

Supplemental Information Report to the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
from
WESTMINSTER COLLEGE
New Wilmington, PA 16172

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March 1, 2014

Subject of the Follow-Up Report:

To document receipt of the monitoring report noting that the report provided insufficient information documenting the use of direct evidence of student achievement of institutional and program level student learning outcomes. (Standard 14) To note that a visit will not be conducted at this time. To request a supplemental information report, due March 1, 2014, documenting the use of direct evidence of student achievement of institutional and program level student learning outcomes. (Standard 14) A small team visit may follow the submission of the report. The Periodic Review Report is due June 1, 2016.

*If this report follows an evaluation or follow-up visit, indicate
date of the evaluation/follow-up team's visit: November 21, 2013*

Introduction

Westminster College is an independent, coeducational liberal arts college that is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Since its founding in 1852, Westminster has been dedicated to the [mission](#) of *helping men and women develop competencies, commitments, and characteristics which distinguish human beings at their best*. The liberal arts tradition is the foundation of the curriculum continually designed to serve this mission in a rapidly changing world. The mission is further expressed as statements of student ability-based outcomes:

- to reason logically and evaluate critically
- to communicate effectively
- to think creatively, and appreciate aesthetic expressions
- to demonstrate intellectual curiosity
- to acquire knowledge of self, society, human cultures, the natural world, and human relationships to God
- to apply our knowledge to contemporary issues
- to demonstrate moral and ethical commitments to neighbor, society, and the natural world
- to demonstrate commitment to lifelong learning and the acquisition of skills for careers and responsible service as world citizens

The overall mission and its related outcomes guide not only the overall operations of the College, including planning and allocation, but also the curriculum and objectives within departments and programs. In all that faculty members do, for example, there is an awareness that their department/program mission and outcomes must be tied to the institution's overall mission and outcomes. Additionally, in creating the [2010-2020 strategic plan](#), *Advantage: Westminster*, President Richard Dorman and his leadership team were (and remain) intentional in keeping the College's mission at the center of strategic initiatives and goals; those goals have assessment plans and accountability measures attached to them.

Westminster offers a bachelor's degree program in 32 majors, many with minors, 7 interdisciplinary majors, and 7 graduate programs. A Westminster education has always been a strong education, and that remains true today. We know this from our alumni, our current students, our stakeholders, and our larger community. Westminster students, for example, are proud of their alma mater, and they express their pride in many ways. They are heavily involved in philanthropy, and they stand on a solid academic, athletic, and co-curricular tradition. Alumni reflect on a Westminster experience that is epitomized by challenging academic programs, positive interactions with a compassionate staff and student body, and a tradition of service and faith. These values are so fundamental to our students' experience that we call them, collectively, the "Westminster Way."

Our reputation in the local and national community is also strong and positive. For example, Westminster was ranked first in the nation as "Best College for Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math," according to *Forbes.com*. The College is a top-tier liberal arts college and a national leader in graduation rate performance, according to *U.S. News Best Colleges* guide, and is tied for 4th among top-tier National Liberal Arts Colleges in graduation rate performance. In addition to having a strong retention rate (86% of first-year students returned for their sophomore year), Westminster is also honored as one of "The Best 378 Colleges" by *The Princeton Review*, and is named to the President's Honor Roll for excellence in service learning. When students graduate from Westminster, their prospects are quite positive. Over 96% of recent graduates are employed or in graduate school, and Westminster graduates who apply to medical school are admitted at nearly double the national average (86%).

External recognitions and rankings help us to know that our students are achieving key learning outcomes. We understand, however, that *knowing* a Westminster education is a great education is different from *showing* that students have achieved outcomes that help them to become the best men and women that they can become. In this heightened era of accountability and economic prudence, the College must show potential students and the greater community that their education dollars will be well spent, and that a Westminster education will prepare them to become productive, contributing members of society. The College must maintain positive relationships with employers who hire Westminster graduates, and we do this by continually demonstrating that our students have achieved important learning outcomes. The College must assure stakeholders that Westminster remains a good investment for their fiscal and human resources, and also a worthy recipient of their confidence in its past, present, and for its future.

Useful, cost effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, planned, organized, systematic, sustained (MSCHE, 2005) – these were the guiding adjectives that Westminster College has used to address the concerns issuing from our decennial Middle States Self-Study on Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning. As Westminster College prepared its decennial review, limitations in the area of student learning assessment surfaced, which led to the College's recognition that greater attention and effort were needed to improve its culture of assessment. The Commission agreed in its request for a [monitoring report](#), which the College submitted in 2013. The Commission requested a monitoring report to demonstrate documented evidence in the following areas:

1. Steps taken to promote a culture of assessment;
2. Institutional support for student learning assessment;
3. Faculty leadership in the assessment of student learning; and
4. Direct evidence of student achievement of institutional, program, and course-level student learning outcomes.

Prior to the team visit and the subsequent monitoring report, the campus had already begun a thoughtful, planned process to address concerns about assessment. The College recognizes that both direct and indirect assessment of student learning outcomes supports our demonstration of student learning outcomes, or SLOs (as described in our decennial self-study and monitoring report). For example, Westminster relies on overall course and assignment grades, student course evaluations, graduation and job placement rates, alumni satisfaction and other evaluative surveys as indirect measures of student learning. The Commission appears satisfied with our indirect evidence.

Not so clear to the Commission, however, is Westminster's direct evidence, which was noted in the Commission's response to our monitoring report. We believe this does not relate to a deficiency in our assessment activities, but rather to our mistake in not providing commissioners access to our evidence. The Commission expected to see this evidence in the monitoring report, and we believed that we had provided it on our assessment website. During the transition from our former to current Vice President for Academic Affairs, all our direct evidence of student learning was not moved to the College's assessment website as was described in the text of the report. We acknowledge our oversight and are grateful to the Commission for its latitude in allowing us to provide more detail and evidence in this supplemental information report.

Following Suskie's (2009) advice for assessing student learning, we now describe and provide concrete examples of how Westminster College's faculty members directly assess SLOs. The examples are non-exhaustive; rather they were chosen to highlight the breadth of assessment activities across academic programs. The description of direct assessment is supplemented by detailed descriptions of the College's short- and long-term plans for the continued development of its assessment culture.

The non-exhaustive but numerous samples of direct evidence are catalogued by course for each department on the College's [assessment page](#). This website represents but one of Westminster's ongoing efforts to "close the loop." That is, faculty members and others can access assessment reports and evidence for every department on campus, thereby sharing in each other's best assessment practices.

As noted in the College's [Principles of Assessment](#), Westminster faculty members believe that assessment should be multi-modal. We assess student learning in multiple ways, and we understand that diversity of methods will appear across the curriculum. Therefore, the College does not expect that individual faculty members will use all or even the same methods of assessment. Their methods will be informed by the myriad best practices available to them, and by their own disciplinary standards. Additionally, the College does not mandate that faculty members use a certain proportion of direct to indirect evidence when measuring SLOs. Again, we expect and have found that across all faculty members and courses, a healthy ratio of direct to indirect measures will

emerge and form a more complete picture of our students' learning within departments and across the institution.

Direct Evidence at Westminster: The Present

1. Capstone

The Westminster Plan is a comprehensive general education curriculum that organizes students' coursework across their tenure (four years for the vast majority of students). As the culmination of this plan, every student must complete a capstone project to graduate from Westminster College. The capstone is a one- or two-semester project that is typically discipline-based, and it encourages students to demonstrate the totality of their learning across the liberal arts. It is completed during students' fourth year, and it may begin in the spring of their third year. The specific nature of the project varies across disciplines, ranging from literary criticism, performances and exhibits, original scientific research, to in-depth simulations and case studies. It is not uncommon for students to present their capstone research at undergraduate conferences or regional/national conferences in their disciplines. Because the capstone is a culminating experience, faculty members use it to assess institutional and programmatic objectives and outcomes.

Just as there is variety in the types of capstone projects students complete, there is also variety in how faculty members evaluate those projects. We see this as a strength because the assessment tools that are typical of a science capstone may not be appropriate for a humanities capstone. A primary method is a rubric to evaluate students' written and oral products. Rubrics are used, for example, in the Biology ([BIO601](#)), Broadcast Communications ([BC601](#)), Music ([MUS601](#)), Physics ([PHY602](#)), Psychology ([PSY602](#)), Public Relations ([PR601](#)), Religion ([REL601](#)), and Sociology ([SOC601](#)) capstones.

Simulations and case studies are typical of the business capstone. Successful strategy design and implementation requires a holistic understanding of the threats and opportunities in an organization's external environment, and of its internal resources and capabilities. The Strategic Management and Leadership capstone course ([BA601](#)) is designed to develop such an integrative view of the firm and its environment, along with appropriate analytical skills. The primary method of instruction utilized within the course is case analysis. As an assessment of learning, students also participate in the Business Strategy Game in which students work in pairs to operate athletic footwear companies. The Business Strategy Game mirrors the real-world global athletic footwear industry and challenges students to plan, organize, control, and strategize to efficiently operate and compete globally against other players. A virtual simulation such as the Business Strategy Game also provides a direct reflection of effective instruction. Additionally, after completion of the simulation, student scores can be compared to the scores of all participants worldwide. On 5 of the 6 domains measured by this simulation, Westminster students scored higher than the global average; additionally, 9 out of 11 students in 2013 placed within the Global Top 100 for their performance at

least once during the semester. This is a significant achievement that exemplifies the strategic decision making capabilities of Westminster business students, and it affirms that students are achieving important SLOs in the business curriculum.

Case studies also are used in the Public Relations capstone ([PR601](#)). Students are expected to identify an organization that has a public relations problem or opportunity and then to research that organization. Ultimately, the students must create a professional case study of the organization and its problem/opportunity with an expectation that the case could be published. Students are evaluated by how well they research the organization; analyze its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; and make research-based recommendations for how the organization should respond to the problem or opportunity it faces. Faculty members in the program discuss any deficiencies and identify changes to the curriculum to address them.

Westminster faculty members use the capstone not only as an assessment of student learning, but also as an assessment of Westminster programs. The [Psychology Department](#), for example, hosted two external evaluators who used a rubric to evaluate a sample of capstone theses. The specific goal was to measure how the quality of scientific reasoning and writing changed from before to after a new technology was introduced into the curriculum. This external pre-post evaluation led to specific changes in the psychology curriculum to address deficiencies identified in the students' work. The reviewers noted that the Results and Discussion sections generally were weaker than other section of students' theses (e.g., lack of figures or indications of measures of variance). Faculty members committed to spend more time instructing students on the importance of figures and how to include appropriate figures and tables in their theses. This has included more emphasis on modules related to figures and tables in the Capstone II (PSY602) course, along with specific evaluation criteria for them in rubrics. The external reviewers also highlighted the ways in which outcome-specific learning improved when the technology was added. For example, faculty members learned that the new technology strengthened critical reasoning, and students' experimental design became more sophisticated and innovative. This supported the department's belief that the technology would help students to achieve key learning outcomes.

Other faculty members evaluate capstone projects internally, still relying on a rubric or other standardized measure. As one example, faculty members in the [Department of English](#) have undertaken a systematic, multi-year assessment of their students' capstone theses. Using a rubric that the faculty members created to measure important outcomes and objectives, they have evaluated theses from several years and will continue to do so. Their goal is to identify areas of strength in student writing and critical analysis, and to identify areas where instruction can improve to address weaknesses in students' knowledge, skills, and abilities. The data collection is still in-progress and will inform any necessary curricular changes.

2. Classroom response systems (e.g., clickers)

Classroom response systems, like clickers, are popular in higher education, and a number of Westminster faculty members have incorporated them into their courses. They use clickers to assess student learning in real time, and this allows them to adjust their pedagogy quickly when students have not mastered course content.

Among the strongest proponents of clicker technology in the classroom is Dr. Karen Resendes. Dr. Resendes uses clickers in many of her biology courses, and she has described the value of clickers for student learning in a variety of local and national contexts. Her on-campus presentations have increased faculty interest in clicker technology, and the College has supported this interest by purchasing clicker systems for use in classrooms. About 10% of faculty members currently use them in their courses. Other faculty members have successfully adopted token systems, flash-card systems, and other low-technology alternatives to measure real-time learning. The College views these as similarly effective alternatives to clicker technology for assessment.

Whether high- or low-tech, classroom response systems provide students with a “safe” mechanism for expressing their learning (or lack thereof), allowing instructors to determine when students have reached a sufficient level of understanding to proceed to other concepts and activities. Instructors also receive feedback when additional instruction is warranted, rather than realizing *after* grading assignments that students did not master specific concepts or skills.

3. Rubrics

Attitudes about the value of rubrics vary across faculty members, and some negative attitudes seem related to concerns that rubrics result in “teaching to the test.” Our faculty members may never reach consensus on the appropriate place of rubrics in higher education generally or their disciplines specifically, but more and more of them are using rubrics or similar tools to measure student learning. We would argue that the Commission has helped us to frame assessment conversations at Westminster as we build momentum for using systematic assessment tools in the classroom, including rubrics.

One opportunity that many Westminster faculty members avail themselves of is grading Advanced Placement (AP) exams. AP grading is strictly guided by rubrics that allow multiple readers to evaluate student essays in reliable ways. This grading opportunity is important because it gives our faculty readers the chance to understand the importance of rubric development and revision, the value of using a rubric to score student work in consistent ways, and the importance of thinking about the validity and reliability of their own classroom assessment tools. Although faculty participation in AP grading is not considered direct evidence, it is a process that supports faculty members’ direct assessment their own students’ learning.

A number of faculty members have introduced rubrics—both quantitative and qualitative—into their general disciplinary curricula. In the [Criminal Justice Studies](#)

program, for example, professors use rubrics to evaluate student learning on exams, homework assignments, blogs and discussion boards, and oral presentations. Similarly, faculty members in the [Economics and Business Department](#) use rubrics to evaluate students' case study learning, business plans, and oral and written communication. Rubrics also are found in the [English and Public Relations Department](#), where faculty members use them to assess written and oral communication, quizzes and exams, and capstone projects. As a final example, faculty members in the [Department of Music](#) use rubrics to evaluate student performances from the first through senior years. Students who major in music education gain additional experience with rubrics by using them to evaluate music teachers who they observe in public schools.

Rubrics are used across the curriculum, from the first to the senior years. For example, in the sequence of courses for the First-Year Program (i.e., Inquiry, writing, and speech), the same rubrics typically are used to evaluate students' [written](#) and [oral](#) communication. These rubrics clearly delineate the courses' outcomes and objectives, along with specific characteristics of excellent, average, and poor work. The use of the same rubric in all three courses is intentional: It provides consistent and predictable evaluation for first-year students as they begin to learn the institutional and disciplinary standards of a Westminster education. The practice of using the same rubric in multiple courses is not unique to the First-Year Program; faculty members in other programs also use the same rubric across their courses to promote consistency. The use of rubrics for the senior capstone experience was described in *1. Capstone* above.

Rubrics across the program curriculum are particularly important in the Department of Education. Given federal and state mandates, demonstrating student learning is absolutely essential for our ability to grant degrees in Early Childhood PreK-4 and Secondary Education PreK-8, along with a minor in Secondary Education. Education faculty members are no strangers to both direct and indirect assessment, and they are strong in using both to understand their students' needs and programmatic effectiveness. Rubrics within education can be found for individual course assignments (e.g., [lesson plans](#)), and for [student teaching](#).

Faculty members across the College often use rubrics in non-traditional ways. In some courses, such as those in the Department of Biology, students are expected to use a faculty member's rubric to self- or peer-assess (e.g., [BIO202](#)). Using rubrics for peer-evaluation is also common in the Department of Education (e.g., [ECE341](#)). This provides students with the opportunity to think critically about their own and others' work, and to identify the similarities in how their work is evaluated across judges (self, peer, instructor). In other courses, students may be asked to create assignment rubrics themselves that are then used as part of the peer review process. It is clear from these non-exhaustive examples that faculty members across the curriculum are using rubrics to assess student learning on a variety of skills and abilities.

4. Ratings of student skills by field experience supervisors

Many students take advantage of opportunities to earn academic credit through field experiences, and they range from internships to placements of student teachers in schools. As part of the field experience, site supervisors evaluate the skills and abilities of Westminster students (direct). The students also evaluate their field experience (indirect). [Standardized forms](#) are used to evaluate all student interns, and these evaluations are provided to the faculty member who supervises and grades the students' field experience for credit. Faculty members in some departments (e.g., [education](#)) provide additional rubrics for supervisors/cooperating teachers to use as they evaluate Westminster students' field experience.

Departments routinely use the information provided by site supervisors to understand our students' needs and learning proficiencies. For example, faculty members have learned that students may need more development in professionalism, writing and oral communication, or the use of specific technologies or skill sets. This allows them the opportunity to modify the curricula to respond to general deficiencies in student learning. Faculty members may also detect problems in the field experience itself that lead them to discourage students from pursuing it in the future. This occurs, for example, when students are expected to complete tasks that do not allow them to use the skills and knowledge they have developed at Westminster, or when supervisors are not providing effective mentoring. Importantly, supervisor feedback also reinforces the strengths of the Westminster curricula, showing where our students have substantial, demonstrated competencies in their disciplines.

5. Scores and pass rates on licensure/certification exams

A number of departments use licensure or published exams to measure key programmatic objectives, and student scores speak to the effectiveness of the Westminster curriculum. The departments that use such exams include:

- [Accounting](#) (Certified Public Accounting exam)
- [Biology](#) (Educational Testing System Major Field Test)
- [Chemistry](#) (ACS Diagnostic Undergraduate Chemistry Knowledge Exam)
- Education ([Praxis](#); Basic Skills Pre-Service Academic Performance Assessment)
- Modern Languages ([University of Wisconsin College-level Placement Tests](#) in Spanish, French, and German; used for students wishing to demonstrate proficiency for meeting the College's foreign language requirement)
- Psychology ([Area Concentration Achievement Test in Psychology](#))
- Public Relations ([locally-designed exam](#))

These exams allow faculty members to evaluate how their students' overall performance compares with national averages, and also to compare students' component scores. That is, faculty members can compare the students' average score on these exams, and they can measure performance for specific components of the curriculum. The latter approach is desirable because it provides faculty members with opportunities to make targeted changes in the curriculum. For example, faculty

members in the Department of Biology revised its curriculum in 2008, and data from the Educational Testing System Major Field Test, in part, provided impetus and context for that revision. The revision itself included a change from a two- to a three-course introductory sequence that included more case study work and student discussions related to a broader curriculum. For upper-level courses, the faculty reorganized content to focus on three general areas (Cell Biology & Genetics; Evolution, Form & Function; and Biodiversity & Ecology), and students are now required to take at least one upper-level course in each area. Finally, to address deficiencies noted in capstone work, the faculty created a Biostatistics and Experimental Design course that students must pass before they can enroll in the capstone sequence.

Departments vary in how they use students' scores in their courses (e.g., part of the course grade), but they consistently use scores to inform curriculum planning and revision and to evaluate their students' learning. On these tests, Westminster students fare well and show the effectiveness of the curriculum in their major. As one example, students in the Department of Education consistently show excellent scores on the PRAXIS examination and its subcomponents:

PRAXIS II PASS-RATE DATA PROGRAM					
COMPLETERS—2007-2012					
TEST	WESTMINSTER				
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Basic Skills	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Summary	99%	94%	98%	95%	98%
Elementary Education: CIA	98%	100%	100%	93%	98%
PPST-Reading	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
PPST-Writing	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
PPST-Mathematics	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Special Education	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Fundamental Subjects	-----	-----	-----	-----	100%
	STATE				
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Basic Skills	99%	99%	100%	100%	100%
Summary	97%	97%	96%	94%	93%
Elementary Education: CIA	97%	98%	94%	91%	95%
PPST-Reading	99%	99%	99%	100%	97%
PPST-Writing	99%	99%	99%	99%	98%
PPST-Mathematics	99%	99%	99%	99%	97%
Special Education	100%	100%	100%	99%	99%

6. Scores on locally-designed examinations

Several departments use placement tests to help determine in what course students should enroll. These departments include chemistry and [mathematics](#). The departments have clear guidelines that allow students to be placed in appropriate courses, given their exam scores and prior coursework. As a specific example, the chemistry faculty historically used a 46-item locally-designed measure, and students had to answer at least 50% of the items correctly to be placed into Chemistry 117 (Principles

of Chemistry). After conducting item analysis and examining discrimination indices, faculty members realized that only a subset of questions reliably predicted performance in the course. This led to revisions of the assessment tool. More recently, chemistry faculty members have determined that scores on the placement test correlate highly with student SAT scores, and so SAT scores now will be used to determine course placement. This example highlights that faculty members not only assess student learning, but also assess the tools with which they measure that learning.

Faculty members in every department use questions on locally-designed quizzes and examinations to measure specific outcomes. These outcomes may be at the level of the institution, program, or course. As just a few examples, the [Deviance](#), [Psychology of Human Sexuality](#), and [Social Theory](#) courses offer objective-specific quiz/exam analysis. To be sure, faculty members are not relying on overall exam scores or course grades alone (indirect). They are using performance on objective-specific questions to evaluate key aspects of student learning (direct).

7. Observations of student behaviors

Many faculty members systematically assess student behavior as an index of their learning outcomes. This is apparent in the first-year speech course that is a required component of the Westminster Plan. Because of the importance of oral communication, faculty members often evaluate the quantity and quality of classroom participation, oral presentations (individual or group), and so on. The College's assessment website offers a number of rubrics that faculty members use to assess student presentation skills across departments.

Observations of student behavior also are important in the Department of Education. All student teachers are observed and evaluated by expert faculty and the student-teachers' cooperative teachers. These observations are made using a rubric that identifies competencies tied to key programmatic outcomes.

Observations of behavior via a simulated experience also appear in the Political Science Department. As part of its outreach to local high school students, the Political Science Department hosts a Model United Nations conference. Westminster students who register for the course (PS204) can participate either in a national conference or serve as a conference staff member for the College's Model United Nations conference. In the latter case, students prepare a simulation experience and host committee sessions for high school delegates who work as diplomats, representing various countries and working toward solutions to various international problems. The experience of preparing the simulation enables students to learn the intricacies of international policy and problem solving.

The Economics and Business faculty use simulations, including the Business capstone example that was described in the first section. Simulations and other hands-on activities also are part of course-level assessment in the Accounting program. For example, the [Accounting Apprenticeship Game](#) provides students with opportunities to

learn the accounting cycle by demonstrating proficiency in the simulation; they also acquire and must demonstrate expertise in using Excel spreadsheets to complete accounting functions (e.g., in the ACC201 course). In other accounting courses, students must demonstrate the ability to use different software to solve problems that relate to course and programmatic objectives. In addition to simulations, accounting faculty members make extensive use of organizational case studies to measure student learning. Finally, accounting students have the opportunity to participate in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA), which allows them to demonstrate their mastery of tax return preparation procedures and rules while gaining an insight into the financial issues confronting those less fortunate than themselves. Independent VITA supervisors evaluate students' performance.

8. Portfolios

Various departments and programs use portfolios for both course- and program-level assessment. In the Chemistry capstone ([CHE601](#)), for example, students are required to assemble a portfolio that shows their learning progression as chemistry or biochemistry majors. Their portfolio includes examples of work across the chemistry curriculum (e.g., graded exams, laboratory reports, oral presentations, and written communications), along with a self-reflection and evaluation of the chemistry curriculum. This portfolio allows the chemistry faculty members to assess specific examples of student learning, and to measure the strengths of the curriculum and opportunities for improving it.

Faculty members in the History and Religion programs also incorporate portfolios in their assessment of student learning. In History, for example, faculty members require senior majors to submit a portfolio that includes representative essays and research papers to demonstrate improvements in writing, reasoning, and the extent of mastery of historical material. Portfolios also are required for students pursuing majors in religion, and those portfolios are evaluated on key programmatic and course outcomes with rubrics ([REL601](#)).

Students pursuing a degree in Public Relations create portfolios to demonstrate proficiency in core competencies. These portfolios are required for the Public Relations experiential study ([PR501](#)) and internship ([PR590](#)). Portfolios also are required for students participating in the [All-College Honors Program](#) and the Department of Education. The latter department uses the [sophomore portfolio](#) as one assessment of students' readiness to enter the Early Childhood or Special Education Block. Evaluating these portfolios allows faculty members to adjust their curricula to better serve the learning needs of students and to meet their institutional/programmatic objectives and outcomes. Evaluations also provide faculty members with a program-level assessment. If, for example, education students cannot assemble an acceptable portfolio that demonstrates clear and compelling evidence of their learning that results in an acceptable minimum grade point average (3.000), then faculty members know they are unlikely to pass state certification exams. This then provides a context for meeting with struggling students to identify corrective plans or to counsel them out of

the education major. As a result of this careful assessment and counseling process, the faculty members ensure that students who are capable of meeting the rigorous institution and state requirements will continue in the program and meet those requirements. When patterns of student deficiencies are detected, the faculty members scrutinize the curriculum to identify course- and program-level solutions.

9. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

In addition to the examples of direct evidence that Middle States endorses, Westminster faculty members assess student learning through their scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL). Such assessment is consistent with our belief that teaching and scholarship are inseparable: Our teaching informs our scholarship, and our scholarship informs our teaching. Westminster's faculty members engage in a variety of SOTL that has been presented in journals/books and at conferences. The methods used in these projects rise to the level of direct evidence of student learning, and thus are included as part of our inventory for this report. Examples of these projects include, but are not limited to:

- **Dr. Helen Boylan's** research on a [service learning project](#) in the Advanced Laboratory course (CHE351), which included student reflections and laboratory reports. She also co-presented research on Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IF-AT) Scratch-Offs with **Dr. Larry Miller**.
- **Dr. Terri L. Lenox's** various publications related to employers' [desired competencies](#) among information systems graduates; [gender discrepancies](#) in enrollment in information systems programs; and factors related to [declining enrollments](#) in information and computing systems courses. This research has informed Westminster's curriculum in computer science and information systems (planning and changes).
- **Dr. Jamie McMinn's** [case study](#) assignment in the social psychology course (PSY321), which included pre-post test and application measures of attribution theory and social cognitive errors, or his assessment of [information literacy](#) resource guides that was coauthored with **Ms. Jamie Kohler**, librarian.
- **Dr. Kristin Park's** [application of Bloom's taxonomy](#) to teaching about income inequality in her Social Class in America course (SOC214), and her assessment of [role play](#) exercises in the Social Theories (SOC350) course.
- **Dr. Karen Resendes'** research on [hybrid versus face-to-face instruction](#) in biology (BIO201), which included pre-post test measures of student learning.
- **Dr. Kristenne Robison's** research on [experiential learning](#) in a criminology course in which students reflected on and assessed learning related to teaching introductory sociology to incarcerated women. Reflection was related to core objectives.
- **Dr. Sandra Webster's** research on [metacognition](#) and gamification of quizzes in the Statistical Methods and Analysis course (PSY201).

- The College's *Sustainability in Motion* program website of resources, activities, and [lesson plans](#) for K12 teachers and students. Westminster students authored many of the lesson plans as part of their coursework, and they include assessment rubrics.

SOTL is a valued activity at Westminster, and is an acceptable form of scholarship for tenure and promotion reviews. Additionally, faculty members can receive funding for their SOTL and its presentation at conferences because we recognize the importance of and support improvements in teaching. This speaks to the College's broad support of assessing student learning and closing the loop with local and national audiences. Institutional support of assessment is offered in a variety of other ways, and we describe those in the final section on the future of assessment of Westminster.

Learning Processes that Promote Student Learning

The College has re-affirmed a [PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT cycle](#) of teaching and learning assessment that mirrors the four steps outlined in the Standard 14 teaching-learning assessment cycle. And although not considered direct evidence, the College has continued to strengthen specific processes that promote student learning. These have occurred at the institutional and programmatic levels. At the institutional level, faculty members are expected to review and evaluate their departmental missions and outcomes routinely, ensuring their consistency with the College's mission and outcomes. Additionally, faculty members are required to list course objectives in all syllabi and to submit one syllabus each year for assessment purposes. Members of our Curriculum Operations Committee then use Bloom's taxonomy to review those syllabi and ensure that the faculty member has listed assessable course objectives, and those objectives are appropriate for an institution of higher education [PLAN]. Feedback is provided to the faculty member, and revisions are required when deficiencies are noted (14% of 615 student learning outcomes in the most recent review). All syllabi, including the one submitted to the curriculum committee for evaluation, are stored electronically by the Office of Academic Affairs. During the semester, courses are offered and faculty members create experiences that can be shown to lead to established outcomes [DO].

During the 2011-2012 academic year, departments met to develop rubrics for programmatic assessment. The Outcomes Assessment Advisory Council (OAAC) presented a model rubric for departments to follow, which many did; but to ensure that assessment leads to improved teaching and learning, the College chose not to impose a standardized college-wide rubric at that time. At the end of the spring semester, all faculty members submitted their assessment of key learning outcomes in their selected course according to departmental guidelines [CHECK].

Department leaders assembled and synthesized the information submitted by their faculty and provided the departments and the Vice President for Academic Affairs

(VPAA) with comprehensive reports on how student learning is assessed, how departments would use this information to reinforce successful practices, and how revisions would be made to enhance teaching and learning in their programs [ACT]. During the 2012 summer months, the VPAA reviewed these reports for completeness and clarity and gave them to OAAC for a thorough peer review. This process continues. The direct evidence of student achievement, including each chair's summary, is available on the College's assessment website.

OAAC reviewed the reports as part of each program's comprehensive design and mission. Upon completion of the review, OAAC drafted several suggestions for the next round of program assessment:

- All departments should use a unified format to make assessment more consistent, transparent, and comprehensive. This suggestion has been addressed in new templates for [course-](#) and [program-level](#) assessment that distinguishes between indirect and direct evidence.
- All departments should adopt a "1 course – 1 outcome" approach to program assessment. That is, departments should meet and select specific courses and outcomes to assess annually across their programs as the best way to effect improve programs through assessment. This suggestion has been incorporated into new departmental/programmatic assessment plans (described below), and it is consistent with the Commission's expectation that appropriate assessment processes have been implemented for an appropriate proportion of goals. That is, faculty members choose different courses and outcomes to assess each year, and this means that our assessment database will continue to grow.

Looking across departmental summaries of assessment activities, departments vary in how they assess their programs; nevertheless, it is clear that departments assess SLOs in both direct and indirect ways. Additionally, departments have created processes that support student learning and that contribute to their assessment activities. Faculty members in several departments, for example, have completed curriculum mapping projects in which they match the courses they teach to their departmental objectives. For example, the [Psychology Department mapped](#) its curriculum in response to new guidelines for the undergraduate psychology curriculum that were published by the American Psychological Association. As result of this effort, the psychology faculty concluded that all core objectives were covered in the curriculum, but that some objectives were covered in only a few courses. This led them to discuss ways to balance coverage across the psychology curriculum and to plan for systematic assessment of their outcomes. Similar programmatic review has occurred recently in the [Biology](#), [Economics and Business](#), [History](#), Mathematics, and [Sociology](#) programs. It should be noted that programs that have external accreditation (Chemistry, Education, and Music) undergo systematic, ongoing program review.

In addition to these initiatives for programmatic assessment, the faculty and administration have demonstrated an extremely high level of engagement and have dedicated time and resources to adopt a very comprehensive approach to building a culture of assessment. For example, the College compensated faculty with stipends of \$100.00 per day for any work that was done outside of the academic year and served meals at meetings. A conservative estimate of the cost for an assessment workshop is \$7,700.00. The College also supports faculty travel to assessment conferences and workshops (e.g., those provided by Middle States). Clearly, the College is supporting assessment work at the institutional level, and assessment is occurring widely. The following table highlights recent events that reflect Westminster's commitment to processes that support assessment of student learning.

EVENT or GROUP	WORKSHOP/MEETING/ACTION	DATE
<i>Spring & Summer 2011</i>		
Spring Faculty Workshop	Organized 10 breakout sessions on best assessment practices, department discussions (50 faculty)	May 25, 2011
Outcomes Assessment Advisory Council (OAAC) & Faculty Development Committee (FDC)	Held summer meetings	May, July, August 2011
Chairs Meeting	Reviewed assessment expectations	August 2, 2011
Chairs Meeting	All Departments/Programs submitted revised Program Mission Statements	August 2011
<i>Fall 2011</i>		
Fall Faculty Workshop	Organized 9 breakout sessions on best assessment practices, department discussions	August 25, 2011
OAAC	Reviewed all Department/Program Mission Statements & Syllabi; Revised OAAC Assessment website, Plan, Do, Check, Act	Fall 2011 – Spring 2012
Curriculum Development Committee (CDC)	Evaluated General Education Assessment – Clusters	Fall 2011 –Spring 2012
Chairs Meetings	Explored self-evaluations of student learning assessment activities; funding to support faculty attendance at disciplinary conferences on assessment	Fall 2011
Faculty Development Officer	Organized B.A.G. (Best Assessment	October & November

	Guidelines) Lunches	2011
Faires Faculty Forum	Outlined course assessment practices – Dr. Larry Miller, Chemistry	October 20, 2011
Faires Faculty Forum	Shared assessable goals with best assessment practices thru poster displays	December 7, 2011
Spring 2012		
All Faculty	Submitted one syllabus with assessable goals	January 2012
Curriculum Operations Committee (COC)	Reviewed spring syllabi submitted by faculty for assessable goals	Spring 2012
Faires Faculty Forum	Presented curricular assessment practices previously presented at the AAC&U's project LEAP – Biology Department	February 22, 2012
OAAC/Faculty Meeting	Demonstrated sample rubrics and templates for course assessment at a meeting of the entire faculty	March 13, 2012
Spring Faculty Workshop	Reviewed course assessment materials (71 Faculty)	May 25, 2012
All Faculty	Submitted course assessment materials to department chairs	May 2012
Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC)	Recommended using an on-line format for course evaluations to facilitate gathering of data	May 2012
Summer 2012		
Chairs	Submitted Chairs'/Coordinators' Assessment Reports to Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA)	June 30, 2012
Fall 2012		
Chairs Meeting	Explored "Building a Sustainable Model of Assessment" with Dr. Tom Flynn, invited speaker – Assessment Coordinator, Slippery Rock University	August 21, 2012
Fall Faculty Workshop	Explored "Building a Sustainable Model of Assessment – invited speaker Dr. Tom Flynn	August 23, 2012
VPAA/Webmaster	Reconfigured assessment website	Fall 2012
OAAC	Reviewed departmental Program Assessment Reports; approved Principles of	Fall 2012

	Assessment; approved revisions to website	
Faculty Meetings	Reviewed and approved Principles of Assessment; Webmaster reviews revisions to the website	Fall 2012
FDO	Explored formative assessment with new faculty at a BAG lunch	November 8, 2012
Spring 2013		
All Faculty	Submitted syllabus with assessable goals	January 2013
COC	Reviewed spring syllabi submitted by faculty for assessable goals	Spring 2013
All Departments	Selected 1 course/1 outcome for department	Spring 2013
Chairs Meeting	Reviewed 1 course/1 outcome; review MS Monitoring Report	Spring 2013
Fall 2013		
VPAA	Coordinated with academic support offices to prepare multi-year assessment plans	September 2013
OAAC	Began discussion of drafts for standardizing classroom observations as part of faculty evaluations	Fall 2013
All faculty	Submitted one syllabus with assessable goals	Fall 2013
Chairs subcommittee	Drafted a revised annual faculty evaluation form	Fall 2013
Spring 2014		
VPAA	Appointed Associate Dean of Academic Affairs (ADAA) and assigned 50% of position time to assessment activities	January 2, 2014
Chairs Retreat	Reviewed drafts of revised annual faculty evaluation form; discussed assessment needs and supplemental information report	Spring 2014
ADAA	Worked with chairs and directors, OAAC, and individual faculty members on short- and long-term assessment plans and a schedule of program reviews	Spring 2014
OAAC	Updated assessment templates to distinguish between direct and indirect evidence of SLOs	Spring 2014

“Closing the loop” is not a concept that is entirely new to Westminster staff members, but our commission liaisons, Middle States workshop speakers, and our site team evaluators have brought the concept into greater focus for us. It is certainly a phrase that we use more now than we did before the decennial review. Westminster faculty

and administrative members have made substantial progress in developing a stronger assessment culture, including more intentional curriculum planning and revision based on direct and indirect measurement of SLOs. Where we recognize that we can improve our efforts is in closing the loop by ensuring that we are sharing evidence of our effectiveness with others; using assessment results to inform planning and allocation more fully; and documenting how departmental/programmatic assessment connects to institutional assessment. Closing the loop does occur at Westminster already, and we are learning new ways to do so. These efforts are supported by changes in the Office of Academic Affairs and a renewed emphasis on assessment, described in the next section of this report.

Assessment at Westminster: The Future

Beginning with her appointment to the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College, Dr. Jane M. Wood reaffirmed the critical role of assessment at Westminster. Dean Wood recognized the need to focus assessment efforts within academic programs and to extend assessment activities to include academic support units, and she delegated oversight of those activities to the new Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Dr. Jamie G. McMinn assumed the associate deanship on January 2, 2014, and 50% of his time is dedicated to assessment. Dr. McMinn has been closely involved in institutional and departmental assessment since he joined the College in 2003. Since January, he has met with faculty members in individual departments to discuss their assessment activities, provided assessment reports to the faculty at large, and brought continued organization within the areas of assessment and institutional research. Therefore at the highest levels of the College, leadership support for assessment—institutional and programmatic—remains strong.

Additionally, the Dean and Associate Dean are creating a centralized and more coherent plan for assessment within the academic program, leading to a more efficient and effective process. This larger plan includes: (1) updated multi-year assessment plans for each academic program so that institutional, programmatic, and course-level missions and objectives continue to be routinely assessed and shared; (2) multi-year assessment plans for each academic support unit (i.e., Registrar, Information Systems, Audio-Visual Services, the Learning Center, Off-Campus Study); and (3) assessment and possible revision of the general education curriculum (i.e., the Westminster Plan). These plans will be guided by both institutional and programmatic mission statements; professional/disciplinary standards, best practices, and characteristics of learning excellence (e.g., those published by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education); and an expectation that a healthy combination of direct and indirect evidence contributes to a more complete understanding of student learning.

The plans ultimately will be a component of [program reviews](#) that are evaluated by the assessment committee, further fostering the College's core value that assessment is

ongoing and routine. The Office of Academic Affairs has created a schedule of program reviews through academic year 2020-2021, with approximately four programs reviewed each year from across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences (see schedule below). These smaller self-studies will feed into the College’s periodic review and decennial self-study reports. Importantly, and consistent with recommendations from our Periodic Review Report reviewers, faculty members will create the plans they use to assess course- and program-level outcomes. This will ensure that faculty members own assessment within their programs, which is critical to the continued growth of Westminster’s assessment culture.

Schedule of academic program reviews, 2014-2021

2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Chemistry	Economics	Computer Science	Business Administration	English	Accounting	Biology
Communication Studies	Media Art + Design	History	Criminal Justice Studies	Fine Art	Education	Sociology
Mathematics	Physics	Modern Languages	Religion	Music	Environmental Science	Graduate School
Philosophy and Classics	Political Science	Public Relations	Theatre	Psychology	Neuroscience	

Schedule of academic support program reviews, 2014-2021

2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Registrar	Information Systems	Audio Visual Services	Learning Center	Off-Campus Study	Library

Inherent in this schedule of program reviews is the observation that some programs at Westminster are stronger in assessment than are others, and weaker programs need more attention sooner rather than later. We believe that the top-tier programs for assessment include those that are accredited or have curriculum standards from their disciplinary organizations. These programs include Biology, Chemistry, Education, Mathematics, Music, and Psychology, and they recognize the importance of direct assessment and are committed to ongoing assessment of student learning outcomes. The middle tier includes programs that have made substantial improvements in their assessment activities over the years, but still need to close the loop by connecting course- and program-level assessment. Computer Science, Economics, English and Public Relations, History, and Sociology are among the programs in this tier. Included in the programs that are targeted for focused assessment efforts are Communication Studies, Political Science, Physics, and Religion, Classics, and Philosophy, where assessment efforts rely mainly on indirect evidence of student learning. We want to fill these gaps so that all departments are strong on assessment, both direct and indirect. We also believe that it is important to ensure that assessment plans are strong and effective for new programs (e.g., Media Arts + Design) so that good assessment occurs from the start.

Moving forward, more centralized assessment planning that is housed under the Office of Academic Affairs will respond to our own calls for focused assessment leadership. Many faculty members and committees talk about and lead the assessment charge on campus, but sometimes that creates confusing messages or expectations. The College has made tremendous strides in fostering assessment within departments, and the efforts have paid off. Where the College must turn its attention is to strengthening integrated, institution-wide assessment, where all the smaller pieces come together to reflect a strong, direct, and flourishing culture of measuring student learning. This includes developing departments that are weak on assessment—especially direct assessment. The ability to accomplish these goals will be furthered by a single voice that guides assessment efforts, ensuring that Westminster College remains the excellent institution of higher learning that it has always been. With 50% of the Associate Dean’s time being devoted to assessment and faculty members working even more diligently on assessment planning and reviews, we believe our strategies are practical, reasonable, and appropriate. Importantly, our strategies are also flexible in the event that ineffective processes arise and must be changed.

We hope that we have made a compelling, evidence-based argument for Westminster’s commitment to assessment and how we are using both direct and indirect measures of student learning. We have made substantial progress since our 2011 decennial review, and we have clear, appropriate plans in place for strengthening our assessment culture. Those short- and long-term plans reflect our commitment to *showing* that students’ education at Westminster has tremendous meaning and value, and we look forward to interacting more closely with the Commission on assessment matters and providing updates and new evidence in our 2016 Periodic Review Report.