Assurance Argument
Illinois State University - IL

Review date: 10/28/2024

4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4.A - Core Component 4.A

The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that ensure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It ensures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution ensures that the credentials it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission.

Argument

Illinois State University emphasizes continuous improvement across all its operations, particularly in teaching and learning. Aligned with best practices, policies, and procedures for awarding credit are regularly developed, reviewed, and revised to support the institution's commitment to providing high-quality educational experiences for students. Procedures for approving new programs or courses that reflect current needs or trends are continually monitored and improved. Driven by multisource reviews and feedback, the assessment of student learning outcomes is fully integrated into the undergraduate and graduate curriculum development process. These assessment data, along with retention and graduation rates, are monitored and guide plans and initiatives.

The quality of the educational experience at Illinois State University is the responsibility of all members of the University community. Ongoing program review and improvement is taken seriously at Illinois State, rather than viewed as an exercise to comply with state mandates.

Specialized accreditation is voluntarily sought by programs when it could benefit students and provide another means of maintaining program quality. Internal processes and procedures are in place to accommodate course and program changes, while maintaining appropriate academic rigor. Illinois State continues to develop a systematic means of documenting and reporting graduate success.

[4.A.1]

The State of Illinois mandates program review and provides guidelines for its implementation through Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) regulations. Illinois State follows a program review schedule that provides for each academic program's review every eight years and each research and service center every four years. IBHE regulations allow Illinois public universities considerable flexibility with their program review guidelines. Consistent with the University's shared governance philosophy, faculty and staff lead academic program and center program review processes, as they engage in a yearlong self-study and submit a resulting report to their dean and the provost. Supported by the Office of the Provost, the Academic Planning Committee, an external committee of the Academic Senate (i.e. although most of its members are not senators), reviews these reports.

Program reviews result in recommendations that inform the department/school, college, and university resource allocation, staffing, program focus, admissions standards, curricular content, and other decisions. The Academic Planning Committee provides observations and recommendations in summative reports. Those reports are submitted to the Provost, who incorporates them into the annual *Academic Plan*, which reports Division of Academic Affairs activities and initiatives to the Board of Trustees after being reviewed by the Academic Senate. Each program's summative report is posted on the program review website.

Self-study reports ask programs to summarize responses to the prior program review's recommendations. In some cases, the Academic Planning Committee requests follow-up reports and recommendations. An example of a program self-study report, a summative report, and a follow-up report appear in an evidence file.

Illinois State's program review process is dynamic. The Academic Planning Committee annually reviews self-study guidelines to ensure alignment with priorities with the most recent university strategic plan.

[4.A.2]

Illinois State has policies and procedures to evaluate all credit it transcripts and for awarding credit for prior learning. Staff conduct each student's degree audit before authorizing graduation. As students enter the University, the Office of the University Registrar evaluates external credit earned through Advanced Placement (AP), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), Cambridge International, or International Baccalaureate Diploma Program scores. The academic catalog details the exam, passing scores, and credit awarded for each exam. Since the 2015 HLC review, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation to standardize Illinois public

universities' granting AP and IB credits, and the *Undergraduate Catalog* contains schedules for credits granted by Illinois State to students presenting AP or IB scores.

Departmental proficiency examinations are offered in some 100-level and 200-level courses. The department/school offering the course establishes the exam content and standards of performance required for receiving credit.

Students who have served honorably in the United States military may qualify for undergraduate credit for their military work. Credit is accepted for DANTES subject standardized exams and military CLEP exams falling within university CLEP guidelines. Upon receipt of an American Council on Education credit recommendation, Illinois State may also grant academic credit for military training (see Policy 4.1.18).

Illinois State awards credit for experiential learning only if completed through credit-bearing courses, evaluated on the department/school level. All experiential learning leading to the awarding of credit must have, at a minimum, clearly stated learning objectives, expected outcomes, and workload expectations that adhere to the standards referenced above. Examples include student teaching required in all educator preparation programs, internships and professional practice courses available in all colleges, and clinical experiences. Guided by a faculty member, independent study experiences are an alternative learning method where student learning experiences occur outside the classroom; they are awarded in most undergraduate and graduate programs.

[4.A.3]

Illinois State has developed policies and procedures for credit earned through transfer. External transfer students graduating from Illinois State between 2019 and 2021 transferred, on average, 60.6 credit hours from some other institution. That figure has remained stable over the last 10 years (source data). To ensure the quality of undergraduate transfer credits, Illinois State participates in the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), which facilitates undergraduate students' transfer between Illinois colleges and universities while assuring equivalency and rigor of courses for which transfer credits are awarded. Illinois State agrees to award credit for a set of general education courses completed at any IAI-participating institution in place of its general education requirements. Illinois State also awards credit for individual courses taken at other Illinois colleges if those courses are equivalent in learning objectives, content, and rigor to those at Illinois State. Equivalency is determined by one of 18 discipline-based or seven general education panels facilitated by IAI and composed of faculty members at institutions across the state, including Illinois State. As its courses are modified, Illinois State submits applications for equivalency reviews to the appropriate IAI panel. In a typical year, Illinois State submits approximately 20 such applications.

To streamline credit transfers into specific majors, Illinois State enters into program articulation agreements with select community colleges, generally initiated by University or the community college faculty and involving careful review of both community college and university curricula. Articulation agreements ensure that community college students are academically prepared to

succeed upon enrolling at Illinois State and that the University accepts community college credits earned by students.

Trained evaluators working with program faculty review and articulate study abroad courses. Evaluators then place course articulations into a database linked to student information systems and used by the degree audit system. Two evaluators review international transcripts, including semester hour and grading scale conversions. Study abroad course credit information is provided on Illinois State's website to assist students, faculty members, advisors, and evaluators.

Graduate students may transfer up to nine credit hours from another college or university to meet master's degree requirements or up to 40% of course work hours for graduate certificate programs at Illinois State. Such transfer is subject to limitations published in the Graduate Catalog, recommendation of the enrolling department/school, and Graduate School approval.

[4.A.4]

Following principles of shared governance, Illinois State faculty maintain and exercise authority over programs and courses offered to ensure quality and appropriate rigor. Academic units and departments uphold authority for course quality and rigor, including on campus and online. University-level undergraduate and graduate curriculum committees guide general performance expectations at different course levels to ensure consistency and appropriate rigor across all programs. Using an online submission system, faculty proposing new or revised courses describe prerequisites and enrollment restrictions, course content, learning goals, assignments, and learning resources, including texts and evaluation methods. General education courses also require a rationale for their alignment. Course proposals are circulated for faculty review to solicit feedback regarding the potential impact on other courses and programs. New program proposals describe admission and graduation requirements, include a sample study plan, and are typically accompanied by individual course proposals. New program proposals undergo a full IBHE board review (see 3.A.1.). Faculty proposing courses or programs also consult with the appropriate library subject specialist to ensure research resource and service availability and adequacy to support student learning.

Following the appropriate curriculum committees' approval, maintaining rigor and enforcing course prerequisites are the responsibility of the specific department or program. Any exceptions to course prerequisites are granted by the department administrator, who typically consults with teaching faculty. Illinois State has several policies and procedures outlining faculty authority over course rigor and student learning outcome expectations. Academic freedom and academic responsibility expectations are described in University Policy 3.3.13.

Tenure track faculty qualifications are established through the tenure and promotion system outlined in Faculty Appointment, Salary, Promotion, and Tenure (ASPT) Policies. Discipline-specific standards are adopted at the college level and the department/school level (see Part I, Part II, and Part III) by a vote of the affected faculty. The Graduate Council (see 3.C.2) determines qualifications for appointment to the graduate faculty.

General policies for non-tenure track faculty appointment and evaluation are outlined in the Non-Tenure Track Faculty Classifications and Performance Evaluation policy (see 3.C.3). Unit faculty establish qualifications for specific non-tenure track positions, based on the discipline and instructional need.

[4.A.5]

Illinois State maintains specialized accreditation or approval through 39 associations, 36 of which recognize academic programs or academic units and three of which recognize non-instructional units. Of the 321 plans of study available, 118 receive specialized accreditation or approval, which promotes academic rigor through the application of discipline-based learning standards and qualifications for faculty and staff. In some disciplines, specialized accreditation is a prerequisite for graduates to qualify for licensing or the right to take examinations required for professional practice.

[4.A.6]

Information regarding graduates' success is collected at the University level for all academic programs and is supplemented by unit/program-specific data.

Given the difficulties associated with gathering alumni information through surveys, Illinois State has explored alternative methods of collecting and sharing alumni data in recent years. The 2015 Assurance Argument references a pilot collaboration with the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) to supplement information obtained from the alumni survey with data regarding employment and earnings of Illinois State graduates who work in Illinois. University Assessment Services (UAS) has since completed the pilot. Illinois State alumni's demographic and academic information was matched with employment and wage records submitted by Illinois employers to IDES. The project database contains longitudinal earnings and industry information through 2016 for alumni graduating between 2003 and 2012. Since 2018-2019, UAS has compiled reports from the database for each academic unit and shared the information with the Office of Enrollment Management and Academic Services for use in recruitment and retention initiatives. UAS regularly updates the database, and reports will be made available to units through the program review process and upon request.

Although it had not been intended, the employment and earnings study conducted by Illinois State has subsequently served as a model for a state-wide initiative sponsored jointly by the Office of the Governor, IDES, and IBHE. Through the initiative, employment and earnings data have been compiled for all public universities in the state, although for fewer years than the Illinois State study. The data are publicly accessible using the Illinois College 2 Career tool.

University Advancement recently conducted an Alumni Attitude Study, which sought information on the perceived value of their degree and their perceptions of the Illinois State experience preparing them for life. Illinois State also participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), with data obtained from undergraduates during their final year at Illinois State.

The various methods used by departments/schools to connect with alumni and document their success are described below. No program uses all methods; however, at least one technique is carried out at some level by all programs.

Of 175 Illinois State degree and certificate programs, 51 prepare students to pass examinations required for licensure to practice or recommended in their profession to establish their credentials, with many preparing students to pass multiple exams (e.g., educator preparation programs). Six colleges offering credit-bearing courses have at least two such programs (the exception is the new College of Engineering, which will have its first cohort in fall 2025). A pass rate report is included in the *Consumer Guide*, updated annually and published on Illinois State's website.

At least nine academic units administered one or more alumni surveys in fiscal 2021, 2022, or 2023. In fall 2024 units will have access to a wider range of alumni data using a new tool SteppingBlocks. The Academic Planning Committee frequently recommends that units prioritize and formalize their alumni outreach efforts through program review processes. Specialized accreditation review may also require these efforts.

At least 17 academic units administered one or more exit surveys in fiscal 2021, 2022, or 2023 to students immediately before their graduation. Exit surveys are typically administered in capstone courses and seek information regarding student plans for employment or further education. Illinois State's Project Nest survey, distributed to all students applying for graduation, also collects students' career and graduate school plans and links them to career/graduate school resources and job search assistance.

Most Illinois State academic units engage with graduates through alumni events, such as Homecoming reunions, unit and program advisory board meetings, and alumni recognition events, during which faculty and staff gather anecdotal information regarding individual graduate successes.

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4.B - Core Component 4.B

The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.
2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

Argument

Formalizing assessment as a component of all programs and services is an ongoing initiative and a high institutional priority.

For Illinois State's academic programs, developing assessment plans and processes has generally progressed in phases. In the 2000s, faculty identified student learning goals and methods and tools to evaluate student performance relative to those goals. In the 2010s, efforts focused primarily on assessing learning relative to each learning outcome at multiple points in the curriculum. Initiatives in the early 2020s are increasing access to institutional supports (i.e., additional program-level data and a new learning management system, Canvas, for assessment) and faculty and staff data literacy to allow academic units to maintain methodologically sound and sustainable assessment plans and processes.

The Division of Student Affairs has created student learning outcomes, which are accessible to the campus community and provide shared language, tools for mapping and sequencing experiences, and resources for assessing student learning from cocurricular programs and services.

[4.B.1]

Illinois State's General Education Program uses the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) and VALUES rubric as part of the Institutional Artifact Portfolio (IAP) process in the assessment of general education learning goals and outcomes. The General Education assessment plan prompts faculty members to indicate which General Education goals and learning outcomes their submitted student assignments address. Assignment reviewers are sought from among the faculty members who teach or have taught courses in the General Education category being reviewed. Additional updates to the plan in 2014 and 2019, again in tandem with a redesign of the program structure and to account for plan implementation, provided for student learning assessment in nine General Education content categories following a schedule spanning seven years beginning in 2013-14. The nine categories are Communication/Composition and Critical

Inquiry, United States Traditions, Individuals and Civic Life, Mathematics, Quantitative Reasoning, Social Sciences, Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts.

Assessment in one of the nine categories, Communication/Composition and Critical Inquiry, is conducted at multiple times during the seven-year period by faculty of the two courses in the category. Both courses, Communication as Critical Inquiry (COM110) and Composition as Critical Inquiry (ENG101; part of the University Writing Program), are the only two courses required of all students and have established assessment processes independent of the centralized program assessment. The most recent assessment reports for these courses are attached (see COM110 Assessment Report and *ISU ENG 101 Abbreviated Assessment Report, 2017-2023: Preliminary Final Week Survey Data*).

Assessment in the eight other General Education categories involves sampling and reviewing completed student assignments and course syllabi. The Council on General Education and the associate vice president for undergraduate education provide primary oversight and leadership, and University Assessment Services (UAS) facilitates implementation of reviews. The United States Traditions category was used to initially pilot the program. A panel of faculty members teaching courses in the category reviewed student assignments. Before being shared broadly with all faculty teaching in the United States Traditions category, a report of findings was provided to the Council on General Education and then shared with small groups of faculty to discuss the findings and gather their interpretations and suggestions for improving student learning based on their pedagogical experiences. UAS provided a summary report of these faculty discussions to the Council on General Education. Following the pilot, the institution began faculty reviews of student assignments in the remaining categories. The timing of some of these reviews was delayed during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the institution has caught up and completed reviews of all categories. UAS has developed a dashboard that provides a summary report of each category's findings to the Council on General Education that is also shared with faculty teaching in the category for their interpretations and suggestions for improvement.

To supplement these direct assessment measures, UAS worked with the Council on General Education to develop several indirect measures. In spring 2019 and 2022, the General Education Student Survey was administered, and UAS developed a dashboard to share survey results. Illinois State developed a cohort model for staggered administration of student engagement surveys (the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement, BCSSE, and the National Survey on Student Engagement, NSSE) but has determined that administering both surveys every year can assist with several university initiatives regarding student retention and success. Results from these surveys also include meaningful information regarding General Education experiences, such as students' perceptions of their learning and development regarding clear and effective written and oral communication, critical and analytical thinking, and working effectively with others. Examining student responses across their first year (i.e., from the NSSE) provides another indicator of how well the General Education Program is helping students attain the learning outcomes.

General Education Program assessment continues to evolve as the institution changes. On October 11, 2019, at the request of the Council on General Education, the University's then-provost requested a task force be formed to undertake a review of General Education. In 2020,

focus groups were completed with students, staff, and faculty regarding the general education program. Benchmarking of Illinois State's General Education Program with peer institutions and best practices were also examined to ensure the University was on par with other institutions. Additionally, in 2023 the campus transitioned to a new learning management system (Canvas), which affords new opportunities for direct embedded assessment models. The institution is working to adapt the rubrics so general education learning outcomes may be assessed within the courses as they are delivered, and earlier feedback may be provided to stakeholders.

Approaches to assessment in degree programs have generally developed independently of one another, shaped largely by discipline idiosyncrasies. The Office of the Provost and UAS support units in developing and implementing their assessment plans and serve as the campus hub for sharing assessment research and best practices across units.

UAS annually asks departments/schools to submit updates regarding implementation of their assessment plans and uses of the information they have gathered and examined. The Assessment Advisory Council, assisted by UAS, provides formative feedback to program faculty members regarding their updates. More intensive reviews of assessment plans occur two years before a unit begins its regularly scheduled program review self-study, through the Process for Review of Academic Assessment Plans (PRAAP). As with the assessment implementation updates, UAS and the Assessment Advisory Council provide feedback to programs regarding their assessment plans to help units maintain methodologically sound and sustainable assessment plans and processes, given available resources.

In addition, UAS offers faculty members assessment-related professional development opportunities, including a four-session workshop series in the fall. Three sessions cover the main components of an assessment plan, and a fourth session addresses aligning student learning assessment with program review.

Of the four administrative divisions at Illinois State, the Division of Student Affairs has primary responsibility for cocurricular programs and services and established a student learning outcomes framework for its programs, initiatives, and services in December 2018.

The learning outcomes framework includes five learning domains, with rubrics for each: relationship building, professional identity and behavior, broadening of perspective, problem-solving, and autonomy. Across the five domains, there are 27 outcomes. The division's 13 departments mapped programs and services connected to at least one outcome to its appropriate level on the rubric. Over 150 mapped experiences were compiled to create the Bird Tracks' resource page (Microsoft Power BI) to encourage students to seek engagement experiences by learning outcomes, with additional filters by time of year, hours per week, perks, and other important factors. (Bird Tracks is the public-facing name for the learning outcomes to make it more accessible to students.) Learning outcome rubrics were converted into an online self-assessment accessible to students each semester. Upon completing the self-assessment, students receive a report documenting their status (one to four) on each outcome/competency and each domain.

Departments are also asked to integrate the learning outcomes into their work and assessment plans. Implementing the new framework helps the division prioritize resources and identify the need for additional learning opportunities to respond to the needs of students. Starting in 2018, the Division of Student Affairs began to recognize Excellence in Assessment annually during its STAR Award Ceremony. The award recognizes and encourages quality assessment work in the co-curriculum.

[4.B.2]

Faculty members directly responsible for programs implement student learning assessment plans for degree programs, with processes and tools varying by unit and program (see assessment plans: CAS Part 1, CAS Part 2, CAST, WKCFA, COE, COB, and MCN). Some idiosyncrasies within colleges are described below.

All College of Applied Science and Technology programs use the Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) teaching evaluation form to gather student reactions to teaching data. Aggregate data may be used in student learning outcomes and program assessment processes. A pilot study is being run on a new tool to determine its validity, as the IDEA contract end approaches.

College of Arts and Sciences programs are numerous and diverse, so commonalities in assessment across all 16 departments/schools are few. Humanities programs rely extensively on writing portfolios; physical sciences and mathematics programs use laboratory reports, fieldwork, and mathematical problems; language programs have oral language proficiency examinations conducted by external reviewers; and social sciences programs often include research papers and case studies in assessment plans.

All College of Business undergraduate programs administer the Educational Testing Service Major Field Test for the bachelor's degree in business as part of the capstone business strategy course and share common rubrics, allowing for comparisons across programs.

Teacher candidates prepared by College of Education programs and across campus take content and professional skills tests mandated by the Illinois State Board of Education, and pass rates are reviewed. Individual teacher preparation programs create and administer additional content-specific assessments of pedagogy, clinical practice, impact on student learning, and teacher candidate dispositions. UAS assists in administering an annual assessment review process in which all teacher preparation programs identify necessary improvements based on student performance data from various assessments.

Student learning outcomes in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts vary by major and sequence, and assessment plans typically include portfolios, exhibitions, or recitals.

Mennonite College of Nursing students are assessed, in part, through licensing examinations and clinical experiences. B.S.N. (pre-licensure sequence) candidates take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses. Two certification exams are available for the M.S.N. (family nurse practitioner sequence).

Assessment of graduate programs across all colleges is characterized by the culminating experience focus: comprehensive exam, thesis/dissertation, or defense.

The department chairperson/school director or the program coordinator, working with an assessment or curriculum committee, usually leads assessment activities. Several programs have addressed assessment sustainability by adopting cycles for collecting and reviewing data.

Student learning in co-curricular programs and services is assessed primarily through participant surveys, interviews, focus groups, observation or reflection papers. Most programs and services are assessed at the program level, but each department selects the best method for their operations.

The student learning outcome framework is undergoing an update to reduce the number of outcomes and to ensure alignment with the university's new strategic plan and proposed general education curriculum. Once updated, standardized learning outcome assessment statements will be available to assess programs' and services' outcomes.

[4.B.3]

One full cycle has been completed for all categories of the General Education assessment plan. Faculty reviewers' feedback has been summarized in reports or dashboards prepared by UAS and shared with the Council on General Education.

Program review guidelines identify student learning outcomes assessment as a critical component of degree program reviews. Faculty provide evidence that program faculty and administrators utilize assessment results to identify and implement improvements to programs.

For each of their academic programs, departments/schools are asked each year to submit to UAS an assessment update, in which they describe assessment activities undertaken by program faculty during the most recent assessment cycle and how assessment findings may have been used to plan program improvements. The Assessment Advisory Council reviews these updates and provides each program feedback. Assessment results prompt numerous and varied program changes, including new course content, modified curriculum structure, and additional cocurricular opportunities, among others.

Having Student Affairs' learning outcomes presented in rubrics allows them to be used across the institution, with clear and distinct outcomes allowing all to see the co-curricular student learning priorities and what each development phase entails. Further, Student Affairs annual reports now require departments to "share an example over the past year where data collected influenced a successful outcome for your department," allowing departments to document how their efforts have resulted in positive and measurable change.

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- 5.B.4.ComplianceExamination

4.C - Core Component 4.C

The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Argument

Along with federal and state agencies and specialized accrediting bodies, Illinois State University carefully monitors retention, persistence, and completion rates on the university, unit, and program level as indicators of student progress and success. The University also tracks time to degree due to the impact on attendance costs.

[4.C.1]

Key metrics in Illinois State's last strategic plan (2018-2023), retention and graduation rates, were measured and monitored during its five-year implementation. Overall, first-time-in-college (FTIC) retention, graduation, and time-to-degree rates have remained high and relatively stable, although inconsistent across groups. For example, since the 2015 HLC review, retention rates for external transfer students have increased by nearly 5 percentage points, and graduation rates for external transfer students have remained stable. Of particular concern is the gap between retention and graduation rates for FTICs university-wide and FTICs self-identifying with groups traditionally underrepresented. The University continues to identify and prioritize strategies for reversing the trend. *Excellence by Design* action teams are in the process of setting metrics identifying retention and graduation goals.

To achieve and sustain these levels, Illinois State initiated its HLC Quality Initiative project in 2021 with a Student Success focus. The project's purposes are to: (a) increase declining retention and graduation rates, (b) develop integrated and cohesive student success efforts across all divisions, and (c) determine appropriate and necessary resources for implementing proposed actions. To this end, the project's six goals are to: (1) develop a campus-wide definition of

student success that extends beyond traditional retention and graduation metrics; (2) develop a campus-wide student success framework that employs collaborative, coordinated, and integrated processes and involvement; (3) expand data-informed decision-making related to student success; (4) establish a clear connection between faculty and student success; (5) analyze university practices for their impact on student success with an emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion; and (6) secure financial structures dedicated to student success and the identified initiatives. The Quality Initiative Project motivated diverse initiatives reaching beyond Academic Affairs to divisions across the institution, some with an immediate impact and others with ongoing impacts. Impact examples include the Provost Innovation and Enhancement grant program, which supports student success, enrollment management, and curriculum redesign initiatives; the new director of advising advocacy, innovation, and technology position; a review of advising caseloads, resulting in new advising positions; improvements in data access, availability, and literacy; program review guidelines revisions to emphasize student success; and campus-wide discussions to draft an institutional commitment and vision for student success. The offices of Planning, Research, and Policy Analysis; Enterprise Data and Analytics; and University Assessment Services (UAS) collaborated to develop a new Data Website to help administrators, faculty, and staff access this information.

The fall-to-fall retention rate for FTICs has fluctuated around 80% during the past 10 years. The rate was 81.1% in 2015, a low of 78.6% in 2017, and a high of 84.2% in 2019. In 2023 the rate was 81.4%. In our 2015 assurance argument, Illinois State articulated the goal of maintaining a rate near 81%.

The fall-to-fall retention rate for external transfer students has trended upward over the last 10 years, reaching 88.9% with the fall 2019 cohort. The most recent rate, for the fall 2022 cohort, was 88.5%. External transfer retention rates have exceeded FTIC rates since 2014.

The 2015 assurance argument cited lower-than-university-average retention rates among groups historically underrepresented at the institution and set a goal of reducing those gaps. The University has had mixed results in attempts to do so. The gap for Hispanic students has declined from 5.7 percentage points (fall 2017 cohort) to 3.7 (fall 2022 cohort), while the gap for Black or African American students has increased from 8.8 (fall 2017 cohort) to 16.9 percentage points across those years.

The 2015 assurance argument articulated a six-year FTIC graduation rate of 71.8% (fall 2008 cohort), with the goal of maintaining that rate. Instead, that rate has declined. The graduation rate for the cohort entering the University in fall 2013 was 69.5%, 68.1% for the 2014 cohort, 67.3% for the 2015 cohort, and 67.0% for the 2016 cohort. Meanwhile, the six-year graduation rate for external transfers increased. The fall 2012 cohort rate was 75.4%, while the rate rose to 77.3% for the fall 2015 cohort, and to 80.9% for the fall 2016 cohort.

The 2015 assurance argument cited lower-than-university-average six-year graduation rates among groups historically underrepresented at the institution and set a goal of reducing those gaps. However, these gaps have continued to increase. The gap for Hispanic students has increased from 9.6% for the fall 2013 cohort to 10.3% for the fall 2017 cohort, and the gap for Black or African American students has increased from 19.2% to 22.3%.

The 2015 assurance argument articulated the goal of increasing the percentage of FTIC graduates completing their plan of study within four years. The University has succeeded in doing so. The 2019 HLC mid-cycle review reported that 71.3% of fiscal 2018 graduates completed their plan of study in four years or fewer, and 75.2% of fiscal 2023 graduates did so.

As students bear increased costs for higher education, time-to-degree and completion rates become ever more critical. The University is home to numerous educator preparation programs across campus, several of which take students more than four years to complete because of state-mandated requirements. Maintaining the percentage of teacher education program graduates who complete their degree within four years at 70 percent is another ambitious yet attainable goal. Aggregated data of time-to-degree rates for all teacher education majors improved from 65.8% in 2017 to 75.2% in 2023. Much of the work to achieve that goal was done at unit and program levels since each discipline has unique, timely program completion challenges. Institutional processes, such as program review processes, and specialized accreditation requirements have inspired program-level time-to-degree monitoring steps that include strategic curricular changes and increasing course scheduling options, summer and semester break academic experiences, and summer courses offered online.

[4.C.2]

The Office of Planning, Research, and Policy Analysis (PRPA) compiles student retention, persistence, and graduation information for reporting to internal units and external agencies. Benefiting internal units and the general public, PRPA reports university-wide rates in its Fact Sheet and dashboards, updated each fall.

The Office of the Provost, with PRPA, began annual distribution of program-level datasets, called academic program profiles (see samples), to all academic programs in 2014. Responding to numerous requests from academic units for more frequent and timelier data distribution, the profiles provide longitudinal data to aid in studying anomalies and trends, including trends in outcome metrics. Since their initial release, the profiles' content has evolved in response to academic units' feedback. Additionally, the programming used to automate the compilation of the reports had to be rewritten by PRPA staff to extract data from the new student information system. In 2022, these profiles were transitioned to a series of Power BI dashboards. Since the 2015 HLC review, the profiles have been used extensively in the program review process, both by faculty compiling program self-study reports and by the shared governance committee reviewing the reports. Academic program profile data have been further integrated into academic planning and budgeting processes. For example, Enrollment Management and Academic Services leadership meet with all new chairs and any chairs from units that struggle with retention/graduation. Chairs and departments receive in-depth data showing problem spots and collaboratively develop strategies to increase retention, graduation, and overall enrollment. Additionally, each college has increased persistence funding to support students with unmet financial needs.

[4.C.3]

Retention and completion data are used at the university, unit, and program levels when studying program improvement needs, implementing improvements, and evaluating changes. Program and service modifications vary from large-scale, campus-wide initiatives involving commitments of substantial resources and impacting large numbers of students (e.g., student orientation programs) to changes at the unit or service level while directly impacting their success (e.g., curriculum changes), albeit in smaller numbers.

As noted in 4.C.1, increasing undergraduate student retention rates is a high institutional priority. Since the 2019 mid-cycle review, the University has deployed new measures to improve student retention and persistence in the first year and beyond. In 2021, Illinois State launched its HLC Quality Initiative Project (see 4.C.1) to improve retention and graduation rates and enhance a university-wide student success approach. The Provost Innovation and Enhancement grant was established to fund $200,000 of annual student success, enrollment management, and curriculum redesign initiatives. The Student Success Community of Practice (SSCoP) was established to serve as a guide for student success across campus, share best practices, and drive university-level student success planning. Enterprise and Data Analytics developed the Student Success dashboard, which features 41 informational items that academic advisors and student success staff can use when engaging with students (e.g., registered student groups the student is in, what registration blocks exist for the student, persistence prediction, advising appointments made/missed, last Canvas login, campus recreation center use, and career center activity). University College advisors use these data to customize academic advising and support and increase student persistence. The Persistence Committee, which uses a case management approach with individual students, uses these data to determine students' needs. Support services coordinated by the committee include peer academic coaching and micro-grants to alleviate financial pressures impeding persistence and completion. Since its inception in May 2018, the Persistence Committee has discussed 639 cases and 476 unique students and awarded almost $700,000 in microgrants. From this sub-group of students, 196 students graduated from Illinois State with more back on track to complete their degrees.

Illinois State's president continues to allocate $250,000 annually to the fund, which is used to help students facing financial obstacles to their graduation. The Persistence Committee, which oversees the fund, provides intensive case management services to students in need and has addressed obstacles facing 412 students since its inception.

The state of Illinois issued $2.73 million in COVID-19 grant funding (GEER: Governor's Emergency Education Relief) for student success, focusing on underrepresented students and purchasing e-textbooks and access codes for use through the library, supporting identity-based registered student organizations, buying loaner laptops for Pell-eligible students, paying internships for students in need, and providing micro-grants to students with unexpected financial needs, among other uses.

Student retention and completion are ongoing priorities of the Graduate School and graduate programs. Graduate School initiatives to increase retention include professional development workshops (in collaboration with CIPD) to help students progress toward their degree and transition to post-degree professional life. The Graduate School also offers dissertation

completion grants and periodically sponsors writing boot camps at which master's and doctoral students receive individualized research and writing assistance.

Programs are asked to review and contextualize retention, time-to-degree, and completion data annually and through the program review self-study process. In 2023, the self-study outline was reorganized to include a section encouraging faculty reflection on programs through a student success lens. The Academic Planning Committee, the shared governance committee responsible for program review, may recommend faculty actions if concerned about any outcome metric.

Since the 2019 HLC review, the Academic Planning Committee has completed five cycles of program reviews, involving 91 academic programs and centers. Of these programs, roughly half were asked by the committee to submit a follow-up report (most commonly regarding aspirational and/or comparator analyses).

Retention, progress toward degree, and degree completion of all students are closely monitored by academic advisors, who use various methods to communicate with students and track their progress toward timely graduation. University College utilizes an early alert program starting in week six each semester. Faculty can submit an early alert for students struggling in their course or facing challenges. Once an early alert is submitted, various resource units across campus are automatically notified, and support can be deployed to the student.

[4.C.4]

Processes and methodologies used to collect and analyze data reflect commonly accepted practices in information technology and institutional research. Information technology policies guide institutional data storage, in compliance with state and federal requirements. The policies address data classification procedures, data security, roles and responsibilities regarding enterprise data management, and security incident reporting. The policies provide for a Data Governance and University Information Technology Portfolio Council that oversees institutional information technology activities.

PRPA within the Division of Finance and Planning compiles many of the data reports used to guide university operations. PRPA staff follow best practices published by the Association for Institutional Research and definitions and methodologies of the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System to ensure compliance with federal requirements and to enable longitudinal and institutional comparisons. These offices have been leveraging Power BI dashboards to provide broader access to and availability of student success-related data.

Sources

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- 4.C.3.UCollegeReport
- 4.C.4.AIR
- 4.C.4.CTDC
- 4.C.4.InformationTechnologyPolicies
- 4.C.4.IPEDSManual
- 4.C.4.ISUDataGovernance

4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Summary

Systematic assessment methods, comprehensive program review processes, and specialized accreditation reflect the University's commitment to ensuring appropriately rigorous, current, and consistently delivered degree programs, regardless of venue. Illinois State continues to improve strategies for collecting data to support assessment efforts, by utilizing new predictive analytic technologies and further strengthening cooperation and collaboration between units responsible for collecting data.

Although they remain strong compared to peer institutions, recent retention and graduation rates have shown some fluctuation. As demonstrated throughout this Criterion, however, Illinois State remains committed to developing and funding initiatives and programs to ensure continued growth in these metrics, particularly those related to the success of students from historically underrepresented groups.

Sources

There are no sources.