School of Arts and Sciences Assessment Plan Executive Summary

Mission Statement

The programs of the School of Arts and Sciences, serving both as a foundational component of the Fisher educational experience and as fields of specialized study, cultivate intellectual and ethical judgment and habits of thinking that prepare students to lead lives of integrity and thoughtful engagement in both the public and private spheres. By striving to provide an environment characterized by respect for individual potential, high expectations, and open and critical inquiry, we develop the capacities of our students, ourselves, and our communities.

Program Goals

- Providing opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to develop proficiency in one or more of the major fields of study housed in the School.
- Providing undergraduate students opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge in a field of study outside of the major through the pursuit of a minor.
- Providing an educational foundation for all undergraduate students through a core curriculum that is intentional and reflective of the breadth of perspectives that characterizes the liberal arts at St. John Fisher College.
- Promoting the engagement of students, faculty members, and professional staff within a learning environment that creates high expectations along with the support for all to achieve their full potential.

Data Collection Tools & Approaches

The assessment plan for the School of Arts and Sciences is overseen by an Assessment Advisory Committee comprised of the Dean, the Associate Dean/Director of the First Year Program, Director of the Core, faculty, a representative of the library, SoA&S Assessment Coordinator, and the Coordinator of Institutional Assessment and Accreditation. Members of this committee are also appointed to work in two subgroups: program-level assessments and core assessments. All groups meet monthly during the academic year to review current assessment practices and make recommendations to the Dean. Reports from the Assessment Advisory Committee, including their recommendations, are then shared by the Dean with the department Chairs and Program Directors.
As a liberal arts institution, St. John Fisher College requires students to complete a 45 credit hour general education curriculum, the “core”, in addition to the program requirements of the major. The following describes each of these assessment systems and how they intersect to provide a comprehensive understanding and evaluation of our student learning outcomes.

The core curriculum is comprised of two tiers of liberal arts courses, foundations and perspectives, offered through the School of Arts and Sciences. Foundations tier core courses are designed to introduce students to the academic knowledge and skills necessary for success in college. Students complete 5 courses (15 credit hours) including research-based writing, scientific and quantitative literacy, cultural contrasts and the interdisciplinary-linked learning community courses. Perspective tier core courses are designed to provide a wide range of experience with fundamental academic perspectives on human nature and the world. This tier includes courses in the arts, philosophy and religion, sociocultural studies, the natural and technical world, and intercultural understandings and languages. The School of Arts and Sciences' core committee assess student learning artifacts from each core course at the end of the semester to analyze the degree to which students are achieving core learning goals. Faculty and program development activities are provided every semester to address curricular and pedagogical needs identified by the assessment process. The results of the core assessments are then shared with the instructors, program directors, chairs, members of the Assessment Advisory Committee, and the Dean to determine what if any changes should be made for the following semester.

A key component of the foundations tier is the First Year Program which consists of two-linked Learning Community courses (LC) and the Research-based Writing course (199). Although currently assessed separately, the First Year Program assessment process is being integrated with the Core in order to provide a comprehensive look at the development of these skills throughout the students’ program of study. The First Year Program Advisory Team, made of faculty teaching LC and/or or 199 courses and under the direction of the Associate Dean for the School of Arts and Sciences, use common LC and 199 rubrics to assess samples of student work from all sections of each course, similar to the core assessment process. Faculty in the First Year Program review the aggregate results during a series of faculty workshops and make curricular adjustments as needed. The aggregate results and evidence-based changes are also shared with all faculty during the annual faculty development day and are available online.

All students are also required to complete courses in their major field of study and are assessed by the individual programs. The School of Arts and Sciences requires that all programs must have a curriculum map that indicates the alignment between course level, program level, and college-wide goals. This map also indicates what measures are used to assess student learning in each of the required courses and guides instructional decisions regarding when specific skills and knowledge should be introduced, reinforced, and mastered. In addition to the use of these embedded formative and summative assessment measures, course instructors will use external examinations when available. The departmental assessment plan uses the curriculum map to
determine when and how assessments are to be conducted and establishes a three-year cycle over which assessment evidence of each of the program learning goals is documented, analyzed, reviewed and acted upon. An annual assessment report is then submitted to the Assessment Coordinator and the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences for further review and to assist with the following year’s assessment planning process. A summary of the annual reports are then shared with the Assessment Advisory Committee for further review.

The assessment process consists of collecting data from the instructors teaching the required courses identified by the curriculum map. Each of these instructors submits specific assignment results to the department assessment committee each semester. The assessment committee analyzes the information and shares the results with full time and part time department faculty. As a group, they determine whether there need to be changes to course content, instructional strategies, and/or assignments to help students meet the benchmarks set for the student learning outcomes. In order to respond in a timely manner to student needs, assessments are continually conducted at three levels as noted: foundational (100-level courses), developmental (200 and 300-level courses), and commencement level (300 and 400-level courses).

All assessment information is also reviewed through the use program-specific excel files that combine core and program goals and outcomes. These files align the core and program goals with college-wide goals and essential skills thereby allowing a thorough review of student learning that informs and supports the College’s strategic plan.

**Use of Evidence**

To ensure a comprehensive use of the assessment data at the program-level, the departmental assessment committees meet with the School of Arts and Sciences’ Assessment Coordinator twice a year to discuss both the core and program assessment results. This information is then shared with the department during their regularly scheduled meetings. The department faculty review assessment findings and identify and prioritize learning goals and objectives by level (foundational, developmental, commencement) for improvement or continued monitoring. Program-level working groups are assigned to develop a better understanding of student learning in the program and to identify potential courses of action. Those working groups then identify actions to be taken to improve pedagogy, curriculum, assignments and/or other actions as appropriate.

The Assessment Coordinator summarizes the status of the program-level and core assessments at the end of each semester for the Dean and the Assessment Advisory Committee. In addition, more detailed summaries are written for the program-level and core assessment subgroups of the Assessment Advisory Committee. The aggregate core scores for each semester are also posted to Blackboard for the faculty. An annual report is compiled each Fall that includes all assessment plans, results and actions items. This information is used
throughout the following year to make recommendations for change, provide information for the Provost through the Educational Assessment Leadership Team and the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee to support initiatives for the Long Range Planning and Budget Committee, and promote successful student learning outcomes.