

Report of Academic Assessment Activities (2021-22 Academic Year)
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Introduction:

The Academic Assessment Committee (AAC) has been shifting from planning to implementation this year, although planning continues to be an important aspect of our work. Implementation of new assessment activities has proceeded down two parallel tracks under the auspices of the faculty Academic Assessment Committee. The first track is the assessment of the new Ole Core general education curriculum, making sure that every intended learning outcome (ILO) for every Ole Core attribute is carefully and repeatedly assessed in a timely manner. The second track is what we have called the Decennial Cycle of department and program assessment. This activity is designed to ensure that assessment activities focusing on departments and programs support in a timely way established college programs for the internal and external review of departments and programs.

GE Assessment:

This year, being the first year of the new Ole Core general education implementation, saw the AAC launch its first assessment of the new Ole Core, focusing on parts of the First Year Experience, specifically the two joint ILOs for the First Year Seminar and Writing and Rhetoric. These assessments are being led by program directors Heather Campbell and Diane LeBlanc. The assessment of the First-Year Seminar ILO concerning finding and citing appropriate references to sources and literature is being led by Jason Paul of the library staff.

In addition to the partial assessment of the First Year Experience ILOs, assessment of general education courses carrying the Social Sciences core attributes are being assessed. Faculty teaching such courses submitted artifacts from fall courses and will be submitting artifacts from spring courses once the term ends. These artifacts are from assignments addressing at least one of the three social science Ole Core ILOs. The artifacts will be scored with a common rubric by a team of faculty in early June at a workshop which includes training as well as the actual scoring. The results of this scoring exercise will be reported to the AAC for further distribution to the Provost, the full faculty and other interested parties.

In anticipation of this summer scoring exercise, a small "trial run" was undertaken in February using social science artifacts collected during the fall term. This trial provided the AAC with important information on scoring rates and training requirements. It also led to an unanticipated discussion about the ILOs for the social science Ole Core, a conversation which is likely to lead to a change in at least one of the intended learning outcomes.

Lastly, the AAC has created a calendar of Ole Core attributes to be assessed into the future. A tentative ten year calendar has been established to pace the general education related activities of the AAC into the future. Ole Core ILOs will each be evaluated at least twice during this ten year period. This calendar also serves as notice to the faculty teaching future Ole Core courses of upcoming assessment activities for their particular attributes.

Decennial Cycle Supporting Department and Program External Reviews

An important goal of the college is to offer departments and programs at St. Olaf an external review every ten years. (Some professional societies require accredited programs to be reviewed more frequently.) This practice gives departments and programs the opportunity to consider all aspects of their programs: majors, concentrations, general education service, internal organization, social events, appropriate research and teaching in established and emerging sub-disciplines, service to the wider St. Olaf community, personnel issues, etc. These reviews involve the writing of an extensive self study which itself includes information on the achievement of student learning outcomes. The newly implemented decennial cycle of department and program assessment aims to support departments and programs in the writing of their self study and to inform other points of discussion and information throughout the external review process.

To this end, the decennial cycle asks programs to write ten year assessment plans shortly after their external review is complete with the goal of using the review results to carefully consider and plan for assessment activities over the following decade. These plans are submitted to the AAC for comments and feedback, but remain under the control of the authoring department or program. The AAC offers guidance, but does not formally approve these plans. It is also possible for a department or program to amend their plan as time passes and issues rise or fall in significance. The AAC monitors adherence to these plans and offers assessment expertise to departments and programs as they implement their plans.

To launch this system it was necessary to recognize that departments and programs are already at different stages in their ten-year cycle of external review. For this reason the AAC placed all departments and programs into one of four categories based on the number of years until the department's or program's next scheduled review. The AAC then asked every department or program to submit an assessment plan for the period of time between the present and their next scheduled review. The specific instructions for these plans differed, slightly, between the four groups.

The AAC has received these plans and offered constructive feedback. The AAC will monitor adherence to these plans as time rolls on. Departments and programs are required to submit two to three interim assessment reports to the AAC over the course of the ten year cycle, the precise deadlines for these interim reports are set out in the department or program assessment plan. The portion of self-studies detailing assessment-related activities will also be forwarded to the AAC for its information and consideration.

This division of departments and programs into four categories is only necessary to start the decennial cycle program. Once a department or program has its next review, it will produce a full ten year plan and fall into the permanent rhythm of the regular decennial review process.