HLC Accreditation
Evidence Document

Title: Results Forum- Impact Report

Office of Origin: Office of Assurance for Learning

Document Summary

This document presents Marian University's Impact Report for the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning. The report encompasses the university's participation from February 2008 through June 2014.

Results Forum Impact Report

Marian University, Wisconsin

Submitted May 2, 2014
to the
Higher Learning Commission Academy for Assessment of Student Learning

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Marian University's commitment to understanding the student learning experience and assuring good learning outcomes is an expression of the five core values that we hold as an institution. The Marian approach to the assessment of student learning is:

- Authentic and embedded in the student's learning experience, in all programs and across all organizational operations,
- Developed, implemented and evaluated by faculty and staff across disciplines, programs, and functions,
- Sustained through an evolving and growing commitment to the assurance of student learning outcomes as the central work of Marian University as an institution.

Institutional commitment to the assessment of learning outcomes is demonstrated over time by several key decisions. These are:

- Establish and implement a strategic plan for assessment that is based on embedded assessment and triangulated with evidence from standard assessments of learning and perception of the learning experience (2000).
- Create a core curriculum (the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum) in which both direct and indirect assessment of learning outcomes is embedded in the student learning experience (2006).
- Adopt Marian University's five undergraduate student learning outcomes (2007).
- Participate as a member of the Higher Learning Commission's Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning 2007-2011 and 2011-2014 as a means for collaborating with institutions across the region in establishing institutional "cultures of assessment".
- Design an Assessment Academy Project focused on building culture through the authentic work of embedding assessment in the university's core curriculum (2008).
- Sustain Marian University's approach to assessment through significant changes in organizational structure and leadership that include the transition from college to university, the creation and restructuring of academic schools, three changes in president, and four changes in director of assessment,
- Redefine and expand the function of institutional assessment and the role of a director of assessment from that of a limited, part-time commitment to committee leadership to a full-time administrative staff appointment with responsibility for leading the design and implementation of the university's system for assuring student learning outcomes across all programs and operations 2011-present).

As a result of this commitment in time, money, and creative development, Marian University has a fully integrated system for the embedded assessment of undergraduate student learning outcomes in the core curriculum and in programmatic assessment in all schools. We have gathered evidence of both student learning outcomes and the performance of our assessment system and made significant

changes in our teaching and learning focus and in the structure and operations of our assessment system over time.

As an institution, we are continuing to address the challenge of gathering valid and reliable evidence of student learning; of assuring that technical support for data collection, management, and use is appropriate and meeting the needs of programs; and of expanding assurance for learning as a whole-campus responsibility rather than only the responsibility of academic programs.

The report that follows represents Marian University's journey to the center of our emerging culture of shared responsibility for assessment of student learning outcomes as an institutional practice. Marian has learned much as an institution through participation in the Academy. We describe this journey as a walk through the labyrinth; our path to the center of our institutional understanding and practice of assessment has been long, winding, and often spurred by realization that, though we could see the center from where we stood, we had not reached it yet.

CONTEXT

Marian University's Impact Report for the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning encompasses our participation from February 2008 through June 2014. We applied to the Academy in July 2007 as an alternative to a scheduled Spring 2009 Focused Visit on **Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching** [(see the HLC Criterion Three Report, 2005)](see the HLC Criterion Three Report, 2005).

At the time of the comprehensive visit in 2005, reviewers acknowledged Marian's full implementation of a strategic plan for assessment, but recommended a focus visit to determine whether the plan had

- Produced systematic assessment of student learning for most programs,
- Created a culture supportive of assessment, and
- Resulted in the use of assessment data to inform institutional decisions.

The intended outcomes of participation in the Academy directly addressed all of the cited concerns regarding Criterion Three, and aligned with the on-going initiative to establish a culture of shared responsibility for assessment of student learning – a primary goal of the strategic plan for assessment of academic outcomes. The impetus to participate in the Academy originated in the Committee for Student Learning, which recommended this action to accelerate and enhance work already in progress related to assessment.

In our "Letter of Agreement of Participating in the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning" (November 14, 2007), Marian University committed to construct a project that would lead to demonstrating results of assessing and improving student learning. The project would include work to address the issues that led to the recommendation for a Focus Visit. The university committed to collaborate with Academy participants to design projects, provide feedback, and share learning and accomplishments.

In return, the Higher Learning Commission committed to collaborating with Marian University to help accomplish our project goals, to maintain Academy participation as long as we provided credible evidence of progress, and to honor successful participation in the Academy to fulfill the Focused Visit.

This Impact Report fulfills the requirement to evaluate the impact of our project, showcase accomplishments, and share good practices with our Academy fellows as well as with the Higher Learning Commission.

THE FIRST ROUNDTABLE AND INITIAL FRAMING OF THE ACADEMY PROJECT

1. **DESCRIBE YOUR ACADEMY PROJECT(S) AS DEVELOPED AT THE FIRST ROUNDTABLE. BE AS DETAILED AS POSSIBLE ABOUT THE ISSUES IT WAS INTENDED TO ADDRESS AS WELL AS THE CONTENT AND STRATEGIES OF THE PROJECT ITSELF.**

GOALS

The project developed at the first roundtable had the overarching purpose of "making the core curriculum responsive and responsible to the academic majors" (Academy Update Version One, 2009). Marian University set three goals for achieving this purpose through participation in the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning. Initial phrasing of the goals has been refined and edited over time, but they remain essentially as follows:

Goal One: Establish a system of course-embedded assessment of student learning outcomes in Marian University's Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (LACC), which serves all undergraduate majors and degree completion programs offered through the university.

Goal Two: Use evidence of student learning to systematically inform decision-making at all levels within the institutional process.

Goal Three: Create and sustain an institutional culture of shared responsibility for the assessment of student learning outcomes, and the use of evidence of student learning to inform decision-making.

RELATIONSHIP OF GOALS TO CONCERNS CITED FOR THE FOCUS VISIT

The Director of Assessment and the Committee on Student Learning and Assessment were charged with developing a response to the concerns cited for Criterion Three (HLC Criterion Three Report, 2005) based on the comprehensive review. These three goals were identified as essential to addressing the specific concerns, listed in order of emphasis in the report:

Component 3c: There is little evidence that assessment data inform curricular, programmatic, personnel or planning initiatives in several academic areas.

Goals Two and Three established the use of evidence of student learning as an essential element of curricular and programmatic decision-making processes in all academic areas at

Marian University, beginning with evidence of student learning in the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum.

Component 3d: The work since 2001 is laudable, but the data is inconclusive, especially in terms of its ability to shape or inform the budgeting process, or establish and sustain consistent participation in assessment activities by all, including adjunct faculty.

Goals: One and Three built and implemented the system of course-embedded assessment of student learning outcomes that is the "third leg" of Marian University's 2005-06 strategic plan for assessment. The strategic plan called for the institution to triangulate data from three sources of evidence of student learning:

- Standard assessment of attitude, beliefs and perceptions through the National Survey of Student Engagement,
- Standard assessment of learning gains relative to the undergraduate student learning outcomes using the Collegiate Learning Assessment and
- *Embedded assessment of student learning outcomes involving all faculty, including adjuncts, teaching in degree programs.*

The first two legs of the assessment triangle were being implemented. Marian University's Academy Project plan focused on establishing and implementing the third leg of the triangle, embedded assessment.

Component 3a: While a comprehensive [assessment] plan has been initiated, it has not been in place long enough to satisfy either the requirements of the criterion or those of the plan itself….it now is incumbent upon the institution to document how these goals are actually met.

Aligned Goals: One, Two and Three: In 2005, Marian University had articulated seven new goals for continuing improvement in the assessment system ([Strategic Plan for Assessment, 2005](#)). Attainment of the goals of the strategic plan would

- establish a collaborative process of continuing review and revision of assessment practice, led and facilitated by the Director of Assessment,
- create, develop and expand institutional structures to support reporting and use of assessment data, and
- integrate the use of assessment data as evidence in the planning and budget process.

Marian University's Assessment Academy Project plan sought to attain these goals for the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum, and establish the foundation of the institutional culture to support program-level assessment of learning outcomes and overcome the noted resistance on campus to institutional assessment efforts.

The Higher Learning Commission, as part of its effort to support the expanded collection and use of evidence of learning, introduced Marian University and other Academy members to several commercial data management systems that could, hypothetically, work with existing Student Information Systems

(SIS) such as PowerCampus to manage the collection, storage, analysis, reporting and use of student learning outcome data for the whole university. Marian University decided to contract with one vendor, The ELumen Collaborative, whose focus on embedded assessment and faculty participation in the assessment process matched our own vision.

THE PLAN

Marian University's strong commitment to creating a culture of assessment led the team to propose a highly ambitious plan in which the work begun in the Academy would expand over time and establish the Marian approach to assessment as an operational and cultural norm of the institution.

The initial plan focused on building a system of embedded assessment of five student learning outcomes in the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (LACC), which is the general education component of the undergraduate degree at Marian University. The work of building this system would support creation of a shared language and culture of assessment on campus

The team envisioned an "expansion wave" strategy for creating this culture of embedded assessment. Work would begin with establishing an embedded assessment process in the six required courses in the LACC. This work would create a cadre of faculty and staff versed in the language and process of assessment, willing to champion expansion of the system into the required Liberal Arts Core Curriculum

Embedded assessment practice "would ripple out semester by semester to include all of the faculty teaching in the undergraduate core curriculum, then the faculty teaching in undergraduate majors, followed by co-curriculum staff, faculty and staff in our adult accelerated program, and faculty and staff in our graduate programs".

The Director of Assessment, in collaboration with the existing Committee for Student Learning, was to lead this work. The director was charged with regular communication - both up (the deans, vice president of academic affairs (VPAA), and the provost) and out (committees, faculty, staff) - to insure that everyone engaged in the project would develop common understandings and expectations of the process of embedded assessment of student learning outcomes. The deans, VPAA, and provost were charged with insuring that faculty and staff was held accountable for gathering, entering, and using outcome data to improve student learning.

The plan was described in phases as follows:

Phase One: Establish embedded assessment and evaluate student learning outcomes in the six required courses of the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum.

Phase Two: Expand embedded assessment to the full Liberal Arts Core Curriculum.

Evaluate impact of the project on the culture of assessment at Marian University, based on the following indicators:

1. All courses in the undergraduate core curriculum are assigned a manageable set of learning outcomes;
2. These shared outcomes are distributed such that students will encounter each outcome on a regular basis (i.e. at least once per year), and in different contexts (in different disciplines, in the co-curriculum);
3. Rubrics have been developed and revised based on feedback from those employing them;
4. Reports are being run using *eLumen* data that exhibit meaningful patterns showing how student learning is and is not being transferred across Marian courses; and,
5. Specific projects are being proposed and implemented to improve student learning based on this data.

- **Make changes** in the system as indicated by evaluation of these outcomes.
- **Expand in Phases Three - Five** to embed programmatic assessment in the majors, co-curriculum, and graduate programs to sustain and expand the culture of assessment at Marian University.

EVOLUTION OF MARIAN UNIVERSITY'S PROJECT OVER TIME

2. DESCRIBE ANY CHANGES THAT YOU MADE TO THE PROJECT(S)—OR THAT HAD TO BE MADE TO IT—OTHER THAN PERSONNEL CHANGES. WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR THESE CHANGES? DID THE CHANGES IMPROVE THE PROJECT?

SPRING 2009

The scope of the Academy Project plan was clarified in Spring 2009 in response to the recommendation of Marian University's mentor to significantly reduce the scope of the project and focus on one or two attainable outcomes. The revised plan was:

- Complete Phases One and Two of the original plan
- Conduct an evaluation of the work of the project relative to the intended outcomes, and
- Use evidence from the evaluation of the project to plan for implementation of Phases Three to Five after successful completion of the Academy.

The scope of Phase Two was altered to include a new First Year Program as part of the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (Academy Update Version 2.0, 2009), and to embed assessment of student learning outcomes in the First Year Program.

This change resulted in a targeted focus on refining the indicators of achievement of student learning outcomes, developing common assessment rubrics aligned to the indicators, and identifying assessment tasks or objects embedded in key courses in the LACC curriculum.

FALL 2011

Marian University re-enrolled in the Academy in November 2011, with the intent to continue the implementation of Phase Two by analyzing the assessment data collected since 2008. In part, this

decision was motivated by reassignment of the Director of Assessment to full-time responsibility for the First Year Program, and a redefinition of the position of director to reflect the expanding role of assessment at the institution. The application for continuing participation in the Academy noted a need to address the inability to accurately extract and analyze data from our data management system, or to generate meaningful reports of student learning outcomes. This challenge was complicated by the fact that there was no dedicated institutional support for the use of eLumen, or integration of eLumen with our SIS.

SPRING 2012

The full scope and sequence of the Academy project was reviewed to determine the status of the work and make recommended changes in the project. This was necessitated by the almost complete turnover in the Assessment Academy Team, the resignation of the third Director of Assessment since 2008, and the appointment of a new associate academic and student affairs officer with oversight responsibility for the project.

FALL 2012

The scope of the Assessment Academy project was once again clarified, explicitly limiting the scope to that originally presented in Spring 2009. The work of the project was "restarted" based on the analysis of what was accomplished as of Fall 2012.

Under the direction of the Academic Affairs Officer, who also became the leader of the Assessment Academy Project team, the work of the project in 2012 focused on developing a Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative that could support completion of the work in the plan as defined in 2009, and build the organizational structure for the next challenge – creation of an institutional system of assurance for learning across all programs and operational functions.

SPRING 2013

The revised scope and timeline for completion of the Assessment Academy Project was submitted to Dr. Karen Solomon by the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Ed Ogle, on May 13, 2013 (see "Letter to Dr. Solomon", 2013). The revision refined the descriptions of the work of Phases One and Two of the project to clearly align with the original Assessment Academy plan as modified in Assessment Academy Update Version 2.0.

This letter formally notified the Higher Learning Commission that Marian University was committed to documenting, with evidence, the completion of the Assessment Academy Project begun in 2008 and sustained through significant changes in the life of the organization.

FALL 2013

The Assessment Academy Team endorsed recommendations stipulating that "remaining courses" in the general education program be limited to courses in the required Liberal Arts Core Curriculum, excluding

courses approved as electives only. The team also endorsed evidence-based recommendations not to renew our contract with our data management services provider, to focus on conducting a complete data management needs assessment for the campus, and to pilot the use of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to assess developmental student learning outcomes in programs.

ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN THE ACADEMY

3. **WHAT HAVE YOU ACHIEVED AS A RESULT OF YOUR WORK IN THE ACADEMY? CONSIDER THE RANGE OF THESE ACHIEVEMENTS, FROM THE VERY SPECIFIC (DEVELOPMENT OF A RUBRIC) TO THE MORE GENERAL (OUTCOMES-BASED CURRICULUM APPROVAL PROCESSES). TO WHAT DEGREE HAVE THESE ACHIEVEMENTS BEEN INSTITUTIONALIZED?**

GOAL ONE: ESTABLISH A SYSTEM OF EMBEDDED ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CORE CURRICULUM.

Marian University was successful in establishing a system of embedded assessment of student learning in the undergraduate core curriculum (LACC Master List, 2011-12). This work engaged faculty in every academic program responsible for the courses in the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum in building and implementing the system. Peak engagement in all processes occurred in the 2010-11 academic year. The process of data collection has been institutionalized within the courses of the LACC, despite the limited analysis and use of the data in programs. Elements of the system are:

- Five Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs) developed in late 2007 and adopted by Faculty Senate in 2008 (see Marian University Student Learning Outcomes).
- Four to five key indicators for each ISLO, identified in 2009 and refined by Learning Outcome cohort teams involving faculty members from all programs responsible for the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (LACC).
- Rubrics for each indicator within each ISLO, developed in late 2008 (see UG Rubrics 2008-2013),
- Authentic assessment tasks embedded in key courses in the LACC in the five "cognate" areas of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Humanities and the Arts, Social Sciences, Applied Liberal Arts, and Theology (See Embedded Assessments).
- Policy requiring all courses in the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum, including electives, to assess Knowledge Acquisition, and identify and assess both a primary and secondary ISLO.

GOAL TWO: USE EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING TO SYSTEMATICALLY INFORM DECISION-MAKING AT ALL LEVELS WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS.

The Academy Project enabled evidence to systematically inform course-level curricular decision-making, with a more limited impact on program-level decisions. The approved strategic plan for assessment included embedded assessment as one aspect of the intended use of three sources of information about student learning outcomes to inform both institutional and program-level decision-making.

In 2009, results from two sources of data, the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (see CLA Summary Report 2009) pointed to little or no measured or perceived gain in critical thinking outcomes over time in the institution. Based on this evidence, the institution developed a strategy for improving attainment of critical thinking outcomes. The strategy was:

- Adopt a model process for developing critical thinking early in collegiate learning
- Pilot a First Year Program curriculum using the model to develop capacity for critical thinking
- Assess gains in critical thinking outcomes within the First Year Program using embedded assessment of critical thinking as the source of data.

This strategy was implemented and pilot data collected and analyzed in 2011.

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME DATA

An analysis of data was presented to the faculty in fall 2011 that provided a summary of the patterns observed in the data collected up until that point in time (see Fall 2011 "ELumen Early Results" presentation).

In the analysis phase, the data management system used by Marian University was not structured to provide easy aggregation and disaggregation of data relative to institutional student learning outcomes (ISLO). Outcomes data were linked to single-indicator "rubrics" in the system, which complicated retrieval of a more holistic aggregate of all data relative to each ISLO. Directors of Assessment worked with support personnel employed by the data management system provider, but were not fully successful in extracting valid data or in generating usable reports.

Since individual faculty and programs were not able to easily access data or create reports as needed through eLumen, some departments decided to keep and manage their own data using simple spreadsheets. These decisions created a "shadow assessment system", with data collected and used at the program level, but not entered into the data management system or shared with the General Education Committee or the schools.

In 2012, the Assessment Academy Project Team leader extracted all of the data entered into eLumen from 2008 through 2012, and conducted an analysis of patterns in the data (see table) that demonstrated assessment of an increasing number of students over a greater range of indicators over time. It also indicated that we were primarily assessing students on three indicators within outcomes (CT4, KA5, and EC4) and only assessing episodically in others.

The Assessment Academy Project Team recognized that, institutionally, we were stalled in a cycle of data collection without significant documented use beyond the course level. The decision was made to "restart" and focus on using evidence from the analysis of student learning to inform decisions about the future direction of our assessment process.

In Spring 2012, the Director of Assessment conducted an evaluation of the impact of participation on the institution based on the criteria identified within the Assessment Academy Project plan in 2009. The evaluation indicated that:

1. All courses in the undergraduate core curriculum are assigned the embedded assessment of three learning outcomes (knowledge acquisition, a primary outcome and a secondary outcome);
2. These shared outcomes are distributed such that students will encounter each outcome on a regular basis (i.e. at least once per year), and in different contexts (in different disciplines and in the First Year Program);
3. Rubrics were developed and revised based on feedback from those employing them, through a process established in 2009 and governed by the campus-wide General Education Committee.

Primary evidence of embedded assessment and of the cross-disciplinary distribution of assessment is found in the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum Master List of assessment of student learning outcomes across all courses included in the required core and in elective clusters (see LACC Master List).Evidence from the minutes of the Committee for Student Learning and the General Education Committee establish that an on-going process for review and revision of rubrics is in effect (see "April 7 , 2014 Minutes").

The Spring 2012 review identified that there was little evidence to establish that:

4. Reports are being run using *eLumen* data that exhibit meaningful patterns showing how student learning is and is not being transferred across Marian courses; and,
5. Specific projects are being proposed and implemented to improve student learning based on this data.

While data was extracted from eLumen each semester, there was no evidence that reports were regularly generated and used to inform understanding of patterns in student learning. The difficulty of generating useful reports in eLumen was cited by the Director of Assessment in two Assessment Academy Updates (Versions 3 and 4).

This indicated that an apparent gap exists between data collection and data analysis and use, perhaps caused by structural problems with the data management system or a lack of training in report generation.

In 2013, two faculty-led teams, the *Keystone Assessment Design Team* and the *General Education Assessment Design Team*, conducted an analysis of the quality of data and reporting in eLumen, and a

review of the use of rubrics. The teams elected to merge their work and presented the following findings to the Assessment Academy Project Team.

FINDINGS

1. Assessment focuses primarily on two learning outcomes: Critical Thinking and Effective Communication. Knowledge Acquisition was assessed across the curriculum, while Global Perspectives and Socially Responsible Action are assessed in two of the academic areas : the Social Sciences and Theology
2. A proliferation of virtually identical rubrics is used to assess Critical Thinking and Knowledge Acquisition.
3. Rubrics intended for assessment of learning in the academic majors are sometimes erroneously associated with the assessment of institutional undergraduate student learning outcomes in the eLumen system. The reverse is also true. This confounds efforts to calibrate rubrics and establish inter-rater reliability.
4. Most assessments are rated by a single assessor.
5. Rubrics initially intended to assess learning over time in the common core program are now used to assess learning within a course.

The Assessment Academy Project Team reviewed and endorsed the following recommendations for institutional action made by the General Education Assessment Design Team.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Non-renewal of the contract with the existing data management provider and discontinued use of the platform to gather and analyze student learning outcomes data after January 20, 2014. (Completed)
- Review of the institution's existing resources to support the continuing collection and analysis of student outcome data and implementation of a transitional data collection strategy for Spring 2014. (Completed, see sample Data Collection Spreadsheet)
- Identification of institutional data collection, management, analysis and reporting needs, beginning with the needs identified through the work of Marian University's Assessment Academy Project. (Pending)
- Sharing of the review of existing resources and identified data management needs with the appropriate faculty and administrative committees to inform administrative decisions re: adoption of institutional data management systems for future use. (Pending)

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION ON INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

4. WHAT EFFECT HAS YOUR TIME IN THE ACADEMY HAD ON INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING ON CAMPUS? HOW BROAD IS THAT COMMITMENT? HOW HAS INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING CHANGED?

As of Fall 2013, embedded assessment of student learning outcomes is standard practice in all required courses in the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (LACC). All courses seeking to be designated as part of the required or elective LACC must specify focal student learning outcomes and describe how they will be assessed. All faculty teaching courses in the LACC required courses are expected to use "anchor assessments" such as papers, presentations, and projects, to assess student proficiency relative to adopted undergraduate student learning outcomes (see General Education Inclusion Packet)

A culture of assessment emerged amongst the faculty from multiple departments and programs serving the LACC, with evidence that the culture became normalized in 2011. A common language about rubrics, outcomes and indicators emerged and began to shape discussions about the LACC curriculum and review and approval of courses. Today, as evidenced in minutes of the Committee for Student Learning and the General Education Committee, and in major program review and planning documents, faculty use a verbal short-hand for describing outcomes and indicators, demonstrating familiarity with the learning outcomes and with the assessment process that is part of "work as usual".

Rubrics for indicators within the student learning outcomes are well established tools in the assessment of learning outcomes; their use has spread across multiple programs, and is explicitly integrated into the assessment of learning in the undergraduate program in English, History, Theology, Philosophy, Criminal Justice, and Communication. Faculty in programs responsible for the LACC developed "anchor assessments" linked to specific undergraduate learning outcomes for those courses. This practice was lauded across campus in 2009 as a "best practice"; key embedded assessments are common to many programmatic assessment plans in the Arts and Sciences, Nursing and Public Health, Education, and Business and Public Safety.

Faculty use of the data management system, eLumen, to report on the assessment of student learning outcomes in the LACC increased from a low participation rate of 35% in 2009 to a high of 61% in 2012. The level of use rose despite delays in producing meaningful reports of student learning outcomes using eLumen' s reporting functions.

The review of progress and evaluation of the quality of outcomes data and rubrics reveal that widespread adoption by faculty of multiple similar rubrics in courses and programs had the unintended consequence of "muddying the waters" in terms of the quality of data reported in eLumen. The structure of reporting in eLumen was complex, and little specialized training was provided by the vendor or the institution to identified "data managers" other than the Director of Assessment. Report generation in eLumen was a challenge for these reasons. The General Education Design Team concluded that Marian University needed to conduct a thorough assessment of data management and reporting needs.

This led to the recommendation not to renew our contract with eLumen, and not to commit to purchasing a data management system until we were sure the system could meet our identified management and reporting needs (see Minutes of the Assessment Academy Project Team 11-16-2013).

The institutional commitment to student learning outcome assessment has already been detailed in the introduction to this report. Further evidence is demonstrated in the collaboration between Information

Technology and Assurance for Learning in developing a transitional system to support continued data collection, analysis and use during the transition to a future data management approach that better meets our needs. The Director of Information Technology has devoted considerable staff resources to supporting data collection and storage, the use of database forms to gather data and generate reports, and in establishing a transparent process for providing information about assessment both internally and externally.

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION ON STUDENT LEARNING

5. WHAT EFFECT HAS YOUR ACADEMY WORK HAD ON STUDENT LEARNING?

Student learning outcome data indicate that students meet or exceed standard expectations for learning in a select set of indicators in three student learning outcomes: Knowledge Acquisition, Critical Thinking and Effective Communication (see Data Day Summaries 2013). The level of learning assessed in the LACC is introductory to developing, with mastery or benchmark performance assessed through program capstones.

The decision to emphasize critical thinking and effective communication has led to the curricular changes in assessment of learning that impact how faculty determines proficiency in an outcome. The assessment of effective communication in writing is one example of this impact.

In 2009, assessment of written communication was not standard across the English program. Faculty did discuss quality of writing with each other, and with adjuncts, but there was no common experience around which to evaluate common expectations. In 2013-14, a common paper type and prompt is used to calibrate evaluation of writing in three areas.

Faculty identifies evidence of proficiency in the sample papers, explain the rationale for a rating, and compare that rating with those of their peers. Faculty have a common understanding of what writing that meets the standard for developing proficiency looks like and provide feedback to students accordingly. This clarification of expectations has improved writing outcomes, based on evidence collected by the English program and reported in their five-year program self-study and review.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

6. WHAT CONCRETE EVIDENCE DO YOU HAVE TO DEMONSTRATE THE EFFECTS YOU DESCRIBED IN QUESTIONS 3-5?

Concrete evidence of the outcome and impacts of Marian University's Assessment Academy Project has been cited where appropriate in each section of the report. Overall, evidence of impact falls into the following categories:

EVIDENCE OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZED PRACTICE OF EMBEDDED ASSESSMENT IN THE LIBERAL ARTS CORE CURRICULUM

The General Education Committee is the current body with curricular oversight of the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum. The structure and responsibilities of the Committee clearly identify the participation of representatives of all programs responsible for the LACC curriculum as well as representatives of each school, in decisions about undergraduate learning outcomes, the revision of rubrics, the review and analysis of data, and decisions impacting curriculum.

EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT ON ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT IN THE MAJORS

In 2012, Marian University revised the academic program policy, cycle, and process. The former Director of Assessment as noted in the response to Question 4, several academic majors in Arts and Science, most notably English and History, have fully incorporated the assessment of undergraduate learning outcomes into their assessment processes. As programs cycle through the five-year program review process, more are providing evidence that they are assessing learning outcomes and aligning assessment across multiple sets of external benchmarks.

Assurance for Learning has created a web-based process for uploading and storing program-level assessment plans in a database structure that will allow the institution to analyze the degree to which assessment of undergraduate student learning outcomes is embedded in program-level learning outcomes assessment.

EVIDENCE OF THE USE OF EVIDENCE FROM THE ASSESSMENT ACADEMY PROJECT IN INSTITUTIONAL DECISION-MAKING

At the institutional level, four key decisions made since 2011 are based on evidence from the analysis of student learning outcome data.

The first was the decision to redefine expectations for the assessment of program-level student learning outcomes, including the expectation that program level outcomes aligned to institutional undergraduate learning outcomes (see Marian University's Program Review Protocol, 2012)

The second was the decision in 2013 to propose a Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative that would a) establish a governance and accountability structure for assuring the quality of student learning outcomes, which would sustain the design and implementation of an institutional assurance for student learning; and b) create an institutional Center for Instruction and Organizational Development to structure faculty and staff development and organizational learning in response to evidence of student learning outcomes gathered through the assurance for student learning system.

The third was the decision in late 2013 not to renew Marian University's contract with the provider managing data collection and reporting of student learning outcomes. That decision was based on analysis of over five years of data on student learning outcomes demonstrated by thousands of

students. The quality of the data and the difficulty in generating meaningful reports were barriers to sustaining a valid assessment system and a participatory culture of assessment.

Finally, as a result of the analysis of the use of rubrics, the institution accepted a faculty recommendation to pilot the American Association of Colleges and University's VALUE Rubrics. This pilot is in progress at the time of submission of this report, and will be complete at the time of the Results Forum in 2014.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

7. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE NEXT LOGICAL STEPS FOR CONTINUING THE WORK YOU HAVE BEGUN IN THE ACADEMY? IN PARTICULAR, WHAT NEW STUDENT LEARNING INITIATIVES DO YOU SEE DEVELOPING FROM YOUR ACADEMY WORK, AND HOW WILL YOU SUSTAIN THE ENERGY AND MOMENTUM OF YOUR ACADEMY WORK?

Marian University has a distinctive approach to assessment that values authentic assessment of learning based on a system of shared, campus-wide responsibility for generating, evaluating and acting upon evidence to improve student learning outcomes. We learned that, with clear institutional leadership and support, we could create and effective system for assessment and inculcate an institutional culture to support this assessment framework because it is a shared responsibility aligned to core values rather than an isolated task with not context.

We also learned that we could sustain the fledgling system through one of the most turbulent eras in the history of Marian University. This project has been successful in attaining its goals and setting the stage for future development despite six years of changing structures, changing leadership, and the inevitable loss of continuity in vision, focus and planning caused by these changes. The Marian Approach to the assurance of student learning survives because of the commitment of faculty to sustaining this important work.

NEXT STEPS ALREADY IN PROGRESS

Establish the Assurance for Learning Council as the governing body for the assessment and assurance of student and organizational learning at Marian University. At present, the system for governing assessment and assurance of learning is distributed. Centralizing this vital function within the governance structure will assure that inevitable changes in leadership and personnel will be less likely to negatively disrupt emerging or established systems for assuring learning across campus (see "Marian University HLC Quality Initiative, 2013"

> **Establish the organizational unit self-study program evaluation process to assess the impact of operations on student and organizational learning**. Attainment of this goal will initiate the process of self-study for every unit in the institution. The self-study has an explicit focus on the self-assessment of impact on student learning outcomes and on professional and organizational learning. The use of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Standards provides a unifying frame for the design of learning opportunities for staff and holds

out the longer-term possibility of creating a common frame of reference for assessing the quality of the learning experience for all Marian faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees.

Establish the Center for Instruction and Organization Development (CIOD) as the institutional structure in which the organizational learning needs related to assuring student learning are assessed based on evidence from student learning outcome data. The CIOD focuses on developing capacity to implement and assess effective instructional methods and strategies as new theory and evidence on learning in higher education emerges. It will focus on professional development for staff and faculty that improve the impact of operations and student services on student learning outcomes.

Pilot Adoption of the VALUE Rubrics and Degree Qualifications Profile to emphasize program-level institutional assessment (see VALUE Rubric Pilot, 2013).

On November 19, 2013, the Assessment Academy Team endorsed a pilot of the use of the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics in up to six undergraduate programs at Marian University. This decision was based on a review of existing data, collection, and analysis trends in outcome data collected from 2007-2012.

VALUE rubrics are aligned to essential learning outcomes developed through the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Initiative of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). They have been calibrated for program-level outcome assessment, field-tested and piloted by the VALUE Quality Initiative of the AAC&U, and are currently in use in hundreds of undergraduate programs, including those offered within the UW System and in several of our fellow independent colleges and universities in Wisconsin. For these reasons, the VALUE rubrics were selected as a possible tool for use in the assessment of Marian University's undergraduate student learning outcomes.

SUMMARY

Marian University made a wise decision to participate in the Higher Learning Commission's Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning in 2008. We set ambitious goals, and modified those goals in the face of challenges posed by changing institutional leadership, priorities, and directions. We succeeded in attaining our ambitious goals because of the institutional commitment for assessment, particularly the commitment of faculty in all schools responsible for providing the Liberal Arts Common Core.

We've taken bold action in electing to work with a data management service provider whose philosophy matched our own, and again in ending our current relationship with that provider based on evidence that the system wasn't working for us as intended.

We have also taken up the challenge of using evidence gathered through the evaluation of the outcomes of the Assessment Academy Project to redefine the scope of the system for assuring learning at Marian University and to take meaningful and deliberate action through our Quality Initiative and projects such as the VALUE Rubric Pilot and the data management needs assessment to continuously improve our understanding of student learning and the student learning experience at Marian University.