

The State of Assessment at IUPUI
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Over the past 30 years, a dynamic and increasingly pervasive culture of assessment and improvement has emerged at IUPUI. Supporting this culture is an array of campus-wide resources that include a robust data infrastructure, a variety of professional development opportunities, and assessment expertise available for individualized consultation and guidance. Assessment and improvement are also strengthened by effective leadership and governance structures at the campus, school, and department levels.

These are among the main findings of this 2019-2020 study of the “State of Assessment and Improvement at IUPUI.” While we found a few outliers—academic programs and administrative units where assessment efforts were less systematic or were concentrated among just a few leaders—the last ten years, in particular, have seen significant advancement of assessment and improvement practices at IUPUI. This progress results from both local and national developments over the course of the decade: a wholly reconceived IUPUI-wide general education program that includes a prominent role for assessment; a re-envisioned institutional research unit; a growing number of designated assessment positions in IUPUI’s co-curricular divisions; increasing emphasis on assessment among specialized and regional accreditors; a flourishing body of new research on the elements of powerful learning experiences; and increasing concern about ensuring that all students have equitable access to such experiences.

In this report, we describe the background, purpose, and methodology of this study; highlight findings and provide examples, where possible; and discuss implications and future opportunities.

Background and Purpose

In recent years, IUPUI has undertaken several studies of the status of assessment across the university. In 2009, as we began preparing for our 2012 reaffirmation of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), members of the Division of Planning and Institutional Improvement (PAII) reviewed annual assessment reports and recent program review self-studies from academic units and university-wide offices that work directly with students. We found notable disparities in implementation of assessment and improvement across units, with some demonstrating exemplary practices and a few lacking even well-defined and widely embraced program learning outcomes, the foundation of any meaningful assessment effort.

Over the next several years, PAII worked closely with the Division of Academic Affairs and key campus-level committees to ensure that all undergraduate and graduate programs identified a set of disciplinary outcomes and that undergraduate programs were assessing the Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs), our campus general education outcomes. IUPUI’s Center for Teaching and Learning and PAII co-sponsored a series of workshops on assessment and improvement fundamentals and on assessment of each of the PULs. In addition, we instituted a

review process for annual assessment reports that was carried out by a subcommittee of our Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC), the main faculty/administrator body responsible for oversight and coordination of assessment and improvement efforts campus-wide. This annual review process led to notable improvement in the annual reports and, we believe, strengthened assessment and improvement practices in several schools and co-curricular programs.

In 2015-2016, PAII led another study of campus assessment and improvement activities as part of the campus's application for the Excellence in Assessment designation, then in its inaugural year. This effort incorporated focus groups of students and of external stakeholders, including alumni and members of program/school advisory boards, in order to gauge their perceptions of IUPUI's assessment work. We found enthusiastic support for assessment and improvement among these stakeholders; most had not been aware of the extent of IUPUI's commitment to assessment and improvement or of the amount of work this commitment entailed. In combination with evidence from assessment reports (both unit-specific and campus-wide) and examples contributed by PRAC members, these findings helped us to develop a compelling application narrative and, ultimately, to become one of four institutions to win the inaugural designation for "Sustained Excellence in Assessment."

Currently, IUPUI is preparing for its 2022 reaffirmation of accreditation by the HLC and, specifically, to implement the Quality Initiative that the HLC requires institutions to undertake as part of the reaffirmation process. IUPUI's Quality Initiative focuses on adopting and assessing our new general education outcomes, the Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success (known as the PLUS outcomes or the Profiles). This study serves as a formative evaluation that will help to guide our campus work on the Profiles.

Methodology

For this qualitative study, we conducted interviews with unit-level assessment leaders, using the protocol in Appendix A. Most of these respondents were PRAC members, but we also interviewed several additional leaders suggested by these initial interviewees. A few of them also provided us with written responses to the prompts in the protocol; several others sent us additional written materials (e.g., syllabi, curriculum maps) that we requested in the course of our discussions with them. We assured participants that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous.

The findings we report below draw on analysis of our notes from the interviews and the supplemental written materials mentioned above. One of us co-chairs the subcommittee that evaluates annual assessment reports, so this analysis also takes into account trends, themes, and other information culled from the most recent (2018-2019) set of reports and the evaluations of them.

Findings

We report our findings in alignment with the questions posed in the interview protocol for this study:

1. What is your school's/unit's primary reason for doing assessment?

Most participants replied with some version of “improvement.” Accreditation was rarely cited as the sole rationale for assessment. Respondents from schools offering general education courses observed that the assessment portfolios now required for inclusion and renewal of a course in the general education inventory have had a transformative effect on the culture of assessment in their schools and departments: As a result of their work on these portfolios, more faculty understand the role and value of assessment for improving teaching, learning, and curriculum. Respondents also noted that general education courses are often critical to retention, and thus that it is especially important to ensure that students have good experiences in these courses; as one faculty member said, “we owe it to our students” to set them up for a meaningful and successful journey to graduation. Representatives of another (non-accredited) school told us that the faculty are “passionate about education” and strongly believe in the power of assessment to guide improvement. A respondent from an accredited discipline observed that cultures of assessment and improvement are more effectively fostered when accreditors expect continuous improvement than when they establish specific benchmarks that programs either meet or fail to meet.

One interviewee from a co-curricular division cited the need to build an evidence-based culture in the unit in order to make decisions informed by data and to demonstrate the value of the institution's investment in the division. Several other co-curricular staff cited inclusion in The Record of Experiential and Applied Learning (commonly referred to as “The Record”), IUPUI's new co-curricular transcript, as a rationale for assessment; the application for including an experience or activity in The Record requires evidence from assessment that the experience contributes to student learning and success.

Two interviewees responded that the required annual assessment report (also known as the “PRAC report”) was the only reason for doing assessment, noting that their units had not articulated the value of assessment.

Other responses included:

- From a professional discipline: To develop a culture of assessment within the profession for the greater good.
- From a healthcare discipline: The curriculum must be updated continuously to reflect the ongoing evolution of the field. Faculty have a “professional responsibility” to “elevate the level of healthcare.”
- To shape the accreditation process for a new academic field.
- To determine what learning “looks like” in a new field; to contribute to building the field.
- To document quality rather than just asserting it.

- To enable comparisons across programs and schools in the field.
- From a co-curricular unit: To get beyond counting.
- From a co-curricular unit: To learn about students' experiences to provide better services.
- From a co-curricular unit: To develop a powerful narrative about the public mission of the university.
- From a co-curricular unit: To ensure that we're reaching our desired demographic profile.
- From a co-curricular unit: Because assessment is everyone's responsibility.
- To improve the reputation of IUPUI and/or of the particular school/co-curricular division in order to "make a case" for IUPUI to parents and students.

2. What is your organizational structure for assessment? Do you have an assessment committee? Or is assessment folded into the responsibilities of another committee? Who is responsible for assessment leadership/coordination?

Most school-level administrations include an associate dean charged with responsibility for assessment and improvement. Several schools have dedicated assessment committees, but a more common practice is to assign assessment responsibilities to school-wide curriculum or undergraduate/graduate program committees. One respondent noted that, initially, his school established separate assessment and curriculum committees, but membership of the two committees overlapped so much that they decided to merge. Particularly in larger schools, individual departments may also have committees with assessment responsibilities. We observed that schools that answer to multiple accrediting bodies and whose students are subject to state licensure requirements seem to have developed the most robust school-level administrative and committee infrastructures. Assessment expertise also appears to be more widespread among faculty in those schools.

On the other hand, schools encompassing mostly non-accredited disciplines were less likely to have highly developed or formalized committee structures and processes for assessment, although most had a school-wide committee with at least nominal responsibility for assessment. This may be changing, however, since these same schools offer the great majority of general education courses; initial and continued inclusion in the general education course inventory requires evidence of student learning, showcased in a course portfolio. Only one school reported having no school-wide committee responsible for assessment.

Assessment has also become increasingly widespread among IUPUI divisions that oversee out-of-class experiences that aim to contribute to students' learning and development and enrich their campus experience. In 2003, IUPUI was one of the first institutions nationally to create a position for an assessment specialist in its Division of Student Affairs. Since then, IUPUI divisions responsible for tracking and coordinating community engagement, service learning, and study abroad, as well as University Library, among others, have also established positions with assessment leadership responsibility. Organizational structures for assessment vary across

these co-curricular units. One division has created its own assessment committee with representation from each division office. Another has appointed data liaisons who communicate regularly with the assessment director. Additional co-curricular units are currently considering how best to capture the impact of their programs on student learning and success and how an assessment program might be structured. As we noted above, IUPUI's adoption of The Record has further encouraged assessment of out-of-classroom experiences. The application to include an experience in The Record requires evidence of student learning and growth, particularly in relation to the Profiles; once an experience has been included, periodic assessment reporting is required for continued inclusion.

Other responses included:

- In our school, assessment is more structured and systematic at the undergraduate level than at the graduate level.
- From a newly merged school: A school-wide assessment structure is currently being determined.
- We have a strong assessment culture in the department, but it's not a "camera-ready," polished structure.
- From a co-curricular unit: The program director "is the assessment structure"; learned about assessment on her own in order to track student learning experiences and outcomes.
- From a co-curricular unit: A couple of staff members have assessment in their titles, but many more are involved with assessment in some way.

3. What resources (e.g., professional development, expertise, fiscal allocations) are available for assessment?

In including this question, we were interested not only in whether schools and co-curricular divisions had internal resources to support assessment, but also in respondents' awareness of campus-wide resources. Several large and well-resourced schools indicated that internal resources, including funding to attend conferences, school-level professional development programs, and peer mentoring programs, were available. Internal faculty/staff expertise was mentioned frequently by both large and small schools, with several noting that their PRAC representatives served as internal consultants. Another school has a Faculty Fellow for Assessment, a model that has worked well and may be adaptable to other units' assessment needs.

Among campus-wide assessment resources, the Center for Teaching and Learning, including its Curriculum Enhancement Grants, was mentioned most often. Also frequently mentioned were PRAC and the PRAC Grants program ("very important," in the words of one respondent); the Division of Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS), as a source of both expertise and data; and the Assessment Institute. Less frequent responses included the Undergraduate Affairs Committee; the Mosaic Fellows program; the Institute for Engaged Learning; LEAP Indiana; and

workshops and individual coaching to prepare course portfolios for the General Education review process.

A very few individuals responded that no resources were available specifically for assessment. It was not clear whether they were unaware of the campus-wide resources noted above or interpreted the question to refer to unit-level resources only.

Other responses included:

- The specialized accreditor for the discipline holds an annual assessment symposium.
- The national disciplinary association is slowly developing a conversation about learning outcomes.
- The Record has the potential to be a useful professional development tool. Applying for an experience to be included in The Record requires consideration of program design, structure, and impact.

4. How has your program defined learning outcomes? How do you teach and assess for these outcomes?

Given the number of professional programs at IUPUI, it is not surprising that respondents often named specialized accreditors as an important source of discipline-specific learning outcomes. Some accreditors mandate outcomes, while others allow programs varying degrees of freedom to adapt outcomes to their own institutional contexts and students and/or determine additional outcomes of their own. Similarly, some specialized accreditors set specific standards or benchmarks for acceptable performance and define the measures to be used; in other cases, accreditors subscribe to a philosophy of continuous improvement or allow programs to decide for themselves how to assess and what level of performance to expect for a given outcome. Programs usually also determine how to teach and incorporate outcomes into curricula.

Most accredited programs and several non-accredited ones also maintain close relationships with local industry, whether through advisory or alumni boards, internships, or other means, with one interviewee noting that the program receives “constant feedback” from local employers on changing workforce needs. Several respondents also cited alumni surveys as important resources for determining what students need to know and be able to do to be ready to enter the professional workforce or embark on graduate/professional study.

Non-accredited programs typically draw on disciplinary associations, national professional organizations, and similar programs at other institutions for guidance on defining appropriate learning outcomes. And, of course, faculty in both accredited and non-accredited disciplines rely on their own experience and expertise in their fields to define the outcomes most essential for their students to achieve. Faculty ideas and expertise are especially critical in determining outcomes for new or young disciplines and emerging interdisciplinary fields. At IUPUI, a number of programs are either relatively new to the campus or new to higher education generally (e.g., Philanthropic Studies). With the help of faculty knowledgeable about learning and its

assessment, several of these programs have been able to build curricula with learning outcomes intentionally scaffolded throughout and mapped to the course and even assignment levels. As one respondent explained, faculty include these outcomes on syllabi and discuss them with students to ensure that students understand what they will know and be able to do by the end of each course, how each assignment contributes to these outcomes, and how the curriculum as a whole is designed to help them cumulatively build the capacities they will need when they graduate.

Such intentionality is, of course, not limited to new schools and programs: Many longstanding schools and programs have recursively revised curricula, courses, and assessment strategies to keep pace with developments in their fields; to incorporate new understandings of how students learn; to accommodate new mandates from accreditors; and to align with general education outcomes.

Other responses included:

- Outcomes are defined by accreditor, but program decides how to define, teach, and assess it, and what level of performance is acceptable.
- Outcomes come from accreditor, but we're also required to establish our own additional outcomes.
- The national organization sets forth 12 "areas of opportunity" and the school organizes its self-study around them.
- We get constant feedback from local industry on new employees and interns from IUPUI.
- We're just developing outcomes for the first time; they're mostly content-focused.
- The challenge is that the field is young and not yet well-defined.
- From a co-curricular unit: We don't yet have learning outcomes, but we need to establish them.
- We're beginning to look at larger outcomes like empathy and communication, attitudes and dispositions, rather than competencies; "educating the whole person"—but some of these outcomes are impossible to quantify.

5. How are you integrating the Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success (i.e., the PLUS outcomes) into program outcomes for undergraduate programs? Can you give us an example of how the Profiles are mapped to program outcomes? To individual course outcomes?

The Division of Undergraduate Education reports that more than 90 percent of undergraduate programs have submitted documents that align program outcomes to the Profiles. Most co-curricular units have developed similar documents and alignment. Responses from our interviewees, however, suggest that the extent of implementation of the Profiles and, in particular, the degree to which programs are assessing them vary widely. Assessment reports for the 2018-2019 academic year similarly indicate that while most undergraduate programs

have mapped outcomes to the Profiles, some have made more progress than others toward incorporating the Profiles into teaching, learning, and assessment.

One respondent, for example, told us that faculty assumed that relationships between disciplinary outcomes and the PLUS outcomes were clear, so nothing special needed to be done in terms of revising curricula or teaching and learning practices. Several respondents said their programs had aligned with the capstone course only. Others had gone beyond the capstone—in one case, by creating a midpoint course that explicitly incorporates and will allow students to be assessed for PLUS learning, and, in another case, by aligning all general education offerings and all courses required for the major. Yet another, relatively new, program had mapped PLUS to disciplinary outcomes at the course and assignment levels, so that “if students read the maps, they know why they’re doing each assignment.” Degree programs that do not admit students as freshmen are finding alignment more challenging; as one interviewee put it, “the Profiles are very longitudinal,” and are difficult to cultivate and achieve during the one or two years that students are in the major. Respondents from several co-curricular programs also indicated some difficulty in aligning with PLUS.

Other responses included:

- The Profiles are “a way of explaining to students what it means to be a college graduate.”
- We need to be explicit with students about how PLUS is tied to the major and career.
- Yes, we’ve mapped them to our accreditation standards.
- We need to offer students multiple opportunities for engagement with PLUS and think strategically about what we can do to enhance these competencies.
- From a co-curricular program: Yes, all outcomes are aligned with PLUS.
- From a co-curricular program: We have found the PLUS outcomes somewhat problematic and difficult to align with.
- Not familiar with that [PLUS].

6. What assessment methods are used in the unit? How do you go about data collection? What is your reporting cycle?

Given IUPUI’s hundreds of academic programs and wealth of co-curricular learning opportunities, it is not surprising that faculty and staff responses to this item ran the gamut of available assessment methods and measures. Most academic units reported using a mix of qualitative and quantitative, and direct and indirect assessment approaches, and assessing at multiple stages of students’ progression through their programs. Exams, of course, including certification exams, with items mapped to specific outcomes—a method required by several specialized accreditors—were a frequently mentioned assessment approach. Almost all respondents also emphasized extensive and increasing reliance on authentic assessments of one kind or another: student projects, essays, various kinds of papers, signature and common assignments, reflections, ePortfolios, clinical observations, internship reports, and more.

Several faculty members expressed some discomfort with the reliability of authentic assessments, asking, “how do you evaluate when there are no clear metrics?” “When data is descriptive, not quantitative, how do you evaluate quality?”

Indirect assessment approaches, including surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups, are also widely used among both academic and, especially, co-curricular programs. Faculty and staff alike highly value feedback from students as they progress through programs, complete them, and continue to graduate study or employment. Respondents reported using various types of instruments, including pre- and post-surveys, course evaluations, surveys of students at successive stages of completing a program, exit surveys, and alumni surveys to determine how students believe they are benefiting from a program or experience. Professional programs sometimes survey employers as well as students or seek feedback from external advisory committees on graduates’ strengths and weaknesses.

By and large, interviewees were knowledgeable about the advantages and limitations of these indirect assessments. Respondents observed, for example, that how a survey/focus group question is asked may influence responses, and that data cannot always be taken at face value. Student surveys and focus groups are, thus, often accompanied by attempts to track students after they complete a program or experience; one degree program reported that it was attempting to track students 15 years out from graduation. Several respondents also noted that they receive and act on extensive informal feedback from students. Indeed, informal feedback, particularly in programs where faculty often work with students one-to-one, is frequently the main influence on decisions about what needs to be improved. Most programs, however, have not found methods for systematically capturing such informal data. This phenomenon may help to explain why improvements described in annual assessment reports often seem unrelated to formal assessment findings.

Several respondents from co-curricular programs reported that The Record has provided a helpful framework for thinking about program design and structure. As one interviewee put it, “The Record gives assessment teeth” in co-curricular programs. The IUPUI taxonomies for high-impact practices were also mentioned several times as useful for planning and assessing learning outside the classroom.

Other responses included:

- We have good response rates on surveys, because our field does a lot of surveys and students understand the importance of responding.
- Lots of one-on-one time with students enables us to make “in-flight” corrections.
- We get feedback from internship and practicum sites/supervisors.
- We use Bloom’s Taxonomy.
- We need to develop ways to assess when we don’t see students continually.
- Each semester, we identify courses to review and students review them alongside faculty. We value student voices highly.

- Assessment is more structured at the undergraduate level, more ad hoc at the graduate level.

7. Do you disaggregate assessment findings, by race, gender, first generation, etc.?

The most frequent response from academic programs was “no,” with most of these respondents adding that they either lacked the resources to gather demographic information or lacked access to such information. (These respondents seemed unaware that this information is available from IRDS.) Almost all respondents said, nonetheless, that equity was an important issue for their programs. Reasons for paying increased attention to equity included: to diversify the pipeline into the field; to diversify a particular program or school; to address state workforce needs; to meet the needs of underserved communities in the state; and to ensure that students receive a genuinely humanistic education that helps them develop empathy for others. Respondents from disciplines where diversity and equity are core concerns, such as social work, education, and public health, were more likely to say they had drawn on IRDS as a data resource.

Equity issues have been prominent in recent national studies and discussions of out-of-class learning experiences, especially High-Impact Practices. Most IUPUI campus-wide divisions and offices that coordinate such activities told us that they do disaggregate findings, relying in part on information and resources provided by IRDS.

Other responses included:

- We don’t have resources for that [disaggregating assessment findings by demographic characteristics], but it would be great to look at that longitudinally.
- Yes, we disaggregate, but very carefully—we’re not seeking to “out” anyone, especially undocumented students.
- No, we don’t look explicitly at demographic categories, but sometimes trends become apparent in the process of analyzing assessment findings.
- Yes, we have conversations about curricular reform, race, diversity, inclusion, and social justice, and have created courses on these topics.
- Yes, our accreditor requires us to disaggregate.
- Yes, our school has its own Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
- We look at demographics for DFW rates, but not for learning outcomes.

8. How are assessment findings and potential improvements discussed by faculty/staff? How are results shared and discussed with external stakeholders (e.g., advisory or alumni boards)?

Most respondents said that assessment results were discussed at some level—program, department, school, or division. For example, one interviewee told us that assessment findings were discussed internally “all the time.” Another reported that findings and improvements

were discussed within programs, but rarely across programs. Other discussion venues included department meetings; school meetings; curriculum committee meetings and assessment committee meetings at the department or school level; the School Faculty Council; meetings of faculty advisory committees or boards (for units with campus-wide missions, including units overseeing co-curricular programs); the Undergraduate Affairs Committee (for general education courses); meetings of faculty and staff collaborating on grant projects; meetings with external funding agencies; and meetings with stakeholder groups, such as a Student Curricular Committee, in one case, and external advisory/industry boards and committees for several professional schools and programs.

A respondent from a co-curricular unit commented that there is not always a clear audience to report assessment findings to. Another observed that The Record provides mechanisms and vehicles for assessment and artifacts of learning that can serve as a basis for discussion. One interviewee noted that IUPUI's current focus on retention encourages more frequent and explicit conversations about student learning and success.

Other responses included:

- We share job placement outcomes and information about teaching innovations with our Advisory Committee.
- We discuss the results of general education course reviews.
- We report findings to the dean.
- We share findings with all schools (from a campus-wide unit).
- We discuss assessment findings when determining needed curriculum changes or re-mapping the curriculum.
- We need to improve our communication about assessment so that we can articulate the value of attending IUPUI.

9. Can you give us an example of an improvement implemented as a direct result of findings from assessment?

All respondents were able to provide us with at least one example of an improvement that resulted from assessment findings. The majority of these involved curriculum revisions: re-sequencing courses or topics within courses; eliminating or combining redundant courses; reducing overlap between/among courses; and developing alternative curricula in new or emerging interdisciplinary fields. One respondent described collaborating with faculty in a different school to address math weaknesses; the faculty then incorporated those math topics into a course sequence and added a course to make the content more explicit and cohesive. Another interviewee discussed a whole-program revision to improve Ph.D. students' preparation for dissertation research.

Several respondents described pedagogical changes aimed at giving students more or better real-world experiences: a class that was flipped to give students less lecture and more

laboratory time; and adjustments to an internship experience based on student feedback. Other changes involved advising and peer mentoring—e.g., adding advisors, changing advising practices, and making advising more proactive; and adjusting training for peer mentors to incorporate more intercultural content.

Our discussions about this topic reinforced the importance of informal, day-to-day interactions with students in prompting adjustments and improvements. Capturing these “findings” in assessment reporting remains an elusive goal.

Other responses included:

- We introduced a topic earlier in the curriculum, so that students were aware of it before interacting with patients.
- We eliminated some courses and re-aligned the curriculum.
- We rewrote our research guide, so that rather than providing a list of resources, we walked students through the research process. Students now report increased use of the guide.
- We leave changes up to individual faculty members.

10. What factors encourage/discourage assessment in your unit?

Responses to this question fell into four main categories: the reward system; disciplinary/school history and culture; leadership for assessment (or lack thereof); and infrastructure for assessment (or lack thereof). These factors overlap and combine to influence whether and how much faculty and staff in a department, school, or administrative area are interested in and knowledgeable about assessment practice.

The reward system for faculty exerts a strong influence on faculty priorities and behavior. While IUPUI as an institution has long promoted assessment as an essential component of excellent teaching and learning and student academic success, we have also promoted the importance of research and external grant dollars, values consistent with many disciplinary traditions and with traditional doctoral training. A perceived lack of recognition and rewards for engaging in assessment was thus the most frequently cited factor discouraging faculty buy-in. As one respondent commented, the “actual reward system is not aligned with the [campus] strategic plan,” and attempting to change the reward system is “like trying to move a mountain.” In schools and disciplines that are not accountable to external accrediting agencies, faculty are not always encouraged to care about assessment and may view it as “busy work.” Several interviewees also told us that the word “assessment” still scares some of their department/school colleagues, that faculty do not see assessment as part of their role, and that there was little internal pressure or support for assessment within the school. As one interviewee put it, assessment “is a lot of work” with “no value articulated” within the department/discipline.

This culture seems to be changing, however. Respondents from schools that teach general education courses reported that the processes for accepting and periodically reaffirming courses within the general education inventory were bringing about a sea change in attitudes toward assessment. The course portfolios developed for these reviews have encouraged faculty to attend more closely to what promotes learning in these courses and how the courses fit into students' pathways to graduation, leading to a greater appreciation and understanding of the value of assessment. The general education process has spurred creation of new committees, syllabus revision, and "non-negotiable" elements of syllabi for general education courses with multiple sections. Assessment is becoming a norm in general education courses because of the requirement that courses be re-evaluated every five years, and resistance has "melted away," according to one respondent. The 2018-2019 assessment reports for these schools support the idea that assessment has become a more established practice among non-accredited units that offer general education courses.

School, department, and disciplinary culture both influence and are influenced by the reward system. Respondents in externally accredited programs and disciplines were more likely to report strong, longstanding cultures of assessment within their units and extensive buy-in to assessment as an important activity, especially in fields where accreditors have a long history of requiring assessment reporting. Interviewees from health care fields were especially likely to cite commitment to best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment. Faculty from accredited programs were also more likely to see assessment as part of their faculty role. In addition, faculty from relatively new fields, including interdisciplinary fields, also tended to be interested in using assessment findings to make decisions about curriculum and teaching/learning strategies.

As we have already noted, assessment is rapidly becoming standard practice in co-curricular units at IUPUI, consistent with national trends. When the Division of Student Affairs established a designated assessment position in 2003, such positions were relatively rare. But today, these positions are becoming the norm at institutions with large student affairs units. Regional accreditors, including the Higher Learning Commission, now expect institutions to assess learning in co-curricular programs. IUPUI units that coordinate programs in areas like service learning, study abroad, and undergraduate research have similarly created positions with designated assessment responsibility. Research and assessment have demonstrated that participation in such programs and other out-of-class experiences can have a high impact on student learning and success when done well. The need to ascertain what "done well" looks like in IUPUI's institutional context and to determine whether a given activity or program is having the desired impact drives assessment in these important areas; the High-Impact Practice taxonomies developed at IUPUI draw on research and our own institutional experiences to articulate what we have learned to date about the characteristics of HIPs "done well."

One IUPUI co-curricular division reported little assessment activity, noting that there was no clear understanding of who was responsible for assessment and no culture of assessment. That

particular division's responsibilities include both activities that do not involve students directly and activities that do. A staff member from one of those student-facing units was able to describe some assessment strategies intended to discern impact on students, but also acknowledged that assessment was informal and that the division lacked both assessment expertise and leadership for assessment.

Of course, one would not expect to find a culture of assessment or recognition and rewards for involvement in assessment when top-level leadership from deans, chairs, and division heads is lacking. Several respondents described lack of leadership at the school or division level as a key influence on assessment culture (or lack thereof) and on rewards and recognition (or lack thereof) for faculty and staff engaged in assessment. Interviewees from such units also tended to report that no one had formal responsibility for assessment and no one believed assessment was part of their role. These comments also speak to a lack of internal infrastructure for assessment: When leaders are uninterested in assessment, infrastructure is likely to be scattered, minimal, or missing altogether, and a systematic assessment program is highly unlikely to exist.

Other responses included:

- We're a young school, not entrenched in any one way of working, and faculty are willing to make changes based on data, as is the norm in the field.
- We have lots of buy-in because of the long history of our accreditor requiring evidence of outcomes.
- Our field has a strong culture of evaluation, so faculty are quite interested in assessment.
- Faculty are genuinely committed to best practices.
- With so many adjunct faculty, it's difficult to get everyone on the same page about outcomes.
- With no school leadership or culture of assessment, making it a priority is challenging.
- The biggest challenge is data collection. People are busy and don't want to spend time collecting data.
- From a co-curricular unit: There are challenges inherent in not being a regular academic unit.
- From a co-curricular unit: We want to assess our programs, but if faculty mentors don't embrace it, there's not much we can do.

11. Is PRAC as currently constituted a useful resource? What else could PRAC be doing to support assessment and improvement in your unit?

While a few respondents thought that PRAC was too large to accomplish meaningful work, the great majority agreed that PRAC was helpful and even essential to ensuring that IUPUI continues to place a high priority on assessment and improvement. Many interviewees talked about what they learned in PRAC meetings, whether about new and best practices in

assessment and improvement, about what others on campus are doing, or about useful ideas they could bring back and adapt to their home units. Comments frequently focused on the value of PRAC as a venue for communicating about assessment, helping members understand the “big picture” of assessment at IUPUI, providing a campus context for assessment work within individual units, and spreading awareness of assessment across the campus. Several respondents remarked that including national speakers in PRAC meetings helped them stay “plugged in” to national efforts and discussions and track how the assessment field was evolving; this addition to PRAC agendas was highly valued by PRAC representatives. Support for representatives to attend the Assessment Institute was also greatly appreciated.

A number of respondents either commented or asked about PRAC’s role with respect to the Profiles. One interviewee observed that PRAC could monitor how IUPUI is progressing with implementation of the Profiles and asked whether we have a systematic way to study our progress institution-wide. Another noted that PRAC will play an important role in assessment of student achievement of the learning and dispositions encapsulated in the Profiles, adding that we need to be “tough” about what is acceptable as an assessment program for PLUS. Others agreed that the Profiles give PRAC more purpose, but thought that we needed more communication between the Undergraduate Affairs Committee and PRAC and more discussion of what campus-level assessment of the Profiles should look like. One suggestion was that PRAC devote some time to considering how academic programs might approach assessment of the Profiles in capstone courses and experiences.

Other respondents suggested that, with a group of such knowledgeable and committed leaders, PRAC might play a more active role in defining a vision for assessment at IUPUI that would work across the full range of school and co-curricular contexts. One commented that the group could have more in-depth, honest conversations about where units “really are” with assessment, what the challenges are, and what we are aiming for vis-à-vis assessment campus-wide. Another thought that the value of assessment needed to be more explicit and that PRAC should do more to support and mentor those responsible for assessment at the unit level. A few noted that there was little awareness of PRAC within their units and that we should reach out to faculty not serving on PRAC.

Several comments addressed difficulties with the annual assessment reports or “PRAC reports,” as many refer to them. One respondent who had just compiled his unit’s report for the first time appeared to be unaware of the report guidelines on the PRAC website. Others wanted more guidance on how to approach writing the reports and noted that the task of putting the report together was particularly daunting for large schools with many departments and programs that have their own discipline-specific learning outcomes and assessment strategies. On a more positive note, one interviewee observed that the PRAC report review process and reviewers’ comments on the unit’s report had helped the unit think more systematically about assessment.

Other responses included:

- We should leverage PRAC's resources to appoint faculty fellows who would focus on assessment of the Profiles.
- I would like to see graduate students involved in PRAC.
- PRAC needs to pay more attention to graduate education. Can PRAC bring together members involved in assessment at the graduate level?
- PRAC strikes a good balance between doing assessment for accreditation/accountability and assessing for our own benefit to improve the institution.
- I learn something from each meeting. Agendas and formats are all useful.
- PRAC should pay more attention to assessment of online learning, perhaps in partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Can we thread conversations on diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout PRAC discussion of other assessment topics?
- We need to treat assessment of neurocognitive outcomes more seriously. PRAC has treated these skills as unimportant.
- PRAC is too big. It needs to be reconceptualized.
- Faculty see PRAC as the place where they send assessment reports.
- There is little faculty awareness of PRAC at the school level. How can we reach out to faculty who are not serving on PRAC?

Limitations of this Study

This study has two principal limitations: the population of respondents may not be representative of faculty and staff at IUPUI; and our data-gathering and analysis were somewhat informal.

As noted earlier, we deliberately chose to interview PRAC representatives and several other colleagues who are involved with assessment within their schools or divisions. Most of these colleagues have formal or informal responsibility for leading assessment within their units. We selected these individuals because they were well-positioned to help us achieve the purposes of our study: to gain a better understanding of assessment activities and engagement at the unit level and to gather feedback about PRAC and suggestions for making it more useful. But members of this group are also more likely to be interested in and enthusiastic about assessment than randomly chosen individuals would be. We relied on their understanding and candor about unit-level assessment activity and colleagues' perceptions of assessment.

This was an informal, formative study, conducted for purposes of intra-institutional understanding and discussion. We did not record, transcribe, or code interviewees' responses. We both took copious notes, and we relied on these notes, supplemented in a few cases by written documents, for our analysis. We explained this methodology to respondents at the outset of each interview, and we believe that it helped them to feel comfortable about providing us with an honest perspective on the state of assessment in their own units as well as

constructive suggestions for improving the work of PRAC. In addition, this informal methodology enabled us to complete this study quickly and inexpensively.

Discussion and Conclusion

IUPUI overall has a healthy assessment culture. All academic units and many co-curricular units are doing at least some assessment, and, for the majority, assessment is routine and based on a sound administrative and committee infrastructure. Most faculty and staff understand that assessment is done for purposes of improvement: to serve our students by helping them, as best we can, to succeed. Establishing and maintaining a flourishing assessment culture is a remarkable achievement for an institution as large, complex, and diverse as IUPUI—and we should not forget that it took a sustained 30-year effort to reach this point.

At the same time, there is clearly still room for improvement in most of the areas addressed in this report, particularly as IUPUI finalizes plans to implement and assess the Profiles. We thus offer the following recommendations for continuing to strengthen our assessment culture and for preparing to assess the Profiles:

1. Intensify efforts to educate faculty and staff about qualitative assessment methods.

Several respondents seemed unaware or doubtful that qualitative assessment is “real” assessment. Yet the Profiles include affective elements that cannot be meaningfully quantified or “measured,” including active listening, relationship-building, perseverance, creativity, decision-making, empathy and respect for other cultures and perspectives, and more. In consultation with the UAC and the Center for Teaching and Learning, PRAC should consider how best to prepare faculty and staff to accept and make use of qualitative assessment methods for both assessment and improvement.

2. Consider strategies for incorporating informal student feedback into assessment findings.

Since a PRAC subcommittee began reviewing annual assessment reports, the most frequent criticism of the reports is that improvements are not aligned with assessment findings. More often than not, we have found that these improvement attempts result from informal conversations between faculty/staff and students or instructor observations of which tasks or concepts are most difficult for students—circumstances that are certainly not unique to IUPUI. It might thus be worthwhile for PRAC to devote some time to thinking about strategies for capturing these informal findings and incorporating them into assessment reporting. Such strategies may be especially useful in the current circumstances where formal assessment activities may be disrupted, but many faculty and staff are making “just-in-time adjustments” to teaching and learning strategies in online or hybrid environments.

3. Consider how IUPUI might make the most of factors that encourage assessment and improvement and mitigate factors that discourage them.

Buy-in to and knowledge about assessment and improvement appear to have increased in recent years—a welcome development—particularly within general education courses and co-curricular units. But it is still worth considering what more can be done to influence rewards and recognition for assessment work; build unit-level assessment expertise, especially in units where such expertise is limited to a few individuals; support the development of leadership for assessment within academic and co-curricular programs; and improve assessment infrastructure at the unit level. And what can PRAC, specifically, contribute to these efforts?

For example, PRAC and PAII should consider an expanded orientation process for new members (who may also be new to assessment) and guidance on writing assessment reports for members who are expected to carry out this task. We might also build out the PAII website so that it provides more support to both PRAC members and other faculty and staff seeking to learn more about assessment.

4. Clarify the roles of PRAC and the UAC vis-à-vis assessment of general education learning.

Some respondents seemed to believe that assessment of general education was PRAC's responsibility, but the UAC has oversight of general education, and mandates, coordinates, and reviews assessments of general education courses. There is also, of course, considerable overlap in membership of the two bodies. What, then, are the institution's expectations for PRAC's involvement in general education? To lead assessment efforts? To support and advise the UAC's assessment work? To ensure and support assessment of the Profiles within the major (i.e., non-general education courses)? Some discussion in both committees might be helpful for clearer delineation of who is responsible for what.