



## Updates on Academic Assessment Academic Assessment Committee Report May 2024

### Executive Summary

This report expands on the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) report the Academic Assessment Committee shared in February, discusses our progress on improving the OLE Core assessment process, and provides updates on a new collaboration with the Associate Deans in overseeing Decennial Cycle Assessment.

Expanding on some of the findings highlighted in the February report on the NSSE, this report discusses:

- Evidence from the Advising Module that suggests early signs of success of the *For Every Ole* initiative.
- Continued challenges in providing an inclusive environment where students of color, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities feel like they fully belong at St. Olaf.
- Trends that may point to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student engagement across difference, first-years' collaborative learning experiences, seniors' acquisition of work-related knowledge and skills, and students' perceptions of a supportive campus environment.

This report also summarizes the steps we've taken to improve OLE Core assessment based on experiences and lessons learned during the first two years carrying out this new assessment process. Finally, we share how the Academic Assessment Committee will partner with Associate Deans to support departments' and programs' Decennial Assessment Plans, helping build a stronger culture of academic assessment at St. Olaf.

## Full Report

### 2023 NSSE Follow-Up

In February, we reported on the 2023 National Survey of Student Engagement results. Here, we re-emphasize and expand on some of the findings highlighted in that report.

1. **The impact of the *For Every Ole* initiative.** *For Every Ole*, now the *St. Olaf Pathway* initiative that will be an integral part of carrying out St. Olaf's new strategic plan, led to several changes in our advising model. Specifically, we implemented a team-based approach to advising in Fall 2022, where first-year students were supported by their academic advisor, a Success Coach staff member, and peer leaders in their SOAR groups. Additionally, half of the incoming class was assigned to an advisor who was also one of their Fall course instructors, a model that proved successful<sup>1</sup> and was expanded to include two-thirds of the first-year class in Fall 2023.<sup>2</sup> Comparing first-year student responses on the 2021 and 2023 NSSE Academic Advising Module provides further evidence of the success of this new advising model:
  - a. First-year respondents in 2023 were more likely to respond positively about academic advising than those in 2021 on all items in the survey module. In particular, 2023 respondents were more likely to report that those involved with advising actively listened to their concerns, provided information about learning support services, and frequently discussed their academic goals, participation in co-curricular activities, and resources for their overall well-being.
  - b. Additionally, 2021 first-year respondents were significantly less likely to hold favorable views of advising than their peers at other institutions for most survey items, while 2023 respondents were similarly likely or more likely than those at other institutions to endorse these same items.
  - c. We will have an opportunity to learn more about the success of this team-based advising model for the NSSE 2023 first-years when they are surveyed again as seniors during the next NSSE administration in Spring 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> As of the Fall 2023 census date, students from the 2022 first-year cohort who had advisors who were also their instructors were retained at a rate of 96.1%, compared to 87.4% of students whose advisors were not also their instructors.

<sup>2</sup> An additional 18% of the incoming class in Fall 2023 were already assigned to a specific advisor through an existing program, such as SSS/SSSD and POSSE students.

- 2. The continued challenge of providing an inclusive environment for all students.** We continue to see in the NSSE data that students of color, international students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities feel a lower sense of belonging compared to their peers (especially among seniors). Most of these groups are also less likely to feel that advisors care about their well-being, actively listen to their concerns, or respect their identities.
  - a. This aligns with other surveys that have asked about belonging and inclusion, such as the 2021 National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates.<sup>3</sup>
  - b. The 2023 NSSE report was shared with the Thriving Innovation Team during the strategic planning process. Ensuring that all students feel a strong sense of belonging will be a key goal of the new strategic plan.
  
- 3. The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' experiences and development.** Looking longitudinally at NSSE allows us to understand more about this disruptive and challenging time in students' lives. In several areas, we saw an interesting pattern in students' responses across survey administrations, where there was a notable drop from 2018 to 2021 followed by a "recovery" in 2023. This suggests a potential impact of the pandemic on the following:
  - a. Engagement across difference, particularly interactions with those of different racial identities. This aligned with a similar pattern in first-year students' self-reported abilities to understand people of other backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>
  - b. For first-years, working collaboratively with other students on coursework and developing the skills to work effectively with others.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Compared to all students, there was a 26 percentage point gap for students of color, a 14 percentage point gap for first-generation students, and a 12 percentage point gap for students with disabilities when asked whether they felt included at St. Olaf.

<sup>4</sup> In 2018, 80% of first-year respondents reported frequently engaging in discussions with those of other racial/ethnic identities; this dropped to 71% in 2021 but returned to 80% in 2023. For seniors, the pattern was similar, though not as robust (2018: 77%, 2021: 68%, 2023: 73%). Additionally, 72% of 2018 first-year respondents indicated that their St. Olaf experience helped them understand people of other backgrounds. This fell to 62% in 2021 but returned to 72% in 2023.

<sup>5</sup> In 2018, 61% of first-year respondents said they had frequently asked other students to help them understand course material; this dropped to 52% in 2021 and rose to 58% in 2023. Additionally, 68% of first-year respondents in 2018 said that St. Olaf helped them develop skills to work effectively with others (this was similar for 2015 respondents as well). This dropped to 58% in 2021, but returned to prior levels (67%) in 2023.

- c. For seniors, their self-reported acquisition of work-related knowledge and skills.<sup>6</sup>
- d. Student perceptions of a supportive campus environment, which includes things such as academic support, opportunities to interact socially with other students and attend campus events, and support for students' well-being.<sup>7</sup>

## OLE Core Assessment

Our experience with two years of OLE Core assessment now allows us to anticipate and respond more proactively to make the assessment process more meaningful and effective. This Spring, faculty voted to approve changes to the Social Sciences Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) that will bring them more in line with expectations for introductory-level courses, following suggestions from the 2022 OLE Core summer scoring workshop team. Knowing that other OLE Core ILOs may face similar challenges, the Academic Assessment Committee helped initiate conversations among NSM chairs to look ahead to the planned assessment of the Natural Sciences OLE Core next year. These faculty submitted proposed ILO revisions to the Curriculum Committee in April. Revising the ILOs before this Core area is assessed next year will help guide faculty to develop stronger assignments prior to artifact collection, as well as focus assessment of the resulting student artifacts on the key skills and knowledge all students should gain from their NTS courses.

Additional actions taken as a result of what we've learned through OLE Core assessment include:

- Introducing new faculty to the OLE Core, and academic assessment more generally, during New Faculty Orientation.
- Conducting a prompt development workshop last Fall to reinforce the importance of structuring assignment prompts to more intentionally assess student learning within the OLE Core ILOs.
- Creating a resource page on the [Academic Assessment Committee website](#) to highlight effective assignment prompt examples from the OLE Core areas assessed so far.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2018, 63% of senior respondents reported that St. Olaf had contributed "quite a bit" or "very much" to this area (this percentage was similar prior to 2018 as well). In 2021, that dropped to 57% of senior respondents, but rose to 64% in 2023.

<sup>7</sup> There was a noticeable dip in this Engagement Indicator index, which combines responses across multiple questions, for first-year respondents (2018: 38.5, 2021: 33.6, 2023: 37.1) and a similar pattern for senior respondents (2018: 34.3, 2021: 30.9, 2023: 33.1).

- Working on changes to the CourseLeaf submission process for new OLE Core courses to promote a backwards design approach, where course proposers are asked to provide potential assignment prompts for each of the OLE Core ILOs their course will carry. This would serve to ensure continued alignment with the goals of the OLE Core and also save faculty time when they begin to actually design the course and syllabus.

Through the OLE Core rubric development teams and summer scoring workshops, we are also building assessment capacity and expertise among faculty, with several who will be participating in their third scoring workshop this June.

### **Decennial Cycle Assessment**

The chair of the Academic Assessment Committee, the faculty Director of Assessment, and the Assistant Director of Assessment met with the Deans Council in January to discuss an improved process for supporting department and program Decennial Cycle Assessment. Associate Deans will now have access to the planning document the Academic Assessment Committee uses to track department/program Decennial Assessment Plans and anticipate reporting years for each department and program. Associate Deans will check in with department chairs and program directors at the beginning of each semester to see what support they may need in moving forward with their Decennial Plan. The Associate Deans can also provide additional reminders about submitting assessment reports (due at the same time as department/program annual reports), which are intended to help build towards the next external review and will serve as resources for drafting the assessment section of the self-study. We believe this new partnership between the Associate Deans and the Academic Assessment Committee will help build a stronger culture of assessment and help departments and programs continue to make progress on their Decennial Plans.

### **Board of Regents Reporting Cycle**

Last year, the Academic Assessment Committee proposed an updated reporting cycle that was approved by the Board. This cycle better aligns with our new OLE Core assessment and Decennial Cycle programs by moving reporting on these assessments to Fall, following OLE Core artifact scoring and Decennial Cycle reporting in the summer. It also introduced a new timing for reporting on institutional surveys, which occurred during the February Board meeting this year. This provides more time to summarize survey results and incorporate institutional comparison data, as survey data and reports are often received near the end of the summer. However, it also presents a

challenge given that the Director of Assessment does not attend the February Board meeting and cannot relay back suggestions or questions from Board members that the Academic Assessment Committee might address in its Spring report. We would like to discuss possible alternatives for the Spring report, including perhaps moving Decennial Cycle reporting to Spring.