

Co-Curricular Assessment

Year-End Report: 2020-2021

Updated June 2021

Overview

As a Catholic institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy, Mount Mercy University is committed to our mission *that provides student-focused education in the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy and welcomes people of all beliefs to join our community in pursuit of baccalaureate and graduate education and compassionate service to those in need. We strive for excellence in accomplishing our mission through four interdependent goals: Using reflective judgment, Engaging in strategic communication, Serving the common good, and Promoting purposeful living.*

It is through this mission and our goals that we provide opportunities for our students to grow outside of the classroom in co-curricular activities along their vocational journey. Whether one of our over 500 student-athletes, a part of our growing musical ensembles, on a faith journey with Mission and Ministry, a student enjoying the residential experience, or a leader in one of our 30+ registered student organizations, students have the opportunity to find their own diverse path on the Hill.

We recognized the need for a more robust co-curricular assessment plan following the previous HLC meeting and took note of the feedback shared:

It should be noted here that there was little evidence of co-curricular assessment. The team saw ample evidence of a culture of assessment, evidence that frameworks for successful assessment have been implemented at the curricular level, and evidence that faculty are challenged institutionally to apply their assessment to their planning and practice to the years ahead. The social and organizational infrastructure to support co-curricular learning is present at Mt. Mercy; however, there is no evidence that co-curricular learning is actively being assessed.

At the request of the visiting team, a two-page narrative document describing co-curricular assessment was submitted by Jan Handler on July 17, 2017. There was reference to one question on the current senior survey (how important were clubs or activities related to the major – rank by importance). There was reference to a new pilot reflection paper for students asking them to address their service experiences. There is reference to objectives to increase co-curricular activities in the strategic plan, but specific objectives for those activities was not included in the narrative. The narrative describes attempts by the assistant director for diversity and engagement to create new activities to include assessments, but these are plans only. The narrative describes hopes for a mobile app, OOH LALA, to provide for future assessment of co-curricular activities, but this too is plan only.

NSSE data was cited in regard to the number of hours that students participate in community service and co-curricular activities, but no assessment of those activities was provided. There was a single question regarding co-curricular assessment cited under criterion 3B.

Although there was not enough evidence for the team to conclude that co-curricular assessment is vibrant, active, and institutionalized at Mt. Mercy, there is evidence that Mt. Mercy is aware of this deficiency, has plans to overcome the deficiency, and has the social and organizational infrastructure to be successful. The team strongly recommends that Mt. Mercy use its strengths in curricular assessment to inform and influence its practices in co-curricular assessment prior to the next review. The team also recommends that the team conducting the comprehensive visit follow up and ensure that a robust program of co-curricular program is in place.

Based on this feedback, we have created our *Every Mustang Made by Mercy*, plan to engage students outside the classroom while focusing on

Methodology

We have built our plan around our mission, values, and the Principles of Good Practice that are grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and formed in partnership with the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) and the Association of Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASACCU). We focused on the following areas of student life outside of the classroom with both qualitative and quantitative tools: Student Engagement, Leadership, Athletics, Diversity, Campus Ministry, Service, Residence Life, Student Health, and Vocation. The specific assessment tools that were utilized are included in the appendices including the frequency of distribution.

Outcomes: While COVID-19 provided unique challenges throughout the year, we had the following outcomes we'd like to highlight for FY21 at Mount Mercy University:

- *Student Engagement:* We saw a 4.6% decrease in the *Offers Enough Programming & Activities* to 3.96/5. Part of this was due to the Governor's limit on in-person gatherings and our own internal COVID-19 regulations.
- *Leadership:* The Leadership Survey Assessment showcased key areas where Registered Student Organization (RSO) leaders felt best prepared to lead in the future (i.e. awareness of personal values and ability to interact/engage with others) and other areas where we need to focus on more in the coming years (i.e. cultural awareness, planning events, and taking risks). Our Mustang Mentoring program also kicked off this year with 71.7% of first-year students meeting with their peer mentor and 68.4% meeting with their staff mentor at least once.
- *Residence Life:* The largest increase in our survey was related to *Meal Plan Value* up 24.24% to 3.05/5. We believe this is in part due to offering to-go options due to COVID-19.
- *Student Health:* There was a 8.22% increase in the *Nurse is Helpful* question to 4.41/5 due to in part we believe to COVID-19 testing capabilities on campus as well as a new partnership we implemented with Mercy Medical Center (local hospital) where we limited available hours yet increase services available by contracting with a Nurse

Practitioner. Every indicator related to *Personal Stress* was up this year as well in areas about anxiety over personal relationships, academic stress, and life in general.

- *Diversity*: Every one of our questions related to *Cultural Interactions* decreased this year which are all focused on contact, communication, and interaction with people that are different than the respondent; mainly due to COVID-19 restrictions we believe and the departure of our Director of Diversity mid-year.
- *Vocation*: In the first year of measuring the impact of the Office of Career Services, students rated a 3.56/5 when responding to the statement, *Based on my interactions with Career Services, I feel more prepared to identify my career interests and develop career management skills.*

Action: Each year, departments will review the outcomes and student wants/needs to identify opportunities for improvement going forward. This typically includes the creation of a proposal to include a program overview, cost-benefit analysis, and measures of success. All new proposals are reviewed by the Vice President of the area, typically for co-curricular activities that is the Vice President for Student Success. If there are costs associated with the new program or initiative, they are included in the in the budgeting process which is reviewed by the Budget Committee and the Cabinet prior to board approval. Typically, items requesting >\$5,000 will require a special presentation and review by the University Cabinet for consideration. Additional programs that are student-centered may receive funding from the Student Government Association (SGA) as a part of their Activity Fee – Additional Funding Request process where they student Cabinet reviews all proposals for consideration.

- *Persistence*: Based on persistence data of under-resourced, racial/ethnic minority, and first-generation college students, the University recognized the positive impact of the summer bridge program for this population of our students and have both proposed and secured \$40,000 to restart our summer bridge program, Project Connect. Students in this program over the first three years showed ~10% greater first-to-second year persistence than those students that qualified for the program and did not participate.
- *Leadership*: Based on survey feedback, the University has created a new leadership program focused on the Social Change Model of Leadership grounded in our Mercy heritage. This program has received >\$5,000 funding from the SGA to engage both traditional undergraduate students, non-traditional, and graduate students in learning about their individual, group, and community values.
- *Student Engagement*: The Mount Mercy Activities Planning (M2AP) Board increased their student activity fee request from SGA by ~\$25,000 to bring back a full slate of programming post COVID-19.
- *Diversity*: In partnership with our SGA, the Office of Diversity created a weekly series focused on civil discourse called *Leave it on the Floor Fridays* where topics are brought forward for discussion and dialogue. The SGA, Office of Diversity, and Mission and Ministry Office collaborated to create a \$25,000 *Sister Cora Marie Billings Diversity*

Endowment that will focus on bringing diversity programming to our students based on survey and climate assessment outcomes noted above.

- *Student Health*: Based on the survey outcomes, the University has made the decision to continue with the contract partnership with the local hospital. This will allow students to have additional services and access to health support on-campus instead of being routed to local clinics.
- *Vocation*: The Director of Career Services will be teaching a portal course that will include all *Exploring* majors in their first year to address vocational questions while providing tools to assess their aptitudes and abilities related to their field of study.
- *Critical Thinking*: An assessment is being created in partnership with the University Faculty to administer to first-year students to better understand the baseline of critical thinking skills prior to coursework and after the first year.