assessment is facilitated by common reliance on a set of assessment templates that all programs employ. These assessment documents provide a predictable framework and have helped secure faculty familiarity and comfort with the program assessment process. As demonstrated by an in-depth examination of the Forensic Science program, this iterative process has achieved its goal of providing faculty with assessment data they can actually use.

When the Forensic Science faculty first began to interface with this assessment system, thorough assessment was a relatively new concept for them, and while they had made an excellent opening effort to their assessment processes, it was natural that there were areas where improvement could facilitate effective assessment. To facilitate faculty involvement in the assessment system, Academic Affairs has worked to make the entire process as straight-forward as possible to ensure that the process is both effective and accessible. A significant element of that is to make sure the program student learning outcomes (SLOs) are as focused as possible, and that faculty in the programs are assessing only the most important elements of their programs. Two basic criteria that operationalize these goals are that the SLOs be workable in number and specific to the program. In its first iteration of the Program Assessment Plan, the Forensic Science SLOs needed work on both of these criteria (see “FSC Assessment Plan\_2019\_2020 w Maps” in “Forensic Science: Program Assessment” folder of Appendix B). In keeping with the system we were building, the provost and the Director of Institutional Effectiveness (previous officer) reviewed the Forensic Science assessment plan in the fall of 2019. The feedback they provided to the program faculty noted that the outcomes would be stronger if they were modified to make them specifically appropriate to Forensic Science and reducing them in number would facilitate assessment. These changes were implemented, as demonstrated in the second year’s iteration of the assessment planning process (see “FSC Assessment Plan\_2020\_2021 w Maps” in “Forensic Science: Program Assessment” in Appendix B). Again, the provost and the Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness analyzed these assessment plans and provided narrative feedback to the program faculty.

In the spring of each year, after final grades have been submitted, the program faculty compile their assessment data from the year (set up in the fall’s assessment plans) and reflect on the results. This reflection results in action plans that are included in each outcome assessment report. The spring of 2020 was the first time in the implementation of the annual assessment cycle that all faculty reported on the results of their outcomes assessment. The results did not disappoint.

The Forensic Science Program Outcomes Assessment Report (POAR) included the standard information programs were all required to report. The POAR is intended to be outcome-specific, and each outcome that the program assessed is reported on a separate form (see “POAR FSC Outcomes 1-8 2019\_2020” in “Forensic Science: Program Assessment” in Appendix B). There are two key elements to the POARs: 1) documentation of how well students demonstrated mastery of the program outcomes in the courses and through the activities identified on previous fall’s assessment plan; and 2) as a result of this assessment and the faculty’s reflection on what that assessment data told them about their program, what changes or improvements should be implemented to increase student success. Specifically, as a result of program outcomes assessment, the Forensic Science faculty recognize the need to implement changes such as these (note these are the old outcomes from the 2019-2020 assessment plans):

- Outcome #1: Describe the connection between science and other disciplines and express the relevance of science to daily life and health.
  - Action Plan: Faculty will implement a new rubric and calendar for the Senior Capstone research project and poster presentation to gauge the improvement of time management compared to past years. The new seminar calendar contains a more detailed schedule for due dates for the senior research project, which helps eliminate issues with ordering supplies in a timely manner and helps students with their time management throughout the semester.
  
- Outcome #4: Practice analytical laboratory skills. Critique scientific literature thoroughly and distinguish between credible and non-credible scientific information. Analyze the experiments of other scientists.
  - Action Plan: Provide students more exposure to researching peer reviewed articles. Currently, students have an introduction to the library databases and how to acquire peer-reviewed articles in the FSC 201 course. Refreshers on this skill will be provided each year.
  
- Outcome #5: Integrate fundamental scientific knowledge in the solution of scientific and criminal problems, making use of crime scene investigation techniques, evidence collection and preservation methods and proper techniques of data gathering analysis.
  - Action Plan: Faculty will add a day of lecture where to cover the specific expectations required of the lab notebook, a crucial skill in college science courses.
  
- Outcome #6: Communicate scientific information with clarity, accuracy, and conciseness, both orally and in writing. Critique scientific literature thoroughly and consider the impact on the lay public of inaccurate or biased communication of scientific information.
  - Action Plan: Prior to the Research Symposium poster presentation, where students demonstrate their communication skills, students will be required to present their research to faculty as well as answer any questions they may have. Whereas this was previously optional it will now be required for students in preparation for the symposium.
  
- Outcome #7: Evaluate actual and hypothetical ethical issues related to scientific technology and argue convincingly on more than one side of a given issue, drawing upon scientific knowledge and personal belief systems.
  - Action Plan: Provide students more exposure to researching peer reviewed articles. Currently, students have an introduction to the library databases and how to acquire peer-reviewed articles in the FSC 201 course. Refreshers on this skill will be provided each year.

This example of assessment of student success in mastering program outcomes for the Forensic Science program demonstrates that this assessment process results in specific improvements in the pedagogy, pacing, and practice within the program that will better prepare future students to demonstrate mastery.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)**

The largest program at the University of Providence, in terms of percentages of enrolled students who take it, is the *Lumen de Lumine* core (general education) curriculum, first introduced in 2017. The Core prepares students with a foundation rooted in Catholic tradition to go forth into the world to make a

difference in whatever career path they choose to follow. The Core challenges students to grapple with the complexities of human society by exposing them to a range of disciplines. Students discover different kinds of insight into the human condition as they dig into important questions such as “What does it mean to be human?,” “What does it mean to ‘make a living’ and to live as a productive human being?,” and “How do we best serve the poor and vulnerable?”

Besides addressing broad questions such as these, the core curriculum also aims to acculturate students in practical skills and cultivate sensitivities of their place in the world by fulfilling requirements of each of five core curriculum “distributions,” including Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Sustainability (SUS), Global (GLO), Oral Communication (COM), and Service Learning (SL). Students meet these distribution requirements by taking specific classes that have been approved for distribution designation. Assessment of these areas has been driven by small committees of faculty who screen courses based on several criteria including the faculty member’s commitment to devote significant attention to writing, the faculty’s attendance in at least two WAC workshops, the integration of writing assignments into the course content, requirements for student revision of writing assignments, and the faculty’s written narrative about adherence to the University of Providence Writing Outcomes (see “Proposal for a Writing Intensive (WI) Course” in “Writing Across the Curriculum: Program Assessment” in Appendix C).

The WAC committee has, since spring 2018, consistently collected assessment reports from faculty teaching writing-intensive courses. WAC was the first distribution area of the revised Core Curriculum to be developed, and has, in many ways, served as a model for the other distributions. The interdisciplinary WAC committee has also been notable for the level of one-on-one support and mentorship they provide for faculty interested in developing WAC courses.

In order for courses to be re-designated as WAC courses after initial approval, instructors must complete an end-of-term semester report on the outcomes for at least three out of five WAC student learning outcomes. The WAC committee has asked individual instructors to determine the particular research questions related to these outcomes they wish to investigate and report. Research on assessment of writing across disciplines suggests that assessment approaches built on standardized rubrics fail to produce valid data, a finding unsurprising given the highly rhetorically situated nature of academic writing (see Anson, Dannels, Flash, & Housley Gaffney, “Big Rubrics and Weird Genres: The Futility of Using Generic Assessment Tools Across Diverse Instructional Contexts,” *The Journal of Writing Assessment*, 2012: <http://journalofwritingassessment.org/article.php?article=57>). Hence, the original instructions for WAC assessment at the University of Providence, drafted in 2018, deliberately allow for flexibility and responsiveness to context in assessment methodologies and foci among WAC instructors.

An examination of one WAC assessment report will help illustrate how the process results in positive, specific changes in the student experience of one of the WAC-approved courses, Theology 201: Introduction to Theology from fall 2020.

Dr. David Gides has been teaching TRL 201 as a WAC course each semester since spring 2019, and recent reports elucidate the value he sees in longitudinal analysis. His fall 2020 WAC report (see “TRL 201 Fall 2020 WAC” in “Writing Across the Curriculum: Program Assessment” in Appendix C) demonstrates that he has used the WAC Writing Outcomes rubric each semester to steadily improve his students’ writing experience. Each anonymized student’s performance is tracked and recorded, with specific improvements noted in score improvements for several categories covered by the rubric. The most notable demonstration of the impact of effective assessment is clear in the “Plans/Alterations for Spring 2021” beginning on page six of his report. In this section of his report, he identifies specific changes he is implementing in each of the categories covered by the rubric (Tone, Conclusions,

Introduction, Location and Analysis of Supporting Ideas/Evidence, Grammar & Usage, and Thesis/Claim). Such changes include shifting the timing in the semester of his coverage of various elements of writing, plans to use exemplars of various elements to illustrate for the students what they should be aiming towards, and requiring more assiduous attention to the importance of iterative draft-writing practices.

Meta-analysis of the last few years of instructor WAC assessment reports by the WAC committee and current core director generated the following conclusions, questions, and action plans for the future:

- 1) **Writing Processes, Scaffolding, and Feedback:** Nearly all instructors report that student writing scores improve over time in their courses and a majority note overall improvement in scores on final drafts in comparison to early drafts of the same writing assignment. Hence, the majority of students in WAC courses are making gains in terms of WAC outcome #4: cultivate flexible, productive writing processes. The WAC designation process for courses in the Core requires that the instructors show how they are scaffolding writing assignments and ensuring that students receive feedback on intermediary drafts on how to improve their writing. WAC instructors appear to be implementing this best practice in writing instruction with some success. In order to investigate what kinds of feedback appear to most helpful in helping students make gains in particular writing contexts, the WAC committee will request in future assessment reports that instructors specify more exactly the kinds of interventions, feedback, and instruction resulted in improved student writing.
- 2) **Moves toward “writing enriched” majors:** An encouraging theme has emerged from the reports. Several instructors have discussed transferring WAC pedagogical and assessment practices from their WAC courses to other courses in their majors in order to advance the development of student writing skills over several courses in the major. “Writing Enriched” curriculum initiatives, in which degree programs deliberately map out writing instruction in major courses, have proven a successful means of improving student outcomes in disciplinary writing at other institutions. The WAC committee plans to encourage and assist in the writing enrichment of majors for interested faculty members through workshops and consultations.
- 3) **Variability among WAC reports:** Faculty teaching WAC courses have some concrete goals for improvement, but the quality and format of data and analysis varies between faculty. One example of meta-assessment by the WAC committee and the core director is a response to the variable quality of reports faculty have submitted for WAC assessment, which has left the feedback loop somewhat incomplete. To address this new need, the interdisciplinary WAC committee and core director are developing a plan to ask for more standardized reporting starting in Spring 2021 and to offer more consistent feedback to WAC faculty based on their reports.

## **Conclusion**

These two programs, Forensic Science and Writing Across the Curriculum, demonstrate the strength of the culture of assessment we have worked to cultivate at the University of Providence. Both examples follow a basic planning-implementation-assessment-analysis-planning process emblematic of this culture. For academic programs, the iterative annual cycle is founded on the basic concept that effective academic assessment does not occur in isolation but is rather much more of a collaborative endeavor. At crucial points on the assessment cycle, assessment practices undergo review external to the programs themselves.

Specifically, after academic departments submit their plans for assessing their students' mastery of program SLOs at the beginning of the year, and after the programs report on the results of their year's assessment activities at the end of the academic year, the provost and the Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness review and comment on programs' assessment practices to provide an external perspective.

The second example above illustrates another manifestation of this culture of assessment. Assessment of the Writing Across the Curriculum distribution of the Core Curriculum predates the annual "continuous assessment cycle" of which Forensic Science is an example. WAC was the first of the Core distributions to be developed, and it has provided a robust model for the others to follow. Beginning with the faculty committee that reviews WAC proposals, the entire process is predicated on the commitment to continual improvement driven by actionable assessment. With specific criteria by which courses are considered for inclusion into the array of WAC courses, and detailed rubrics built around the stated goals of improving students' success in writing throughout their academic pursuits at the University, WAC demonstrates that faculty in charge of the curriculum are fully engaged in assessment. Forensic Science and WAC are two examples of the University of Providence's commitment to student success that is both driven by, and a result of assessment and continuous improvement based on data-oriented decision making.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

### **Mission Fulfillment**

We are pleased with a number of avenues we have taken towards mission fulfillment. Our Mission Integration office and Campus Ministry in conjunction with Mission Alignment workstream have brought mission and Catholic Identity to the forefront with students in their academics and student development, and all levels of staff through hiring, training, and formation. These efforts will continue. We are particularly pleased with the MCIA findings which evidence that mission and Catholic identity permeate during the course of study with us.

### **Student Achievement**

We, like many institutions, find it difficult to make comparisons. There are a host of common indicators of success out there but we find it important to keep a perspective. Whereas we understand why we may not look so comparable or competitive on some of these common indicators, we step back and examine other indicators that are unique to us as successes. We find success in our retention and graduation rates for many of our student sub-populations. We understand the context of a drop in full-time, campus, freshmen from one year to the next. Our NSSE findings are exciting and better than comparable institutions. We are not pleased with the CLA because its administrative method has excluded distance students (e.g., nursing) and requires a proctor. With this in mind we are considering another assessment.

## Programmatic Assessment

While the University is proud of the progress it has made over the past three years, it recognizes that it is not done cultivating a culture of assessment. Various areas will be topics of focus for the University community as it prepares for the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness in year seven. These include:

1. The annual program outcomes assessment system is a good start but not an end. While there has been tremendous progress in acculturating the campus as a whole to view assessment as an integral part of the University's day-to-day operations, much more progress needs to be made. While the University now has one full cycle under its belt and this process of continual improvement has borne actionable data upon which changes have been implemented, the process itself needs improvement. Chiefly, although the faculty have made impressive strides at devising reasonable, meaningful, and assessable student learning outcomes, it is still possible to find examples of weak outcomes and inappropriate assessment throughout the institution. The work of honing outcomes continues. In several notable places, faculty identify lower-division courses as the most appropriate point in their curricula to assess students' mastery of program outcomes. We are working with them to re-examine this practice.
2. Co-curricular assessment continues to be both a challenge and an opportunity for the University. Significant progress in well-established programs continues, particularly in Career Services. New initiatives, such as the Providence Servant Leader program, are just now being established as a result of findings of deficiency of older co-curricular programs (e.g., Providence Formation Program) that resulted from assessment of those programs. Much work continues, however, in drafting common outcomes and common assessment practices for co-curricular programs at the University of Providence.
3. Regarding core curriculum assessment, our *Lumen de Lumine* core curriculum, first instituted in 2017-2018, is just now reaching a level of development that allows for thorough outcomes assessment. The director of that program has done truly impressive work bringing the core curriculum faculty to a point where assessment of the curriculum is beginning to reap rewards. The director has charted a measured path in which Core Curriculum outcomes are assessed through three "question sets" (Critical Reading, Mission Alignment, and Underprepared Students) undergo protocols of rigorous examination alongside other elements of the Core (Integrated Learning Communities and Distribution assessment). That formative assessment work continues, and actionable assessment data are being used for program improvement. As the institution progresses towards the Year Seven report, it recognizes that this is something that needs constant tending so that by the end of the three-year cycle, the core curriculum itself will have undergone significant improvement.

**ADDENDIX A**

**PROGRAM ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTS**

**(SEE FOLDER)**

**ADDENDIX B**

**FORENSIC SCIENCE: PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

**(SEE FOLDER)**

**ADDENDIX C**

**WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

**(SEE FOLDER)**

**ADDENDIX D**

**SPRING 2021 INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES FROM THE YEAR SEVEN REPORT:  
RECOMMENDATIONS 1, 2, 6, AND 9**

## **Recommendation 1**

### **Identify methods or indicators to define an acceptable threshold for mission fulfillment aimed at determining quality, effectiveness, and mission fulfillment.**

University of Providence Mission statement: “As an expression of the teaching mission of Jesus Christ, the mission of the University of Providence is to provide students with the opportunity to obtain a liberal education for living and for making a living.”

The University’s core themes, which derive directly from the Strategic Plan, are the primary mechanisms through which the institution expresses mission fulfillment. Fulfilling each pillar of the Strategic Plan is tracked by a workstream. Through the workstreams, the University works through the various metrics, indicators, and thresholds of mission fulfillment.

Fulfilling the University’s mission is demonstrated through meeting metrics established in the Strategic Plan from which the core themes were derived:

- Academic Excellence, through which the University pledges to “uphold the highest academic standards across all programs,” holds student success as the primary indicator. Elements that help us demonstrate student success under this core theme include graduation rates, student achievement of program learning outcomes, student performance on various assessments, and faculty training in outcomes and assessment;
- Student Experience, through which “students undergo a distinctive and transformative experience that prepares them to pursue their lifetime calling and make the world a better place,” is expressed through a number of indicators, including retention, student engagement through internships and other field experiences, and student perspectives as reflected in NSSE surveys (“Reflective & Integrative Learning,” and “Academic Advising” and Transferable Skills” modules); and
- Mission Effectiveness, through which the University pledges to provide life-changing educational experiences and programs while focusing on operational efficiency to deliver on our vision for sustainable growth. This is assessed through expressions of the institution’s mission such as a customized student survey on alignment with the institution’s Catholic mission, program enrollment growth, and assessment of program viability, which is measured through student surveys, enrollment growth as a reflection of responsiveness to market demands, and systematic program assessment.

The University of Providence works hard to define methods and measures of mission fulfillment through the pursuit of the core themes. These core themes, as demonstrated through their indicators of achievement, are regularly reviewed in an ongoing, systematic manner to ensure the quality of the measure is maintained.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Establish indicators of achievement that are meaningful, assessable, and verifiable; and that form the basis for evaluating accomplishment of the objectives of its Core Themes**

As the University considers assessment of its core themes, it has derived meaning from the indicators of progress on various initiatives within the “pillars” of the strategic plan, which serve as the foundation for the core these themselves. The indicators that undergird each of the core themes are meaningful,

assessable, and verifiable. Thresholds by which progress is measured are intentional, and provide essential discomfort as the institution works toward realistic goals that also require the institution to stretch itself in pursuit of them.

### Core Theme 1

In Core Theme 1, Academic Excellence, the institution's ultimate goal was to identify indicators that had relevance to the student experience, including graduation rates, employment or further study among its graduates, student responses in standardized nationally-recognized assessments, e.g., the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and faculty development. Graduation rates are concrete signs of student success, indeed, growing graduation rates are penultimate goals (the ultimate goal, of course, is that graduates live full lives and contribute to their communities after graduation). In order to assure as great a number of successful graduates as possible, the University engages in a comprehensive program of assessment. This iterative assessment program focuses on assessment of program student learning outcomes (the assessment system is more fully explained above in Programmatic Assessment and below in Recommendation 9). This system finds significant meaning in the assessment of the program outcomes themselves on a granular level, that, taken together, provides a clear view of student success in our programs overall. One essential element of student success at the University is our Core Curriculum, which includes a specific focus on critical thinking and reasoning and is assessed through the CLA+ exam administered to all seniors. In the spring of 2019, University seniors exemplified basic mastery of critical-thinking and written-communication skills as measured by the CLA+ with a score of 1046, which is better than or equal to the average senior score at 14% of CLA+ schools (N=61 baccalaureate colleges).

More longitudinal data that are meaningful, assessable, and verifiable are derived in NSSE's engagement indicators. As detailed in the body of this report above, the NSSE engagement indicator means for our seniors have been compared to NSSE's Rocky Mountain Privates. Our senior means did not exceed the Rocky Mountain Private senior means on any of the indicators in the 2017-2018 academic year. However, in the 2019-2020 academic the University of Providence senior means did exceed the Rocky Mountain Private senior means on all indicators with the exception of reflective and integrative learning. It is noticeable that the Rocky Mountain Private senior means decreased over the two-year period while our senior means increased. We attribute this improvement to our new core curriculum that contains enhanced math and writing courses and further integration of theology and philosophy courses.

Finally, to assure that faculty are fully prepared to offer well-designed programs, faculty development is a significant datum that we believe demonstrates both areas of excellence, as well as areas deserving further development.

### Core Theme 2

In Core Theme 2, Student Experience, the University strives to demonstrate that its students experience distinctive and transformative development to prepare them for pursuing their lifetime calling and to make the world a better place. One clear way for the institution to demonstrate that it provides a value to our students and the public is through retention. We believe that if our programs are able to work toward student success as measured by students' own commitment to remaining in those programs, we will have demonstrated the inherent value of a UP education. In the same way that NSSE scores provide

meaningful and verifiable data in support of Core Theme 1, it also helps demonstrate campus progress on the “student experience.” One element of the student experience that the University, as a small, intimate institution, can demonstrate its value compared to large universities is in a supportive atmosphere and person-to-person relationships among students, faculty, and staff. NSSE high impact practices help the University assess its own progress in building this environment from the students’ perspectives. In our most recent NSSE report, 90% of our freshmen participated in at least one service learning project, or learning community compared to 65% of freshmen in the Rocky Mountain Privates. This participation is attributed to the new core curriculum that has service learning and learning community requirements.

Finally, the University recognizes that transformative experiences transcend the classroom. Therefore, student satisfaction with opportunities to participate in experiential learning, as expressed in assessment of student participation in learning outside the classroom through internships and field experiences. More than 83% of seniors have participated in service learning, learning community, research with a faculty member, internship or field experience, or senior experience at least one time based on our 2018 NSSE findings with 93% participating in these high-impact practices in our 2020 NSSE report.

### Core Theme 3

The University community considers tracking and assessing institution progress on Core Theme 3, Mission Effectiveness, foundational. This core theme combines elements of three separate-yet-related pillars in the Strategic Plan, Mission Alignment, Market Positioning, and Organizational Effectiveness. Through this core theme, the University demonstrates its recognition that operational efficiency and sustainability are elemental to continued operations through which excellent programs and transformative student experiences are made possible. Indicators of progress in securing mission effectiveness include student responses on the Mission and Catholic Identity Assessment (MCIA). This survey is an institution-specific derivation, with prior permission, from the Catholic Identity & Mission Assessment administered by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. As detailed in the body of this report, we hypothesize that seniors would exhibit greater understanding of our MCIA indicators compared to freshmen. Our findings support the hypothesis with statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Seniors exhibit a greater understanding of: 1) the relationship between faith and reason; 2) the relationships between the sciences and things of divine or holy nature; 3) the presence of the sacred in daily life; 4) social justice when making decisions in life and work; 5) the moral and ethical implications of personal conduct; 6) positive contributions to the broader communities; and 7) environmental stewardship.

One way the institution assesses progress on recruitment goals (as an expression of market positioning) is measuring the number of net full-pay fulltime students. Finally, the University views programmatic review and optimization as valid and meaningful expressions of institutional effectiveness. Fiscal sustainability is of paramount importance for UP, as demonstrated in such institutional efforts as the Program and Resource Optimization process (2017-2018). While program prioritization may cause momentary discomfort within the University community, the institution recognizes that such realignments are necessary for the long-term sustainability of the institution. Quality control is also crucial for institutional sustainability, and the University is undergoing various program quality reviews, including student evaluations and faculty self-evaluations that are intimately aligned, a revised program review process, and the implementation of a software solution (“Blue”) to facilitate the implementation, administration, and analysis of numerous evaluation and quality-control processes. Through targeted assessment of MCIA, the enrollment growth anticipated from the University’s value proposition, and the

offering of high-quality, well-designed and evaluated programs, the University has laid the foundation for mission effectiveness.

## **Recommendation 6**

### **Develop a system of regular, systematic evaluation of co-curricular programs for effectiveness and alignment with the mission and Core Themes of the institution (2.D.11).**

Co-curricular assessment to assure mission alignment and program effectiveness is vital to the whole-person development, which the University of Providence maintains is central to its value proposition to prospective students and the broader community. Beginning in 2019, a university-wide effort to formalize assessment protocols for co-curricular programs took the form of the Co-Curricular Assessment Group (CCAG). This group made significant progress in establishing a process for assessment of co-curricular programs, but its progress proved contingent on guidance from the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Director of Institutional Effectiveness. The former position was vacated in the summer of 2019, and the latter in the summer of 2020. Without direct supervision, the group lost its focus and drive as a coherent initiative. Assessment and its improvement continue apace in most of the individual areas covered the “co-curricular” umbrella. Indeed, progress has been impressive in individual co-curricular offices, such as Career Services. Other areas, such as the Providence Servant Leader (PSL) program, are just getting off the ground, though it bears noting that the very existence of PSL is the product of effective assessment that brought weaknesses of an older program (Providence Formation Program) to light. For the University of Providence, reviving the co-curricular assessment group is a priority as the University moves works to demonstrate mission fulfillment in the Year Seven report.

In its fall 2019 *ad hoc* report, the University reported on co-curricular assessment of the following programs

- Campus Ministry
- The Academic Success Center
- The Career Center

The effectiveness of co-curricular programs at the University of Providence is important for the institution, particularly as those programs provide essential support for the University’s focus on the student experience that supplements its academics programs. Crucially, the faculty supports the continued use of the student support center (Academic Success Center, TRIO, STEM Center, and Writing and Critical Thinking Center) located centrally in the library.

The following are updates on programs that either have continued to make good progress in terms of co-curricular assessment or have been discontinued or changed as a result of that assessment.

#### **Campus Ministry: Providence Formation Program**

Campus Ministry is a newer co-curricular program on campus, providing learning opportunities for all students and maintaining the distinctive Catholic identity of the institution. The Director of Campus Ministry supports the Catholic ministry in numerous ways:

- Student ministry including an ecumenical Bible Study Group
- Trinitas Chapel Mass, celebrations, and sacraments and records
- Leadership in the Providence Ministries “Year of Mission” program provided for faculty and staff as Providence Ministries moved forward on their organizational mission work
- As a Providence Ministries Associate, the Director is an invaluable historian for the institution and the Sisters of Providence

Assessment of the Providence Formation Program in 2019 demonstrated that it was meeting neither its intended target audience, nor the mission-specific objectives, nor the University’s general goals or expectations. It was also discovered that the program did not adhere to measures/policies designed to protect the vulnerable populations it served, creating a risk and compliance issue. It was, therefore, closed and replaced with the Providence Servant Leaders (PSL) program. The guiding influence of PSL is the drive to respond to “the call of the Sisters of Providence to be ever mindful of the signs of the times as we find new and creative ways to live our Providence charism,” through which PSL “seeks to foster the development of communities of Providence among young people – rooted in faith, service, and social justice.” The Providence Servant Leader program is the newest manifestation of the drive to align co-curricular program development with the mission of the University and the guiding charism of the Sisters of Providence. Once the program is established, assessment of this alignment with the University mission and broad goals of co-curricular student development remains a top priority.

### **Academic Success Center**

The Academic Success Center (ASC) is undergoing significant revision in 2020-2021. The director of the center retires at the end of the academic year and the grant that funded the establishment of the center has lapsed and was not renewed. The Office of the Provost has conducted several listening sessions with the University community to assess what has work well in the ASC, and areas where it did not meet the expectations of the University community. The provost has established a steering committee comprised of representatives from divisions across the University to craft an effective ASC for the future. Central to that process will be the establishment of an assessable set of student learning outcomes for the ASC to serve as metrics with which the performance of the revised ASC will be measured. The revised ASC will be open in the summer of 2021 to facilitate freshman registration and placement activities.

### **Career Center**

The Career Center has become a crucial student services center providing access to summer employment and housing on campus, career opportunities on- and off-campus and professional skills support.

### **Career Readiness Assessment and Core Competencies**

Students who are awarded donor-sponsored internship funding and those who are in the University’s student employment program set personal development goals (see p. 19 and 20 of “Student Employment Guide 2020-2021” in “Career Services: Support Documents” folder of Appendix E) based on National Association of Colleges and Employers Core Competencies and get employer feedback (see “Career Readiness Employer Feedback” in “Career Services folder) on their progress in those areas. This provides

a multi-faceted examination of the students' readiness for employment and an external validation of that readiness. These are then cross-referenced to the university's outcomes for all graduates (see "Bachelor's Degree Outcomes Core Competencies" in "Career Services: Support Documents" folder of Appendix E). The benefit of this cross-reference is that faculty are able to demonstrate to their students ways in which the established course learning outcomes tie to "real world" professional competencies. In both cases, students are able to recognize that the goals of each course are not just well-thought-out standards for a graduate of the University of Providence, but they are also essential core characteristics for employment success and advancement. Engaging in course learning outcomes is in and of itself a career readiness exercise.

This career-readiness effort is further facilitated by a well-established program of cooperation with faculty and employers in setting up internship opportunities, training for students who are entering internships, and an assessment system intended to assure that students' and employers' mutual expectations and their performance in these experiences are well-aligned. The Career Services office works as a conduit for coordinating these activities, and the applications, guidebooks, and assessment tools used to measure progress are part of a coordinated operation. See "Internship Employers Guide," "Student Employment Guide 2020-2021," and "Internship Student Guide Forms" in the "Career Services: Support Documents" folder of Appendix E for specific examples of the protocols and processes that assure this alignment.

As detailed in the body of this report, the First Destination Survey (FDS), administered to recent graduates, demonstrates that value-added element of the University's efforts to prepare students to enter the workforce and begin their careers. More than two-thirds of the graduates in the spring of 2020 had secured full-time or part-time employment in their fields of study.

### **Response to Recommendation 6 Conclusion**

Co-curricular assessment informs an important indicator of student success at UP. As such, it deserves the focused attention of the entire University community so that the institution is able to assure that our students get the transformative, whole-person attention that the University maintains as a key goal.

## **Recommendation 9**

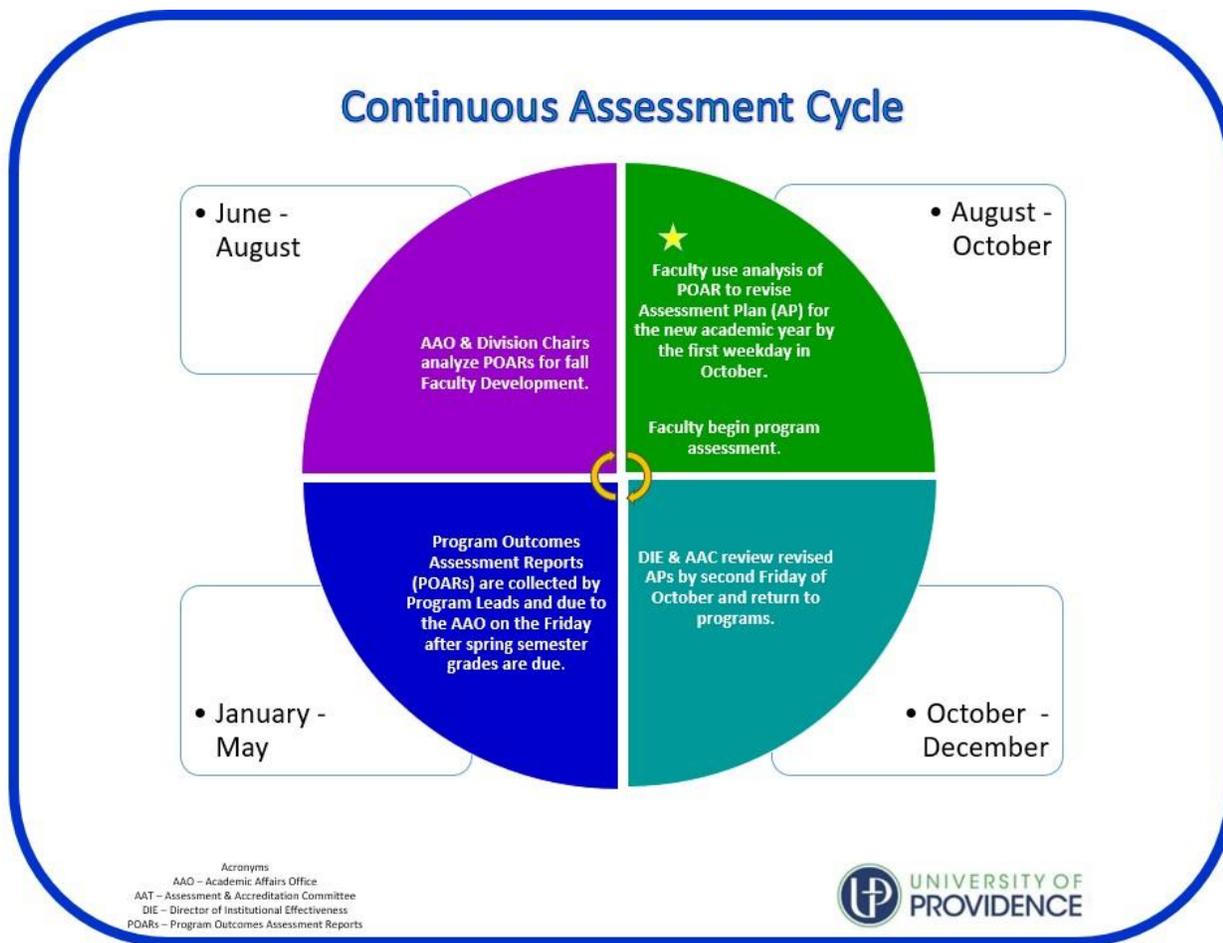
**The Commission encourages the University to continue to diligently instill a culture of evidence for the purpose of evaluating student achievement and institutional accomplishments with a particular focus on the Program Outcome Assessment Reporting (POAR), the Core Curriculum, and the associated pillars of its strategic plan including Academic Excellence, Retention and the Student Experience, and Mission Effectiveness (2020 Standards: 1.B.1).**

Over the past several years, the University of Providence faculty and Academic Affairs staff have been working hard to instill a culture of assessment and evidence-based improvement. We are proud of the progress we have made. At the center of that effort has been the development of an iterative planning-implementation-assessment-analysis-planning cycle that undergirds efforts to demonstrate for our students and other constituencies the value of a UP education. The faculty teaching the Core Curriculum (UP's designation of its General Education program) have likewise been working to produce common assessment rubrics for use across disciplines to assess the current core competencies across the curriculum. All of this progress is guided by alignment with the strategic plan in general, and the University's core themes in particular.

### **Program Outcome Assessment Reporting**

The assessment plan outlined here uses as its capstone the annual Program Outcomes Assessment Report (POAR), with which faculty across the University report on progress measuring student success in meeting program learning outcomes. The process begins before the fall semester with assessment planning for the academic year. Shortly after census in the fall, the faculty submit assessment plans which will guide their programmatic assessment activities for the year. These plans require that faculty demonstrate alignment between outcomes, assessment opportunities throughout the curriculum, appropriate places in the curriculum for testing student success in achieving those outcomes, and timelines for this assessment. The plans also include an annual curriculum map that requires regular review of program outcome and curricular alignment. These plans are submitted to the Director for Institutional Research and Effectiveness (DIRE). Together, the DIRE and the provost review these plans using a standardized rubric that facilitates these reviewers' analysis of the strength of the student learning outcomes themselves, the methods and measures of assessment, and the plan's coherence, completeness, and sustainability overall. The results of this review are shared with program chairs to help guide their programs' assessment activities for the year.

At the end of the academic year, program chairs submit a Program Outcomes Assessment Report (POAR) in which the program chairs report on the results of the assessments that they identified in their assessment plans at the beginning of the academic year. This standardized report requires faculty to report on the percentage of their students in the courses/activities identified in the plan that reached basic levels of mastery. These assessment reports are analyzed over the summer by the provost and DIRE. The results of this analysis, particularly any recommendations for adjustments and emendations that will help facilitate a process of continual improvement, are shared with program faculty at the annual Faculty Development session that precede the beginning of fall semester. The faculty then use both the results of their own assessment (as submitted in the POAR) and the comments and analysis by the provost and the DIRE to further hone their programmatic assessment practices for the coming year. This process has resulted in concrete improvements in programs and assessment practices.



Faculty, ultimately, are the experts who collectively continue to review/revise/refresh programs for effectiveness based on student achievement of program student learning outcomes. Their work ensures programs are thoughtful, aligned, have well-designed learning activities and assessments, and are up-to-date with discipline norms, providing a rigorous educational experience for students that is meaningful and engaging. Their collective responsibility demonstrates true ownership of their programs and achievement by their students. This continuous improvement effort provides added value to successful achievement of degrees and certificates through this evidence of commitment to high-level learning experiences for students in all programs.

### Core Curriculum Assessment

The core director, in consultation with a group of core faculty and the provost, developed a new core curriculum assessment plan in Fall 2020, with implementation of the plan to begin in Spring 2021. The plan for the first core assessment cycle centers on three primary areas of inquiry: critical reading; mission-specific core outcomes; and underserved/underprepared student performance in the core. The plan involves both direct and indirect assessment of UP’s core curriculum student learning outcomes. Assessment cycle 1, which will be completed in Summer 2023, will directly assess eight out of twenty-one total core course outcomes. Two subsequent cycles, each two academic years in length, will directly

assess the remaining core course outcomes. Cycle 1 is a semester longer than either Cycles 2 or Cycle 3 to allow time for building and working out processes for data collection and analysis. Core instructors will begin to submit cycle 1 end-of-semester reports at the close of the spring 2021 and thereafter track and report on the same outcomes over the next several semesters. The core director and a core advisory committee will review and respond to these semester reports, working with core faculty to develop goals and actions plans for improving SLOs. Various required professional development activities, such as peer observations and inter-rater reliability workshops, complement these direct assessment activities. The intent in using assessment cycles of substantial length and requiring complementary professional development activities is to create a more robust community of inquiry into effective pedagogical practice among core faculty.

The core assessment plan also involves standardization of the assessment processes and cycles carried out in each of the core curriculum distribution areas: Sustainability (SUS), Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Global (GLO), Oral Communication (COM), and Service Learning (SL). Assessment of these areas has been driven by small committees who screen courses to be designated in these distributions. The Writing Across the Curriculum committee has, since spring 2018, consistently collected assessment reports from faculty teaching writing-intensive courses. One example of meta-assessment by the WAC Committee and the core director is a result of the variable quality of reports faculty have submitted for WAC assessment, and the feedback loop has been left incomplete. To address this new need, the interdisciplinary WAC committee and core director are developing a plan to ask for more standardized reporting starting in spring 2021 and to offer more consistent feedback to WAC faculty based on their reports. The Oral Communication committee designed and implemented a revised assessment process for that distribution in fall 2020. It hinges on a university-wide University of Providence COM rubric adapted from the AACU VALUE rubric. The core director will work with the committees for the remaining distributions to model their assessment after WAC and COM; the core assessment plan calls for all distributions to have implemented formal assessment by spring 2022.

### **Assessment of Academic Excellence, Retention and the Student Experience, and Mission Effectiveness**

As noted in the updated institutional response to Recommendation 2 above, assessment of the three strategic pillars that constitute the framework and foundation of the University's three core themes is characterized by thorough examination, constant improvement, and regular reporting. We have worked to foster the establishment a culture of evidence-based decision making across the University in general, and in assessment of the core themes in particular, through meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of progress.

#### **Academic Excellence**

Among the indicators that demonstrate this culture of evidence used to secure and assure academic excellence are graduation rates, employment or further study among the University's graduates, student responses in standardized assessments, and faculty development in assessment and program quality assurance. We believe that these indicators are appropriate measures of progress in meeting our core theme goal of determining academic excellence. Graduation rates are concrete signs of student success. The University demonstrates high graduation rates specific baccalaureate programs and graduate programs, but more importantly, these rates are comparably high for both women in general and women

of color at the University of Providence. A comprehensive program of program assessment helps the University demonstrate its efforts to help students progress toward graduation with degrees that they can use to live and work within their communities. Our First Destination Survey findings reflects this success as over 75% of the graduates in a baccalaureate program are gainfully employed or continuing their education. Our Core Curriculum includes a specific focus on critical thinking and reasoning and assessed through the MCIA and NSSE with significant findings. Finally, we work to fully prepared faculty to offer well-designed, well-assessed programs.

### Retention and Student Experience

The University uses reliable, meaningful, and verifiable indicators to track progress and improvement in retention and student experience. Through these indicators, the University strives to demonstrate that its students experience distinctive and transformative development to prepare them for pursuing their lifetime calling and to make the world a better place. These indicators include retention rates through which the institution demonstrates that its students themselves find value in their experience. Retention rates are high for many student sub-populations such as distance and nursing students. With retention tactics in place for campus students, the retention of on-campus freshmen has been increasing in the midst of a pandemic.

The University also uses NSSE engagement indicator scores to track how well the institution demonstrates its work in providing a supportive atmosphere and person-to-person relationships among students, faculty and staff. NSSE also helps the University track progress on student-centric teaching and learning, as well as other essential elements of student success (advising and student engagement). A NSSE engagement indicator found to have statistically significant differences in means ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) for both 2018 and 2020 is student-faculty interaction for first-year students. In 2018 the University of Providence mean was 28.5 compared to 16.5 for the Rocky Mountain Privates and in 2020 the means were 30.8 and 22.8, respectively. Finally, the institution tracks students' satisfaction with opportunities to participate in experiential learning, as expressed in assessment of student participation in learning outside the classroom through internships and field experiences. More than 83% of seniors have participated in service learning, learning community, research with a faculty member, an internship or field experience, or senior experience at least one time based on our 2018 NSSE findings with 93% participating in these high-impact practices in our 2020 NSSE report.

### Mission Effectiveness

Finally, the University community considers tracking and assessing institutional progress on Mission Effectiveness, as foundational. This core theme combines elements of three pillars in the Strategic Plan: Mission Alignment, Market Positioning, and Organizational Effectiveness. Through this core theme, the University demonstrates its recognition that mission alignment, operational efficiency, and fiscal sustainability are elemental to continued operation that makes excellent programs and transformative student experiences possible. Progress on these is measured through our Mission and Catholic Identity Assessment where seniors exhibit a greater understanding of topics such as faith, reason, the divine, personal conduct, and nature compared to first-year students ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Additional progress has been achieved on fiscal sustainability facilitated by hitting recruitment goals (e.g., fall 2020 enrollment was greater than fall 2019 enrollment during the pandemic) through the number of net full-pay fulltime

students, and institutional efforts to demonstrate quality assurance through various review and evaluation processes.

Through targeted assessment of MCIA, the enrollment growth anticipated from the University's value proposition, and the offering of high-quality, well-designed and evaluated programs, the University has laid the foundation for mission effectiveness.

### **Recommendation 9 Response Conclusion**

The University's effort to cultivate a culture of evidence-based planning and decision making demonstrates its commitment to student achievement and institutional sustainability. Through the program assessment process tracked by Program Outcomes Assessment Reporting, *Lumen de Lumine* Core Curriculum assessment, and tracking progress through effective indicators for the three core themes, the University of Providence strives to establish a solid data-oriented foundation, driven by passion for the institution's mission and the commitment by the Sisters of Providence to serve the community.

**ADDENDIX E**

**CAREER SERVICES: SUPPORT DOCUMENTS**

**(SEE FOLDER)**