



Spring 2020 Report on Assessment

April 2020

Full Report

This report is divided into two sections. The first details current efforts by the faculty Assessment Committee to implement changes to St. Olaf's assessment program, both for general education and the assessment cycle for departments and programs. The second section summarizes the process and results of the four-year assessment cycle activity for 2018-19: the assessment action year for all academic programs.

Changes to the St. Olaf Academic Assessment Program

In the summer of 2018, as part of a program review of assessment, two external reviewers spent two days meeting with major stakeholders and participants in assessment at St. Olaf. The report we received from the reviewers contained many thoughtful recommendations for ensuring that St. Olaf's assessment program continues to be mission-driven, meaningful, and manageable. Based on these recommendations, the Assessment Committee has been working to implement changes to general education assessment and the assessment cycle for departments and programs.

General Education Assessment

In December 2019, the Assessment Committee worked with the GE Task Force to recruit and assign teams of faculty (and staff where appropriate) to create Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for the sixteen requirements of the new OLE Core general education curriculum. Teams were made up of one Assessment Committee member, one GE Task Force member, and at least one subject matter expert for each of the GE requirements (typically two) assigned to the team. These ILO writing teams submitted draft documents to the Assessment Committee at the beginning of February, and the full faculty was invited to review and comment on the documents from February 27th through March 2nd via a poster session and an online form. Additionally, the Assessment Committee worked with *To Include is To Excel* leadership to identify a group of students to review the ILO documents for clarity and inclusivity of language. The Assessment Committee is currently integrating faculty comments as appropriate and compiling other comments that the Committee cannot address to pass to the Curriculum Committee for consideration alongside the ILO documents themselves. As of the writing of this report, 4 ILO documents have been approved by the Curriculum Committee and the remaining 12 are under Curriculum Committee review. Following Curriculum Committee approval, the documents will be presented to the faculty for a vote.

In addition to the ILO development process, the Assessment Committee utilized FLC Professional Development Grant funds to design and host a faculty workshop in January for scoring first-year writing student assignments. The motivation behind this workshop was to pilot a method of direct assessment using student work samples as a potential new model for general education assessment. While not all outcomes lend themselves well to this type of assessment, analyzing student work products (as opposed to students' self-reported knowledge on a survey, for example) when possible allows for greater insight into students' knowledge and skills.

Seven first-year writing faculty provided student essays for the January workshop. Because planning for the workshop began before the new GE curriculum was passed, the Assessment Committee chose to focus on a current GE requirement likely to exist in some form in the new GE curriculum. From the student essays submitted, we selected a random sample of forty for scoring. With the help of faculty teachers and scholars of writing, the Assessment Committee developed a common rubric for faculty to use to score the essays. Eight faculty, including two Assessment Committee members, participated in a workshop over three half-days. On the first day, Writing Program faculty led the group through a norming exercise to build consensus on applying the shared rubric to the student assignments. During days two and three, faculty worked in pairs to score ten student essays per pair.

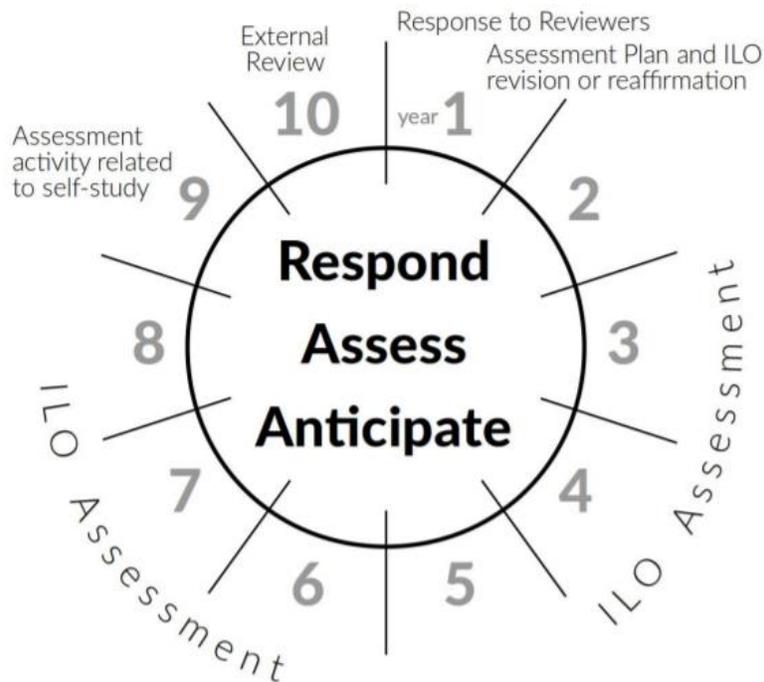
Feedback from faculty participants was overwhelmingly positive, and many saw the experience as an important professional development opportunity. The remainder of this academic year, and likely part of the next given the current uncertainties, will be devoted to finalizing GE ILOs and introducing the new decennial assessment cycle for departments and programs (described in further detail below). Next year's Assessment Committee will undertake further reflection on the feasibility of scaling up the GE assessment method piloted in January once the new ILOs are approved.

Decennial Assessment Cycle

The other major area of revision to St. Olaf's academic assessment program concerns the previous four-year assessment cycle of general education assessment; assessment of academic majors; assessment of concentrations, conversations, and other academic programs; and an assessment action year. In light of suggestions from our external reviewers, the Assessment Committee has developed a new decennial assessment cycle for department and program-level assessment. This new assessment cycle will follow individual departments' and programs' 10-year external program review cycle. This will better allow assessment to serve a meaningful role, as departments and programs will be able to use their external reviewers' recommendations in a more intentional way to plan their assessment activities for the next decennial cycle, creating an assessment plan tied to the questions and goals that have emerged as a result of the program review process. Providing this increased flexibility should help reduce the perception that assessment is something imposed upon departments and programs,

especially given that the prior four-year cycle requires all faculty to adhere to the focus of that year's assessment activity (e.g., majors). The decennial assessment cycle model will allow for greater faculty control of assessment and better tailoring of assessment to department and program needs.

Below is an illustration of the general guiding principles of the decennial assessment cycle and how it will operate in parallel with the program review cycle. Department chairs and program directors received this diagram along with a detailed description of the expectations for the new decennial cycle in early March (see Appendix A for a copy of this document).



The Assessment Committee intended to workshop the decennial cycle with department chairs and program directors at the March 19th Academic Leadership meeting, but the COVID-19 disruptions necessitated postponement of that meeting. The Assessment Committee plans to reschedule their presentation for an Academic Leadership meeting in the fall.

2018-19 Assessment Action Year

Program Participation

Number of academic programs¹ with completed assessment reports: 34 out of 56 programs (61%)

¹ In addition to all academic departments and programs, this also included International and Off-Campus Studies, Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum (FLAC), Libraries – Research & Instruction, and Student Support Services

Of the 22 programs without completed assessment reports:

- Three indicated they were not submitting reports due to a lack of time or staffing to conduct a project the previous year.
- Two indicated plans to submit late reports by the end of the fall semester or early January, but didn't respond to additional follow-up emails.
- The remaining seventeen chairs and directors never responded to the report submission reminders or additional follow-up emails.

Assessment Action Projects

Table 1 summarizes the types of action projects conducted by all programs for which an assessment report was submitted.

Focus of Project	Number of Programs	Percentage of Assessed Programs ²
Course/pedagogical changes (e.g., change in assignments, learning outcomes, readings, course description, or assessment criteria for a single course)	17	50%
Curriculum redesign (e.g., adding or removing courses, changing major requirements, revising program ILOs)	15	44%
Curriculum map or analysis of student trajectories through the program	7	21%
Other programmatic changes (e.g., staffing, budget needs, faculty development)	5	15%
Planning future assessments or developing new assessment tools	5	15%
Closing the loop (i.e., assessing impact of prior curricular changes)	4	12%
Changing co-curricular offerings	2	6%
Enhancing advising practices (e.g., career advising)	2	6%
Continuing with current practices (no changes made/anticipated)	2	6%

Nearly all programs that participated (94%) implemented some type of curricular or pedagogical change, such as adding one or more courses, changing requirements for the major, or altering the content of a specific course. Another common action project, undertaken by 21% of reporting programs, involved creating a curriculum map or analyzing student trajectories through the program to identify gaps in providing opportunities for students to

² Percentages add up to greater than 100% due to some programs reporting on projects that fit multiple categories

achieve the intended learning outcomes or otherwise progress through the major/concentration.

Other departments or programs utilized prior assessment data to make staffing or budget changes or plan faculty development opportunities. Additionally, several used the action project year to plan for future assessments, develop new assessment tools, or “close the loop” by assessing the impact of prior curricular changes. Finally, a few programs made changes to their department’s or program’s co-curricular offerings or advising practices, and two determined that no changes were needed at this time.

Within their action projects, several programs also considered issues of equity and inclusion, reflecting the current initiatives on campus in service of these goals.

Department and Program Examples

To further illustrate the variety of assessment action projects departments and programs undertook, we provide a few more detailed examples below.

The Classics department and Ancient and Medieval Studies program had previously assessed the level of students’ basic cultural knowledge relevant to each program (part of their Intended Learning Outcomes) and found that students acquired a satisfactory amount of knowledge. However, in light of both GE reform and the goals of the *To Include is To Excel* initiative, faculty wanted to push their pedagogical creativity in thinking about how they could engage students more actively in their learning. Faculty across the department and program experimented with various active learning techniques, such as role-playing in the classroom, engaging students in writing and acting out their own short plays, inviting students to immerse themselves in the cultural lifestyles they were studying, and implementing an Academic Civic Engagement component in a course. Feedback from students and faculty has been very positive, and the department and program plan to continue developing innovative teaching strategies while also measuring their effectiveness in promoting student learning.

Management Studies developed a new course, Organizational Storytelling, to address prior assessment findings that students need greater support in developing a convincing argument and presenting it in a compelling way. Students “explore the craft of storytelling and study a variety of media (analogue and digital) on which the story can be delivered.” The course uses client-based projects as one of the main educational activities. The Management Studies program plans to use assessment of student learning in this course to make improvements for when it is taught again next year.

The German department initiated extensive changes to their curriculum based on past assessment results, including a new upper-level course sequence for majors, revisions to other upper-level courses, strengthening of the language requirements for concentrators, and restricting off-campus courses that count towards the major to those conducted in German. As a pre-post measure of the impact of these changes, the department asked all graduating majors

and concentrators in 2016-17 and 2018-19 to take the nationally normed ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview. The results indicated more advanced language proficiency among students who graduated under the new curriculum. The department also hosted an Assessment Forum to learn more about students' comfort levels with different types of communication, reactions to the curricular changes, and suggestions for increased student engagement across language courses. The department plans to continue refining their curriculum and assignments, offer more opportunities for students to practice speaking German, and more intentionally incorporate ideas around language proficiency into their language course sequence. The chair noted in her assessment report that "College mandated and financed assessment has enabled us to learn about our program and its effectiveness with students in a way that would not have been possible from simply reviewing course assignments or even interviewing individual students."

The Psychology department engaged in two major action projects. First, every faculty member revised at least one course in order to increase diversity and inclusivity of content throughout the curriculum and not only in the courses that carry MCD/MCG GEs. Second, the department enlisted the help of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment to map students' trajectories through the major, identifying enrollment patterns by demographic groups and looking for any disparities in access to particular courses, especially advanced-level research. The department is continuing work in these areas, as well as undertaking a curriculum audit to ensure its course offerings "reflect the breadth of psychology and current issues in the field."

From a student transcript analysis, the Linguistic Studies program found that students' course selections for completing the concentration were, on the whole, supportive of the program ILO that students "[understand] the interconnectedness of the study of language and other disciplines." However, they also discovered that the most common majors of their concentrators aligned with the departments that offer the bulk of the level-three courses approved for the concentration. In response, Linguistic Studies applied for additional FTE to support offering two level-three DUR courses to provide opportunities for students from a wider range of majors to explore the concentration. The program plans to continue seeking funding to be able to offer a level-three course on a regular basis.

Summary

In accordance with St. Olaf's four-year data collection schedule, the focus of program-level assessment in 2018-19 was the assessment action year. The intention of this year in the cycle is to provide all academic departments and programs with time for reflection on past assessment activities and implementation of changes in response to assessment findings. Ideally, departments and programs would "close the loop" on assessment by returning to changes made and assessing their impact on student learning (either within the action year period or at a later time). In October 2019, programs were asked to submit reports to the Assistant Director of Assessment in the Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IE&A) office. These reports

asked chairs and directors to describe the assessment results they considered in designing their action year project, the specific intervention or changes they made, and their next steps (see Appendix B for a copy of the report template).

As illustrated above, departments and programs took a wide variety of approaches in responding to assessment findings during the action year: Some added or modified courses, others gathered further data in the form of a curriculum map or student trajectory analysis, and still others used assessment results to plan future assessments, determine staffing or budgetary needs, or add/modify co-curricular offerings. Nevertheless, the Assessment Committee received reports from just over half of all departments and programs. This is a much lower response rate than the previous action year, and likely reflects some of the issues with the four-year assessment cycle that the new decennial cycle hopes to address.

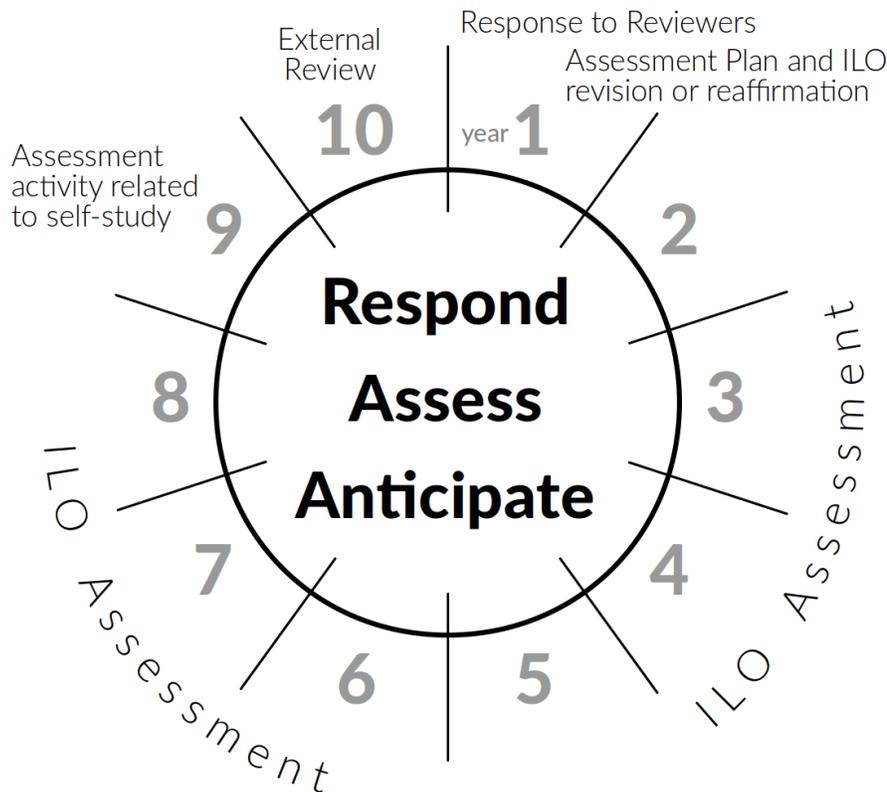
Specifically, encouraging departments and programs to create a long-term assessment plan will help bring assessment more front of mind and assist with continuity during chair or director turn-overs, alleviating last-minute scrambles to respond to yearly requests for assessment data and preserving knowledge about the department or program's recent assessment activities. In addition, giving departments and programs the flexibility to set their own reporting deadlines, while also decreasing the number of reports submitted overall, will help ensure that the Assessment Committee receives more thoughtful, rich assessment reports. In addition, while some requirements will need to be met by all departments/programs to ensure continued compliance with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation criteria (such as requiring that all Intended Learning Outcomes be assessed at least once throughout the cycle), the new decennial cycle may actually allow us to provide the HLC with better evidence of the use of assessment information to improve student learning if departments and programs are able to design their own assessment plans based on current concerns.

Appendix A: Program/Department Decennial Assessment Cycle Description

The new Assessment Plan and Decennial Cycle is designed to make assessment relevant to your department/program’s long-term goals, to directly link short-term assessment activities with the full cycle leading up to and following your program review, and to ease your workload by allowing your department/program to craft a long-term assessment plan that is most appropriate for your needs. Assessment activities, and a department or program’s response to assessment, is one important aspect of every self-study. Under this new plan, *your department/program* is the primary relevant audience for your assessment data.

The new Assessment Plan works on a Decennial Cycle linked directly to your department/program’s external review cycle. In brief, your department/program will develop a ten-year Assessment Plan following your external review, integrating assessment activities with department/program goals and recommendations from the program review. In turn, assessment work done during the years leading up to the next program review will directly support your next self-study and help your department/program prepare for that review.

The Assessment Plan will be designed by members of your department/program with your students’ learning in mind. Plans will differ significantly among departments/programs and will ideally reflect each program’s specific concerns and aspirations as they develop in the period following the program review.



Overview

Respond (to External Review)

The Decennial Cycle will begin with the external review. The department/program will consider how the external review and the broader response connects with its goals for student learning and therefore its intended learning outcomes (ILOs). This may lead to a process of revising ILOs. The department/program may wish to consider the following:

- What are the department/program's broader goals for student learning over the next ten years? How will these goals be met through curriculum, pedagogy, hiring decisions, etc.?
- How might current or revised ILOs reflect these broader goals, and how can student learning be effectively assessed?

The next step will be devising a specific Assessment Plan for assessing ILOs over a ten-year period. This plan will involve at least three assessment activities during the decennial cycle that incorporate reflection on assessment findings. The plan should be designed to produce useful information that will be incorporated into the next self-study.

Assess (at least three assessment activities)

Ideally, assessment activities will together assess all department/program ILOs over the course of ten years. (Keep in mind that a single assessment activity might be used to assess more than one ILO.) A department/program may wish to continue a current trajectory of assessment, or create a new plan. Learning outcomes may be assessed directly (looking directly at student work) and/or indirectly (surveys, etc.); in general, indirect assessment gathers student self-reported data and direct assessment collects actual examples of student performance.

Anticipate (the next review)

This phase of the decennial cycle is designed to incorporate a final assessment activity in preparation for writing the department/program's self-study. The final step is writing the self-study for the next external review. Among the questions you may consider:

- What assessment activities has the department/program already done? Is there a significant missing piece? How might the final assessment activity create a more comprehensive picture of student learning overall?
- Are there specific questions the department/program is asking in anticipation of the self-study that might be answered by a specific assessment activity?

Examples of different ways departments/programs may approach the Decennial Assessment Plan

- Some departments/programs may initiate significant curricular changes in response to their external review. Such changes may involve revising ILOs as a first step. Another strategy may involve assessing a given ILO prior to, and again after, curricular changes are made.
- Some departments/programs may have grown or changed in relation to recent hires. Such departments should consider how these changes might intersect with student learning and consider ways to assess that learning.
- Some departments/programs may decide that one or more of their ILOs are not easily assessable, or more like “goals” than learning outcomes. This may also involve revising ILOs as a first step.
- Departments/programs that already use external assessment instruments or credentialing activities may consider how best to incorporate these into their Decennial Assessment Plan.
- Departments/programs that anticipate contributing to the General Education curriculum in new ways may consider the value of assessing an ILO meant specifically for General Education.
- Departments/programs might look back at past assessment activities and consider the success or appropriateness of continuing those activities, and ask what might have been overlooked in past assessments.

Getting Started

As noted above, the Decennial Cycle will begin with the external review, move to the creation of a Decennial Assessment Plan, and typically involve three assessment activities that will provide information for the next program review. However, in our initial rollout of the new system, your entry point will depend on where your department/program sits in relation to its next scheduled external review. Based on this, the first assessment plan will be larger or smaller depending on the period of time remaining until the next review and the number of anticipated activities.

- **GROUP 1:** Departments/programs that have just completed (or are completing) their external review will undergo the full decennial assessment cycle, as described above.
 - Art/Art History
 - English
 - Philosophy
 - FLAC
 - Great Con
 - Film Studies
 - Women's and Gender Studies
 - Middle East Studies
 - Biology
 - Computer Science
 - Psychology
 - Science Con
 - Economics

- **GROUP 2:** Departments/programs that underwent an external review within the past 2-3 years should aim to complete a variation of the full Decennial Assessment Cycle in the 7-8 years that remain until their next external review. Assessment plans should include 2-3 assessment activities and 1-2 reports.

- German
- Russian & Russian Area Studies
- Africa and the Americas
- Race and Ethnic Studies
- Latin American Studies
- Biomolecular Science
- Family Studies
- Exercise Science

- **GROUP 3:** Departments/programs that are 4-7 years removed from their most recent external review should devise a plan that includes 1-2 assessment activities and 1 report in preparation for their program review.

- Religion
- Classics
- Ancient Studies
- Medieval Studies
- Spanish
- History
- Environmental Studies
- Linguistics
- Asian Studies/ Asian Conversations
- American Conversations
- Media Studies
- Chemistry
- Neuroscience
- Mathematical Biology
- Statistics
- Social Work
- Education/Social Studies Education

- **GROUP 4:** Departments/programs whose next external review is scheduled within the next 3 years should devise a plan that may include 1 assessment activity (depending on when the program review will take place) that will inform the self-study.

- Dance
- Political Science
- Norwegian
- Integrated Studies
- Nordic Studies
- Physics
- Management Studies
- Music
- Theater
- French
- IOS
- Mathematics
- Sociology/ Anthropology

Decennial Assessment Plan Details

A full Decennial Assessment Plan should:

- Incorporate assessment of each of the department/program ILOs.
- Schedule conversations around potential changes to the set of ILOs, if appropriate.

- Create specific action plans to address items raised during the external review process or in the final years of the previous decennial cycle.
- Schedule reassessment of student learning in areas in which actions have been taken during the cycle, thus closing the loop on prior assessment work.
- Identify two years within the decennial cycle in which Assessment Reports will be submitted to the Assessment Committee. In these years, report deadlines can be scheduled for October 1 or February 15.

A Program/Department Decennial Assessment Plan will be submitted to the Assessment Committee for feedback. The deadlines for these reports will also be October 1 or February 15.

Assessment Reports will be reviewed by the Assessment Committee, with comments and concerns returned to departments/programs.

In addition to these two Assessment Reports, program directors and department chairs will be asked to respond briefly to the following prompt as part of their Annual Report to the provost:

Describe any activities your department or program has undertaken this past year in assessment of student learning. Please describe how these activities fit into your current Assessment Plan. If appropriate, describe any plans to revise your department's/program's Assessment Plan.

Appendix B: Action Year Assessment Report Form

Program name:

1. Which intended learning outcomes were the focus of your action year project in 2018-19?

Your project may have focused on outcomes specific to your academic program, outcomes for one or more General Education requirements, or one or more of the college-wide STOG goals.

2. What specific assessment findings did you consider in the process of selecting and/or designing your action project?

Please describe briefly what these findings suggest about student learning in your program. The evidence may have been drawn from your own program's assessment work, from our campus-wide assessment of General Education, or from any institutional-level assessment report, whether findings from a specific instrument (e.g., the National Survey of Student Engagement, St. Olaf Learning Goals Questionnaire, etc.) or from a topical report synthesizing evidence from a variety of sources.

3. What did you initiate, pilot, modify, or revamp in response to this evidence?

Please describe the action project you undertook and the goals you hoped to achieve in undertaking it.

4. What are your next steps?

Please indicate where you are in the development and implementation of your action project, describe any needs you may have, and discuss what you plan to do next in order to realize the goals you described above. (Your "next steps" might be simply that you will continue to offer the course, use the pedagogical strategy, require the assignment, etc.)