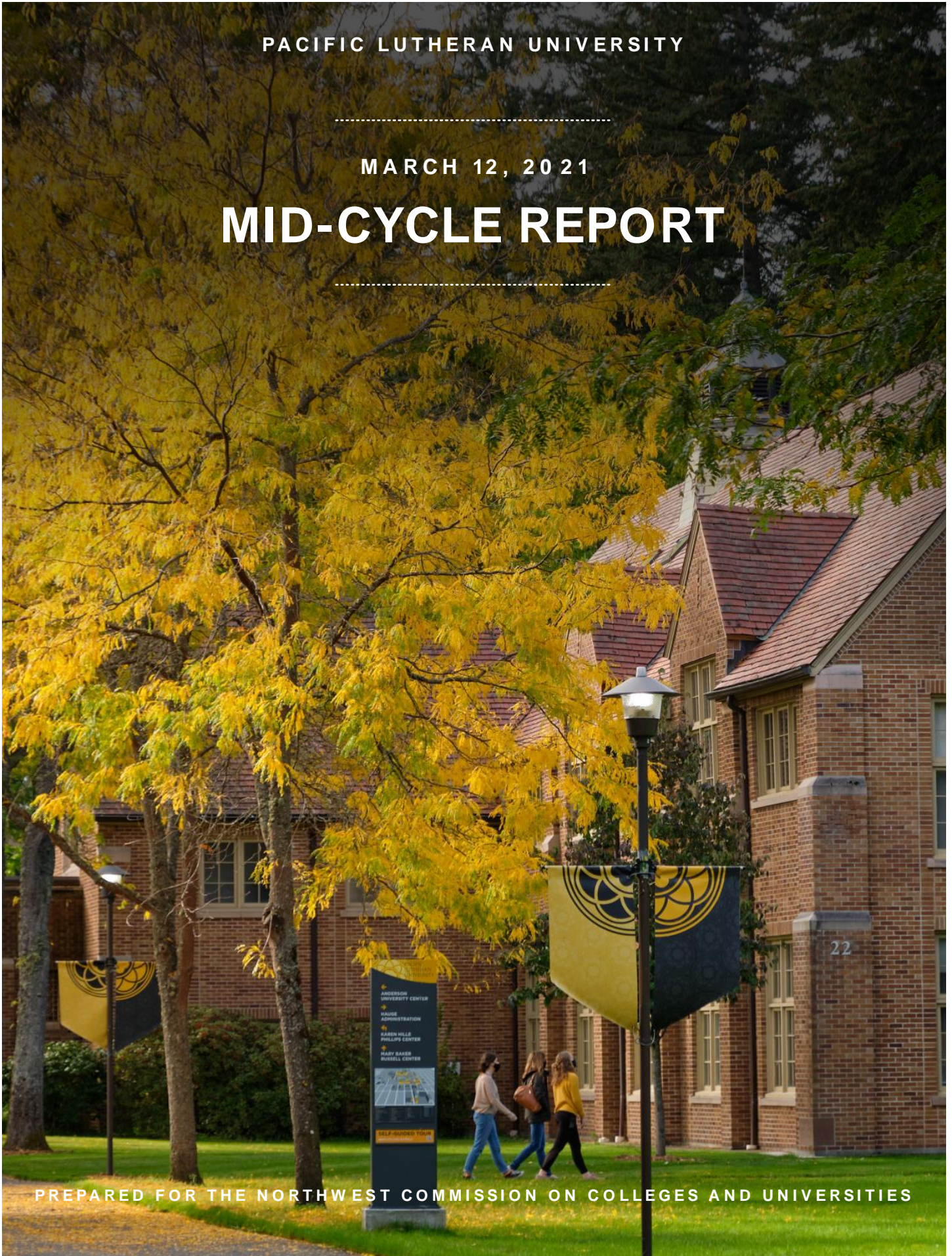


PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

MARCH 12, 2021

MID-CYCLE REPORT



PREPARED FOR THE NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Contents

PART 1: MISSION FULFILLMENT	1
Vision and Strategic Planning.....	2
Core Themes and Key Indicators	2
A Challenging Academic Experience	2
A Community of Care	3
A Culture of Service and Leadership	3
Continuous Improvement.....	3
Realizing Mission Fulfillment	4
PART 2: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT	4
Peer Identification Process	5
Pacific Lutheran University Comparable Peer List	6
Data Capacity	7
Data Utilization and Benchmarking	8
Vision and Strategic Planning.....	8
Core Themes, Objectives and Key Indicators.....	12
Quality Assurance	14
Student Achievement Summary	14
PART 3: PROGRAM ASSESSMENT	14
Learning Outcomes, Curriculum Maps and Multi-year Assessment Plans	15
Annual Unit and Assessment Reports.....	16
Periodic Program Review	16
Case Studies	17
First Year Experience Program	17
Biology.....	19
Case Studies Summary	22
PART 4: MOVING FORWARD.....	23
Planning for Success.....	24
CONCLUSION.....	24

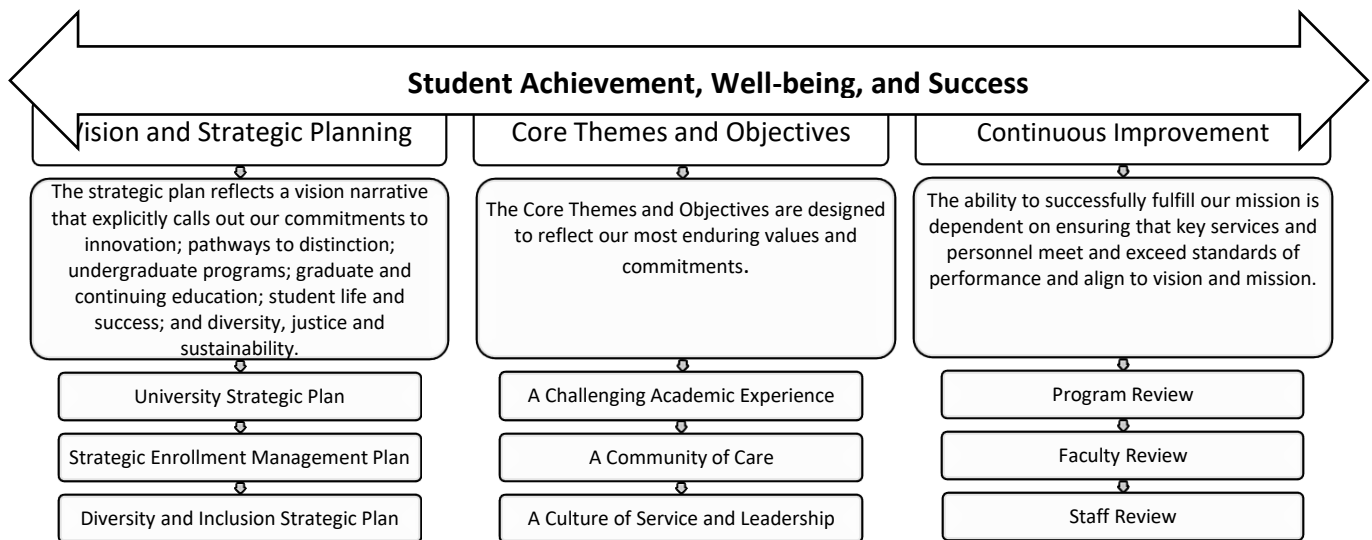
PART 1: MISSION FULFILLMENT

From its founding in 1890, Pacific Lutheran University has been an on-going collaboration of dedicated teacher-scholars, professional staff, and willing stakeholders convinced that an education that deepens students’ understanding, expands their horizons of imagination, and increases their range of freedom and opportunity, changes the world. That conviction, bequeathed by the institution’s Lutheran heritage, impels the university to educate in a way that contributes to the success of all students and openly embraces the world in all its complexity. We accompany students as they come to imagine more and better possibilities for themselves and their world. We mentor students as they explore and develop expertise in disciplines and professional fields. We connect students to experiences and relationships to advance their flourishing individually and in community.

Hence, our mission:

“Pacific Lutheran University seeks to educate students for lives of thoughtful inquiry, service, leadership and care—for other people, for their communities, and for the earth.”

The mission statement traces its origins to the early 1990’s as part of the first long-range planning process that resulted in PLU 2000: Embracing the 21st Century. Since that time, this single statement has guided the university through all aspects of subsequent long-range planning efforts (PLU 2010 and PLU 2020). Today it lies at the foundation of the planning process. The mission statement has a simplicity and clarity of purpose that is consistent across



all aspects of the institution. PLU strives to fulfill our mission through achievement in three distinct but overlapping pathways as expressed below.

Vision and Strategic Planning

Pacific Lutheran University aims to deepen our commitment to being an inclusive, rigorous and innovative university in the Lutheran tradition by providing access to a transformative, lifelong and distinctively purposeful education. As a distinguished, learning-centered university that integrates the liberal arts and professional studies, PLU will thrive by continuing to educate graduates who exemplify ethical character, care for others, global perspectives and thoughtful service to the common good.

Through the act of intentional planning, and through the deliberate execution of our plans, we progress in both the embodiment and the realization of our mission and vision. Completed in 2020, the current [University Strategic Plan](#) is organized around four overarching themes and corresponding goals: identity and messaging, environment and well-being, innovation and change, and resources and stewardship. These themes and goals were developed to reflect and extend upon key priorities and values expressed in parallel vision and planning documents: [the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan](#), the [Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan](#), and the [Academic Identity Statement](#). The strategic plan also reflects a vision narrative that explicitly calls out our continued commitments to innovation; pathways to distinction; undergraduate programs; graduate and continuing education; student life and success; and diversity, justice and sustainability.

Core Themes and Key Indicators

To best realize mission fulfillment, we work to ensure alignment between our [Core Themes and Objectives](#) and the University Strategic Plan. As both documents are designed to reflect the Institution's Mission and traditions, this alignment is anticipated to be natural. Unlike strategic planning which reflects a series of priorities at a moment in time, the Core Themes and Objectives are designed to reflect our most enduring values and commitments. Core Themes are also expressed in terms of the student experience - centering student achievement, well-being, and success at their core and in their measurements of achievement. The Core Themes and Objectives, and the specific outcomes identified in the University Strategic Plan, should complement each other, or duplicate as appropriate.

Our Core Themes are:

A Challenging Academic Experience

At Pacific Lutheran University, a challenging academic experience is expressed primarily through the undergraduate and graduate academic programs. The core curriculum, rooted in

the liberal arts and complemented by a strong array of disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs, provides students with an undergraduate academic experience that is both rigorous and flexible, creating a foundation for their lifelong vocations and career possibilities. Opportunities to engage high impact practices including study away, internships and student-faculty collaborations anchor these experiences. PLU graduate programs deliver intellectually challenging, collaborative learning experiences in specialized fields that assist students to reach their personal and professional goals.

A Community of Care

At Pacific Lutheran University, our mission calls for members of the community to assume the important responsibility to care for themselves and others, recognizing the interconnectedness of care for people, their communities, and the earth. Care is reflected in our efforts to provide an inclusive environment that welcomes and supports all, engages equity mindedness, and fosters a sense of belonging among its members. These efforts help the community to flourish, affirming the education of the whole person in body, mind and spirit, our Lutheran tradition, and our mission of care.

A Culture of Service and Leadership

At Pacific Lutheran University, we recognize that part of our vocational identity is grounded in our civic commitments and relationship with our community. PLU seeks to sustain a culture that models engaged and collaborative service and leadership among faculty, students and staff through shared governance and a tradition of collective decision making. Supported and surrounded by this culture we strive to foster the conditions and opportunities that develop the dispositions, skills and knowledge needed for students to grow into leaders who positively impact their current and future communities.

Continuous Improvement

A commitment to continuous improvement builds upon our culture of leadership and service and invites broad engagement into the process of imagining and reimagining our university programs. This broad engagement supports the flourishing of both individuals and the university. Continuous improvement is ultimately about mission fulfillment, ensuring the alignment and quality of programs, services, and personnel. The collection of data used to measure improvement occurs, to the greatest degree possible, on a regular and on-going basis as expressed in guiding documents, policies and procedures identified in the examples below.

- [Academic Program Review](#) (See Program Review Section)
- [Student Life Program Review](#) (See Student Life Program Review Schedule)
- [Faculty Activity Reporting and Review](#) (See Rank and Tenure Information)
- [Staff Performance Review](#) (See Performance Management section)

Continuous improvement measures center around supporting the focus and quality of programming efforts, as well as the accomplishments of personnel and students. Program reviews occur across the campus, particularly in the Academic and Student Life divisions, and all personnel engage in on-going reflection and evaluation through annual and/or periodic evaluation and goal setting. These processes, and the utilization of key findings from them, vary by review type and purpose.

Realizing Mission Fulfillment

At present we lack the infrastructure to fully monitor and track our achievement on mission fulfillment. The President's Council is in the process of operationalizing the Strategic Plan by identifying target dates, responsible parties, and key metrics by which to measure progress. This work will continue through the current academic year and will include the identification of the specific changes to the institutional organization, personnel and policies needed to sustain the work. Currently, any monitoring and tracking we do typically center on discrete projects and tasks and must be done through a loosely articulated process that involves Institutional Research, the President's Council, and the Long-Range Planning Committee. While these parties have been able to weigh in on or influence specific elements of strategic planning work, they are not well positioned to support a systematic and sustained commitment to monitoring progress moving forward.

PART 2: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Student Achievement is evaluated, in part, through careful collection and consideration of key achievement indicators. While high level quantitative measures do provide a basis for comparison with peers, they carry the limitation of not accounting for other documented contributions to student achievement, among them student well-being and the unique experience of place and community. For this reason, student achievement is best monitored through a combination of traditional measures that can be compared to peers, as well as through more nuanced, internal assessments that help us understand the "why" behind a trend or observation seen in these high-level data. Internal surveys, reports, focus groups and other forms of formal and informal feedback also serve to help assess how our programs and services impact student achievement, inform institutional effectiveness, and align with our pathways to mission fulfillment.

A recent example of how internal data and reflection informed our progress occurred as part of an applied project in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program. The project evaluated the awareness of and satisfaction with Lute Telehealth (virtual counseling service). Findings affirmed that the resource is increasing access to students who would not have accessed mental health resources otherwise (45% of users) and that overall awareness of the resource is

still limited and requires another educational campaign. The DNP student, PLU Active Minds club, and Student Life are continuing to collaborate on that opportunity.

Peer Identification Process

As an institution we had not identified or utilized a consistent set of widely applied comparable peers until this report prompted us to do so. Historically the work of engaging in peer comparisons emerged organically out of the questions and challenges posed to committees and working groups, the reflective work of administrative councils and advisory groups, and the illumination of issues that surface in program reviews and annual assessment reports. As such, the selection of comparison institutions used was similarly inconsistent. We recognize the history of this work as being periodic and episodic – while still appreciating the potential these moments have demonstrated. An example of this was during the creation of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan in 2018, which emerged out of the work of the Strategic Enrollment Management Advisory Committee (SEMAC). The need for a more organized, systematic and data informed direction related to admission and enrollment at the institution was a direct result of the promise and limitations the committee had previously experienced in leveraging data points to illuminate discrete and disparate concerns. As we realize a revisioning of our structure and resources around mission fulfillment, we also anticipate being able to articulate the expectations around what types of projects should leverage peer comparison data as a strategic element of the work.

Placing our own performance in context with our peers and reviewing that achievement against internal goals on a regular basis allows us to understand our progress as a function of our own accountability and as our contribution to a larger shared purpose. To best serve the needs of the university at large, different comparison group configurations may be required as benchmarks for different questions. The university recognizes a formal set of ten comparable peer institutions, and maintains a larger list of similar, but less tightly matched peers. In addition, we recognize and support the use of specific competitive and aspirational lists that may be unique to groups and projects. The following operational definitions guide the development and use of such lists.

Comparable Peer Institutions are those peers identified as overall most similar to PLU on the key indicators described below. This is the university's primary peer group that is used for NWCCU Student Achievement purposes. Whenever possible and appropriate, this list should be used for the purposes of identifying peer(s) for program review.

Competitive Institutions are defined as those colleges and universities that compete for students and resources and will be used as appropriate by select PLU constituents. These lists are shared with Institutional Research. This includes lists that might be generated by consultants who are hired to provide external perspectives on various elements of our operations.

Aspirational Institutions may be defined as needed by PLU constituents to drive reflection and improvements. Aspirational institution lists are submitted to Institutional Research when used.

National data (aggregate) will be used as a barometer for progress in mission fulfillment when needed. National Peer comparisons may be filtered (e.g., by Carnegie classification) to provide a clearer picture for comparison purposes.

To establish the Comparable Peer Institutions list, an initial broad list of peer institutions was generated from previous lists used in analysis of competitor schools, survey reports, (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement - NSSE), IPEDS benchmarking via the Data Feedback Report (DFR), and regional associations (e.g., Independent Colleges of Washington - ICW). This list of nearly 50 institutions was discussed by the President and Vice Presidents and was initially reduced to 27 after consideration of salient variables (e.g., public vs. private, size, religious affiliation).

Using the most current available IPEDS data (2017-2019), a quantitative comparative analysis was done of the 27 institutions comparable to PLU using 54 metrics from categories of enrollment, demographics, retention/graduation, student finances/aid, and institutional finances. Some examples include:

- Enrollment
 - undergraduate, new-first year, graduate as a percent of undergraduate, FTE
- Demographics
 - percent of students of color, women, out-of-state residents
- Retention/Graduation
 - first-year retention rate, 4- and 6-year graduation rates
- Student finances/aid
 - tuition, total price, net price, discount rate, percent of students with aid
- Institutional finances
 - endowment, FTE, expenses/revenues per FTE, salaries

With PLU as the basis, schools were compared using an absolute difference on each metric. The top ten were flagged in each comparison and the ten institutions with the most occurrences were identified as PLU's primary peer institutions. Those institutions are listed below and also appear on the [Institutional Research website](#).

Pacific Lutheran University Comparable Peer List

- Augsburg University
- California Lutheran University
- Capital University
- Carthage College

- Hamline University
- Pacific University
- University of Redlands
- Seattle Pacific University
- Valparaiso University
- Whitworth University

The Comparable Institutions Peer List is reviewed annually by the President’s Council, which includes representation from all major divisions of the university. In addition, any Competitive Lists or Aspirational Lists used by internal constituents during the previous year are cataloged and reviewed for the purpose of informing future peer groupings.

A more comprehensive list of peer comparison data points related to student achievement are maintained in a peer comparison spreadsheet that is generated through the Institutional Research office. These data points stem from IPEDs data and are updated throughout the year as new data is published. The intent of maintaining this data set is to allow for peer comparison data requests to be generated on demand and in house. Additionally, [an IPEDs Peer Institution Data Feedback Report](#) specific to our comparable peers list provides a summary of peer comparison data and is made available to all PLU employees through the Institutional Research website.

Data Capacity

The current University Strategic Plan calls out the importance of improving and leveraging our data utilization capacities and more directly connecting data to establishing institutional priorities and allocating resources. This need is articulated in the strategic initiatives under the Resources and Stewardship theme:

1. Review scope of work and tasks across all roles and areas of responsibility in order to determine what work can be eliminated, achieved differently or prioritized differently.
 - a. Develop an impartial and data-informed process by which the university will undertake a systematic and collaborative review and prioritization of programs and resources.
 - b. Review operating procedures across units to identify potential strategic investments that could lead to more efficient operations and savings.
 - c. Expand the use of software to automate some processes and accomplish work more effectively.

Included in this effort is the careful consideration of how to best organize and leverage human resources in the areas of Institutional Research, Assessment, Accreditation and Institutional

Effectiveness. One FTE (full time equivalent) has been added to the operating budget beginning next academic year to support the work related to Institutional Research and Institutional Effectiveness. The exact configuration of this position will be finalized in summer 2021, following the NWCCU Visit and Report. We hope that the feedback provided by the Commission might include suggestions on how to best define the new position. A [review of staffing levels and structures](#) used by our comparable peers has been a part of this discussion and decision-making process.

Data Utilization and Benchmarking

To identify and make meaningful use of the wide array of the potential peer comparisons available, we rely on the priorities set forth in our various strategic planning and vision documents. Our goal is to elevate specific data points of value to best focus our energy to acknowledge our own performance achievement and gaps. In setting specific goals or targets regarding mission fulfillment, we are committed to benchmarks that are at or above the median when compared to our peers. Below we provide a series of examples that demonstrate how we are using both internal and peer comparison data to guide us toward mission fulfillment.

Vision and Strategic Planning

In the area of Strategic Planning, our Strategic Enrollment Management Plan includes the following goal:

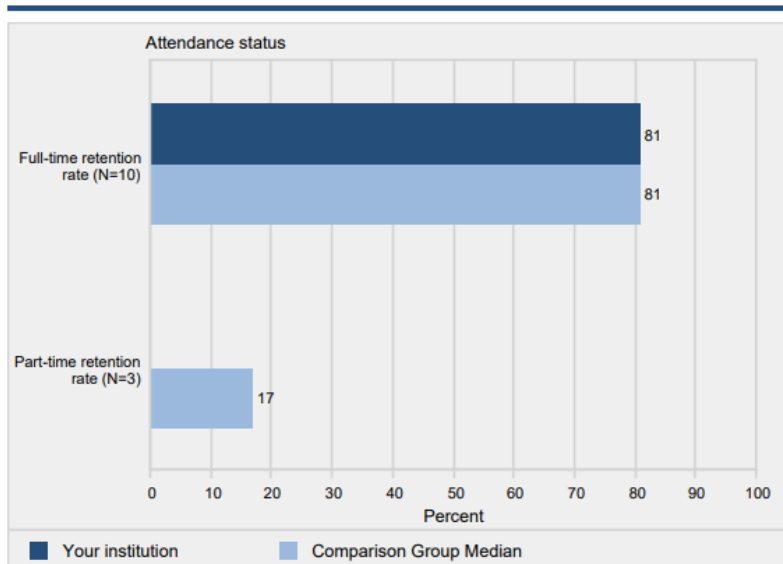
Goal 2.1: By fall 2023, PLU will achieve a first fall to second fall retention rate for all racial and ethnic groups that is equal to at least 90% of the retention rate of White students. By fall 2023, PLU will achieve a 4-year graduation rate for all racial and ethnic groups that is equal to at least 80% of the 4- year graduation rate of White students.

In this case, disaggregated data is used to evaluate our progress, trigger deeper reflection, and position our success in comparison to our peers. Specific data identified as relevant to this goal include internally reported trends in retention disaggregated by race and ethnicity, a peer comparison of overall institutional retention rates, as well as four- and six-year graduation rates disaggregated by race and ethnicity. To align these data to the specific SEMAC goal and to provide clear and meaningful comparisons, the data used also provide a way to compare groups with the lowest retention rates (currently students of color) to that of the highest rate (currently white students). In this instance the Strategic Enrollment Management Advisory Committee can use the comparative data as they track and monitor progress as part of their regular and on-going work. Relevant sample data is provided below, and the full disaggregated data set used for this comparison is located on the [Institutional Research webpage](#).

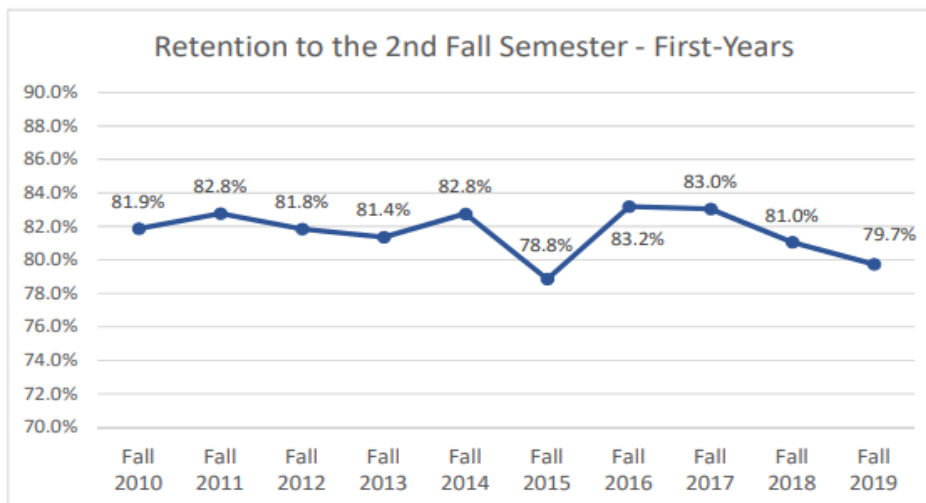
Retention Rates (overall)

IPEDS Data Feedback Report 2020

Figure 21. Retention rates of first-time bachelor's degree seeking students, by attendance status: Fall 2018 cohort



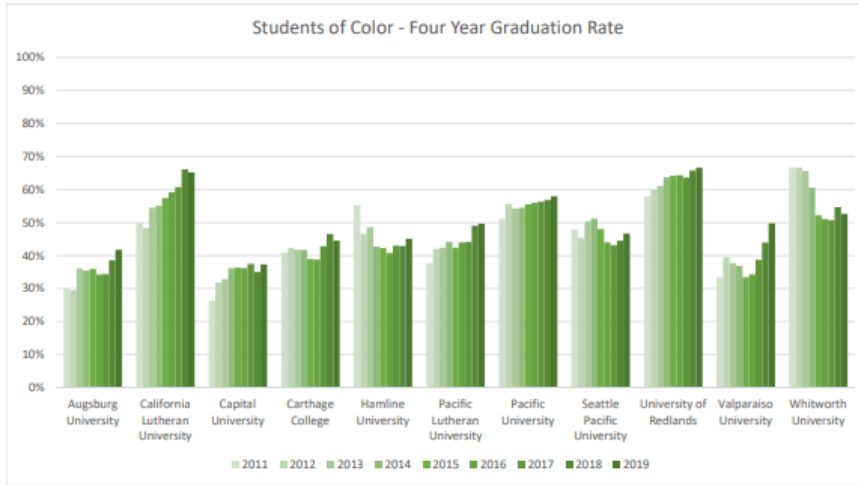
Internal Data (overall retention trend)



The most recent available IPEDS comparison data shows that our first-time, first-year retention rate is the same as the median of our peer institutions, however more recent internal data shows our retention rate has declined.

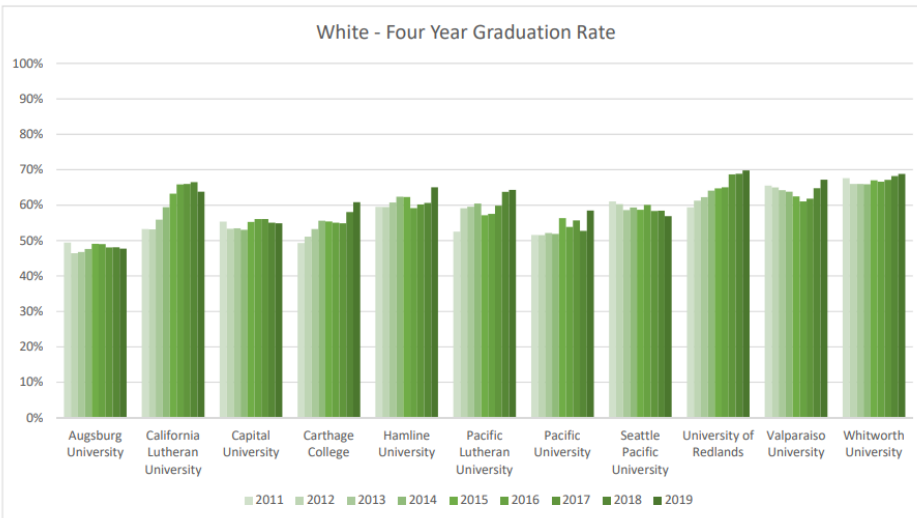
Four Year Graduation Rates for Students of Color

Students of Color



	Four Year Graduation Rate									2019 rank
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Augsburg University	30.0%	29.5%	36.1%	35.4%	36.0%	34.3%	34.4%	38.6%	41.8%	10
California Lutheran University	50.0%	48.4%	54.5%	55.1%	57.5%	59.2%	60.7%	66.1%	65.2%	2
Capital University	26.4%	31.8%	32.9%	36.2%	36.3%	36.2%	37.5%	35.1%	37.3%	11
Carthage College	40.9%	42.3%	41.8%	41.7%	39.0%	38.8%	42.9%	46.6%	44.5%	9
Hamline University	55.3%	46.6%	48.6%	42.7%	42.3%	40.8%	43.0%	42.9%	45.1%	8
Pacific Lutheran University	37.6%	42.1%	42.4%	44.1%	42.4%	44.0%	44.1%	49.0%	49.6%	6
Pacific University	51.3%	55.7%	54.3%	54.5%	55.6%	56.0%	56.3%	56.8%	58.0%	3
Seattle Pacific University	47.8%	45.3%	50.3%	51.2%	48.1%	44.0%	43.1%	44.5%	46.7%	7
University of Redlands	57.9%	59.9%	61.1%	63.7%	64.2%	64.4%	63.7%	65.8%	66.7%	1
Valparaiso University	33.3%	39.5%	37.7%	36.9%	33.4%	34.3%	38.7%	43.9%	49.8%	5
Whitworth University	66.7%	66.7%	65.6%	60.6%	52.2%	51.1%	50.7%	54.7%	52.6%	4

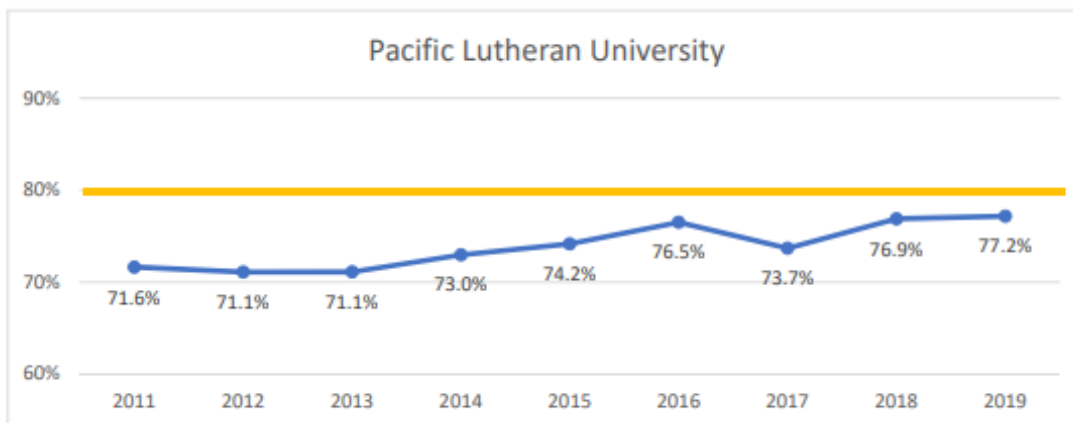
Four Year Graduation Rates for White Students



	Four Year Graduation Rate									2019 rank
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Augsburg University	49.5%	46.4%	46.8%	47.7%	49.1%	49.0%	48.1%	48.1%	47.7%	11
California Lutheran University	53.3%	53.2%	55.9%	59.4%	63.3%	65.9%	66.0%	66.5%	63.8%	6
Capital University	55.4%	53.3%	53.5%	53.0%	55.2%	56.1%	56.1%	55.0%	54.9%	10
Carthage College	49.3%	51.1%	53.3%	55.6%	55.4%	55.1%	54.9%	58.1%	60.8%	7
Hamline University	59.5%	59.5%	60.8%	62.4%	62.3%	59.2%	60.2%	60.6%	65.0%	4
Pacific Lutheran University	52.5%	59.1%	59.6%	60.4%	57.2%	57.5%	59.9%	63.8%	64.3%	5
Pacific University	51.6%	51.5%	52.1%	51.9%	56.3%	53.8%	55.7%	52.7%	58.5%	8
Seattle Pacific University	61.1%	60.3%	58.6%	59.3%	58.7%	60.1%	58.3%	58.4%	56.9%	9
University of Redlands	59.4%	61.2%	62.2%	64.1%	64.8%	65.0%	68.7%	68.8%	69.8%	1
Valparaiso University	65.5%	65.0%	64.2%	63.8%	62.4%	61.1%	61.8%	64.8%	67.2%	3
Whitworth University	67.6%	66.0%	66.0%	65.9%	67.0%	66.6%	67.1%	68.2%	68.8%	2

Four Year Graduation Rates for Students of Color as a Percentage of White Students

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Augsburg University	60.7%	63.5%	77.2%	74.4%	73.4%	70.0%	71.6%	80.2%	87.5%	
California Lutheran University	93.9%	91.0%	97.5%	92.6%	90.9%	89.8%	92.0%	99.5%	102.3%	
Capital University	47.7%	59.5%	61.5%	68.2%	65.7%	64.5%	66.8%	63.7%	68.0%	
Carthage College	83.0%	82.8%	78.5%	75.0%	70.4%	70.4%	78.1%	80.2%	73.2%	
Hamline University	92.8%	78.4%	79.9%	68.5%	67.9%	68.9%	71.5%	70.7%	69.3%	
Pacific Lutheran University	71.6%	71.1%	71.1%	73.0%	74.2%	76.5%	73.7%	76.9%	77.2%	
Pacific University	99.4%	108.0%	104.2%	105.0%	98.6%	104.0%	101.1%	107.8%	99.2%	
Seattle Pacific University	78.3%	75.2%	85.9%	86.3%	81.9%	73.2%	73.9%	76.2%	82.1%	
University of Redlands	97.5%	97.8%	98.2%	99.5%	99.2%	99.0%	92.7%	95.6%	95.5%	
Valparaiso University	50.9%	60.7%	58.7%	57.8%	53.6%	56.2%	62.6%	67.8%	74.1%	
Whitworth University	98.6%	101.0%	99.4%	92.0%	77.9%	76.7%	75.5%	80.2%	76.5%	



While the three-year graduation rate of the four year average for students of color seems to be in the median of our comparable peers, we have not yet met the specific target identified in our SEMAC strategic plan.

Core Themes, Objectives and Key Indicators

As we worked through the process of defining mission fulfillment for the purposes of NWCCU accreditation, we reaffirm our commitment to our long-standing Core Themes and Objectives. The core themes represent our enduring values and are reflected in the preamble to the University Strategic Plan. The review of the themes and objectives resulted in some consolidation and reorganization, and the recognition that many key indicators must be revised by appropriate committees and offices for future use. Select examples of objectives and associated key indicators are provided below for the purpose of illustrating our orientation and use of data when tracking our progress. Peer comparison data is only referenced when it is appropriate to the key indicator identified, and some peer data from past reports (e.g. NSSE) do not yet reflect our revised set of comparable peer institutions.

Core Theme 1: A Challenging Academic Environment

Objective 3: Undergraduate and graduate students will engage in one or more high impact practices.

Key Indicator 1: Every undergraduate student participates in at least one high impact practice.

Methodology: NSSE

Benchmark: 100% participation by the time of graduation

The [2020 NSSE data](#) indicates that 96% of seniors have participated in at least one high impact practice with culminating senior experiences, service learning, internships, and study away as the most frequently occurring opportunities. It is also apparent that the disaggregated data do not provide a clear picture of the differential ways in which race or ethnicity might impact these opportunities (for example: no black students responded to this question). These data help us to understand that while seniors at PLU have engaged in at least one high impact practice at rates that are higher than the comparative groups listed, there remains a small number of PLU students indicating they have not participated in these practices. Working to identify what groups these students might represent, and what might need to be done to ensure more equitable opportunities for all students, is a next step toward reaching our stated benchmark.

Core Theme 2: A Community of Care

Objective 2.2 Strengthen and support the safety, holistic health, and well-being of the campus community in service to student learning and success.

Key Indicator 1: Students are aware of and utilize available mental health services.

Methodology: Healthy Minds survey and mental health services utilization data, DNP doctoral project data

Benchmark: At least 60% of students indicate awareness of PLU mental health resources available to them, % of students using resources match % of students indicating that they need or are interested in using resources

Key Indicator 2: There is an improvement in the proportion of students experiencing positive mental health.

Methodology: Healthy Minds survey

Benchmark: Positive trend in data, including a 5% improvement in positive mental health ratings biannually.

As an institution we recognize that mental health is a concern that has been exacerbated by the global pandemic and that PLU students tend to trend higher in diagnosis of mental health concerns and in overall use of services, compared to peers, even prior to COVID-19. For example, Timely MD, our Lute Telehealth provider, shared that PLU students are using telehealth Counseling resources at an annualized utilization of 37% of our population compared to a benchmark of 20% utilization at other small private schools (TimelyMD utilization data, January 2021). In addition, two questions on the Healthy Minds Survey provide us with data snapshots that allow us to understand how students are doing and that also permit us to adjust education and resources in response. Responses to the positive mental health question (Flourishing Scale) on Healthy Minds Survey shows currently indicate that 31% of students experience positive mental health as measured by a rating of at least 48/56 on the scale. Our goal is for the proportion of students experiencing positive mental health to steadily increase, with at least a 5% increase occurring between every biannual survey administration. Similarly, in response to the question indicating knowledge of mental health resources on campus, 52% of PLU students (compared to 55% of students nationally) agree or strongly agree that they “know where to go to access mental health resources from school.” Our goal is for a solid majority of 60% of students to report that they know where to go to seek help as PLU’s understanding of our student population reinforces that we need a larger proportion of students who do know about resources, both to meet their own needs and to refer peers.

Core Theme 3: A Culture of Service and Leadership

Objective 3.2: Students develop and practice the dispositions, skills and knowledge needed for impactful service and leadership through curricular and co-curricular opportunities.

Key Indicator 1: Students have the opportunity to participate in community engaged learning.

Methodology: NSSE

Benchmark: 66% of all seniors will have indicated participating in community engaged learning experiences

Not all majors are equally suited to specific service-learning opportunities, and while we have considered requiring service-learning designated courses in our Core Curriculum, both faculty resources and oversight of such an endeavor have proven too challenging. We strongly encourage that such opportunities be built into the curricular and co-curricular experiences and we strive to have at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of our students formally engage in these intentional learning

opportunities. This benchmark also exists in the broader context that PLU students are also actively engaged in community service and volunteer work individually and through their respective clubs, organizations, and teams. Taken together, we view these as opportunities that can seed lives of thoughtful service among our graduates.

Quality Assurance

In this instance, disaggregated peer comparison data could provide the context into which internal data points can be positioned. For example, while we may not be able to compare graduation rates by degree program across peer institutions, we can situate a department's graduation rate against our overall university graduation rate as well as our peers' graduation rates to reflect on the department's overall contribution to student success.

In addition, the existing program review process both supports and may require external evaluation to help situate findings in a larger context. This meets the same spirit as expectations to utilize peer comparison data. In some instances, direct data comparisons with peer institutions may be possible. For example, using specific peer comparisons on the NSSE survey can allow us to better understand our students' sense of safety on campus which might help further triangulate data in the context of a review of the Campus Safety office.

Student Achievement Summary

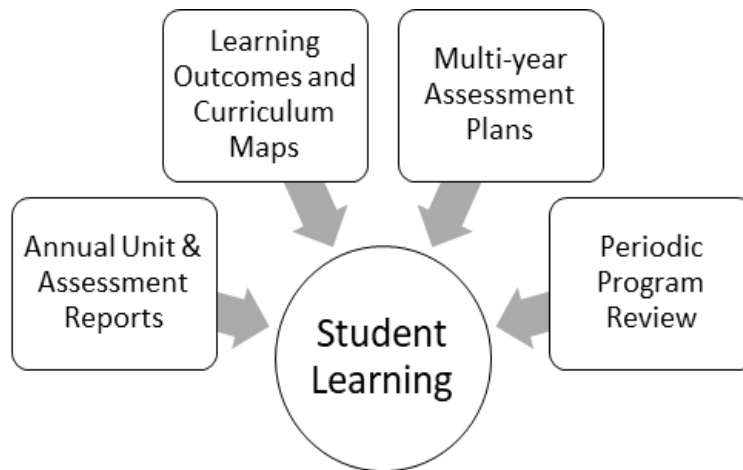
We recognize the need to develop clear timelines, reporting cycles, responsible parties, and expectations for follow through when it comes to effectively leveraging data to inform decisions, resource allocation and growth. This represents a stretch for our existing Institutional Research capacity and will require considerable reflection and care. The specific need to identify, collect, distribute, manage, and communicate peer review data, and to infuse that practice into the ethos of the university, is a prime example of why we must first prioritize the work of shoring up our human resources and capacity - and represents the type of work that will fold into the portfolio of the professionals appointed to the work. We plan to reorganize our institutional effectiveness structure and enhance our capacity in late summer. As such, we anticipate a slightly longer timeframe, stretching into the Fall of 2021 and winter of 2022, for the full and systematic understanding of data tracking and peer comparison data usage to emerge. We are hopeful that the feedback we receive following the mid-cycle evaluation will help bring clarity to our thinking on these fronts.

PART 3: PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Assessment in the Academic Division has developed and improved on a gradual upward trajectory over the past ten years. While challenged by small setbacks and delays, a robust system of assessment that supports improved student learning is now solidly established, with

each element described below. Included in this gradual but persistent improvement of assessment work has been the development of meaningful learning outcomes, the establishment of curriculum maps and the development of multi-year assessment plans for all majors and degree programs, as well as for the Core Curriculum. In addition, the Academic Division has continued its long-standing practice of requiring annual unit reports and assessment reports from all units and has implemented a program review cycle for all academic programs. Finally, specific attention has been placed on the careful management of the Core Curriculum, including the regular review of learning outcomes and assessment findings by an elected faculty committee.

Program Assessment Overview



Learning Outcomes, Curriculum Maps and Multi-year Assessment Plans

All academic programs have established student learning outcomes that align to [institutional learning outcomes](#), inform their curriculum offerings and design, and frame on-going assessment work. Learning outcomes are reviewed by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Curriculum with the assistance of a faculty advisory group. Learning outcomes are available on all department home pages (see example: [Religion Learning Outcomes](#)), as well as on the [Assessment web page](#) and updates to learning outcomes occur as part of the annual reporting process.

Learning outcomes are aligned to each program's curriculum using [curriculum maps](#). These maps also identify the key assessments that are part of each unit's [Multi-year Assessment Plan](#). These plans help to ensure that each unit is adequately and regularly assessing all of its stated learning outcomes. Curriculum maps and assessment plans for all units are available upon request via a Google Shared Drive.

Annual Unit and Assessment Reports

All academic majors, as well as the Core Curriculum, are required to submit Annual Unit Reports and an annual Assessment Report. The Annual Unit Reports provide executive summaries of key achievements within each academic unit for a given year. Assessment Reports focus on the reporting of assessment activities, associated findings and action steps. An example of an [Assessment Report for the department of Religion](#) is provided. Each program uses methods and strategies that are appropriate to their respective disciplines when doing assessment work and the use of authentic, embedded assessments are encouraged. Five years of past reports for all units are available for review as needed.

Periodic Program Review

In 2019 the Academic Division began to implement a seven-year cycle for periodic program reviews. This review process has experienced previous failed launches but received a renewed commitment following our NWCCU Year Seven report. The Provost convened a Program Review Team to develop a comprehensive and sustainable process that was subsequently implemented with an initial cohort of three undergraduate programs (History, French and Francophone Studies, and Religion) as well as three graduate programs (MSMA, MSF, MBA). The review process is delineated in the [Program Review Process Guide](#). All reviews occur over a 1–2-year period and consist of a [comprehensive self-study](#) and internal review which is then followed by an [external evaluation](#). The [Program Review Schedule](#) ensures the timely review of all units.

During the implementation of this process, we learned important lessons about the procedures, expectations, and efficacy of the work. For example, in the case of the Religion program the process successfully illuminated the program’s strengths and general weaknesses, provided a comprehensive look at program assessment over time, and raised questions about how to best assess Religion in the context of general education versus the major. As a department, Religion has engaged in in-depth analysis of qualitative data related to student performance in capstone. The struggle to fully assess the impact of the required religion courses in General Education emerged in this process. The need to reflect more deeply on the unique contributions that religion can play in the Core Curriculum and consideration of how to best leverage that contribution became the proposed focus for the external review process (pending completion). These findings are summarized in the [Religion program review summary](#). The Program Review Team also realized that the framing of certain questions and directives in the self-study guide failed to elicit the depth of reflection desired - especially around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This resulted in revisions to be made to the [original program review guidelines](#). These results also underscore the need for a more in-depth approach to the development of types of evidence sought, and more importantly, how to more deeply analyze, interpret, and take action.

Case Studies

Two case studies portraying assessment processes are included in this Mid-cycle Report: The First-Year Experience Program (FYEP) and Biology. The First-Year Experience Program reflects the evolution of on-going assessment work; essentially, it represents the implementation of responses from the Commission's reviews in 2008 regarding the need for learning outcomes and assessment over time. The program has developed a model of reviewing student work via rubrics designed to reflect learning outcome expectations in a collaborative, faculty-driven model. Biology is also highlighted to provide a description of the Periodic Program Review Cycle implemented in 2019. Both units have embraced the on-going revision of learning outcomes and curricula in response to student learning, albeit in quite different ways. Our goal is to demonstrate the working design of our assessment program while highlighting the flexibility it offers to individual departments and programs to represent their pedagogies and expectations for students. Assessment data, as available, is offered from 2010-11 through 2019-20.

For each case study, we provide a process narrative describing themes emerging, with an accompanying table of data points that summarize practices and findings.

First Year Experience Program

The [First-Year Experience Program \(FYEP\)](#) at PLU is unique in its cross-curricular design; that is, the expectation is that faculty from various disciplines will participate in teaching FYEP courses. Currently a two-semester requirement, students take a writing-focused seminar in the Fall (101), and an introductory discipline-focused course in either J-term or Spring (190). The program provides on-going opportunities for curricular and pedagogical development by the faculty who consistently teach in the program.

The First-Year Experience program began to consider a "common assignment" approach for the writing seminars in 2008. The current model began in the 2010-11 academic year and has continued to provide a method of consistent review and adjustment of the program based on student learning via outcomes.

In reviewing the data over the past ten years, the following themes emerge, with a range of actions taken in response. An FYEP [Summary Table of Results](#) is also provided.

1. Program Design

- Learning outcomes. The program has three layers of learning outcomes: programmatic, specific to 101, and specific to 190. Student learning is assessed within the two courses. Over the years, revisions to all outcomes have occurred:

Program outcomes in 2016, 101 outcomes in 2018, 190 outcomes in 2013 and 2016. Discussions of student learning informed the design of a rubric that could best capture four years of learning development. How the common assignment is designed to align to specific learning outcomes created lively discussion and spurred on-going curricular and pedagogical shifts. The rubrics themselves have also been revised over time.

- Curricular offering/scaffolding. Scheduling FYEP courses was under the purview of deans and chairs who could offer 101 and 190 sections as they saw fit within the broader context of their major/minor/general education offerings. This resulted in an inconsistent introduction to writing and an inconsistent student experience. Emerging literature regarding first year seminars as being impactful to student success, coupled with our own internal data that pointed to those students who took 101 in the spring fared less well via learning outcomes assessed, encouraged faculty to consider a more scaffolded curricular model. In Fall 2015, the majority of 101 sections were offered in the Fall, with J-term and Spring reserved for 190 sections.
- Curricular design: 101. While always robust conversation around the development of student writing abilities and skills, the past five years have brought more focus to the alignment of the common assignment to the learning outcomes. Essentially, does the assignment offer students the opportunity to demonstrate what we hope they have learned? Much discussion around the role and dependence of reflection (in early interactions, the only route for information), how we communally define “reflection” (we don’t, really), and the consistency of expectations across instruction led to a variety of revisions to the common assignment, to our own expectations, and to the development of supportive pedagogical materials for faculty. Workshops around syllabus design, incorporation of reflective techniques, and the importance of the status of the common assignment itself (e.g., more than an “add-on”) have been made available to support faculty.
- Curricular design: 190. The ownership, focus, and status of FYEP 190 courses has long been a source of tension. Many departments have defined their contribution as one important avenue for gaining majors. Often, these offerings are introductory courses required for either their own majors or other majors (e.g., ECON 101, SOCI 101), and, given that, determine that their focus must remain on disciplinary learning outcomes in preference to those laid out for 190. Faculty buy-in to the FYEP outcomes and focus, and participation in the common assignment, remained spotty over time. The Cornerstones General Education pilot program (a Mellon-grant initiative) provided the opportunity to consider

ways to strengthen student learning via scaffolding to create a more “common” experience between the two courses. Using this student learning data, as well as continued support from the literature on high impact practices, the program has begun to draft a new course, FYEP 102, focusing on Diversity, Justice, and Sustainability as an introduction, and the first of a two-course requirement.

2. Assessment process and practice.

- Model. The model for assessing student learning via samples of student writing, read by a team of faculty, and scored via a faculty-designed rubric, have served the program well. During pandemic times, finding ways to conduct these assessment practices have been developed, though we worry about losing the conversational aspect of this faculty development model.
- Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data. As a result of the 2018-19, and 2019-20 reports, finding ways data to triangulate has been a priority. A draft of a student survey to provide contextual background information has been developed.
- Organization and structure for data collection over time. The process of trying to gather up the data over the past ten years has, again, emphasized our lack of on-going oversight and structure for annual reports. Ten years ago, assessment reports were appendices to annual reports submitted by chairs; the final copies are inconsistent at best, sometimes as one document, sometimes as three, and everything in between. Supplemental documents within the program are also not easily discovered due to inconsistencies in naming.

The Ad Hoc Assessment Committee has continued to discuss this issue, as it is common across all units at PLU. The assessment report has been shifted to a Google form for submission; there is on-going conversation around the viability of organization and access within our current options of a Google Drive and/or Sakai (our LMS).

Biology

Biology majors at PLU remain among the most popular. The department also provides service courses for Environmental Studies, Kinesiology, Nursing, and Social Work students.

The Biology faculty have prioritized assessment of student learning over the past ten years, slowly developing a solid foundation of consistent data points and processes for review and implementation. A key component to their work has been the utilization of a departmental assessment committee, organized by the chair to include 2-3 faculty members. As a

department, data collected and analyzed by the committee is reviewed, and decisions for implementation and next steps are made. Annual retreats are scheduled prior to the beginning of the next academic year, allowing faculty to review data and analyses from their colleagues to determine revisions/changes to curricula.

The focus on student learning, via outcomes and usable data, is consistent across their documentation. Faculty initially decided on key data points predicted to be critical in understanding student progress, essentially at the beginning of the program, a common mid-point for all students, and the final capstone. As well, the faculty chose a range of tools, including a normed exam for content knowledge, writing in the discipline, and student perception feedback that allows for triangulation of data. These data represent key intervals of student learning, reflecting the viability of their curriculum in support of these expectations. Their current assessment plan includes solid data points and instruments, developed through their review process over the past years. While they are quick to admit that some years do not yield the results and/or initiatives they prioritized for various reasons, the Biology Department embodies the shift of faculty culture into understanding, perhaps embracing, the critical role of best practice assessment in successful student learning.

The following themes emerge from the data and are also represented on the [Biology Summary Table of Results](#).

1. Attention to Learning Outcomes. The Biology department has continued to use their learning outcomes as the benchmark for learning success for students. They consistently refer to the recommendations from their professional organization regarding breadth, depth, scope, and sequence to ensure a robust curriculum as well as opportunities for student learning to be successful. A university-wide review of learning outcomes ensued in the 2018-19 academic year, where the department looked closely at the accessibility of their outcomes resulting in a set of outcomes while pared down, were clearer in their purpose and results.
2. Development of clear data points for assessment of student learning outcomes. The department's current assessment plan reflects their on-going development of clear and strategic data points across the path toward degree completion for students. Clear outcomes are mapped across major courses and include both data on student learning and student perception. Data points include a) initial data of content learning in the two required foundational courses, b) analysis of writing development across the curriculum in preparation for capstone writing, c) review of capstone projects, and d) an exit survey for insight into student perception of their experience.

- a. Focus on content knowledge outcomes. The Biology Department offers a strong example of the positive influence of professional organizations in providing leadership and support in efforts toward assessing student learning. Following the best practices as described through discipline specific reports (see [Vision and Change](#)), faculty have used this tool to design, and reaffirm, the suitability of their learning outcomes. The department has continued to focus on discovering ways to measure student outcome of specific content knowledge. Initially, they developed and implemented their own exam, used at the beginning and end of the introductory Biology sequence (BIOL 225 and 226). Over time, they have moved into utilizing a normed exam, GenBio-MAPS, which helps both in understanding how students progress internally and provides comparative, normed data. These data have been instrumental in developing consistency across sections, as well as curricular adjustments to provide students with experiences to enable success. In particular, the department has embarked on deeper analysis of the following: 1) transfer student preparation as it impacts their success in foundational courses; and, 2) identified discrepancies in background preparation between students who take the fall or spring semester of the introductory course, resulting in changes to curricular offerings (e.g., reducing class size for increased support in the spring entry sections). Revisions to capstone experiences continue to be on-going from these data points.
- b. Focus on writing in the discipline. As early as the 2013-14 academic year, the department began a conversation on the role of writing in their discipline, seeing this as both a critical learning outcome for their graduates and an additional data point through which to gauge student success. In Summer 2014, a consultant conducted a workshop with the faculty, and the quest to integrate and assess writing across their major as an important data point began. This initiative has, indeed, become a quest, in that it has been slow in development due to a wide range of interferences. However, their reporting documents a consistent and careful path that includes reviewing of student papers for benchmarking purposes, the development of assignments and a rubric, and finally the gathering of data over the 2019-20 academic year. The department is well poised to fully implement this component of their assessment plan during the 2021-22 academic year.
- c. Student perception as an additional lens into the student experience. The faculty value input from students and have long included some form of exit survey in the capstone course. In 2016-17, the assessment committee developed an instrument to be used consistently, the Biology Graduating Majors Survey. They continue to work on participation rates.

- d. Follow-through on issues emerging from data. As an example, the faculty determined from their review of data in 2014-15 and 2015-16 that transfer students entering the major were not as successful as four-year students. The faculty determined an additional set of data for analysis in the 2016-17 academic year, and reported on a list of strategies, revisions, and changes that were implemented beginning 2017.

During the 2020-21 academic year, the Biology Department is engaging in composing Phase I of the Program Review process. Because of reduction in force initiatives, all program review work has been extended through to Fall 2021 for completion.

Case Studies Summary

The exercise of creating these case studies has been helpful in acknowledging both strengths and challenges to our assessment efforts over the past twelve years. The FYEP program reveals the consistent development of an assessment protocol, attention to learning outcomes and specific student learning expectations as documented through a common assignment. On-going and evolving discussions by faculty have led to an increasingly sophisticated alignment and deeper look into actual student learning. The iterative process that emerges across the case study demonstrates this growing understanding. Importantly, the FYEP process has become the core of faculty development for assessment strategies as it “lives” across the curriculum. The assessment work of the Biology program provides an overview of their specific context and their assessment journey, again describing a consistent growth in sophistication toward understanding both expectation and outcome for their students. Importantly, the department provides examples of translating data into “big ideas” (e.g., offering better support for transfer students).

These case studies also remind us that assessment is not “one size fits all”, thus requiring a flexible infrastructure and support system. Clearly, faculty continue to grow in their sophistication of seeking data that best reflects their expectations, though an important goal in our assessment processes is providing support for faculty to dig deeper into student learning evidence. We also realize we need to think through the next steps of both data collection (organization and access) and data analysis: that is, what do these assessments tell us holistically about our academic programs? This effort is tied to our periodic program review. As we move all academic programs through this process over the next five years, the Program Review Team, Provost’s office, and Assessment Committee will be charged with independently evaluating the impact and quality of our assessment work as an academic division.

PART 4: MOVING FORWARD

As we look to the future, we seek to find solutions to some of our largest gaps while committing ourselves to the practices and infrastructures that have, and continue, to serve us well. Our efforts in response to multiple NWCCU reports has resulted in elevating the work of assessment in the Academic Division. Creating a culture of assessment has been an on-going effort and a point of significant achievement. Continuing to support this work with dedicated administration, faculty governance, and faculty development opportunities remains a top priority. Recent demonstrations of this commitment include the creation of the Core Curriculum Committee, the appointment of an Instructional Designer and weekly communications on pedagogy in the Provost's Faculty Newsletter.

Assessment in the Student Life Division continues to be a point of institutional strength. This work takes place at the program and learning activity level with data sources feeding divisional and institutional understanding of student experience. Data and information are used to triangulate learning and to emphasize where priority attention needs to be paid. This engagement with closing assessment loops has cultivated a synergy of purpose that also supports greater collaboration, stewardship of resources, and capacity for creative problem solving. An on-going commitment to continue this work in a way that interacts with strategic priorities remains a central focus.

In addition to our achievements in program assessment, our structure also reflects the student-centered nature of our commitment to mission fulfillment. We look at ourselves critically and do not experience the same protectiveness of boundaries that exists at other universities, allowing for an organizational structure that best serves mission and purpose. For example: a purposeful synergy connects our current students more closely with our alumni in our Division of University Relations. It makes sense that those relationships are held together in [University Relations](#) because the purview of that area is constituent relations in total, and, simultaneously, it reflects how students are centered across the university.

An example emerging from this student-centered structure is seen in our effort to engage more robustly with our alumni base in understanding the fulfillment of our mission. As graduates of our programs who have experienced and have engaged with our institutional culture, we believe alumni are in a unique position to provide a powerful mirror into which we can view the impact of our work. An annual alumni survey is currently being developed that will allow us to capture alumni perceptions related to the value of our mission in their lives today, as well as examples of how mission is manifested in their vocations and lives. With input from numerous campus constituents and an external consulting group, the Mission Fulfillment Survey is scheduled to run every February for five years beginning in 2022.

Planning for Success

Our primary gap, or set of gaps, center around questions about how to best position the work of accreditation and institutional effectiveness, broadly defined, within current and changing organizational structures and declining budgets and staffing. We acknowledge an overall lack of resources associated with accreditation, internal communication, and data management. Our current success in moving this work forward exists and exceeds expectations primarily because of the people currently holding key administrative positions and their ability to work collaboratively and transparently toward common goals. It is understood that such a system is fragile and that dedicated resources are needed to advance the work in meaningful ways. It is also clear that such a commitment will help the institution succeed in the long term because the work associated with mission fulfillment is, in fact, the work required for our long-term viability and success.

At this stage we have identified a handful of key priorities that need careful consideration. Additional priorities may yet emerge, however, any forward progress on mission fulfillment seems dependent on solving for these challenges first:

1. The establishment of a clear organizational structure to support the overall work of university mission fulfillment and university accreditation.
2. Investments in data support and institutional research, both in terms of human resources and data management systems.
3. Clarification of, and mechanisms for, monitoring progress on core themes and key indicators.
4. The establishment of clear peer and internal benchmarks relative to student achievement data (at or above the median for our peers) and a mechanism for the appropriate public dissemination and targeted use of this data.

CONCLUSION

At this stage, it is apparent that there is more than one way to understand, and thus to realize, an aspirational mission statement such as ours. The articulation of mission fulfillment as a combination of achieving strategic initiatives, monitoring progress on core themes and objectives, and attending to the alignment and quality of our programs and individual efforts, allows us to articulate some reasonable and measurable ways in which we might reflect on our work holistically and in conversation with each other. Mission fulfillment as expressed here is not intended to limit the imaginative work that the mission itself is designed to inspire.

The current moment in time also serves as a clear illustration of how quickly momentum, progress and vision can be upended. The need to prioritize and address the comprehensive challenges associated with managing COVID-19 has delayed our progress and has created a

unique set of realities in which we must now position the work of mission fulfillment. Financial strain, enrollment declines, reductions in force and operational restructuring have all risen to the top of our collective commitments.

The challenge of managing the impacts of COVID-19 has also provided a window into the ways in which our mission lives in our daily work. In the early stages of the pandemic members of our community manifested our mission of service when our Division of Natural Sciences and our School of Nursing donated their supplies of PPE to local hospitals in support of the critical shortages that crippled early medical responses. As the pandemic moved into the Fall of 2020, our community of care was evident when faculty were given agency and choice in how they wanted to best serve their students - being supported in their choice to teach fully on-line or with on campus face-to-face elements. Our leadership and civic engagement in Pierce County have also been evident throughout the pandemic as we worked in collaboration to establish mitigation measures, including hosting free community testing events on campus. In these ways, even as priorities and energies shift, our mission presents itself in the ways in which we approach challenges and work together to create paths forward.