Report of the Task Force for Learning Goals & Assessment

January 31, 2020

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE.

Task Force on Learning Goals & Assessment

2019 Task Force on Learning Goals & Assessment

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Task Force on Learning Goals & Assessment

Executive Summary

The Task Force on Learning Goals & Assessment was launched in September 2019 to examine the University of Delaware's approach to developing, communicating, and assessing program-level educational goals. The Task Force was charged to look at UD's existing practices – particularly in the context of national conversations and guidance provided by UD's accrediting body, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The Task Force was asked to make recommendations about several processes:

- Develop an institutional timeline and procedure to collect program educational goals and share them publicly.
- Propose an appropriate schedule for programs to assess educational goals over time. This process should address the manner in which assessment evidence is collected and stored. Furthermore, this process should ensure that responsibility for all stages is clearly communicated.

The Task Force reviewed literature on educational goal assessment, studied practices at peer institutions, and consulted broadly with faculty and other stakeholders at the University of Delaware. We make the following key recommendations:

Key Recommendations

1. The University of Delaware Faculty Senate should revise the current Academic Proposal Approval process to collect program educational goals. Such goals should be required to accompany proposals for new (provisional) programs and applications for permanent status. In addition, all existing programs should submit program educational goals through this process according to the specified timeline. These goals will be collected via the current Curriculog forms and published by the Registrar in the Academic Catalog. (See page 9 for proposed Senate Resolutions.)

2. The University of Delaware should ask the faculty of each educational program to develop (where no plan is currently in place) and maintain an annual cycle of program educational goal assessment. This schedule should be embedded within regular strategic/curricular planning conversations amongst faculty, directors, chairs, deans, and the provost. Such an ongoing process should ensure maximum participation from key stakeholders (program faculty, chairs, deans, and the provost).

3. The University of Delaware should collect program educational goal assessment data via a new Webform. Because evidence of student learning can take a variety of forms depending on the program, the Webform should be simple and flexible, in order to accommodate both quantitative and qualitative elements. (See page 10 of this report for a sample form.)

4. The assessment data collection Webform will send assessment evidence to the Office of Institute Research. IRE will store, aggregate, and share assessment data back out to

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units undergoing Academic Program Review. The evidence should be available to program faculty at all times and automatically returned to chairs/directors as part of the APR cycle. Further, these results should be available to college deans, the university provost, and the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning (to further CTAL's mission to support UD faculty in their teaching and assessment efforts).

5. The University of Delaware should continue to keep pace with peer institutions to better assess student learning, integrate it into strategic and resource planning decisions, and emphasize its value in faculty reward systems.

The Task Force believes that these steps are necessary to promote educational excellence as a core value at the University of Delaware and to remain aligned with our local and Middle States peers.

Introduction

The University of Delaware Task Force on Learning Goals & Assessment began its work in Fall 2019. Our work started by acknowledging the current conventional wisdom around assessment: It is an institutional bureaucracy of endless assessment reports written by overworked, under-recognized faculty to feed the detached interests of academic administrators and regional accreditors. Higher education journalists have published articles[1] and opinion pieces about inauthentic program educational goal assessment and the need for better processes. At the same time, Americans seem to increasingly distrust universities' ability to provide students with useful skills, knowledge, and habits of mind. A recent *Wall Street Journal*/*NBC News* poll revealed that the majority of young adults believe that college is not worth the cost.[2] This current national conversation impels us to search for the best possible ways to evaluate and improve student educational outcomes.

The Value of Assessable Educational Program Goals
As a tuition-driven institution, the University of Delaware can use program assessment to help demonstrate the value of its degrees to students. In addition, an improved culture of assessment would provide a set of common tools, resources, and processes. These would not only foster greater transparency for students, but also assist faculty in making curriculum and program decisions.

Excellent teaching is at the heart of the educational experience at the University of Delaware. Our peer institutions and professional organizations, such as the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), have advanced a national dialogue about how to use assessment data to inform and strengthen teaching and learning. Therefore, it is critically important for UD to examine its own approach to program educational goal setting and assessment. Simultaneously, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, our institutional accreditor, requires that universities conduct assessment of learning to demonstrate that students have accomplished stated program educational goals. Current practice and literature

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[1] See selected bibliography for examples.

[2] Wall Street Journal/NBC News September 7, 2017.

make it clear that high-quality assessments are tailored to unique learning environments and advance educational priorities. Assessment programs should reflect individual teaching philosophies, program educational goals, and disciplinary values.

Task Force Guiding Principles
From its early stages, our Task Force was guided by three interconnected principles. First, as we considered how best to assess program educational goals, we recognized the diversity of undergraduate and graduate teaching that takes place in UD's schools, colleges, and locations. Some programs are externally accredited, and others are not. Some programs are taught by a majority of faculty from a single department, and others rely heavily on courses taught by other multiple departments. Classes range from large lectures to small seminars and one-on-one instruction. Some programs have lab, project-based, professional preparation, or community-learning components. Programs are offered in face-to-face, online, and hybrid environments. We adopted the principle that any new approach to collecting or evaluating program educational goals must accommodate this diversity.

The second principle honors the expertise of academic units. We affirmed that decisions about the wording, specificity, and content of program educational goals and assessment plans should be decided at the level of the academic unit. According to past commentaries on assessment, when the process is overly prescriptive, programs become less internally motivated to engage and may even resort to a "check the box" approach.

A final guiding principle of our Task Force was simplicity. We aimed to design a process that could be easily integrated into existing software and require minimal monitoring by people outside the unit.

Collecting and Publishing Program Educational Goals
The Task Force's research on both our current practices and national trends suggest that we currently lack a clear, shared practice of ongoing and authentic program educational goal assessment. Further, the availability of stated program educational goals is highly variable across the University, making it difficult to communicate the intended goals for each program to students, accreditors, and community.

We were charged with making recommendations about how to collect and publish program educational goals. The Task Force suggested that the Academic Catalog is the most logical place to publish these goals. And because the faculty oversees the Academic Catalog, we determined that the educational goals for each program would need to be collected in a manner consistent with the Faculty Senate's current practices. We consulted with the University Registrar's Office and three Faculty Senate committees (Coordinating, Undergraduate Studies, and Graduate Studies). The Task Force concluded that program educational goals can be submitted and routed using Curriculog. We developed a Senate resolution indicating that units should submit their programs' educational goals for publication in the catalog. Several university programs already have such goals (especially if their programs are externally accredited, or if they developed goals in the past). These programs could simply submit them, verbatim, using Curriculog. Other programs will need to develop or revise their goals and submit them for the first time. Any new program proposal or program revision will be required to include its educational goals at the time

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of proposal. The resolution that describes this process has been supported by the Faculty Senate Undergraduate Studies Committee, Graduate Studies Committee, Coordination Committee on Education, and Executive Committee, and can be found in the Key Recommendations section of this report.

Assessment of Program Educational Goals

The Task Force was also charged with drafting a University-wide assessment form to be used in both undergraduate and graduate programs. This form needs to allow colleges, programs, departments, and individual faculty members to tailor the assessments to their specific needs. Our work first recognized that research on the validity of program educational goal assessment is evolving. As a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article summarized, assessment is "all too often a top-down process with puzzling mandates and obscure language inflicted on - rather than decided with or by - faculty."[3] Task Force members repeatedly affirmed that by reforming UD's culture around assessment, faculty members could reclaim assessment and do it diligently and well. We argue that we should empower each department not only to describe its own program educational goals, but also decide how to measure them. We trust faculty to articulate the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind they hope to teach in their programs.

With this context in mind, the Task Force drafted the simplest possible set of questions to structure programs' assessment reports. A simple format would provide meaningful feedback to chairs/directors while also affirming that program faculty are best qualified to identify and interpret authentic evidence (quantitative and/or qualitative) of student learning. To develop the questions, we consulted examples from NILOA case studies that have recently gone through a similar revision process.

As for process, we propose using the Webforms technology already in operation at UD. Using Webforms removes the need for third party software. Units will submit their assessment data through the proposed form, to be stored at the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE). Storing assessment data in a central location will make it easier to retrieve for academic program reviews. In addition, central storage will enable units to sustain and build on assessment cycles over the long term, especially when the faculty members in charge of assessment in a particular unit rotate off, retire, or go on sabbatical. IRE can play a valuable role in ensuring assessment data are collected and represented in a format useful to all stakeholders. Finally, IRE can ensure assessment data are redistributed back to departments during Academic Program Review.

Members of the Task Force consulted with department chairs and program directors and senators about if, when, to whom, and how the results of program educational goal assessment should be made available. The process we developed is open to key stakeholders, including program faculty, chairs, deans, the provost, the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning, and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. All of whom potentially need access to assessment data:

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[3] Gannon, Kevin. "Stuck in the Assessment Swamp?" ChronicleVitae, May 1, 2017.

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Faculty need timely and reliable formative and summative feedback about their course design in order to ensure course-level learning goals are aligned with program educational goals and related program-level assessment initiatives. **Faculty who are new to teaching, or new to teaching a specific course**, would benefit from clear expectations as to how their course(s) are expected to teach and assess program educational goals, and would similarly benefit from historical assessment data which provides context for the way that their course(s) have historically taught and assessed student learning relative to the entire program.

Provost, Deans, and Department Chairs can use timely and reliable information about educational goal assessment to support program faculty and inform strategic curriculum planning.

Institutional Research and Effectiveness and the **Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning** (CTAL) can best support the University of Delaware mission by using accurate and reliable data, analysis, and research. Such information facilitates decision making that impacts priorities for program, college, and institutional improvement, resulting in integrated learning experiences for UD students. CTAL believes the purpose of assessment is not to generate reports but to inform ongoing efforts to improve what happens for students in their courses and programs.

Each of these stakeholders needs reliable information. Currently, educational goal assessment data at UD, when it exists, is not always archived or organized, so our proposed model is an improvement.

Recommended Timeline for Implementation
Implementing a well-designed process of educational goal assessment takes time. The University will need to support departments and create a reasonable timeline for implementing the new approach. This report provides suggested timelines, rubrics, and guidelines for writing and assessing program educational goals to help departments start the process. The Task Force believes that such steps are necessary, both to promote a culture of assessment as a core value at the University of Delaware and to remain aligned with our accreditors.

To accomplish this goal, the Task Force suggests the following timeline:

April/May 2020: An announcement is made to the UD community immediately after the Faculty Senate approves the relevant resolutions.

By October 2020: Any program that already has program educational goals and those that have developed them during the spring and summer of 2020 will submit them via Curriculog for inclusion in the 2021-2022 academic catalog.

By October 2021: All other programs submit program educational goals no later than October 2021 for inclusion in the 2022-2023 academic catalog.

By October 2022: Programs will submit their first annual assessment report.

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Subsequent annual assessment reports will be submitted annually, due in October. This date enables academic program changes to be initiated through the current annual revision cycle.

Key Recommendations

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2. The University of Delaware should ask the faculty of each educational program to develop (where no plan is currently in place) and maintain an annual cycle of program educational goal assessment. This schedule should be embedded within regular strategic/curricular planning conversations amongst faculty, directors, chairs, deans, and the provost. Such an ongoing process should ensure maximum participation from key stakeholders (program faculty, chairs, deans, and the provost).

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4. The assessment data collection Webform will send assessment evidence to the Office of Institute Research. IRE will store, aggregate, and share assessment data back out to units undergoing Academic Program Review. The evidence should be available to program faculty at all times and automatically returned to chairs/directors as part of the APR cycle. Further, these results should be available to college deans, the university provost, and the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning (to further CTAL's mission to support UD faculty in their teaching and assessment efforts).

5. The University of Delaware should continue to keep pace with peer institutions to better assess student learning, integrate it into strategic and resource planning decisions, and emphasize its value in faculty reward systems.

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Program Educational Goals

Following its charge, the Task Force consulted with various University of Delaware Faculty Senate Committees to draft the following:

Recommendation, from the Faculty Senate Coordinating Committee on Education with concurrence of the Faculty Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies and the Faculty Senate Committee on Graduate Studies, for a revision to the new program request form.

WHEREAS **program educational goals** clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, habits of mind and/or other characteristics that students are expected to acquire in the specific educational program; and

WHEREAS for the purposes of this resolution, an **education program** is a program of study that leads to a degree (e.g., bachelor's, master's, doctoral degrees). For the purposes of this resolution educational programs do not include concentrations, certificates, minors, or other non-degree programs; and

WHEREAS the course catalog currently includes curricular information specific to degree programs but does not publicly share the program educational goals these programs support; and

WHEREAS clearly stated program educational goals can guide curriculum design and revision and guide assessment activities, a process fundamental to the educational mission of a university; and

WHEREAS the Middle States Commission on Higher Education accrediting body requires universities to clearly state educational goals, and regularly assess student accomplishment of these goals; and

WHEREAS the Provost's Task Force on Learning Goals and Assessment developed a timeline recommending that programs with existing educational goals submit them by October 2020, and other programs submit them no later than October 2021, therefore be it

RESOLVED that representatives from all educational programs will submit program educational goals to the Faculty Senate for publication in the academic catalog on the suggested timeline; and be it further

RESOLVED that any newly proposed educational program be required to include program educational goals.

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Assessment of Program Educational Goals

No single method can evaluate the quality and effectiveness of program educational goals and related student learning; however, by thinking about the purposes of and audiences for educational goal assessment and the strengths and limitations of available data, we can arrive at a culture of assessment that incorporates multiple measures and focuses on improving student learning at the University of Delaware. Such a culture will provide a shared, university-wide framework with enough flexibility to align with the needs of colleges, departments, programs, and individual faculty members.

In order to successfully measure, document, and improve student learning across campus, the Task Force believes that a culture of assessment needs to be championed by the provost, deans, and faculty. To reflect the University of Delaware's academic mission, the provost must address program educational goal assessment reports with college deans during strategic planning discussions. In turn, the deans must hold department chairs and directors accountable for their programs ongoing and regular assessment. And because assessment requires faculty time, the Task Force recommends that adequate resources be made available for this important work.

The Task Force proposes an annual cycle for program educational goal assessment where each program, organized by a chair/director or faculty designee, collects and evaluates evidence of student learning aligned to a minimum of ONE program educational goal each year. Such efforts can then inform a program's academic effectiveness. The Task Force believes that the number of program goals, the frequency of reporting for any specific goal, and the timeline for revision of goals, once introduced, be left to the discretion of individual units, depending on their educational priorities and level of resources.

Proposed University-Wide Assessment of Program Educational Goals Form

- Which educational goal(s) have you elected to assess?
- Briefly describe the evidence collected to evaluate student learning related to the above goal(s).
- Describe the results of your review.
- Describe the process you used to disseminate these results to your program faculty and the process to facilitate discussion to determine curricula changes, actions, etc.
- What changes are you making, if any, as a result of your assessment? Such changes may be at the course, program, or department level.
- What type of support or resources, if any, are needed to make the changes at the course, program, or department level?

Conclusion

The Task Force on Learning Goals & Assessment's proposed Senate resolutions and university-wide program educational goal assessment processes will put the University of Delaware in line with Middle States Commission on Higher Education's standard on educational effectiveness assessment. In addition, the new assessment form when viewed alongside related strategic

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planning discussions, will create a framework for assessing program educational goals that is both sustainable and flexible enough to reflect disciplinary and departmental expertise. Our proposal leverages current systems, including annual strategic curriculum planning timelines, and uses existing software.

Our proposal is intended to provide high-quality feedback about program effectiveness to all stakeholders. We hope to foster a university culture that invests in excellent assessment and continuous improvement of program educational goals.

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Appendix A: Schedule of Consultations

- October 9, 2019: University of Delaware Registrar
- October 17, 2019: Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness
- November 5, 2019: Chair's Workshop
- November 6, 2019: University of Delaware Information Technologies
- November 26, 2019: University of Delaware Registrar & University of Delaware Information Technologies
- December 3, 2019: Faculty Senate Executive Committee
- January 9, 2020: University of Delaware Middle States Working Group 5 Co-chairs: Standard V, Educational Effectiveness Assessment
- January 21, 2020: Faculty Senate Undergraduate Studies Committee
- January 29, 2020: Faculty Senate Graduate Studies Committee
- February 10, 2020: Resolution on Program Educational Goals introduced to the Faculty Senate (planned)
- February 19, 2020: Coordinating Committee on Education (Planned)

Appendix B: University of Delaware Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning Rubrics for Program Educational Goals and Assessment Plans (January 2020)

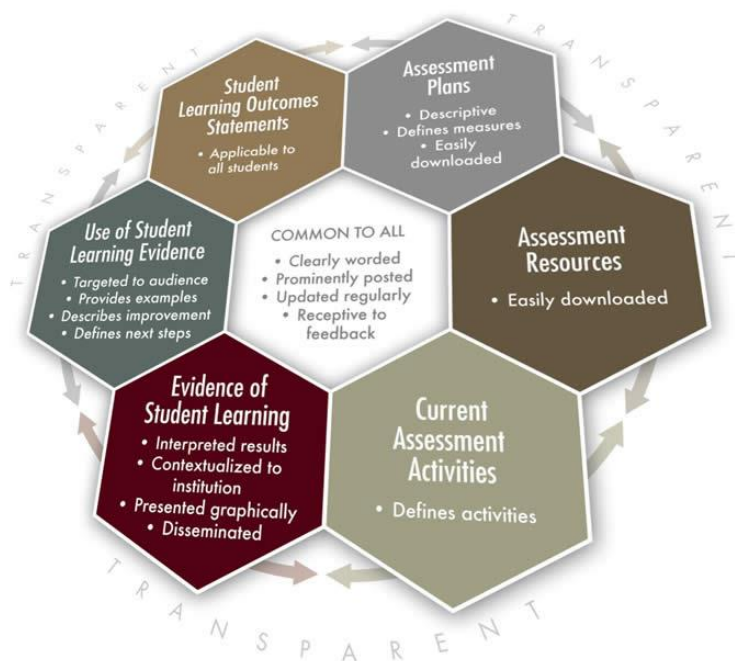Winter Institute on Learning 2020

Rubric: Assessment Plans

Criteria	4 points	3	2	1 point	0 points
Practiced	Assessments of student work and performance - in courses, during field experiences, in and out of class, etc. - evaluate the extent of student achievement of institutional and program educational goals.			Assessments are conducted but do not evaluate the extent of student achievement of institutional and program educational goals.	Assessments are not conducted.
Organized and systematic	Faculty in the program collaborate to create and use assessments of student work and performance that are meaningfully and effectively integrated to assess all program educational goals.			Assessments of student work and performance are conducted but faculty do little work to collaboratively create and use them or their results are scarcely integrated.	Assessments of student work and performance are conducted but faculty do no not collaborate to create and them and their results are not integrated.
Aligned	Assessments of student work in courses, in and out of class, are clearly aligned with or linked to institution- and program-level educational goals.			Assessments of student work in courses, in and out of class, are very poorly aligned with or linked to institution- and program-level educational goals.	Assessments of student work in courses, in and out of class, are not at all aligned with or linked to institution- and program-level educational goals.
Meaningful	Assessments of student work in courses, in and out of class, are clearly and effectively used for the improvement of the educational effectiveness of this program.			Assessments of student work in courses, in and out of class, are rarely and poorly effectively used for the improvement of educational effectiveness.	Assessments of student work in courses, in and out of class, may be done but they are not used for the improvement of educational effectiveness.

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Rubric: Program-Level Educational Goals

Criteria	4 points	3	2	1 point	0 points
Clearly stated	**Program-level educational goals clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind that students are expected to acquire in the specific degree program.**			**Program-level educational goals are indicated but are vague and unclear.**	**Program does not have educational goals.**
Integrated	Program-level educational goals appropriately incorporate and reinforce educational goals from the university, college, co-curricular, and *appropriate disciplinary values.*			Program-level educational goals are only integrated with educational goals from one of the following: the university, college, co-curricular, and appropriate disciplinary values.	Program-level educational goals are not integrated with any other educational goals e.g., the university, college, co-curricular, and appropriate disciplinary values.
Rigorous	Program-level educational goals reflect *a course of study that is appropriately rigorous for the students admitted to the program.*			Program-level educational goals reflect a course of study that is inappropriately demanding or too easy for the students admitted to the program but still able to completed by some students.	Program-level educational goals reflect a course of study that is completely inappropriately rigorous for the students admitted to the program.
Realistic	Program-level educational goals reflect a course of study that students are able to complete it within the *average/reasonable time-to-degree for that program.*			Program-level educational goals reflect a course of study that students are very unlikely to complete within the average/reasonable time-to-degree for that program.	Program-level educational goals reflect a course of study that students are completely unable to complete within the average/reasonable time-to-degree for that program.

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Appendix C: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment Transparency Framework

National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. (2011). Transparency Framework. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA).

The Transparency Framework addresses the question: How might assessment of student learning efforts be made more visible? One avenue adopted by many campuses is to share relevant information about student learning on the institutional website. Just as making student learning outcomes more transparent is a work in progress, so is this Framework. The Framework is not a checklist to be followed but rather a guide to suggest priorities and possibilities with an eye toward communicating meaningful information about student learning that will be useful to various audiences in an online format. An institutional website that is transparent conveys information of student learning in a clear and coherent manner to a target audience. The Transparency Framework provides guideposts to consider in online communication.

Examples are provided of institutions using the Framework in the Field, and the NILOA Featured Websites provide examples of elements of the framework in action.

Download the entire Transparency Framework here. Information on the background and development of the Transparency Framework can be found here.

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Appendix D: Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standard V

Standard V - Educational Effectiveness Assessment

https://www.msche.org/standards/#standard_5

Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.

Criteria

An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

1. clearly stated educational goals at the institution and degree/program levels, which are interrelated with one another, with relevant educational experiences, and with the institution's mission;

2. organized and systematic assessments, conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals, evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/program goals. Institutions should:

> a. define meaningful curricular goals with defensible standards for evaluating whether students are achieving those goals;

> b. articulate how they prepare students in a manner consistent with their mission for successful careers, meaningful lives, and, where appropriate, further education. They should collect and provide data on the extent to which they are meeting these goals;

> c. support and sustain assessment of student achievement and communicate the results of this assessment to stakeholders;

3. consideration and use of assessment results for the improvement of educational effectiveness. Consistent with the institution's mission, such uses include some combination of the following:

> a. assisting students in improving their learning;

> b. improving pedagogy and curriculum;

> c. reviewing and revising academic programs and support services;

> d. planning, conducting, and supporting a range of professional development activities;

> e. planning and budgeting for the provision of academic programs and services;

> f. informing appropriate constituents about the institution and its programs;

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       g. improving key indicators of student success, such as retention, graduation, transfer, and placement rates;

       h. implementing other processes and procedures designed to improve educational programs and services;

4. if applicable, adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval of assessment services designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers; and

5. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of assessment processes utilized by the institution for the improvement of educational effectiveness.

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