SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Interim Report on Assessment to the HLC

Saint Louis University
Dr. Fred Pestello, President

Submitted: September 4, 2018

Interim Report on Assessment

Context

In her July 1, 2016, letter to Saint Louis University (SLU) President Dr. Fred Pestello, Higher Learning Commission (HLC) President Barbara Gellman-Danley outlined the HLC's requirement that SLU submit an Interim Report on Assessment of Student Learning, due September 4, 2018.

Per that letter, this Interim Report is to "establish: a) all student learning outcomes are published and transparent; b) learning outcomes and assessment plans are available for all colleges/schools and for general education; c) data collection as evidence of student learning; and d) samples of direct and indirect evidence of student learning across the University."

Those requirements summarize more detailed expectations articulated in the Final Report from the team of HLC peer reviewers who evaluated SLU's March 1, 2016, Assurance Argument. These more detailed requirements have guided the SLU community's efforts to expand and improve its assessment work since 2016, and now serve to frame this Interim Report. The table below lists those requirements, as well as their related HLC Assumed Practices and Core Components:

#	HLC Interim Report Requirements	Related HLC Core Components & Assumed Practices
1.	All programs (undergraduate and graduate) have approved learning outcomes and these outcomes are published in appropriate catalogs and on websites for each program and major in compliance with the requirements of the previous report.	Assumed Practice B.1.h Assumed Practice C.6 Core Component 3.A.2
2.	Learning outcomes and assessment plans for undergraduate core curricula (general education) have been established for all schools and colleges serving undergraduates within the university.	Core Component 3.B.1 Core Component 3.B.2 Core Component 4.A.1
3.	There are active assessment practices at the program level for all programs at the university that include the collection of evidence of student learning, and the use of such evidence for program improvement.	Core Component 4.B.1 Core Component 4.B.2 Core Component 4.B.3 Core Component 4.B.4
4.	University-wide assessment of undergraduate outcomes includes a reasonable sample of direct and indirect evidence of learning and the use of such evidence for improvement.	Core Component 5.C.2

Over the past two years the SLU community's assessment efforts have resulted in significant improvements in processes, awareness/transparency, and outcomes. This report summarizes these efforts. The report is organized to address each of the above-noted Interim Report requirements in order. Appendices provide additional context and evidence as referenced in the narrative.

Saint Louis University's Response:

Individual program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are regularly reviewed by college/school faculty and assessment leaders to ensure they are clear, measurable, and observable. Feedback is provided to program leaders and faculty and is used to continuously improve the SLOs. This recurring review and feedback loop supports the development of a culture of continuous improvement and broad-based stakeholder engagement. Regular and substantive support has been provided by the Provost, Assistant Provost, and University Assessment Coordinator, a full-time administrator dedicated solely to improving assessment of student learning.

Program-level SLOs are initially developed by the respective program faculty. These SLOs are then used to develop a program-level assessment plan. Development of the SLOs and the assessment plans is directly supported by department chairs, college assessment coordinators, and the University Assessment Coordinator. Additionally, our University Assessment Plan Template (see **Appendix A**) guides the faculty's development of SLOs that meet our University Assessment Standards (see **Appendix B**), ensuring that they are:

- the educational result of tasks, experiences, or assignments (as opposed to the tasks, experiences, or assignments themselves)
- program-focused (addressing learning holistically from/across multiple program courses, and preferably across multiple years of study for an emphasis on students' developmental growth)
- clear, specific, and observable/measurable

Regular/cyclical feedback on those SLOs is offered via:

- annual assessment reviews conducted by the University Assessment Committee (see **Appendices C and D**) using the rubric aligned with our University Assessment Standards
- full Academic Program Reviews (APR), which utilize the same University Assessment Standards rubric and are conducted on 7-year cycles
- self-studies conducted for disciplinary/professional accreditors during re-accreditation reviews
  - *NOTE: Via our Office of Assessment and the Office of the Provost, we have addressed with deans, department chairs, and others that assessment-related expectations of some professional/disciplinary accreditation bodies have lagged those of the HLC. Accordingly, we have called on selected programs to revise SLOs (and/or other facets of their assessment protocols) that seemed sufficient for their accrediting bodies but did not meet internal, University expectations – expectations informed by the* HLC's Criteria for Accreditation

Additionally, the University Assessment Coordinator consults regularly with faculty and others responsible for SLO development and revision.

As part of program-level assessment plans, SLOs for all academic programs are now being regularly reviewed by the University Assessment Committee, which was created in Fall 2017 to:

- provide internal faculty peer feedback
- expand the number of assessment champions and experts throughout the colleges/schools
- significantly increase the capacity for assessment review and feedback (beyond the University Assessment Coordinator and Assistant Provost).

Examples of University Assessment Committee feedback to programs about their SLOs can be found in **Appendix E**.

Because the quality and utility of a learning outcome is best demonstrated by its employment in a well-executed assessment plan, we will address the quality of our undergraduate SLOs, University-wide, in the upcoming section on *Interim Report Requirement #3*.

The public posting of program SLOs on the [Provost's website](#) has been occurring since 2016. While such postings were inconsistent in 2016 when the HLC team reviewed them, today nearly 100% of programs SLOs are posted as part of their respective program assessment plans. Posting of SLOs as part of specific program information was made possible by the implementation of two new technologies.

First, in 2017-2018, SLU implemented a new web content management system that standardized how and where SLO information is published online. Second is the implementation of CourseLeaf (*nearly complete as of September 1st*), a web-based curriculum and catalog management system that governs how curriculum and learning outcome data is presented and updated on the web. Via CourseLeaf, all program SLOs (and other curriculum information for each academic program) are maintained centrally and published both to the main SLU Academic Catalog online and to all program websites consistently and simultaneously. Updates to SLOs are made in the CourseLeaf system so all catalog and program web pages that feature SLOs are automatically updated correctly and consistently.

We anticipate that our CourseLeaf-based SLO and catalog data will be available via the web on Friday, September 28. At that time, HLC reviewers will be able to locate the SLOs of academic programs in the catalog and on all program websites. **Appendix F** features screenshots of actual program web pages in CourseLeaf to illustrate how SLOs will be publicly available and transparent for students, parents, and other constituents.

> ### Interim Report Requirement #2:
> Learning outcomes and assessment plans for undergraduate core curricula (general education) have been established for all schools and colleges serving undergraduates within the university.

Saint Louis University's Response:

SLU colleges/schools with undergraduate programs have their own "core" curricula via which they foster a breadth of education across fundamental academic disciplines in the Jesuit educational tradition. SLU meets the HLC's expectations for the provision of general education through these college/school-specific core curricula.

Although there are many shared purposes and academic requirements amongst our core curricula, there has not been a single, unifying set of articulated student learning outcomes to drive either the design/review of those cores or assessment of student learning within those cores. Additionally, the

University-Wide Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes approved in 2012 did not align with the individual college/school core curricula as noted in the HLC review team report of 2016.

Therefore, to ensure quality core curriculum assessment, we were faced with two options:

A. Try to expand significantly the scope, quality, and impact of the then-existing assessment effort (which, most likely, was irreparably plagued by the lack of a University-wide core curriculum and any common curricular vehicles to facilitate such assessment); or

B. Redirect faculty and academic leadership efforts into the development of what is traditionally understood as a true, University-wide core curriculum. This new University Core would be driven by an entirely new set of well-defined University Core SLOs, and would plan for and incorporate assessment from the earliest stages of SLO and curriculum design.

Informing the deliberation on which option to choose was a report from the faculty-led *Task Force on Becoming a SLU Baccalaureate,* which was jointly constituted and charged in Fall 2015 by the Faculty Senate and Provost Brickhouse, as noted in our 2016 Assurance Argument. The Task Force was charged with developing a vision that articulated the overarching aim of undergraduate education at SLU. The Task Force conducted an extensive review of historical and contemporary interpretations of Jesuit higher education, and consulted with faculty, staff, and students throughout the SLU community. Their final report (see **Appendix G**) was submitted in Spring 2016 and featured this *Vision Statement*: "As Saint Louis University faculty, our vision for the baccalaureate degree programs we offer is to provide an educational experience that helps actualize in each student a *well-developed mind*, a *generous heart*, and a *reflective soul*."

Based on the Task Force's comprehensive report and the HLC's review of our Assurance Argument in Summer 2016, Provost Brickhouse – with the support of President Pestello and the affected deans -- chose Option B: to redirect faculty and academic leadership efforts into the development of a new, true, University-wide core curriculum. This decision established a major institutional priority and marked an historic moment of shared curricular leadership at SLU, as the institution has operated under the current "separate cores" model for most of its 200-year history.

Assessment of the University-wide SLOs approved in 2012 was, therefore, discontinued. Deans and department chairs were instructed to cease existing or planned efforts to assess student learning in their respective college/school-level cores (some of which lacked formally articulated learning outcomes, which meant that any related assessment efforts were not likely to bear much fruit). We made this decision knowing it would extend the time before we could begin meaningful core curriculum assessment; however, priority was given to the quality of core assessment and curriculum development over expediency.

The processes by which the new University Core SLOs were developed and approved, and by which our new University Core Curriculum is being designed and implemented (with an early emphasis on assessment), are summarized below:

1. **Development of a Governing Vision Statement for the SLU Baccalaureate (2015-2016)**
   As noted above, this Vision Statement informed the decision to develop a new, shared, University-wide Core Curriculum.

2. **Preliminary Crafting of University Core SLOs (2016-2017)**

In 2016-2017, two related but separate core development initiatives were underway. First was an effort in the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) to revise its own college-level core student learning outcomes – work that had begun before the above-described decision to pursue a University-wide core. *(Note: Because of the centrality of the arts and sciences in all existing SLU cores, Provost Brickhouse saw wisdom in allowing CAS core SLO development work to continue, anticipating that it would greatly inform the University core SLO development conversations, which it did.)* A CAS core task force produced a new set of eight student learning outcomes (see **Appendix H**) approved by the CAS Faculty Council in May 2017.

Also in 2016-2017, a Joint Faculty Senate-Provost Task Force on the University Core Curriculum and Shared Undergraduate Experience had been established and engaged in similar work, but from a University-wide perspective. Their final report (**Appendix I**), a draft of which was submitted in late July 2017, recommended adopting the eight CAS-approved SLOs plus adding two additional SLOs. The Task Force's recommendations affirmed the Provost's decision to allow the two separate-but-related core SLO development efforts to continue simultaneously.

3. **University-Wide Review, Editing, and Approval of New Core SLOs & Founding of University Undergraduate Core Committee (2017-2018)**
Having received reports from both task forces noted in #2 above, Provost Brickhouse asked her staff to publish a single set of proposed University Core SLOs for University-wide review and deliberation. **Appendix J** is the communication Provost Brickhouse shared with the University community to solicit their engagement in the process.

That communication also included Provost Brickhouse's decisions to a) establish a new core curriculum faculty governance committee, the University Undergraduate Core Curriculum Committee (later changed to [University Undergraduate Core Committee](#), or UUCC); and b) establish a new faculty/administrator position, the Director of the Core. Both decisions were initially recommended by the Joint Faculty Senate-Provost Task Force on the University Core Curriculum and Shared Undergraduate Experience.

The UUCC, which began work later in Fall 2017, immediately assumed responsibility for leading the campus through the remaining SLO editing and approval efforts. And as Provost Brickhouse announced in late April 2018 (see **Appendix K**), the faculty governance bodies of all SLU colleges/schools with undergraduate programs had approved new University Undergraduate Core Student Learning Outcomes – a major milestone for SLU (see **Appendix L**).

4. **Core Curriculum Architecture Design (2018-2019)**
The UUCC is currently [working to involve faculty](#) from throughout the institution in the design of the architecture of the new core curriculum – driven by the newly-approved Core SLOs. Fall 2018 workshops to help St. Louis-based faculty understand and deliberate curriculum options/models will be held on September 21, October 5, and October 26; a session for the Madrid, Spain faculty will be held in Madrid on October 19. All sessions will be led by the Director of the Core and the Director of SLU's Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning.

5. **Approval of Architecture and New Course Development (2019-2021)**
The UUCC's current timeline calls for the architecture of the new core to be approved by December 2019, with the commencement thereafter of efforts to develop/revise core courses (if applicable).

6. **Piloting of Key Core Components (2021-2022)**
   If the architecture of the new core calls for new or significantly revised courses or related curricular components (which we think is highly likely), we will pilot such courses/components as deemed necessary; revisions can then be made prior to full implementation.

7. **Implementation for All New First-Year Students (Fall 2022)**
   With new core courses/components developed and piloted, we plan for full implementation of our new University Core Curriculum with the entering first-year student class of Fall 2022.

Evidence demonstrating our emphasis on assessment from the beginning of these core curriculum design processes includes the following:

- As the Office of the Provost shared drafts of the proposed new University Undergraduate Core SLOs in Fall 2017, attention to assessment of student achievement of the SLOs was evident. The draft document published for University-wide feedback (see **Appendix M**) included discussion of assessment-related issues in both the preface to the draft SLOs and the FAQ section.

- In her e-mail update to the SLU community on 11-2-17 (see **Appendix N**), Provost Brickhouse noted the faculty's attention to assessment of the Core SLOs in their feedback.

- Assessment has been a regular topic for the UUCC leading the design of the new Core. For example, the UUCC has created a Peer Core Assessment Subcommittee charged with a) becoming the committee's experts on core assessment by reviewing pertinent literature and b) investigating how other institutions designed and manage their core assessment efforts. A report on that work is available as **Appendix O**. In Summer 2018, the UUCC also hosted University Assessment Coordinator Kathleen Thatcher for a discussion about core assessment and how it should inform curriculum design at this stage and throughout the process.

Again, we recognized in 2016 that our decision to develop new University Core SLOs and a first-ever University Core Curriculum meant we would not meet the letter of this particular 2018 HLC Interim Report Requirement. We do, however, anticipate that our adherence to the spirit of this requirement will mean that assessment of student learning throughout our new University Core Curriculum will be well-designed, robust in its implementation, and meaningful.

Interim Report Requirement #3:

There are active assessment practices at the program level for all programs at the university that include the collection of evidence of student learning, and the use of such evidence for program improvement.

SLU's Response:

In 2016, HLC reviewers learned that approximately 75% of SLU academic programs at that time had developed assessment plans. Today, over 95% of our approximately 230 academic programs (majors and certificates) have assessment plans – all of which are available publicly for review on the Provost's Office website; most of these plans have been reviewed and subsequently updated since 2016.

A significant number of these plans utilize a 2017 update of our University Assessment Plan Template (see **Appendix A**). This template prompts specific program responses regarding SLOs, curriculum

mapping, assessment methods (emphasizing *direct* measures of student learning), and intended uses of resulting data. The quality of these plans has continually improved and is a focus of peer review via the University Assessment Committee as well as in the Academic Program Review process. All proposals for new academic programs must also detail their assessment plans, which are reviewed by the UAAC (undergraduate) and GAAC (graduate) curriculum committees; in the process of doing so, most units consult directly with the University Assessment Coordinator for guidance.

The HLC team also found in 2016 that the proportion of programs that had documented implementation of their assessment plans was far lower, at approximately 25%. Further, of those existing reports, only about half evidenced good use of assessment data for program improvement. We are proud to report significant improvement has been made in this regard.

At the start of the Fall 2018 term, approximately 80% of all SLU programs have submitted updated (within the past academic year) assessment reports, also accessible via the Provost's Office [website](). Many of these reports utilize a 2017 update of our [University Assessment Report Template]() (see **Appendix P**). This template prompts specific program responses regarding which SLOs were assessed, what data/artifacts of student learning were analyzed, what the major findings of the analysis were, and how those findings were used to inform changes to pedagogy, curriculum, or assessment. The template also asks programs to address assessment-informed changes implemented in previous years, and to describe the impact of those changes.

The number of assessment reports that document the use of assessment data for improvement (in either curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment) is also significantly higher than in 2016, and is continually rising. Today, approximately 50% of programs have, in the past year, reached the point in their assessment cycles that they have begun using their assessment data to either substantiate current practices and/or inform meaningful change. As much as we are working toward 100% compliance, it is understandable that some programs that were not implementing assessment plans at all in 2016 are not yet at the point of having sufficient, quality data to act upon – even though they are faithfully implementing sound practices guided by their assessment plans.

However, the positive trends we are seeing in our evaluations of assessment plans and reports are encouraging. We expect that, by our next 10-year HLC Comprehensive Review in 2021-22, we will not merely have quantitative compliance (100% of programs with assessment plans and updated reports) but will see even greater quality of assessment work – and much more demonstrable impact of use of assessment data informing pedagogy and curriculum design.

The notable improvement thus far has resulted from several institutional factors and initiatives:

- First and foremost, Provost Brickhouse made this a University imperative – and a very transparent one: She spoke and wrote about it regularly, as well as presented progress updates to the Board of Trustees (**Appendices Q, R, S, and T**), the University Leadership Council (**Appendix U**), the Faculty Senate, the deans, and other groups. President Pestello was also vocal and transparent about our need to improve our assessment work, and publicly supported Provost Brickhouse's efforts.

- As part of efforts to expand and strengthen support for high-quality assessment, the Office of Assessment conducted a series of professional development seminars in Fall 2017, and brought in nationally-recognized experts and assessment leaders from peer Jesuit institutions:

- o Dr. Susan Hatfield (HLC Senior Scholar on Assessment): September 28, 2017. Dr. Hatfield presented to department chairs and deans about reviewing and improving program assessment plans, and helped attendees better understand and de-mystify assessment work – particularly from the perspective of the HLC.
- o Dr. Sharron Ronco (Director of Assessment, Marquette University), Dr. Todd Bruce (Assistant Provost for Assessment, John Carroll University), and Dr. April Trees (Chair of Communication, SLU): October 21, 2017. This panel of experts helped our department chair and dean attendees address shared assessment challenges and tips in the context of Jesuit higher education.
- o National core curriculum development expert Dr. Paul Hanstedt will lead SLU faculty in core development workshops on September 7, 2018 that will attend to assessment concerns as part of the core design phase. That follows the participation of six SLU team members in the 2018 AAC&U Summer Institute on General Education and Assessment.

- Since the HLC's last review of SLU in 2016, three more SLU employees (in addition to Assistant Provost Steve Sanchez, who is our HLC Accreditation Liaison Officer) have joined the HLC's Peer Review Corps, notably expanding and strengthening SLU's expertise with accreditation and assessment:
  - o Dr. Mardell Wilson, Dean, Doisy College of Health Sciences
  - o Dr. Tracy Chapman, Dean, School for Professional Studies and Associate Provost for Distance Education
  - o Dr. Lisa Dorsey, Assistant Professor of Physical Therapy and former Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education

- SLU joined the HLC Assessment Academy in Fall 2017. Our lead mentor is Dr. Felix Wao, supported by Dr. Jan Smith. Our work on Academy-related initiatives is ongoing.

- Having over 40 SLU programs with their own disciplinary/specialized accreditation certainly helped, as did the heightened expectations for assessment that we have observed been seeing in many of those external accreditation bodies. However, those 40+ programs constitute less than 20% of SLU's total number of programs. So perhaps most impressive is the progress made by those programs without external accreditation (most of which are in our College of Arts & Sciences), where we have seen so many faculty come to experience assessment as a key element of their teaching and an embodiment of the principles of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm.

- Emphasizing assessment across institutional organizations and processes – such as in our Academic Program Review and UAAC/GAAC curriculum development processes – is helping ensure that assessment is not experienced as an isolated, "extra thing to do" but, rather, is embedded wherever and whenever we address the quality and impact of our teaching and curriculum design/redesign.

- Our new University Assessment Committee is doing outstanding work providing faculty-based, peer analysis of assessment plans and reports and giving sound feedback: what's going well, and what could be improved (including concrete suggestions gleaned from the successes of other SLU faculty and programs with which the UAC has worked). See **Appendices E and V.**

- To expand the capacity for support of assessment in the Office of the Provost, Provost Brickhouse established a Faculty Fellow for Assessment position that provides release for a full-

time faculty member to assist the University Assessment Coordinator and the Assistant Provost (see **Appendix W**). The first Faculty Fellow for Assessment began work in Summer 2018.

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Interim Report Requirement #4:

University-wide assessment of undergraduate outcomes includes a reasonable sample of direct and indirect evidence of learning and the use of such evidence for improvement.

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SLU's Response:

The 2016 HLC team's concerns about ensuring a "reasonable sample of direct and indirect evidence of learning and the use of such evidence for improvement" were primarily grounded in:

a) the small sample size of student learning portfolios analyzed as part of our initial efforts to assess student achievement of the University Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes adopted in late 2012; and
b) the limited amount of actionable data that was being derived from that analysis.

However, as detailed in our response to Interim Report Requirement #2, the University opted later in 2016 to essentially de-commission those 2012 University SLOs and develop an entirely new set of University Core SLOs (approved in Spring 2018) that would drive the development and assessment of a first-ever common University Core Curriculum.

The planning for assessment of our new University Core Curriculum (under development, as detailed in the response to Interim Report Requirement #3) is grounded in the University Assessment Standards, which clearly emphasize the use of direct evidence of student learning. The curriculum development forms/templates used by our University Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC) and Graduate Academic Affairs Committee (GAAC) also clearly emphasize the use of direct evidence of student learning in all assessment work. Moreover, evaluations of program assessment plans and reports conducted by the University Assessment Committee specifically address concerns about direct versus indirect evidence (for examples, see **Appendix E**).

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We close this Interim Report with a note of appreciation for the HLC's support of SLU's assessment efforts. As humbling as an Interim Report requirement is, it did what it was designed to do: help stimulate necessary change at SLU. This report acknowledges the significant work still ahead to build upon progress made thus far. However, we are confident this report also documents the very real and significant change in our institutional culture that our assessment work is now fostering.

Should you have any questions about this Report, or need additional information or documentary evidence, please contact Assistant Provost Steve Sanchez at (314) 977-2611 or steven.sanchez@slu.edu.

Appendices

A. University Assessment Plan Template (revised August 2017)
B. University Assessment Standards
C. University Assessment Committee Charge (February 24, 2017)
D. University Assessment Committee Roster 2018-2019
E. Examples of University Assessment Committee (UAC) Reviews
    1. Biology – BS
    2. Biology – PhD
    3. Biostatistics – BS
    4. Computer Information Systems – BS
    5. Healthcare Ethics – PhD
    6. Health Management – BS
    7. Italian Studies – BA
    8. Organizational Studies – BA
    9. Public Health – BS
    10. Spanish – MA
F. Examples of Student Learning Outcomes on Program Websites (CourseLeaf Screenshots)
    1. Art History – BA
    2. Dentistry, Endodontics – MS
    3. Higher Education Administration – PhD
G. Final Report and Vision Statement on SLU Baccalaureate (May 2, 2016)
H. College of Arts and Sciences Core Document (May 2017)
I. Draft Report on University-wide Learning Outcomes (July 27, 2017)
J. Core-Related Proposals for Faculty Input (August 25, 2017)
K. Provost Announcement re: Final Approval of Core Student Learning Outcomes (April 30, 2018)
L. Final, Approved University Core Student Learning Outcomes (April 2018)
M. Revised Draft University Core Student Learning Outcomes (November 2, 2017)
N. Provost Email to Faculty on Core Student Learning Outcomes Highlighting Attention to Assessment (November 2, 2017)
O. Survey of Core Assessment at Other Institutions for the University Undergraduate Core Committee Subcommittee
P. University Assessment Report Template (revised August 2017)
Q. Presentation on HLC Progress Report for Full Board of Trustees at September 21, 2017, Meeting
R. Presentation on HLC Progress Report for Full Board of Trustees at December 1, 2017, Meeting
S. Excerpt of Presentation on Assessment to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees at May 4, 2017 Meeting
T. HLC Progress Gantt Chart for May 2018 Board of Trustees Meeting
U. HLC Update Presentation for the University Leadership Council (August 8, 2018)
V. Master of Public Health (MPH) Program Response to Spring 2018 University Assessment Committee Review
W. Faculty Fellows for Assessment Overview for the University Community