Criterion Four—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.

Ball State University strives to enhance the quality of the educational experiences available to all students and uses assessment procedures designed to promote continuous improvement in student learning. In preparing this narrative, a subcommittee comprised of faculty from all seven academic colleges at Ball State and several professional staff created summary responses to the Criterion Four components and subcomponents for all academic units plus the Division of Student Affairs.

Core Component 4.A.

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

Consistent with its vision and mission, Ball State University grants doctoral, specialist, master's, bachelor's, and associate degrees through its seven academic colleges. All of the university's colleges, departments, and schools demonstrate responsibility for the quality of their educational programs. The following summary describes exemplary efforts as well as general explanations of how quality is exhibited at Ball State through such dimensions as program review and accreditation, credit evaluation policies, and the success of graduates.

Subcomponent 4.A.1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.

Subcomponent 4.A.5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.

Institutional planning and decision making at Ball State are amply supported by data obtained from continuous assessment by the university and individual units. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) is a fully staffed, internally funded unit that addresses the growing and evolving demands of both internal and external constituents for evidence regarding student outcomes and administrative decision making. Ball State uses multiple methods to systematically collect student feedback. Well-established procedures enable the university to undertake program-based, department-based, and university-wide assessment, and these procedures continue to be revised and refined to serve and strengthen the institution's planning efforts.

A major aspect of Ball State's ongoing assessment activity involves external reviews of academic programs and departments. Most of the university's 48 academic units are

periodically reviewed for accreditation by national or regional organizations. Formal records of unit accreditation reviews are available for viewing.

In past years, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) also required an internal and external review of all academic programs every seven years, which ensured units not subject to national or regional accreditation still underwent formal outside review. ICHE has since made this review voluntary, but Ball State has maintained a cycle of academic unit reviews and has integrated the process with an annual evaluation of progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the university's current strategic plan. Guidelines for academic program reviews specify the type of information to be provided. Copies of reports from these reviews since 2004 are available for viewing.

Subcomponent 4.A.2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning.

Subcomponent 4.A.3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.

All of Ball State's academic units have established clear procedures and protocols to ensure the appropriate evaluation of credit granted to undergraduates who transfer in and to graduate students who wish to have courses from other institutions applied toward Ball State degrees. Unit procedures and protocols comply with university policies related to credit evaluation.

Undergraduate Transfer

Ball State's policies and procedures governing undergraduate transfer credit are defined in the *Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog*. Undergraduate applicants with previous college experience follow the same application procedures as students with no postsecondary experience. Admission decisions are based on the applicants' academic records at all educational institutions attended. The following core policies determine a transfer student's admissibility:

- Transfer applicants must be in good academic standing and eligible to return immediately to the institution they last attended.
- Applicants must have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale for all transferable course work attempted.
- Remedial and vocational credits are not transferable, as well as courses from institutions that are not regionally accredited (i.e., Middle States Association, North Central Association, New England Association, Northwest Association, Southern Association, Western Association). However, transcripts from all such institutions attended are still required.
- Students who apply for admission to Ball State while enrolled at another college or university may be admitted with incomplete transcripts based on their cumulative GPA at their current institution. Admission granted under these circumstances will be withdrawn if the student's cumulative GPA falls below 2.0.

Along with Indiana's other state-assisted colleges and universities, Ball State collaborates

with the Transfer Indiana office in maintaining the Indiana Core Transfer Library, an electronic resource that lists more than 80 common undergraduate courses and how they transfer among all participating institutions. This course-by-course equivalency library does not have program-specific information, but it does provide prospective students with baseline course equivalencies by course and by institution.

Only course credit can be transferred to Ball State; grades do not transfer. All admitted transfer students meet with a professional academic advisor before their initial enrollment. Official Ball State course equivalents are established by the academic advisor in consultation with the appropriate academic department. Department chairs or their designees approve all courses transferred to a program that are not covered by articulation agreements. Credits associated with the Indiana Core Transfer Library are automatically accepted without departmental approval. Students can go online to see if their classes will transfer.

An example from the School of Nursing illustrates how Ball State departments evaluate credit from other universities. Students admitted for a baccalaureate program in nursing submit official transcripts of completed undergraduate course work for evaluation according to policies in the *Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog* and the *Baccalaureate Nursing Program Handbook.* An academic advisor evaluates transfer credits for relevance to the nursing program and University Core Curriculum requirements. The School of Nursing evaluates all transfer credits for relevance to the baccalaureate nursing program on the basis of didactic and clinical content and hours.

Transfer of credits for nursing courses from other baccalaureate nursing programs is considered on an individual basis according to a review of academic records and course syllabi. A student who wants to transfer nursing course credits from another program must submit the course descriptions, syllabi, content information, and related clinical information to the associate director of the baccalaureate nursing program for review. Following this review, the student receives a letter documenting the status of the course materials submitted for transfer credit.

Graduate Transfer

Policies and procedures governing graduate transfer credit are outlined in the *Ball State University Graduate Catalog*. Students who want to transfer graduate work completed at another institution for credit toward their Ball State degrees must ensure the work satisfies specific Graduate School policies, such as completion at a regionally accredited institution. The Graduate School does not give credit for experiential learning. Transfer hours cannot be used toward a master's degree at Ball State if they have been used toward a previous degree. Graduate School admissions personnel review potential transfer hours and indicate to the relevant academic department when transfer hours can be used toward a degree. Academic programs have discretion to allow transfer courses to count toward program requirements or electives.

Graduate students pursuing a master's degree requiring 44 or fewer credit hours may transfer up to 9 hours. If the master's degree requires 45 or more credit hours, students may transfer up to 15 hours. Students seeking a specialist degree may transfer up to 6 hours. Doctoral students

must complete 48 of the required 90 credit hours at Ball State. Individual departments may have more restrictive rules that take precedence. Other transfer rules include:

- Students must complete their degree's research requirement at Ball State.
- Credit hours for courses with credit/no-credit or pass/fail options cannot be transferred unless the academic department approves.
- Credit hours for correspondence courses cannot be transferred.
- All work for master's and specialist degrees must be completed in a six-year time limit. All work for a doctoral degree must be completed within seven years, with a mechanism for "certifying" out-of-date classes by showing the student has been engaged professionally in the field.

Graduate students also meet with department representatives who determine the relationship of previous credit to a current course of study. For international students, the Rinker Center for International Programs provides initial screening and recommends transferable credits, but individual departments determine which courses are accepted in their programs.

Subcomponent 4.A.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 assures 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.

Ball State's academic departments maintain authority over prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, and access to learning resources. This authority is exercised through continuously monitoring the curriculum and making changes as needed based on annual reviews of course evaluations, specialized accreditation criteria and external program reviews, and adherence to professional guidelines. Each unit initiates curricular additions and changes through departmental committees.

Examples from two different colleges illustrate authority over these assessment dimensions at the academic level:

Speech Pathology and Audiology—In the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology, baccalaureate and master's curriculum committees have authority over program curricula. These committees and other faculty maintain authority over prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, and expectations for student learning. They review annually the results of student learning outcome measurements, the continued adequacy of current student learning outcomes, and course content.

Course and curriculum changes are based on Council of Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech Pathology (CAA) accreditation criteria, student and faculty feedback, and aggregate results of the Praxis II Exam in Speech Pathology and Audiology, administered by the Educational Testing Service for the American Speech and Hearing Association. Depending on the state, this examination is used for state licensure or national certification.

Theatre and Dance—Of the 115 courses listed in Ball State's catalog for the Department of Theatre and Dance, approximately 75 percent have prerequisites ranging from previous coursework to department chair approval. Prerequisites are maintained and carefully enforced for all relevant courses within each of the department's seven program options. Sequential learning of skill sets is managed to ensure progress from general knowledge of a topic to a more refined level of expertise. Rare exceptions to prerequisite requirements must be approved by the primary departmental advisor.

Rigor of courses and expectations regarding student learning are maintained by individual faculty members and monitored by the department's curriculum committee. Master syllabi are created and maintained for all courses. The assumption underlying course and curriculum expectations is that these expectations align with the talent and motivation of the students admitted for study. Students applying to Ball State who indicate a potential major in the department complete a supplementary application and select an audition or interview date and location.

Each academic college at Ball State also has a curriculum committee to review and act upon changes proposed by departments. The Graduate Education Committee (GEC) and the Undergraduate Education Committee (UEC) are committees of the Faculty Council, one of three units of the University Senate, charged with reviewing, evaluating, and revising policies and programs at their respective levels. Their voting membership includes faculty and students.

Course Rigor

Ball State accepts responsibility for providing students with a rigorous education, and toward that end, a University Senate task force made up of faculty from each college plus student representatives was formed in January 2012. The task force completed its work and submitted its report to the Senate early in the spring 2013 semester. The study group collected data on grade inflation, students' academic engagement, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, the new core curriculum, immersive learning, expectations of external accreditors, and other relevant issues. Among its recommendations, the task force suggested that the university:

- develop longitudinal studies to assess the impact of existing programs and initiatives on student engagement, critical thinking, and problem solving
- define the topic of academic rigor broadly
- require the establishment of departmental program goals to address discipline-related ends to which faculty and students should strive

In response, the university provost charged academic deans with the responsibility to assess and plan for rigor in each of their respective colleges.

Faculty Qualifications

Departments uniformly work across all programs to ensure faculty are academically and experientially qualified to accomplish the mission, goals, and expected student outcomes. Search committees maintain high standards and are committed to recruiting and retaining faculty with nationally recognized credentials. See also Criterion 3, Subcomponent 3.C.2.

Ball State's policies governing graduate faculty status mandate that faculty quality remain consistently high. Faculty cannot teach graduate courses unless they hold at least associate graduate faculty status. Special status is required for regular and doctoral endorsement faculty, as outlined in the university's *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook.* To retain their status, graduate faculty must undergo regular review of their recent scholarly accomplishments. Ball State's Graduate Education Committee recently subjected all departmental graduate faculty policies to a thorough review.

Learning Resources

Two examples illustrate how Ball State maintains and exercises authority over access to learning resources:

Libraries—University Libraries provide access to learning resources for all students. The main facility, Bracken Library, is open more than 120 hours weekly, and students can access online course reserves, full-text databases, and other resources 24/7. Professional librarians provide research assistance both in person and remotely via chat, telephone, and text messaging. With authentication through a proxy server, students taking classes remotely have full access to online resources and may have print resources mailed to them upon request. See Criterion 3, Subcomponent 3.D.4. for a fuller discussion. View a photo gallery of [Bracken Library's facilities](#).

Technology—Ball State's information and communication technologies infrastructure also controls access to learning resources through policies and systems such as the following:

- User accounts are automatically generated once the users' affiliation with the university is verified, and these accounts are terminated when the individuals leave the university.
- Users access all learning resources with the same sign-on.
- Firewalls and intrusion detection systems are in place to protect systems and data.
- Data governance procedures allow access for only authorized individuals, and these procedures are reviewed regularly.
- Secure wireless and mobile access to learning resources is provided.

These systems are managed through a coordinated approach to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations as well as interoperability practices.

Dual-Credit Program

Ball State's dual-credit College Transition Program began in 2002 with a mission to foster partnerships between the university and high schools. The program promotes college preparation for high school juniors and seniors by assuring quality instruction and offering students an experience that is otherwise unattainable before they enter college. Dual-credit courses are available through two delivery methods:

- on-site distance education courses taught in high schools by qualified high school instructors certified by university academic departments
- online distance courses taught by Ball State faculty

Ball State currently partners with 18 Indiana high schools, primarily in east central Indiana, and had more than 1,000 juniors and seniors enrolled in online and on-site courses during both the 2010–11 and 2011–12 academic years. Through the dual-credit program, students enroll in more than 50 on-site courses and 30 online courses. They take the courses with other high school students rather than with Ball State undergraduates. The average class size is 12 students.

The Division of Online and Distance Education is the central contact point between Ball State's academic departments and high schools wishing to affiliate with our College Transition Program. Two staff members—a full-time assistant director of online and distance education and a full-time program coordinator—administer these relationships. The program is growing, and administrators are working with academic departments and high schools to expand the number of courses offered and the number of high school teachers certified to teach on-site courses.

Academic Quality—To ensure the academic integrity of the College Transition Program, the policies and procedures established for it conform to the standards of the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), of which Ball State is a member. All high school instructors who participate in the program must have the same credentials as Ball State adjunct faculty. In July 2012, administrators of the program submitted an application to become accredited by NACEP. The university expects to hear from NACEP about the accreditation decision in April 2013.

Ball State is also listed as a preferred provider of dual-credit courses in Indiana. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) created the preferred providers list in December 2011 for high schools seeking quality postsecondary partnerships for dual-credit programs. ICHE compiled and approved the list after reviewing dual-credit programs statewide. This list includes all Indiana colleges and universities that are accredited by NACEP or that submitted review materials to the Indiana Dual Credit Review Subcommittee for approval.

Course Equivalence—High school teachers participating in Ball State's dual-credit program use the same course materials that university faculty use, and they conduct courses using the same standards as on-campus courses. In addition, Ball State faculty members serve as liaisons to the high schools. These faculty liaisons—along with department chairs and college deans—review and approve applications from high school instructors. Faculty liaisons also coordinate orientation and professional development sessions for high school instructors who plan to teach in the dual-credit program. These liaisons visit high schools to observe dual-credit classes, and they answer questions from high school instructors via phone or e-mail.

The NACEP accreditation body requires that faculty liaisons conduct an annual visit to schools, which is what most Ball State academic departments do. However, the Department of English has taken the requirement a step further as its liaison often conducts two visits per year.

An example from Ball State's Department of English illustrates how an academic unit determines the equivalence between on-campus courses and dual-credit courses taught in high schools. The English department has a dedicated faculty member for evaluating these classes. The director of the Writing Program reviews all applications and reapplications for

instructors in the dual-credit program. Each instructor must meet minimum requirements for credentials and submit teaching materials that align with the Writing Program and University Core Curriculum (UCC-21) goals. Dual-credit instructors are mentored via a departmental liaison and are observed twice during the academic year. The instructors are required to follow all course policies that regular Ball State Writing Program classes follow for textbook selection, assignments, grading, student attendance, and student evaluations.

Subcomponent 4.A.6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs 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, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and AmeriCorps).

Ball State uses multiple methods at the unit, university, state, and national levels to evaluate the success of its graduates. Academic departments vary in the amount of data they collect. Some units (e.g., anthropology, geography, and mathematical sciences) maintain current records of employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs. Other departments acknowledge the need for further information and are partnering with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to improve the data stream.

Departmental Data

Three examples from different colleges illustrate departments' use of surveys and other data sources to ensure degree or certificate programs accomplish their purposes:

- **Nursing—**In the College of Applied Sciences and Technology, the School of Nursing uses program outcome data and graduation rates along with indirect measures such as student exit, alumni, and employer surveys to promote ongoing undergraduate and graduate program improvements. Pass rates on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) have been above the national mean, as required by the Indiana State Board of Nursing. Nurse practitioner (NP) certification pass rates approach or exceed internal benchmarks. Respondents to the exit and alumni surveys report they are employed, and employer satisfaction is consistently high.
- **Business—**All departments in the Miller College of Business consult with business advisory boards one to three times per year to ensure students' preparation includes the skills necessary for employment in the relevant business specialty areas.
- **Journalism—**In the College of Communication, Information, and Media, the Department of Journalism uses alumni advisory boards to critique its curriculum and to ensure its programs prepare students effectively for advanced study or employment.

The use of outside input will spread throughout the university under Ball State's 2012–2017 strategic plan, which states in Performance Indicator 95 that every department will have an external advisory council.

Institutional Surveys

Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) administers a university-wide senior survey sent to all graduating students. This survey, first used in December 2011, asks graduates about their experiences at Ball State, their satisfaction with various aspects of their enrollment, their educational and personal growth, and their current/planned employment and further education. The results of the most recent survey for the 2011–12 academic year are available for review.

OIE also administers alumni surveys to measure recent graduates' perceptions of their experience at Ball State, including how well the university prepared them for work and further study. The 2012 survey focused on alumni who graduated one and five years prior, or in academic years 2010–11 and 2006–07. Results of these surveys include:

- After five years, 83 percent of the 2006–07 graduates were employed full-time, 7 percent were employed part-time, 2 percent had some type of student employment, and 7 percent were not employed. Of those not employed, 38 percent could not find employment, 22 percent had other reasons, 28 percent were raising a family, and 6 percent were pursuing further education.
- After one year, 63 percent of the 2010–11 graduates were employed full-time, 14 percent were employed part-time, 11 percent had some type of student employment, and 11 percent were not employed. Of those not employed, 51 percent could not find employment, 34 percent were pursuing further education, 10 percent had other reasons, 3 percent were raising a family, and 3 percent reported recently being laid off.
- Of the alumni employed full-time five years after graduation, 73 percent were working in their major or in a field related to their major. After one year, 76 percent were employed in their major or in a related field.
- Of the graduates employed full-time after five years, 87 percent said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their current employment. After one year, 80 percent were very satisfied or satisfied with their employment.
- After five years, 75 percent of graduates were pursuing or planning to pursue further education. After one year, this figure was 81 percent.

OIE has expanded its use of alumni surveys to include summer baccalaureate graduates. Separate surveys cover students who graduated one year ago and five years ago, and both surveys ask about their current employment and further education. The one-year alumni survey asks about graduates' satisfaction with various programs, services, and experiences at Ball State, while the five-year survey asks whether what the students learned at Ball State has helped them in their chosen professions.

OIE also conducts a graduate student exit survey, and a graduate student alumni survey will be developed and regularly administered in the future.

Scholarships/Fellowships

Another indicator of graduates' success is the number of scholarships and fellowships they receive. Since 2010, three students were finalists for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship—the first finalists in Ball State's history—and another student became the university's

second-ever Truman Scholar. Over the past decade, Ball State has had eight Goldwater Scholarship recipients and six Udall Scholarship recipients.

Internship Participation

High rates of participation in internships also indicate student success. Between 2004 and 2012, Ball State granted internship credit to 8,241 students. Their experiences enabled them to apply relevant knowledge and skills in the content areas of their specializations. Each year, for example, the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences places more than 120 students in internships; the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology places between 90 and 100; and the Department of Social Work places between 60 and 65, excluding students whose classes incorporate fieldwork but are not primarily internships.

Many other students participate in noncredit internships, although details about these experiences rely on survey responses or reports from employers and students. In addition, Ball State's Career Center collects information on students and alumni who participate in on-campus job interviews. Employers also visit the campus for job fairs and often return to Muncie for follow-up interviews. The Career Center makes every effort to verify the number of job offers and acceptances that result.

State/National Data Sources

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) uses state and national data repositories and networks to track the success of Ball State graduates. The Indiana Workforce Intelligence System (IWIS) recently created reports on the number of students at each Indiana public institution, by degree level, who remain in the state and are employed, along with their average salaries. The report is currently available only in aggregate and with results at one point in time after students graduate. Efforts are under way to make these results available at the individual student level so they can be summarized at the level of each major and each college and at multiple points in time following graduation. These results are available only for graduates who remain in the state of Indiana.

In addition, the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Student Tracker system is being used by OIE to report on the number of Ball State baccalaureate graduates who reenroll for graduate and professional school at other universities across the country and the number of these who subsequently graduate. NSC results were recently obtained for the past five years of Ball State baccalaureate graduates, and a report is being prepared. Information on earlier cohorts is also being collected and will be submitted to NSC.

Summary: Core Component 4.A.

The evidence shows that all colleges, departments, and schools at Ball State demonstrate responsibility for the quality of their educational programs. The university has consistently maintained specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes and a process of regular external reviews for other units. Since the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) policy regarding regular internal and external review of all academic programs is now voluntary, Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) and academic departments need to maintain a cycle of unit reviews in order to ensure program effectiveness

for student learning and to promote continuous improvement throughout the university. Other challenges include:

Technology Use—The university is investigating how to effectively deploy institution-wide software systems and emerging technologies to promote educational quality and continuous improvement. Ball State's response includes the new campuswide Banner data system (part of the university's Enterprise Resource Planning initiative, described under Core Component 4.C.). Banner was introduced in 2012 to help academic units maintain and exercise authority over course prerequisites. New Blackboard modules, including Blackboard Outcomes and Blackboard Analytics, will facilitate monitoring the connections between course assignments and specific curriculum goals and the evaluation of student learning.

Alumni Tracking—Tracking of alumni employment and post-baccalaureate educational outcomes has been limited by low return rates on voluntary surveys. Both the low return rate and the voluntary nature of the surveys call into question the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the survey results for assessing postgraduation student outcomes. Ball State supplements these surveys with data from the Indiana Workforce Intelligence System (WIS) and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), but the university could also work with individual academic departments to develop better means for obtaining reliable information on postgraduation outcomes from their alumni.

Credit Policies—Ball State's transfer-credit and dual-credit policies seem reasonable, but there is little or no empirical evidence showing that arbitrary limits (e.g., up to 9 transfer credits for graduate programs of 44 hours or fewer but up to 15 transfer credits for programs of 45 hours or more) are effective in balancing quality control with efficiency in persistence and degree completion in a way that enhances the use of Ball State's resources. Action plans for continued improvement involve standardizing how students qualify for dual-credit courses, assuring consistent and reliable access to the university's online student evaluation forms, and including dual-credit sections within departmental and university assessment initiatives.

Finally, the university accepts responsibility for providing a rigorous education. Now that the academic rigor task force has reported to the University Senate, it is up to the colleges and departments to translate these ideas into action steps that ensure a rigorous intellectual experience for all Ball State students.

Core Component 4.B.
The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

Ball State University recognizes assessment as a strategy for measuring, understanding, and improving student learning, having as its goal a higher-quality education. Academic departments devote considerable effort to gathering evidence of student learning. Without exception, all colleges, departments, and schools at Ball State engage in programmatic assessment of student learning and consider it an essential way to identify areas for

growth and improvement. Academic departments and schools identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities their programs are designed to instill in students, determine assessment measures, and collect and examine assessment data.

Each year, every department reports its assessment results to its college dean, and numerous examples demonstrate that departments take effective action on the results. The following information elaborates on this evidence and cites some exemplary efforts to address this criterion.

Subcomponent 4.B.1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.

Subcomponent 4.B.2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.

Ball State's 2012–2017 strategic plan states the university is "relentlessly focused on learning outcomes." All academic departments have specific, clearly stated student learning outcomes that are assessed regularly and used to suggest curriculum and pedagogical changes. In addition, some programs, such as the three departments in the College of Architecture and Planning (CAP), display a core set of beliefs espoused by each program. CAP calls these the TIBs (This I Believe):

- We believe in the power of the studio.
- We believe in learning without borders.
- We believe in multidisciplinary integration.
- We believe in the perpetual learner.

These beliefs form the foundation that connects curricula to the criteria of the college's three accrediting bodies, the National Architecture Accreditation Board (NAAB), the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Accreditation Board, and the American Planning Association (APA) Planning Accreditation Board. The accreditation criteria are the student learning outcomes of each program and can be traced to the courses and experiences that contribute to their fulfillment. In its 2013 reaccreditation, the Department of Architecture was not only reaccredited but achieved "distinction" in several accreditation categories.

Similarly, the university's teacher education programs, which involve six of the seven academic colleges at Ball State, not just the Teachers College, share a common "conceptual framework" that appears in logo form on the cover of the *Ball State University Professional Education Unit Assessment Handbook.* Highlighting "expertise," "engagement," and "context" and the elements of each, the logo quickly introduces one to the fundamentals of the unit assessment program that are more fully developed at "decision points" in the educational plan for each preservice teacher in a Ball State program. This structure is implemented through rGrade, a Ball State database that captures examples of artifacts, records the analyzed results of assessments, and produces reports for use in curriculum and pedagogical modification.

The implemented assessment program for teacher education produced not only a successful reaccreditation of all of the teacher education programs following the Professional Education Unit's most recent accreditation visit in 2011, but 23 teacher education programs also received national recognition through their respective professional associations. Moreover, as part of the reaccreditation, each institution had to strive toward reaching "target" for at least one of the six standards. Ball State reached target for Standard 2: Unit Assessment System. As a result, the university was selected for the 2011 Board of Examiners (BOE) training in November of that year. Ball State was chosen because of its distinctive combination of achievement, complexity of the professional education community, and continued and extensive experience with successful accreditation. These factors made Ball State the ideal place for BOE nominees to learn about standards, processes, and expectations of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The assessment program of every academic unit at Ball State includes at least one direct measure of student learning that demonstrates explicitly how well students have acquired knowledge, work-related skills, or abilities targeted by the department or a specific learning experience. Direct measures include:

- comprehensive written and oral examinations
- standardized tests (e.g., Educational Testing Service Major Field Exam)
- licensing examinations
- faculty evaluation of student portfolios
- faculty juries (e.g., School of Music)
- performance artifacts
- business plans
- evaluations of students by practicum and internship supervisors, outside professionals, and community partners

In addition, indirect measures of learning ask students to reflect on what they have learned and experienced. These include student ratings of program quality and student self-assessment, focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews. Not all units use all of these direct and indirect measures.

In smaller departments, assessment data are typically collected from every student in every course each semester. In large departments that may enroll thousands of students in dozens of sections each semester, assessment data may cover only a subset of courses in a given year and be obtained through random sampling rather than collected from every student.

Major Field Exams

Learning outcomes have been assessed for many years at Ball State. For up to 20 years, senior majors in many departments have taken the appropriate major field exam sponsored by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). A current list of these departments is available for review.

By way of illustration, the Miller College of Business uses this exam to ensure business graduates have relevant content knowledge in all areas of business. Data are collected

each spring in the capstone classes that all business majors take, and these data are used to evaluate individual majors and the college as a whole. The average ETS score of Ball State business majors has improved the past three years:

- 2010—70th percentile among students taking the test at 618 schools
- 2011—75th percentile among students taking the test at 259 schools
- 2012—79th percentile among students taking the test at 438 schools

In 2010, an emphasis on "continuous improvement" led Miller College of Business faculty to examine the ETS data broken down by major and to observe that cross-major knowledge (e.g., marketing knowledge among finance majors, finance knowledge among management majors) needed improvement. Faculty identified and disseminated ways to integrate cross-functional knowledge into upper-division courses. Performance in cross-major knowledge will also be a special focus in 2012–13 when Miller College scrutinizes its ETS results again.

Professional Abilities

In departments that emphasize performance-based assessment, direct outcomes include external demonstrations of students' professional abilities.

One of the best examples of this approach is Ball State's news curriculum. Based on the recommendations of alumni and professional advisory panels and the results of the faculty's own environmental scan, the dean of the College of Communication, Information, and Media (CCIM) tasked a group of telecommunications and journalism faculty with the responsibility to create "a distinctive, innovative news and information program that will attract national attention, research partnerships with industry, and the best students from across the country."

The college developed a new curriculum from the ground up, shattering the disciplinary silos that separated expertise. Graduates of the program had to be able to appreciate the opportunities and challenges presented by print, video, audio, radio, and mobile platforms and to exhibit the ability to adjust nimbly to the evolving formats offered by new technology and demanded by consumers. Program graduates also had to function comfortably across platforms, which is the professional direction that news communications is taking in the 21st century.

The success of this curriculum is best measured by the employment record of its graduates. The program is producing its first alumni in May 2013. However, in addition to test scores, student creations—stories in various formats across different platforms—have been embedded in the curriculum and assessed by faculty. Each class and each student is also expected to submit class projects to various student media outlets that are independently judged by editors and possibly published. Assignments from this curriculum will be tied to the Unified Media Lab when it opens in 2014. See a video about the Unified Media Lab.

Other examples that illustrate these outcomes include:

- Undergraduate students in a philosophy and religious studies course produce and edit *Stance: An International Undergraduate Philosophy Journal*, the only

undergraduate journal of sufficient quality to be listed in *The Philosopher's Index*. Members of this class have performed especially well on the student learning outcomes of transferable career skills, integrating disciplinary knowledge, and professional ethics. *Stance* received the 2010 Prize for Excellence and Innovation in Philosophy Programs from the American Philosophical Association/Philosophy Documentation Center.

- Each year, undergraduate immersive learning students in English produce *The Broken Plate*, a literary magazine that won a 2011 award as the best student literary magazine in Indiana.

- Many student media organizations within the Department of Journalism (e.g., *The Ball State Daily News*, *Ball Bearings*, Cardinal Communications, and the American Advertising Federation) receive national, regional, state, and local awards each year.

- Telecommunications programs and projects have been recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (two gold Student Academy Awards), Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (39 regional Emmy Awards), Indiana Association of School Broadcasters, Indiana Broadcasters Association, Sports Video Group, and Fox College Sports.

- The School of Music's jury system is a useful example of "value-added" assessment. At the end of each semester, all music majors complete a juried performance to evaluate their progress in studio classes. This performance also provides feedback as students work toward the "gateway" assessment of junior standing. Typically students complete a minimum of four juries before attempting the junior-standing assessment. Students decide to seek junior standing in consultation with their studio teachers. As students progress through the undergraduate program, repeated evaluation of their performances provides a clear basis for assessing what they have learned at Ball State. The School of Music is also considering collecting data from students' admission auditions to provide a baseline for later comparisons.

- The Department of Theatre and Dance established Acting Showcases in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago that give our students the opportunity to connect with agents, producers, and directors—those who have the potential to affect their lives and launch their respective careers. The associated benefits from this endeavor include heightened visibility for the academic program, critical networking with industry professionals, enhanced recruitment of students and faculty, and program assessment by active professionals in the field.

Graduate Programs

Academic departments at Ball State are also required to have assessment plans in place for graduate programs. Some departments, such as educational psychology, may conduct assessment as part of a student's doctoral defense, but all departments are required to conduct an evaluation of doctoral students at the end of their second year, before reaching candidacy. Assessment at the master's level may also be accomplished through master's-level comprehensive examinations, public presentation requirements, and thesis/creative project defenses.

Special Impact Programs

Ball State's emphasis on assessment extends to programs that have a special impact on students. For example, the Rinker Center for International Programs established learning outcomes for all study-abroad experiences that encompass:

- personal development (e.g., adapting effectively when presented with change)
- career preparation (e.g., foreign study that takes advantage of unique local resources)
- interpersonal communication (e.g., improved foreign language competency)
- global citizenship (e.g., increased awareness of the interdependence of global systems)

The Rinker Center first measured the extent to which students achieve these goals as a result of study-abroad experiences in 2012 and will collect and compare predeparture and returnee surveys annually. The center will also implement programmatic changes to introduce new learning content and activities to assist students in their achievement of these outcomes, which will be revisited in 2014.

Ball State's Honors College has also established student learning objectives, such as critical analysis of human artifacts and effective written and oral communication. Faculty who teach in the Honors College meet annually to review assessment data from the previous year and chart changes or adjustments to the curriculum as appropriate.

University Core Curriculum

At the university-wide level, academic assessment begins with the common core curriculum required of all undergraduate students at Ball State. The initial phase of the new University Core Curriculum was implemented starting with the fall 2010 freshman class. Enough students have progressed through this curriculum for the university to begin the core curriculum assessment process, as mandated by Ball State's 2012–2017 strategic plan (Goal 1, Objective 6, Performance Indicator 37), in fall 2012. The curriculum's framework includes 12 goals and objectives, such as written composition and critical thinking, and each of these elements will be assessed. The overall assessment plan involves a four-year cycle, with three elements to be assessed each year.

Blackboard Outcomes will be piloted to collect student samples needed for the assessments in summer 2013. This program will randomly sample examples of student work representing the transformations of each tier. Teams of faculty will be trained to use rubrics developed to evaluate specific elements of the transformations. The teams will then review the samples of student work to determine how well students achieved the learning outcomes' expectations. Information gained from the assessment and evaluation process will then be used to make decisions about possible changes in the core curriculum.

The initial UCC-21 assessment project focuses on written composition. Academic departments have been asked to identify a course in every major that provides a mature writing sample. Artifacts from these courses will be placed into Blackboard Outcomes and a random sample taken. A group of faculty will be trained to apply a rubric for evaluating writing samples and will participate in the process outlined above. The full UCC-21 assessment process is expected to begin in summer 2014.

Writing Proficiency

Baccalaureate students at Ball State must demonstrate that they are proficient writers by passing either an exam (WPP 392) or a specific course (WPP 393). Both of these were developed to assess the writing and critical reading and thinking skills of students. WPP 392 (Writing Proficiency Exam) is a proctored, timed-writing exam taken in a computer-mediated environment. Offered twice in the fall and spring semesters and once in the summer, the exams are graded holistically by a committee of readers from departments across the campus.

Students who do not pass after two attempts can complete the requirement by taking WPP 393 (Writing Proficiency Course). The class size for WPP 393 is limited to 10 students, and they work one-on-one with their instructor to create a portfolio of four essays that mirror the critical reading and writing process students need to demonstrate in order to be successful in the Writing Proficiency Exam.

The writing exams and portfolios are graded by instructors who teach the undergraduate courses that form UCC so there is consistency in expectations among university faculty about what constitutes junior-level writing proficiency in all disciplines. The information gathered through these assessment tools is shared regularly with individuals and university groups, such as departments, committees, and offices. Since the program moved to its current format in summer 2010, the general pass rate for the Writing Proficient Exam has been about 70 percent, and the general pass rate for the Writing Proficiency Course has been 98 percent. Approximately 10 percent of students pass the exam after the second attempt, and about 5 percent do not pass after the second attempt.

Student Affairs

Assessment also extends to Ball State's Division of Student Affairs and its cocurricular outcome goals that all students demonstrate life skills, multicultural competence, active citizenship, leadership, and behaviors consistent with institutional values. This division developed a comprehensive assessment program for all of its units. In an effort to be more transparent and to identify performance improvements, each unit implements at least one assessment project each academic year, with at least one study conducted in each of the outcome areas. Studies used direct measures such as academic status changes (e.g., withdrawals) and indirect measures such as satisfaction surveys, use of program services, and lifestyle and leadership assessments.

To take one example, the Career Center investigated whether online career assessment would effectively engage freshmen to use additional career programs and services early in their college careers. The study compared three groups of freshmen:

- students who were given results of an online personality measure plus matching career interest information
- students who received additional access to on-site Career Center assistance plus one career development program
- students who received neither intervention

Students who used the online career assessment later made better use of the Career

Center's programs and services (e.g., selecting a major) than did the other groups, indicating that online options effectively engage freshmen with the career development process. As a result, messages are being developed for the orientation program to motivate freshmen to participate in the online career assessment.

Building on these and other efforts, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) facilitated a workshop for 30 staff members within the Division of Student Affairs in summer 2012. This workshop helped the group to fine-tune existing learning outcomes and projects, collaborate across departments on future assessments, and identify campus resources that support current efforts, including the OIE-sponsored student surveys.

Indirect Evidence of Assessment

Virtually all of Ball State's academic departments provide direct evidence of their efforts to promote and assess specific student learning objectives, such as knowledge, skills, and effective writing. Indirect evidence that such assessment is relatively broad-based at Ball State comes from students who recognize and reflect on the gains they have made and the effectiveness of the education they received. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered by Indiana University to measure the extent to which students engage in practices that are empirically shown to promote learning and success. NSSE was administered to Ball State's first-year students and seniors in the spring semesters of 2004, 2007, 2008, and 2012.

Eight NSSE items provide indirect evidence of the university's effectiveness in helping students achieve several broad learning goals. Responses of Ball State seniors in 2008 and 2012 were compared with responses of NSSE's 2008 and 2012 national samples of seniors from institutions in Ball State's Carnegie classification, Research University/High Research Activity, or RU/H. These items ask about the extent to which the university contributed to students' knowledge, skills, and personal development. The results are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: 2008/2012 Ball State–NSSE Comparison (Seniors)

To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? (Percent very much or quite a bit)	Ball State University 2008	Other RU/H Institutions 2008	Ball State University 2012	Other RU/H Institutions 2012
Acquiring a broad general education	86 percent	84 percent	82 percent	81 percent
Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	80 percent	72 percent	77 percent	74 percent
Writing clearly and effectively	73 percent	73 percent	73 percent	74 percent
Speaking clearly and effectively	71 percent	69 percent	73 percent	70 percent
Thinking critically and analytically	85 percent	86 percent	84 percent	87 percent

Analyzing quantitative problems	72 percent	76 percent	68 percent	78 percent
Using computing and information technology	85 percent	81 percent	79 percent	79 percent
Working effectively with others	81 percent	77 percent	80 percent	77 percent

In 2008, the percentage of seniors reporting that their experiences at Ball State contributed "very much" or "quite a bit" to achieving each goal was within plus-or-minus 2 percent of the national percentage on four of the eight items, below the national percentage (72 percent vs. 76 percent) on the item "analyzing quantitative problems," and at least 4 percent above the national sample on "acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills" (80 percent vs. 72 percent), "using computing and information technology" (85 percent vs. 81 percent), and "working effectively with others" (81 percent vs. 77 percent).

In 2012, the percentage of seniors reporting that their experiences contributed "very much" or "quite a bit" to achieving each goal was within plus-or-minus 3 percent of the national percentage on seven of eight items and below the national percentage (68 percent vs. 78 percent) on the item "analyzing quantitative problems." Thus, in both recent administrations of NSSE, Ball State seniors were comparable to seniors from other RU/H institutions in the national sample with respect to several broadly stated student learning objectives, with the exception of analyzing quantitative problems. With respect to the last item, however, more than two-thirds of seniors reported that their Ball State education contributed "very much" or "quite a bit" to their skill in analyzing quantitative problems.

Other indirect evidence comes from recent Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) surveys of Ball State graduates, one of 2008–09 graduates conducted in 2010 and another of 2007 graduates conducted in 2012. Findings of these surveys included:

- More than 94 percent of all respondents indicated their experiences at Ball State prepared them very well or satisfactorily in the areas of intellectual and personal growth, speaking, listening, problem solving, analysis and evaluation of ideas, critical thinking, and lifelong learning.
- More than 85 percent reported they were very well or satisfactorily prepared for a career and further education.
- About 93 percent reported their Ball State experiences prepared them very well (50 percent) or satisfactorily (43 percent) in the area of writing skills.
- Math was the lowest-rated academic skill, with 21 percent of 2008–09 graduates and 16 percent of 2007 graduates reporting poor preparation in this area.

Finally, the evaluation of teaching plays a primary role in providing Ball State students with the best possible educational experience, and faculty annually evaluate their teaching by a variety of means, including student ratings of the quality of instruction. Ratings by students are conducted each year on a regular schedule, and ratings are collected in at least one class per year for every faculty member whose assignment includes teaching. Students are invited via e-mail (with reminders every three days) to complete online evaluations for all courses with four or more students. To increase participation, timely completion of evaluations allows

students early access to their final grades.

The statistical data gathered from student ratings are summarized by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and overall results have been consistently good. Student evaluations are used for personnel decisions such as progress toward tenure, merit pay, and promotion. They are not generally used for program assessment, although individual instructors may make changes in pedagogy in response to the comments they receive from students.

Subcomponent 4.B.3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

Among the nearly 50 academic departments and cocurricular programs at Ball State, some are "closing the assessment loop," meaning they not only use assessment data to modify goals and programs but also obtain the necessary follow-up evidence on whether these changes were effective. Other units use assessment data in making program changes but do not always collect and evaluate follow-up evidence. Still others assess and evaluate learning objectives when considering program changes but may not base all changes directly on established evidence.

All units at Ball State at least recognize that the purpose of assessment is improved student learning and have developed procedures for reviewing and acting on assessment data. Examples from three different colleges illustrate how departments use assessment information to improve student learning:

Psychology—Every bachelor's graduate in the Department of Psychological Science has completed the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Major Field Exam in Psychology since 2003. From the beginning, ETS mean scores of Ball State psychology majors have been compared with mean scores from two relevant groups of institutions: those similar to Ball State in Carnegie classification and located in the Midwest, and the entire national population of colleges and universities using the ETS Major Field Exam in Psychology. From 2003 to 2010, Ball State psychology majors consistently matched or outperformed both of the comparison groups on mean total score and almost all subscores and assessment indicators provided by ETS. The exception came in the neuroscience areas (physiology, sensation, and perception), where students at more than 50 percent of the comparison institutions scored higher than Ball State students.

From 2003 through 2011, no courses covering neuroscience topics were required of psychology majors (i.e., such courses were only electives) despite rapid growth in the importance of this area to the field of psychology. In response to this situation, the Department of Psychological Science hired a tenure-line faculty member in 2009 to immediately take all responsibility for teaching the neuroscience-related courses. In the 2011 administrations of the ETS exam, Ball State's psychology seniors for the first time received higher mean scores in all areas— including the neuroscience subscale and assessment indicator—than students at comparison schools. As of fall 2012, all new psychology majors are now required to take a course in the biological basis of behavior.
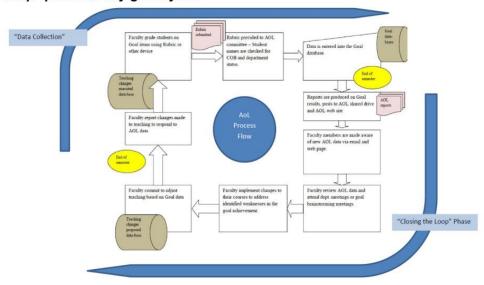
Nursing—Ball State's School of Nursing has used assessment evidence to modify its curriculum and improve its four-year graduation rate. After observing that 10–15 percent of nursing students repeated one of the clinical courses regardless of how these courses were taught, the school overhauled its curriculum by converting two 6-credit-hour courses to three 4-hour courses, reorganizing other content into two new courses, and moving material of special interest to many nursing students (psychiatry/mental health and pediatrics) earlier in the course sequence.

After making these curriculum changes in 2010–11, the School of Nursing predicted that students admitted to the program would be more motivated to pursue nursing as a career and show more commitment to succeeding in the rigorous curriculum. The retention rate among nursing majors increased from 92 percent in 2010 to 98 percent in 2012. The four-year graduation rate for this cohort will also be monitored as further evidence of the effectiveness of the curricular changes.

Business—In the assessment loop used by the Miller College of Business (see Figure 4.1 below), data are collected for half of the college-level goals each year, while evidence for the other half is reviewed in preparation for closing the loop. For this latter process, quarterly brainstorming sessions examine how the data collected the previous year can be used to improve teaching and learning. The schedule is maintained on the college's Assurance of Learning (AOL) website, and minutes of these meetings are accessible to all faculty. In addition, faculty members who use evidence gained from assessment to make improvements in their classes (typically 20–35 percent) report back to the AOL committee.

Figure 4.1: Miller College of Business Assurance of Learning (AOL) Process

As an example of this process, business faculty recently used several years of evidence and experience to modify the entrepreneurship curriculum to better address changes in the field,

the industry's criticism of academic practice, and the importance of continued learning after graduation. Specifically, the introductory course now comes earlier to expose more students to entrepreneurship and give them more lead time to enter the major or minor based on their experiences in the course. Subsequent entrepreneurship courses focus on the creativity and opportunity recognition process, application of engineering and design principles to an entrepreneurial opportunity, production of a business model and plan that a student defends before an outside panel of business professionals, and a consulting course that teaches long-term entrepreneurial decision making through research.

This new curriculum more effectively immerses students in each stage of the entrepreneurial process, allowing them to acquire not just content knowledge but also the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills and experiences necessary to take advantage of future business opportunities.

Mathematics—Several years of indirect evidence from the NSSE and alumni surveys indicated that our graduates experienced difficulty analyzing quantitative problems. Coupling these findings with direct evidence from the core curriculum assessments and low classroom performance (D and F grades and withdrawals), the Department of Mathematical Sciences took the following actions:

- MATHS 111, the algebra-focused precalculus class, was redesigned in spring 2011. The changes were implemented in fall 2011. The course topics and pedagogy were altered to place preparation for calculus (MATHS 132, 161, 165) at the forefront. A custom textbook was adopted. Input from faculty about areas of student weakness in preparation for calculus was used in redesigning the course.
- MATHS 108, the intermediate algebra class, was redesigned in spring and fall 2012. The course topics and pedagogy were altered to focus on preparation for MATHS 111 and MATHS 201 (Mathematics for Elementary School Teachers). A custom textbook— a slight modification of the textbook for MATHS 111—will serve both MATHS 108 and MATHS 111 students.
- The department is working to ensure that all entering freshmen pursuing a business or STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) major take the Mathematics Placement Test, which is believed to be more effective in accurately placing students than the use of ACT/SAT scores.
- Department faculty worked to "flip the classroom" using a new technology known domestically as Vizi-Swap—created at and spun-off from Ball State—to create a text for MATHS 125, the primary core curriculum mathematics course for non-STEM and non-business majors. The goals were to increase understanding of mathematics as an analytical tool for everyday life and to increase critical thinking. This course was piloted during academic year 2012–13, and assessments of student performance are forthcoming.

Subcomponent 4.B.4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

At Ball State, assessment is largely the work of the teaching faculty in each academic department and school, since those areas have the greatest influence over the formulation of learning goals, pedagogical practices to attain learning goals, and best ways to assess student learning outcomes. All faculty participate in the assessment of student learning at some point— identifying learning objectives and measures, grading student work and collecting other data, and deciding on proposed program changes as voting members of their departments.

In the Miller College of Business, for example, assessment committees are especially inclusive and broad-based, with more than 30 faculty members (40 percent of the college's faculty) participating on unit assessment committees or the college's steering committee. In some other departments on campus, such as those using studio-based learning (e.g., architecture, fine arts), faculty panels or juries assess student performance. Some departments (e.g., biology, chemistry, computer science, mathematical sciences) require faculty to participate in the assessment of student learning in order to be eligible for merit salary increases.

Unit Assessment Plans

Each academic unit at Ball State has created an assessment plan detailing its student learning objectives and how they are to be assessed, and each has designated a faculty member other than the department chair to serve as the unit's assessment coordinator. This coordinator helps to ensure the quality (e.g., reliability and validity) of assessment data and procedures and their relevance to the department's student learning objectives. The assessment coordinator typically chairs a unit assessment committee made up of other faculty in the department. These committees meet regularly and produce annual assessment reports for their units.

For example, the Department of Psychological Science conducts internal reviews of its academic programs more or less continuously. Assessment data are shared with all faculty members, and any of them can propose a program change to the appropriate departmental committee. These committees—all made up of and elected by teaching faculty—discuss the proposals and recommend changes in the curriculum or assessment procedures for approval by the full department. Once a change is in place, new assessment results are used to evaluate how effective it was in improving student learning, with further input used to start the process again.

In other units at Ball State, outside advisory boards sometimes add further impetus to change, and some departments hold annual retreats to discuss curriculum and learning goals.

Other Effective Practices

A number of other policies and activities also reflect Ball State's effective practice in the area of assessment:

- Both direct and indirect assessment of student learning is used, incorporating both faculty and student perspectives.
- A number of faculty have used their assessment activities and data as the basis for scholarly work, publishing papers or presenting their results at professional conferences.

- Many departments and colleges use results from their assessment programs to maintain national accreditation, which requires good assessment practices.
- Academic colleges collaborate with departments and schools to monitor the assessment activities of their units. This effort includes establishing regular reporting of results, determining the success of the college and its units on the basis of the departmental and school reports, reporting the results of that assessment to the university's provost and vice president for academic affairs, and taking action to benefit student learning.
- Faculty from each college are voting members of the university's Academic Assessment Committee, which is responsible for examining and discussing assessment programs and activities, identifying relevant issues, disseminating information about university-related academic assessment issues and programs, recommending policies for academic assessment, and providing advice to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE).

Institutional Support

In a variety of ways, Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) assists departments, schools, and colleges with the considerable effort required to create assessment procedures and materials that document student success in attaining learning objectives. For example, this office leads classroom assessment working groups for interested faculty and conducts a variety of assessment workshops, including general interest sessions and specific workshops for faculty interested in particular assessment topics. OIE also helps units develop or revise assessment plans, including choosing goals and assessment techniques and a process for putting results into action.

In addition, OIE assists with data analyses related to assessment or institutional projects—designing surveys and other instruments, coding data, entering data, and analyzing data, including qualitative results. If needed, the staff:

- designs, conducts, and interprets the results of focus groups
- conducts, records, transcribes, and summarizes the results of individual interviews
- creates, administers, and interprets the results of standardized tests and assessment surveys
- helps design student portfolios and schemes for evaluating them

OIE regularly surveys freshmen, sophomores, graduating seniors, and alumni and can generate separate reports by program and combine student responses from multiple years to create department-specific reports. This office also maintains historical records on many departmental characteristics, including counts of majors, average class size, and descriptive information about students such as class level distribution, grade point average, retention rates, and graduation rates.

Finally, OIE helps fund faculty travel to national or regional conferences focusing on assessment-related issues and conducts a summer grant program that supports full-time academic year faculty so they can carry out assessment projects during the summer.

The office consults with deans and departments chairs to identify appropriate projects.

In 2011–12, the OIE staff assisted with more than 150 special projects in various units at Ball State. The office's consultative services were used by 20 academic departments, all colleges and schools, and 25 other campus offices or centers. During the spring semester of 2012, two assessment workshops were offered to 60 faculty and staff members. OIE also awarded a number of summer assessment grants:

- Summer 2011: Grants totaled $37,500 for 41 faculty members to conduct 25 projects within their respective departments, schools, and colleges.
- Summer 2012: Grants totaled $40,100 for 48 faculty members in 19 academic units to conduct 23 projects (37 proposals submitted). Funded projects included efforts to integrate Blackboard Outcomes into the Assurance of Learning (AOL) system in the Miller College of Business and to improve the assessment of student learning outcomes in design studios in the College of Architecture and Planning.

Summary: Core Component 4.B.

Evidence demonstrates Ball State is in a transition toward a value-added approach to the assessment of student learning. All academic departments are engaging in assessment, and an increasing number of them are applying the results using good practices with substantial faculty involvement. However, the degree of involvement by faculty and administrators in a "culture of assessment" is clearly uneven across the seven colleges and 50 other units that make up the university.

If forward momentum is to continue, more departments need to emphasize closing the loop—not just introducing changes based on assessment results but also carefully evaluating those changes using rigorous, evidence-based examinations of their effectiveness and sustainability. Related challenges include:

Performance Gains—One persistent shortcoming is that nearly all assessment describes student performance only at the end point of a course or major experience. A truly value-added approach requires information on before-and-after gains that are directly tied to participation in specific courses and majors throughout the university. Assessment is expensive and time consuming for faculty, students, and administrators. Without strong evidence that this investment pays off in terms of significant gains in student learning, the time and energy devoted to changing the curriculum could sap departmental resources and weaken the impact of faculty teaching on student learning and thus the quality of the students' education.

Public Transparency—The transparency of Ball State's assessment results, such as to the general public, remains limited. Recognitions are noted in news releases and other communications, and public presentations by students are increasingly frequent (e.g., poster sessions of student research, public presentations, and other products such as DVDs from immersive learning projects). However, a more comprehensive picture of learning gains across all units would better inform the public about the effectiveness of teaching and learning at Ball State and the importance the university places on student

success and on its accountability for documenting that success.

In response, Ball State's 2012–2017 strategic plan calls for more presentations by students at professional conferences and increased publications and presentations by faculty based on the scholarship of teaching and learning. One way to support this objective is for the institution to fund significant research efforts by departments and to feature these projects at annual poster sessions and in university communications. This strategy would address both the need for stronger evidence from assessment studies and also the limited visibility of Ball State's accomplishments in this area.

A useful place to start is to request proposals for projects that close the assessment loop. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) could prepare the way for high-quality proposals by providing workshops on this and other topics.

Academic Rigor—These efforts will acknowledge the importance of academic rigor at Ball State. When conceived as an iterative process rather than a state or condition, academic rigor means defining and measuring specific learning objectives in a way that makes clear the value they add to a student's education and then assessing them directly using objective measures that provide unambiguous results. These outcomes go beyond course grades to include performance on external tests such as the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and licensure exams, timely progress in completing graduation requirements, and indicators of postgraduate success.

Academic rigor also means that assessment and change are continuous, and each modification made in the learning objectives, assessment measures, or academic program on the basis of assessment results is itself evaluated as to its effectiveness and efficiency. Over time, this rigorous approach to assessment will increase the value of a Ball State education.

Core Component 4.C.
The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

Ball State University's approach to improving its rates of student retention, persistence, and completion involves providing students with high-quality, engaging educational experiences. However, the most intense efforts to increase student persistence and completion are taking place outside of the academic departments, few of which have even set retention and graduation goals for their students. For its part, Ball State's Division of Student Affairs has made a broad-based commitment to student persistence and completion by creating opportunities for students to connect with their peers, engage with campus activities, and be challenged in a supportive academic environment.

Subcomponent 4.C.1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.

In *Education Redefined: Strategic Plan 2007–2012*, Ball State set goals for retention and graduation that were clear, ambitious, and appropriate: achieve a first-year retention rate of 80 percent by 2012 and achieve a six-year graduation rate of 60 percent by 2012 and 65 percent by 2015. According to the *Retention Synopsis 2011,* the university's first-year retention rate improved from 74.5 percent in 2005 to 78.0 percent in 2012. The *Retention Synopsis* provides comparative data for the persistence of first-time, full-time matriculates for a given cohort, defined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) as full-time, degree-seeking, fall matriculates. Ball State's six-year graduation rate was 56.6 percent for 2011–12.

During the six-year period when retention rates rose, the academic profile of Ball State's admitted students strengthened, and the disqualification rate for first-year students declined. A change in the university's disqualification policy, the expanded living-learning communities on campus, and increased opportunities for student engagement in special summer bridge and student life programs helped increase and sustain the retention of first-year students. Additional information about these programs is presented later in this section. Ball State's 2012–2017 strategic plan will enhance the quality of academic experiences for all students. Target retention rates will roll forward in the new plan, with the goal of achieving and maintaining a first-year retention rate of 80 percent. The target four-year graduation rate is 50 percent, and the target six-year graduation rate is 65 percent. Student success initiatives will continue to emphasize strengthening the academic profile of the student body as well as career assessment, internships, and transfer students.

Subcomponent 4.C.2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.

Effective improvement efforts require accurate and comprehensive information about students, their needs, and the factors that affect persistence and completion. Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) annually collects and analyzes retention and graduation data in support of external agency reporting and internal decision-making processes. For example, OIE reports to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) the retention and graduation rates for first-time, full-time Ball State undergraduate students who graduate four, six, and eight years after enrolling.

The university's most comprehensive annual source of data on retention and graduation is the Consortium for Student Retention and Graduation Data Exchange (CSRDE), which tracks 10 first-time, full-time undergraduate student cohorts over an 11-year time span disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. CSRDE also provides Ball State with information on retention and graduation rates for institutions that are similar in mission and student composition. Other data collection and analysis initiatives include:

Common Data Set—OIE collects information for the Common Data Set (CDS), a collaborative effort designed to improve the quality and accuracy of information provided to all stakeholders involved in student transition to higher education and to reduce the reporting burden on data providers. The CDS uses clear, standard data items and definitions to determine the relevant student cohort for each item. Data items and definitions used by the U.S. Department of Education in its higher education surveys guide the continued development of the CDS.

Student Flow Model—OIE is developing a larger "student flow" model of tracking that follows all students every semester through the receipt of a degree. Enrollment, retention, and graduation rates as well as time to degree, cumulative grade point averages, and cumulative credit hours earned are tracked for all students in a cohort. The major cohort groups are new freshmen, new transfers, new graduate students, students in living-learning communities, and adult learners. These flow models will be deployed as a series of searchable web pages on the OIE website, where users can disaggregate the data by gender, race/ethnicity, academic program and college, test score bands, residency status, and cohort year.

Published Reports—OIE publishes a regular series of *Ball State Fact Book* and departmental profile reports online as a series of PDF documents. In the future, these profiles will be redeployed as searchable online reports so internal and external stakeholders can quickly understand the status of university enrollment, retention and graduation rates, degrees conferred, and other data of interest.

Empirical Studies—OIE also conducts its own empirical studies on variables affecting persistence and completion. For example, a 2012 OIE study found that from 2005–06 to 2010–11, the median number of semesters to complete a bachelor's degree at Ball State was 10, and the fewer the average credit hours taken per semester, the longer it took to graduate. More surprisingly, this study found that students who changed majors took fewer semesters to complete their degrees than did other students. Perhaps students who change majors later increase their course loads to make up for lost time, or maybe students who decide to change their field of study are more fully engaged in the academic purposes of college. Regardless of the explanation, OIE's empirical approach to understanding and promoting degree completion suggests that in addition to encouraging students to take heavier course loads, it may be important to not discourage them from changing to a major they decide is more appropriate.

In 2012–13, OIE conducted a study of factors affecting the retention of 2011–12 freshmen. A number of differences in retention rates were identified across demographic groups, colleges, majors, and academic enrichment programs. Students were better retained if they participated in the Honors College and living-learning communities. Many significant relationships were identified between retention and students' responses to the Summer Orientation Survey, MAP-Works survey, and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Significant relationships were also identified between retention and grades in courses taken by large numbers of first-year students. A profile of students who chose to transfer out of Ball State was also developed. Several actionable tactics were suggested by the study results and have been shared widely. The study is available online.

Unit Data Collection

Several academic programs at Ball State also collect student retention and completion data for their external accreditations. Examples include:

- The Department of Social Work tracks students at each level of its program and reports additional demographic information as part of its annual report to the Council on Social Work Education.
- The Department of Journalism participates in the annual survey of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication and creates a student profile report that tracks graduation rates and the success achieved by minority students.
- The Miller Scholars program in the Miller College of Business is a four-year, cohort-based, comprehensive academic and scholarship program that consists of a differentiated curriculum and developmental programming focused on academic, professional, networking, and social growth. Retention, persistence, and completion of programs are tracked for each of the approximately 80 students at the end of each semester through verification of course progress, grade achievement, and future semester planning. Academic advising is required at least once each semester for the first four semesters. Students are then assigned to faculty advisors. A year-end survey is also conducted to assess student-perceived levels of importance and satisfaction regarding program offerings.

One of the most advanced practices for data collection is the Decision Points (DP) Model used by the Professional Education Unit. In this model, each teacher education program identifies key assessments for monitoring student progress and guiding decisions about student performance. Accuracy of the assessment is determined through data review to ensure that knowledge, skills, and dispositions are measured as prescribed by program and state standards and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Specialized Professional Associations (SPA). Consistency of the assessment procedures is maintained using common unit assessments (e.g., the Unit Dispositions Assessment and the Unit Digital Portfolio Assessment), allowing for comparison within and across student performance over programs, semesters, years, course instructors, gender, and other dimensions.

Remediation and appeal procedures allow units throughout the university to implement the DP requirements fairly for all students and across all programs, and multiple surveys (e.g., exit survey) obtain students' views of the evaluation guidelines, satisfaction with their program, and perceptions of fairness and accuracy. As an example of this feedback loop, more than 10 percent of graduating special education majors in 2011 disagreed on the exit survey that they were prepared to work effectively with students having linguistic differences. As a result, teaching strategies for students with linguistic differences were added to three special education courses beginning in spring 2012.

Indirect Evidence

With too many students nationwide failing to complete a bachelor's degree within six years, it is useful to examine correlates of persistence and completion that are under the control

of university policies or practices. One useful measure of an institution's overall success in these respects is seniors' answers on selected items from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), such as "How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?" and "If you could start over again, would you go to the *same institution* you are now attending?"

Table 4.2 below displays these and other relevant items organized in groups labeled "engaged learning," "supportive relationships," and "practical support" (which includes academic advising). This table compares responses of Ball State seniors in 2008 and 2012 to responses from NSSE's 2008 and 2012 national samples of seniors from institutions in Ball State's Carnegie classification, Research University/High Research Activity, or RU/H.

Table 4.2: 2008/2012 Ball State-NSSE Comparisons (Seniors)

	Ball State 2008	NSSE 2008	Ball State 2012	NSSE 2012
Engaged learning: *Percent done or plan to do before graduation*				
Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment	85 percent	77 percent	81 percent	78 percent
Community service or volunteer work	80 percent	75 percent	78 percent	76 percent
Study abroad	27 percent	23 percent	23 percent	23 percent
Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements	35 percent	34 percent	33 percent	37 percent
Supportive relationships: *Quality of your relationships with people at your institution (1 = unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation, 7 = friendly, supportive, sense of belonging) (Percent 5 or greater shown)*				
Relationships with other students	85 percent	81 percent	86 percent	82 percent
Relationships with faculty members	80 percent	73 percent	81 percent	78 percent
Relationships with administrative personnel and offices	48 percent	51 percent	52 percent	57 percent
Practical support: *To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following? (Percent very much or quite a bit)*				
Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	72 percent	68 percent	71 percent	70 percent
Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	25 percent	26 percent	28 percent	28 percent

Providing the support you need to thrive socially	60 percent	36 percent	39 percent	39 percent
Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution? (Percent excellent or good)	63 percent	64 percent	71 percent	71 percent
Overall satisfaction:				
How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution? (Percent excellent or good)	87 percent	85 percent	87 percent	85 percent
If you could start over again, would you go to the *same institution* you are now attending? (Percent definitely yes or probably yes)	84 percent	80 percent	82 percent	82 percent

Engaged Learning—In 2008, the percentages of Ball State seniors reporting that their educations included "engaged learning" was 4-8 percentage points higher than the NSSE normative group on three items, and 1 percentage point higher on the fourth item. On these same items in 2012, the percentages of Ball State seniors were similar to the NSSE normative group on three items, and 4 percentage points lower on the item "Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements."

Practical Support—The percentages of 2008 Ball State seniors reporting that they received "practical support" during their time at Ball State were 4 percentage points higher than the NSSE normative group on "Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically," 24 percentage points higher on "providing the support you need to thrive socially," and similar to the normative group on the other two items. In 2012, Ball State students were similar to the normative group on all four items.

Supportive Relationships—The percentage of Ball State seniors reporting satisfaction with their relationships with other students was 4 percentage points higher than the NSSE normative group in both 2008 and 2012, and the percentage reporting satisfaction with their relationships with faculty was 7 percentage points higher than the NSSE normative group in 2008 and 3 percentage points higher in 2012. However, the percentage reporting satisfaction in their "relationships with administrative personnel and offices" was 3 percentage points lower than the NSSE normative group in 2008 and 5 percentage points lower in 2012.

Overall Satisfaction—On the two summary questions, Ball State seniors were 2 percentage points higher than the normative group in both 2008 and 2012 in rating their "entire educational experience" at Ball State as "excellent or good," and on the item "If you could start over again, would you go to the *same institution* you are now attending?" Ball State seniors were 4 percentage points higher in responding "definitely yes" or "probably yes" in 2008 and equal to the normative group in this same percentage in 2012.

Ball State seniors completing the NSSE survey in 2008 and 2012 were generally very satisfied and were involved in activities related to persistence and completion. They generally equaled or exceeded seniors from other RU/H institutions in NSSE's national sample with respect to supportive relationships and academic support. Support from administrators and academic advising were average in comparison with the normative group.

Very similar perceptions were also reported in the one- and five-year Alumni Surveys described earlier. For example, 95 percent of alumni reported a very positive or positive attitude toward Ball State one year after graduation, while 92 percent of alumni had a very positive or positive attitude toward Ball State five years after graduation.

Subcomponent 4.C.3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) conducted a comprehensive study to examine factors related to the fall 2012 reenrollment of fall 2011 new, full-time, baccalaureate-seeking first-year students. Only the spring semester cumulative grade point average (GPA), spring semester credit hours, and fall semester credit hours proved to be significant predictors of retention in a logistic regression analysis. Significant predictors of spring semester cumulative GPA included listing Honors College as an important reason to attend Ball State, not coming to class unprepared, being more likely to participate in activities to enhance spirituality, and identifying student blogs as an important source of information about Ball State. Actionable tactics suggested by the study results include:

- emphasizing the Honors College
- working to ensure that students come to class prepared
- recruiting students with higher levels of family financial contribution to college costs
- providing support for students who need to care for dependents
- emphasizing graduates' career success and national rankings of academic programs
- providing students with options that allow them to remain at Ball State if they are considering changing majors
- promoting college visits, including Ball State Preview Days
- following up on cues from MAP-Works and other sources where students may indicate they are experiencing attrition-prone behaviors

This study also supports current efforts to facilitate students' awareness of their success in first-year courses while they are enrolled in those courses.

Several factors contributed to the improvement in Ball State's first-year retention rate from 74.5 percent in 2005 to 78.0 percent in 2012. For one, the university's efforts to strengthen the academic profile of admitted students produced a lower disqualification rate for first-year students. Also, beginning in 2006, students who previously would have been disqualified for having a first-semester grade point average (GPA) of 1.0 or lower were given the opportunity

to participate in a program called Academic Made, in which they met regularly with their academic advisor and attended study skills or similar workshops. Over a two-year period, an additional 30 students persisted to the sophomore year, increasing the freshman-to-sophomore retention rate to 77 percent for the 2006 freshman cohort and to 78.3 percent for the 2007 freshman cohort.

Following the success of the Academic Made program, the university changed the disqualification requirements to allow first-time matriculates earning below a 1.0 GPA to be placed on probation if they participate in the Partnership for Academic Commitment to Excellence (PACE). PACE is a collaborative effort by many campus departments to provide services to support freshmen on probation in improving their performance. These support services include increased interaction with advisors, individual tutoring, workshops, assessment of study skills, and personal counseling.

Ball State has also implemented several other programs and initiatives that are helping first-year students make a successful transition to college and boosting retention, persistence, and completion rates.

Freshman Connections

Throughout its 15-year evolution, the Freshman Connections program has enhanced the academic achievement and persistence of new students by providing opportunities for them to interact with their peers and faculty through a variety of extracurricular activities, including cultural and social events. Special living-learning communities, a common reader, and a common writing experience also connect freshmen with each other and with the university. In 2008, a Commuter Ambassadors program was added to Freshman Connections. In this program, upper-level student ambassadors help first-year commuter students make connections on campus, and monthly workshops address needs specific to commuter students. With the implementation of this program, commuter retention jumped from 68 percent for the 2007 cohort to above 74 percent for the 2011 cohort.

The university is consistently recognized for the excellence of its first-year programs. For example, in 2012 *U.S. News & World Report* invited college presidents, chief academic officers, deans of students, and deans of admissions from more than 1,500 schools to nominate up to 10 institutions with stellar examples of first-year experiences. Ball State was included among 23 colleges and universities mentioned most often by these educational leaders. In fact, *U.S. News* has ranked Ball State's programs for first-year students among the top in the country for nine years in a row.

Summer Bridge Programs

Ball State's Summer Bridge Programs give new students an opportunity to get a head start on college by helping them meet other students, build confidence, learn leadership skills, and become familiar with the university. Programs vary in duration and focus. Examples include:

- Cardinal Leadership and Service Seminar (CLASS) allows freshmen to move to campus early and gain experience in the areas of service, citizenship, leadership, and success.

- Early Start focuses on academics by offering a four-day, 1-credit seminar sponsored by the University College. Freshmen interact with other students and popular professors while learning about an interesting subject of their choice.
- Outdoor adventures such as whitewater rafting and backpacking, sponsored by the Office of Recreation Services, introduce students to unique environments as they get to know each other and learn about upcoming college opportunities.
- Excel Summer Mentor Program for first-year students of color is a four-day experience that features workshops designed to introduce participants to the college experience and resources that support academic and social development.
- Ball State Gives Back builds on the university's tradition of community involvement for a one-day service project during which new students meet other incoming freshmen, interact with upper-level student leaders, and represent the university.

Many of these are offered at times that allow students to participate in multiple summer bridge programs. Students who participate in these programs return for their sophomore year at a significantly higher rate (82 percent) than the general freshman retention rate.

Living-Learning Communities

Ball State's Living-Learning Communities (LLC) are either major-based (e.g., Business, Communication, Education, Nursing) or interest-based (Discover, Emerging Media, International). Students who participate in these programs benefit from learning teams that offer advising and immersive programming in the residence halls and in the community, often related to the major or focus area of the LLC. These learning teams include academic advisors, career advisors, librarians, faculty, residence hall directors, other professional staff, and student staff.

The effects of these communities on student success have been examined using surveys, focus groups, and an analysis of MAP-Works comparative data. Students reported that living close to others in the same major is beneficial in terms of creating study groups and adjusting to the university. Students in a major-based LLC have an increased commitment to their chosen major compared to students in an LLC not based on a major. Students also expressed a desire for more connections to their courses, and in collaboration with University College, a change in how freshmen are enrolled in various courses and assigned to their residence hall and room was implemented for the fall 2012 semester.

MAP-Works data indicate that men participating in a living-learning community were less likely to be on academic probation than other men. The fall-to-spring retention rate for all LLC students was 94 percent, compared with 92 percent for other students. It appears that interventions by residence hall directors with students receiving midterm deficiency notices were helpful in getting students to meet with an academic advisor or faculty member, seek tutoring, or visit Ball State's Learning Center.

21st Century Scholar Support

In fall 2012, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education funded a full-time position to be staffed by an Americorps member to work with first- and second-year 21st Century Scholars at Ball State. **"**Indiana started the 21st Century Scholars in 1990 to ensure that every student

can afford a college education. Income-eligible seventh and eighth graders who enroll in the program and fulfill a pledge of good citizenship are guaranteed to receive up to four years of undergraduate tuition at any participating public college or university in Indiana."

The 21st Century Scholars support specialist is housed within the Office of Admissions and works collaboratively with a variety of campus offices and services. The goals of the support program are to create a sense of community among 21st Century Scholars on campus, provide support and advocate for the scholars, encourage scholars to excel by getting involved on campus, and ensure the scholars maintain financial aid eligibility. This position is funded for two years.

Additional performance measures outlined by the Scholar Corps grant include that scholars obtain a cumulative GPA 20 percent above their baseline peers, that Scholars will persist to their next year as a full-time college student at a rate 25 percent better that their baseline peers, and that, as a result of member support, scholars will participate in a minimum of eight hours each month in educationally purposeful activities intended to increase their academic performance, on-time graduation rates, college access, community engagement, financial literacy, and college persistence.

Immersive Learning Experiences

Ball State's 2012–2017 strategic plan continues to place immersive learning at the center of a Ball State education. In recent years, more and more students have participated in immersive learning experiences as part of interdisciplinary student teams that solve problems for community partners. Students have used their classroom instruction to create business plans, websites, documentaries, content and applications for emerging media, and publications designed to have a lasting impact. Students develop career-making connections and demonstrate real-world experience to future employers.
In 2011–12 (the most recent data available), 4,177 students from 37 departments participated in immersive learning experiences. Ball State's goal is that all departments will offer immersive learning experiences, and all students who wish to participate in immersive learning will be able to do so. Learn more about these projects in the university's Chronicles videos and online feature stories.

Building Better Communities

One of the most popular hands-on learning options for faculty and students is called Building Better Communities (BBC), which enhances the economy and quality of life in Indiana by directly helping local businesses and organizations to improve services, quality, and competitiveness and develop new job opportunities. Other BBC goals include developing a more educated workforce and increasing the number of college graduates who stay in Indiana. The program creates new business connections for students in a wide variety of disciplines, increases their potential for employment in Indiana, and provides professional field experience. BBC enhances students' academic experiences and increases the number of students participating in immersive learning.

MAP-Works

To better understand and address the factors associated with retention, persistence, and student success, Ball State uses the MAP-Works system from Educational Benchmarking (EBI). MAP-Works is an assessment system designed to promote student success and retention by helping students align their behaviors with successful outcomes and by providing administrators (e.g., residence hall staff, advisors) with an early alert and monitoring system so they can identify students at risk of leaving the university.

The original survey was developed at Ball State by the Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research (now the Office of Institutional Effectiveness), Office of Housing and Residence Life, Academic Advising Center, and Learning Center. In fall 2006, the university partnered with EBI to move the survey and its reporting online.

Ball State currently administers the MAP-Works survey to first- and second-year students early in the fall semester. Students are asked questions about factors known to be related to retention and persistence, such as their desire to stay at the university, the degree of homesickness they experience, and how frequently they attend class. After completing the survey, students receive customized reports that help them better understand their individual strengths and weaknesses in areas essential to their persistence at Ball State.

The MAP-Works system provides the infrastructure to manage important support and intervention efforts students may need. Summary reports and analyses also provide the data necessary for informing policies and procedures that promote retention and persistence. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) produces summary reports on the MAP-Works surveys for first-year students, sophomores, and transfer students. More in-depth analyses and comparisons are produced for additional subgroups, such as students participating in living-learning communities.

Registration Assistance

Another retention initiative targets freshmen who, for whatever reason, have not successfully registered for their next semester's classes. Timely course registration is a strong indicator of student progression toward graduation. Following registration, a list of freshman nonregistrants is generated, and they are contacted by residence hall staff (for students living on campus) or other student affairs staff (for commuting students). The staff member completes a Non-Enrolled Student Questionnaire based on information provided by the student. Capturing student cell phone numbers during the orientation program has helped to increase the contact made with students living off campus.

For students with university "holds," attempts are made to help them resolve the issues to clear the path for registration. For example, the Ball State Health Center may place a hold on a student's record because he or she has not shown proof of required immunizations or a physical. Another common example is when the bursar's office places a hold because a fine or fee is overdue.

On-Time Degree Completion

In 2011, Ball State launched cost-saving initiatives to improve on-time degree completion among undergraduate students, an important priority of the university and the State of Indiana. The new Completion Scholarship awards $500 to Indiana students who graduate within four calendar years. Students are also encouraged to take advantage of discounted tuition for summer courses and to build hybrid schedules that combine online and on-campus courses. In addition, Ball State reduced the minimum number of credits required for graduation to 120 from 126. Students who maximize all of these opportunities could save nearly $6,000 over four years.

Other institutional efforts to promote four-year degree completion include:

Excess Credit Hours Fee—Implemented in fall 2012, this fee is charged to Indiana resident undergraduate students who have been enrolled at the university for more than four calendar years and have earned more than 144 credit hours during that time. The charge is $150 per credit hour accumulated in excess of 144 credit hours (not including transfer hours). The purpose of the fee is to encourage students who have earned enough credit hours to attain a baccalaureate to complete and accept their degree.

Think 15 Initiative—In fall 2012, Ball State's associate provost and dean of University College and the associate vice president for student affairs were asked to cochair the "Think 15" task force on four-year degree completion. The Think 15 concept resulted from research conducted by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) showing that a major predictor of students not graduating in four years is carrying fewer than 15 hours a semester. The purpose of the task force is to identify factors inhibiting progress, including the financial impact of delayed graduation, and to gather information related to current efforts in order to identify gaps or needs.

An initial report with recommendations and a plan for implementation was presented to the provost and vice president for student affairs in early October 2012. Ongoing dialogue and program and policy reviews will continue in order to eliminate barriers to graduation and support student success.

Unit Completion Tracking—Ball State's provost provides academic departments with reports on degree completion within their units. This information has been collected in spreadsheet form for the past decade and can be used to identify persistence, which helps departments in terms of advising and course scheduling. Some areas such as telecommunications, nursing, and the Teachers College have begun to track students after they complete a gateway course or at each stage of progress. Others have undertaken further study as to why their students are not progressing or graduating.

For example, the Department of Physics and Astronomy used external assessment information from a study of similar physics departments to develop strategies for improving student retention, persistence, and completion in the undergraduate physics program. The department implemented several of the best practices from the SPIN-UP Project sponsored by the American Association of Physics Teachers, such as providing an undergraduate study

room for students to work on homework, engage with peers and faculty, and develop a sense of community within the department. A 1-hour class, PHYCS 115, was created to familiarize students with the major, create a sense of community, introduce faculty members and their research, review program planning materials online, and otherwise offer assistance. Similar courses are required for majors in natural resources and environmental management and in psychological science.

The physics department also offers a robust colloquium series that brings to campus professional scientists from academia, business, and industry to provide networking opportunities for majors. Programmatic changes have also been made to enhance the academic experience and better prepare graduates for advanced study and careers. Changes include a problem-solving course, PHYCS 111, for students enrolled in algebra-based physics courses and a formal undergraduate research requirement, including oral and poster presentations to demonstrate communication skills.

These efforts have been effective: Over the past three years, the physics department has been recognized by the American Institute of Physics for placing in the top 15 percent of departments nationwide in the number of students receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in physics.

Transfer Students

A new initiative to improve persistence and completion focuses on transfer students. Transfer student data from 2003 to 2010 was summarized in two reports, *Transfer Student Report 2010* and *2011,* which presented four findings:

- Transfer students overall were less likely than other Ball State students to persist and graduate.
- Transfer students were more likely to academically disqualify than other Ball State students.
- Upper-division (advanced) transfer students were less likely to disqualify than were freshman transfer students and were therefore more likely to complete a degree.
- Transfer students from Ivy Tech Community College were retained at a slightly higher rate than other transfer students.

In December 2011, Ball State's vice president for student affairs created a task force to examine the issues and challenges related to transfer students. The *Transfer Student Task Force Report* was released in March 2012 with recommendations for how Ball State can better assist transfer students in the transition to meet academic expectations and connect socially in order to persist and graduate.

Several task force recommendations are being implemented in 2012–13, including:

- The university has begun targeted recruitment of high-achieving transfer students. The coordinator of transfer admission is working to build connections with key community colleges, and collaboration with academic advisors at the

community colleges will provide transparency and improve confidence and accuracy in transfer advising.

- Prospective and new transfer students are encouraged to connect with Ball State's Career Center early and often, and career assessment and advising are offered during the transfer orientation programs.
- Transfer students living on campus are invited to participate in the university's living-learning communities, and key events during Welcome Week will cater to new transfer students.
- Transfer student ambassadors will assist new transfer students during the critical first semester at Ball State, with a focus on the needs of commuter and advanced transfer students.

Enterprise Resource Planning

Ball State's implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software system and database for processing all institution-wide transactions will enhance the university's efforts to help students progress and graduate on time. The ERP system will integrate information related to all of the institution's core functions, including course registration, grades, financial aid, finance, and human resources. Students used the system to register for fall 2012 courses.

The Banner system will tie successful registration to students' academic profiles and completion or enrollment in appropriate prerequisite/corequisite courses. A process of checking for majors and prerequisite/corequisite courses will allow for a more accurate count of majors and will indicate whether students are progressing in a timely fashion within their majors. Additional software programs such as Bb Analytics, Bb Learn, and Talisma will likely introduce tools that will assist faculty advisors and students in making decisions that support academic success.

In fall 2012, Ball State also rolled out DegreeWorks, a comprehensive academic advising, transfer articulation, and degree audit software solution that helps students and their advisors negotiate curriculum requirements. DegreeWorks allows academic departments to identify when and where students in their programs appear to lag or fall behind, and students can plot courses to complete their degrees in a timely fashion through eight-semester plans. Students who do not take unnecessary courses are more likely to stay directly on the path to graduation.

Subcomponent 4.C.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.)

Historically, Ball State's procedures for collecting retention and graduation data have been decentralized across a number of offices using a variety of data extraction programs and procedures. Consequently, the university has no standard definition of "best" reporting practices. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) recently formed a permanent working group in collaboration with other campus offices to establish systematic procedures,

consistent with State of Indiana and U.S. Department of Education guidelines, for reporting information both internally and externally so it is timely, consistent, and relevant to all of the university's various stakeholders.

Ball State should also spell out what is expected of individual academic units with respect to collecting and analyzing student persistence and completion data. A deep investment in technology helps, but so does strong support to faculty assessment coordinators and committees who know their disciplines, their students, and the learning experiences most likely to benefit students. More empirical evidence at the department level will help in identifying the most effective and efficient ways to promote persistence and completion, after which these "best practices" can be publicized and disseminated so that other units will be able to adopt them as appropriate.

Summary: Core Component 4.C.

Since 2006, Ball State has collected a variety of information, created a number of intervention programs, and seen its student persistence and completion rates improve slightly. However, persistence to the sophomore year has not quite reached the 80 percent target, and persistence of certain subgroups of the population (e.g., commuters, students of color) lags behind that of Ball State students in general. Graduation rates have also fallen short of strategic plan targets.

Continuing and expanding the institution's commitment to educational excellence, retention, persistence, and completion should remain a high priority. Since different students have different reasons for staying in college or leaving and are likely to respond in different ways to particular programs, a useful next step would be to examine more closely the success rates and contributing causes for the persistence and retention of specific population subgroups.

Additional challenges include the following:

Unit Goals—Every academic department at Ball State has a plan by which students can graduate in four years, and some have three-year plans. However, only art, nursing, architecture, and a few other programs have explicit persistence and completion goals for their majors and a process for monitoring them. Some departments are interested in setting goals and monitoring persistence and completion, but the majority of academic units admit that both historically and currently the retention and graduation of their majors is not a high priority for them.

A challenge for Ball State is to develop a comprehensive plan spelling out what is expected of individual academic units in this regard and how thorough a university-wide "student flow" system will be in tracking persistence and completion on behalf of all units.

Unit Initiatives—Success and failure in the areas of retention and graduation affect the entire university community, and further progress in persistence and completion probably calls for something more than broad, campuswide efforts alone. Reliance on a single, comprehensive "student flow" system could relieve units of any sense of responsibility for persistence and completion. However, new initiatives at the unit level are more likely to

support academic and nonacademic retention factors in an integrative fashion. That is, a student may pass courses but still drop out because of nonacademic issues, such as wavering commitment to obtaining a particular degree, low academic self-confidence, poor study skills, or insufficient academic and social integration into the program or the campus.

Academic departments enjoy a special relationship with the student that extends for at least a year (and typically more), making the unit one of the best places to conceive and implement the engaging and integrative experiences needed to further improve persistence and completion rates. For example, many students find digital methods and materials more engaging than print materials, in both their academic and their personal lives. Ball State's Departments of History and English both hired specialists in digital humanities to introduce significant changes in the instruction and preparation of students to use digital technologies in teaching, learning, and research.

Similarly, virtually all academic units at Ball State sponsor student organizations. However, it's not just having student organizations in a department that keeps students engaged and progressing toward a degree, but what students actually learn from participating in them, such as self-confidence about their academic potential and future career prospects with the degree they expect to earn.

Empirical Evidence—Another challenge facing Ball State is the need for much more empirical evidence on university and departmental retention efforts to date, so the most effective and efficient ways to promote persistence and completion are identified. For example, in 2008, the Department of Journalism responded to low examination scores on its entry skills test (now the Language Usage Proficiency Examination, or LUPE) by restructuring its Journalism Writing Center to promote more student engagement (e.g., enhanced classroom interaction, a revised coaching structure, and a test revision). Follow-up analysis shows the coaching has been effective in improving student scores on the LUPE, but more research is needed to measure its effect on overall student retention.

Once the effectiveness of these and other "best practices" is determined, the university should increase the visibility of such efforts and assist other units in adopting them as appropriate.

Adequate Resources—A final challenge facing Ball State involves whether, in tight fiscal times, the resources exist to fully achieve the desired rates of persistence. For example, many departments report that they track overall numbers of majors not for retention and graduation purposes but to anticipate future course demand. If persistence improves significantly, as desired, how will the university enable academic units to accommodate the increased numbers of students wanting to enroll in what have historically been smaller-sized junior- and senior-level classes (e.g., internships, immersive learning, capstone)? Will resources be provided for nonacademic retention programs, such as further efforts to create and enhance the living-learning communities? Ball State should seriously consider the level of new resources it can afford to invest in the important goals of improved persistence and completion.