Criterion 4 – Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

Criterion 4 – Summary

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Summary

MSU has made substantial progress in the areas of assessment, information collection, and dissemination since the last HLC visit. A more robust culture of assessment, evidence, and data-driven decisions is evolving, and is especially noticeable in academic program initiatives. Programs have identified student learning outcomes and have the necessary systems for managing assessment data and reports.

Consistency is apparent in how all divisions engage in transcription of credits, regular program assessment and analysis, and use of assessment data to make decisions on an annual basis. Additionally, analyses are annually made across divisions to inform decisions. Faculty, administrators, and, where appropriate, specialized accreditation, all contribute to program quality. There is a general recognition of the need for changes to be driven by evidence at the institutional level to positively impact student learning. Areas for additional progress remain. MSU can continue to diversify types of assessment (both direct and indirect measures), further develop co-curricular learning outcomes and assessment processes, place value on and reward assessment related/driven work, and maintain an emphasis on regular, systematic documentation and dissemination of assessment results.

Core Component 4.A

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.

2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.

3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.

4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.

5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.

6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

Argument

4.A.1

Mayville State University maintains accountability for quality educational programming through a systematic institutional program review process that supports the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) program review

policy every seven years, with new programs to be reviewed on a five-year cycle. MSU's program review policy and schedule guide regular evaluations of program quality, a means to improve program quality, a review of relationships of the program to the mission of the institution, and program productivity. Division Chairs appoint appropriate program faculty to complete a self-study outlined by policy, with attention to a program's mission, context within the university, faculty assignments, program curriculum, assessment, and administrative structure. External reviewers evaluate programs and consult faculty to provide critical insights used to assist faculty in developing action plans that support continuous program improvement. Action plans are implemented throughout the time period indicated on program review reports. For example, a recommendation of external reviewers from a 2014 BA Studies in Education program review (page 15) indicated a need to change the internship process for BA Studies in education students. This recommendation resulted in the development of specific BA Studies in Education Internship Handbook.

Succeeding evaluations address the extent to which a program has successfully dealt with concerns of a preceding evaluation for continuous improvement. Students, faculty, division chairs, external experts, and university administrators are involved in the program review process to ensure that each program review report accurately represents program status.

Division Chairs also submit an annual report summarizing program assessment activities for the prior academic year. The program guide document ensures each report consists of the important findings, course-embedded activities, non-course embedded activities, and a prior year review. Annual program report documents support the university mission by continually improving undergraduate education through the cyclical process of identifying learning outcomes, assessing the students' achievements of those outcomes, analyzing the results of learning assessments, and using those results as a basis for enhancing the curriculum and the teaching-learning process.

The Director of Academic Assessment (DAA) works with academic divisions, division chairs, division academic assessment coordinators, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs in the planning, implementation, interpretation, and use of results to determine program quality and effectiveness. Data is presented and reported to the University President and President's Cabinet.

4.A.2/4.A.3

Under the general administration and direction of the State Board of Higher Education, MSU follows all SBHE policies related to the transcription of credits and experiential learning. MSU transfer credit policy ensures that only quality credits are transferred from regionally accredited institutions or institutions that are members of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the U.S. Secretary of Education, recognized by a specific country's Minister of Education.

The Faculty Association formulates educational policy at MSU. This body makes recommendations on academic policy and practices. MSU's Curriculum Committee reviews academic policies related to curriculum and instruction. Since 2011, the use of the Transfer Evaluation System (TES) within College Source has improved the process and provided additional efficiency for credit transfer. The Office of Academic Records requires division chair evaluation for any transfer course that is not already identified as transferable credit. MSU has developed articulation agreements with community colleges and other four-year institutions of higher education made transparent on the MSU website. Articulation agreements are created, reviewed yearly, and maintained through the MSU Extended Learning Office and require administrative review before TES updates are made. Collaborative work among North Dakota University System schools supports thorough review of courses and course credit for articulation agreements, such as the statewide ECE articulation agreement or GERTA (General Education Requirement Transfer Agreement) – an approved set of general education courses transferable between University System campuses and North Dakota's five tribal colleges.

MSU's process for governing transcription of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) credits, allowed by SBHE Policy 403.6, requires students to complete a PLA form. The PLA form is reviewed with the advisor, requires division

chair approval, is voted upon by the Curriculum Committee, and finally, reviewed and signed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Registrar.

Service personnel may have educational experiences evaluated for transfer credit under the Armed Service Credit protocol. Military service courses are given credit as recommended in the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services published by the American Council on Education (ACE). MSU allows a maximum of 30 semester hours of credit by examination, including Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), advanced standing credit, advanced placement credit, International Baccalaureate (IB), CLEP, and DANTES.

Students seeking to obtain credit by internship meet with the Director of Career Services and Internships to register. Students are assisted with development of an approved internship learning plan, and are informed of the evaluation process that takes place under the supervision of required on-site and university supervisors.

Credit has been established through the SBHE policy for advanced placement credit, International Baccalaureate (IB), CLEP, and DANTES. Under NDUS procedure, the MSU Registrar reviews credits based on information provided on the credit by examinations matrix. If the student meets the minimum score indicated on the chart, credit is transcribed.

Advanced standing credit is available to students for courses without a CLEP or AP option. The student petitions to take a comprehensive or final exam in lieu of a course. After the request has been granted by the instructor, division chair, and registrar, the student's exam score is transcribed as the grade for the course by the course instructor.

Credit transcribed for advanced standing credit is dependent upon a student's ability to demonstrate appropriate competencies in a subject matter comprehensive exam.

Students must complete service learning activities within the semester of enrollment and relate them to an existing program in the MSU catalog to earn credit. A total of six semester hours of service learning may be included in graduation credit hours. Service Learning credit experiences are arranged, and associated credits are evaluated by division chairs. One hour of academic credit equals a minimum of 30 clock hours of volunteer service.

In 1994, Mayville State University in conjunction with other NDUS system universities, and five ND Tribal Colleges, developed a General Education Requirement Transfer Agreement to assist students in the transfer of general education coursework. GERTA updates are completed yearly through NDUS system reviews.

The evaluation and transfer of coursework among University System campuses, North Dakota tribal colleges, and North Dakota private colleges is made easier by the use of a common course numbering (CCN) system. The common course numbering guidelines are an NDUS procedure. Any credits transferred that have CCN credits have been previously evaluated by all system campuses for transfer within the university system. MSU accepts these CCN courses without further evaluation. The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum Agreement allows students to be exempt from additional lower general education courses if the student has an Associate Degree. Credits earned in an approved AA degree are not evaluated, as processes in place acknowledge thorough reviews have been completed.

4.A.4

Prerequisites for any given course are indicated on the new course request form and also on the course change form. Divisions collaboratively develop and review course proposals and changes prior to submission to the Curriculum Committee for the review and approval process. Prerequisites are indicated in the Academic Catalog and class schedules used for registration.

MSU maintains high standards for student learning that ensure a strong liberal arts foundation with expected student learning outcomes (SLOs) and essential learning outcomes (ELOs) consistent with those identified through the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Liberal Education - America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. Specific program approvals indicate that MSU has a focused collection of instructional/learning activities and, the completion of which, signifies a level of competence. The expectations of academic background and academic level are indicated in the course prerequisites and course numbering system. MSU provides up-to-date course listings that include developmental courses created to support a preparedness for academic degree-credit courses, 100-200 level courses identified for freshmen, sophomores, and students beginning post-secondary study indicate an academic rigor appropriate for initial studies typically within the first 4 semesters at the university. As per NDUS procedure (guideline 2), courses numbered as 300 and 400 level courses are typically prepared for a student's last four semesters of study. These courses are typically designated in MSU programs of study and require students to use discipline-specific foundational theory and understanding. The process of course development or change is one of faculty involvement at the division level and at the university level. Online course development goes through the approval process using an Online Course Development Planning Form, an Agreement for Development of Online Courses Form, both of which must be signed by the developer and the chair, as well as the Online Course Development Rubric, the results of which are distributed to the developer and the chair. The purpose of the planning form is to strategically plan for the development, scheduling, and marking of online courses. The agreement form ensures that all parties involved are aware that: a) new course development or redevelopment is underway; b) all online courses are evaluated soon after being initially developed and approximately every three years thereafter using the Online Course Development Rubric. The rubric evaluates use of best practices in course design and compliance with federal and local policies and procedures. Credit(s) associated with courses offered at MSU also guide course planning and rigor. The Division Chair has the responsibility to work with faculty to ensure quality instructional programs, learning objectives, continuous course improvement, and program outcomes that support institutional objectives.

Access to academic support services are adequate for students and faculty to meet program requirements and to achieve the mission, goals, and expected program outcomes. University efforts to review adequacy of academic support services for students are ongoing. The following committees regularly review learning resources: Online Learning Committee(OLC), Learner Accessibility Committee(LAC), Technology Planning Committee(TPC), Emerging Technologies Committee(ETC), and the Academic Assessment Committee (AAC). Leaders within academic divisions and administrative offices discuss available learning resources at Curriculum Committee (CC) meetings with movement for additional resources or elimination of others determined by the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The Office of Instructional Design & Technology provides support services to full-time and part-time faculty, staff, and students for innovative technologies to be used for learning. Faculty are assisted with technology integration for all courses, as well as the development of high quality online courses.

The Byrnes-Quanbeck Library supports teaching, learning, and research that is central to MSU's mission. The library relies on purchase recommendations from faculty for collection development in their areas of expertise and to ensure the resources being purchased are relevant to the courses being offered. The library has also worked to make its collections accessible to both on-campus and online students by switching from print periodical and reference resources to online subscriptions (page 6) for these materials. Students are able to access these resources using their MSU credentials.

Academic support web links are accessible on the MSU website, and remote connection with these services is possible via email, phone, and video-conferencing. Access to both the Student Success Center and the Writing Center are available to both online and on-campus students. An expansion of the current tutoring and writing services offered within the online Smarthinking support platform was initiated the summer of 2015. Usage statistics for the Writing Center and tutoring services are kept for evaluation purposes.

Students have access to all required course materials, including printed and electronic access textbooks, lab and practicum kits and general interest books, along with other class supplies and electronic accessories through the Mayville State University Bookstore. Through the bookstore students are allowed to charge course materials to

their university accounts. This ensures that all students have the necessary course materials on the first day of class.

Faculty qualifications are outlined in university policy (page 2). The policy identifies that the qualification held in highest regard for hiring or recruiting is that of an earned terminal degree. Yet, consideration of degree, experience and certifications and/or licensures are also important as faculty responsibilities, for academic duties require attention to standards for instruction (section B). Hiring processes assist in the effort to maintain highly qualified faculty. A request to recruit, and later in the hiring process, a request to offer require approval from the Human Resources Administrator, the Vice President for Business Affairs, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the President allowing for extended review of any given candidate. The hiring process of adjunct faculty follows the process as used for full-time faculty. Within policy M605.1.1 it outlines the qualifications for adjunct faculty, to assure quality is maintained during the hiring process.

As faculty work toward change in rank and tenure status, policy (page 5) provides explicit details and process. The faculty qualifications, rank, and tenure status report indicates 42% of faculty have terminal degrees with two more recently conferred. Recent faculty hires support the movement towards expectations of recruiting faculty with terminal degrees or significant qualifications.

Dual credit courses are developed with the rigor required of all college courses. Instructors must use the same course description, syllabus template, and assessment process as other sections. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) provides expectations for dual credit courses to high school principals and colleges. Division chairs approve dual credit instructors after reviewing instructor qualifications, and review the text choice and syllabi. MSU hosts required orientation for dual credit and all adjunct faculty. An on-site review is completed yearly for all dual credit courses to ensure rigor and course consistency. MSU has 183 students enrolled in 27 dual credit class sections taught by both adjunct faculty and full-time faculty for the Fall 2015 semester. This is a 37 % increase in the past five years. Dual credit enrollment has increased 110% over the past ten years. MSU is committed to continue serving area high school students with dual credit course offerings.

4.A.5

MSU's HLC accreditation was established in 1960 and has continued since that time. Accreditation review occurred in 2006 with subsequent comprehensive evaluation occurring Spring 2016. MSU offers two programs required to maintain specialized accreditation: Teacher Education and Nursing.

Mayville State University was established in 1889 as a normal school to prepare teachers, and has continued to maintain visibility in teacher preparation throughout North Dakota. MSU has been accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) since 1954. Currently, MSU's 14 B.S.Ed. programs, including three double major programs, are approved by the North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board to ensure the programs meet state program standards and by NCATE. In the 2013 NCATE accreditation review, the onsite team indicated that MSU's Education Programs had preliminarily passed the accreditation visit. Upon final review by the Board of Examiners (BOE), an area for improvement was indicated on Standard 4: Diversity. An Institution Report was submitted and intensive work was completed in 2014-2015 to meet NCATE Standard 4. A focused visit in April, 2015 was completed by the BOE indicating all standards were met. Full accreditation was granted on October 27, 2015.   A continuous improvement plan was developed and is used to guide ongoing program improvement. Annual reporting, using Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, has begun. The NCATE accrediting organization has transitioned to CAEP, which has presented new standards for accreditation, to which MSU's Teacher Education Program is structured.

The newly established RN-to-BSN program gained approval from the HLC in July, 2014 and underwent an on-site accreditation visit November 16-18, 2015 with the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The final report from the evaluation team reflected that the program had met all accreditation standards and there were no identified compliance concerns for any of the key elements within each standard. The CCNE Board of

Commissioners will communicate the final accreditation decision early in May, 2016. A program self-study was completed in preparation for the accreditation visit.

4.A.6

MSU's graduates serve to complete MSU's mission of educating to enhance lives and fulfill career potentials. Evaluation of the success of MSU graduates begins by obtaining information on employment or graduate pursuits in advanced study. The Career Services Office develops a database for all graduates, and initiates contacts with those individuals at several points before and after graduation. This initial contact begins with a pre-graduation survey that students complete online. The pre-graduation survey is emailed 3-5 weeks prior to graduation with a follow-up shortly after graduation. Due to low response rates Career Services will enlist the support of faculty and advisors for assistance. Graduates are contacted several months following their graduation for up-to-date contact information, and information related to their current employment status. Graduates are asked to complete an online survey, any time after graduation found on the MSU website. Information gleaned from these surveys and from other data collection sources culminate in the First Destinations Outcomes Report and First Destinations Outcomes Year-by-Year Report that provide aggregate and annual data about graduates' status. Data from these reports are shared with faculty and staff, and the aggregate report is posted online on the public web site.

Graduates' responses to items on post-graduation surveys also indicate levels of success. For example, the most recent Alumni Survey conducted with graduates from 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 provided data on outcomes, including overall satisfaction with alumni's college experience, level of preparation for employment in their field of study, levels of involvement in community, professional, personal, and interest-related organizations/activities. Higher levels of alumni involvement were noted for professional organizations and lower levels for religious or community groups.

The First Destination and Outcomes reports provide statistical evidence of graduates' success, and data can be compared to other state and national data. The North Dakota Association of Career Services Professionals (NDACSP) First Destination Report for 2013-14 allowed outcomes for our graduates to be compared to aggregates for other institutions within the state. Those comparisons revealed that employment rates for MSU's recent BA/BS graduates average 81-93%, while aggregate figures for BA/BS grads for all institutions within the state are at 77% for the most recently reported year.   The percent of students continuing their education average 18% for all other institutions, while Mayville State graduates numbers average between 8-13%. Support and opportunities for advanced study are areas for MSU to further investigate.

Another indicator of our graduates' success relates to the perceptions that employers have of graduate performance in the work place. In 2010 MSU participated in a system-wide project in which employers of alumni were contacted and asked to respond to a standardized survey to provide input about graduates' preparation for, and performance on the job. The Executive Summary of the Noel Levitz Employer Survey for 2010 revealed general, overall satisfaction of supervisors with our graduates' knowledge and performance. Comparisons with results from other NDUS campuses also supported the relative success that MSU graduates have in the work place. A lack of state funding support and issues with obtaining employer contact information led to the discontinuation of this survey project. The Education Division gathers data from graduates, alumni, and employers for continuous improvement and reporting purposes.

Employment rates and admission to advanced study programs provide only one measure of student success and can be skewed for individual programs due to small numbers of graduates. Comparisons for rates of employment vary among programs, as indicated in the First Destinations Outcomes Year by Year Report, with graduates in teacher education and business/CIS showing the most positive outcomes. Graduates of other programs have higher percentages pursuing advanced study. The combination of employment and advanced study rates indicate successful outcomes for 93% to 99% of MSU graduates. These figures demonstrate strong indicators of success for MSU graduates.

Another indicator of successful student outcomes is the number who participate in internship experiences. Business/CIS and Psychology now require completion of an internship as part of the program of study.   All teacher education candidates complete several clinical placements culminating in a student teaching experience. Given that approximately 60% of all yearly graduates complete programs in teacher education, business/CIS or psychology, it is evident that the majority have had some type of successful experiential education activity, including formal internships.   The Intern Data Report shows that in recent years an average of 27-47 students participated in some type of formal internship experience, with the majority being part-time activities within the state. Some internships are competitive, as indicated by average salaries earned, while others may provide academic credit as a reward. Internship experiences are seen as a valuable part of the student's academic program of study. Evaluations of employers and faculty/staff supervisors gather evidence attesting to MSU student success.   All approved internships require the identification of successful learning outcomes by the student, and supporting documentation gathered by the Career Services and Internship Office supports successful completion of these objectives.

Core Component 4.B

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.

2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.

3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

Argument

4.B.1

MSU demonstrates commitment to maintaining, revising, and improving student learning outcomes at the institution and program levels with an efficient assessment process implemented in 2011. In 2010-2011,Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) were created in each academic division for all majors according to acceptable professional guidelines and standards. All SLOs are accessible within MSU's online catalogs. An SLO affirmation process guides faculty in developing SLOs. For quality purposes, this process continues if changes to program SLOs are necessary. For example, in 2014, Elementary Education SLOs were changed (effective Fall, 2015) to support Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) and Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards.

In 2013-2014, MSU, as part of the ND General Education Council (NDGEC), endorsed five of the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELO). An internal survey identified faculty perceptions of important ELOs. A process was created so all Essential Studies courses go through certification and verification that ensures alignment between each outcome and individual learning activity, thereby supporting faculty in the measurement of student achievement toward common learning outcomes. MSU faculty refer to the Liberal Education - America's Promise (LEAP) essential learning outcomes guide for common measures of student achievement. Faculty generate course objectives for student learning based upon program SLOs.

MSU's quality improvement initiative strengthened interdisciplinary communications and collaborative efforts to support a common process for assessing student achievement that occurs on designated Assessment Days.

TaskStream assessment software is used to collect and report data on student achievement outcomes. Dissemination and discussion of data reports occur at the division, campus, and Administrative levels. Assessment coordinators and division chairs review and create annual reports for important findings on each SLO to measure student achievement in each division using course and non-course embedded data to close the assessment loop and prepare for the next assessment cycle.

4.B.2

To encompass program and course SLO's, assessments are mapped for each major over a two-year cycle. Each semester, faculty input course assessment plans, assessment findings, action plans based on assessment findings, and a status report describing the action plan status in TaskStream. Faculty use direct and indirect artifacts to evaluate student achievement toward defined acceptable and ideal targets aligned with program SLOs. Student work is evaluated against rubrics developed through individual and collaborative efforts. Some programs also use measures of national assessments for student achievement such as licensure exams (page 4) as well as, locally developed program capstones that measure the LEAP ELOs, student knowledge, performance, and dispositions. The locally developed alumni survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement allow MSU to gather other data that are measures of student engagement.

Throughout the self-study process, an awareness was gained of the need to develop learning outcomes for co-curricular activities and programs. In Fall, 2013, members of the Office of Student Affairs attended a series of webinars sponsored by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), regarding Student Affairs assessment. The purpose of the webinars was to provide staff with a basis for developing plans, activities and strategies to assess student learning outside of the classroom, as well as supplement and support ongoing strategies in academic assessment. In Summer, 2015, the Vice President of Students Affairs disseminated to all areas of Student Affairs, a list of quick assessments and a template to assist in the composition of student learning outcomes that connect learning with co-curricular student activities, and design qualitative and quantitative assessment activities/measures. The Office of Student Life works with the Student Activities Council (SAC) and all campus organizations on the development, organization, and implementation of student activities. A 2014 alumni survey indicated graduates positively perceived their MSU experience as it supported the development of personal and professional skills. The alumni survey, along with the NSSE data, is reviewed by faculty and administration and provides information for the institution, but not specific to co-curricular programs. The design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the current academic assessment process has provided an excellent framework of understanding and foundation of experience for the aggressive development of co-curricular assessment practices going forward.

4.B.3

MSU has developed a strong culture of assessment to evaluate program effectiveness and quality. In addition, nursing and education programs complete measurements of outcomes that are in accordance with the CCNE and CAEP standards. MSU recently completed the academic assessment initiative to improve overall academic quality. The institution encourages continuous improvement of all courses through assessment practices that improve student learning, with the ultimate goal of improving education quality for students. At the course level, instructors create action plans based on student assessment data. To close the assessment loop, these action plans are reviewed and status reports to check progress are completed yearly by instructors and reported to Cabinet. Faculty review all assessment data to make decisions regarding quality improvement. A continuous quality improvement plan has been developed and is currently being implemented within nursing course and program processes. Data collected at the course level and non-course levels are used to compile an Important Findings annual report that indicate actions that will be taken. To ensure that assessment information is used for student achievement, a Prior Year Review report is completed annually by faculty within each division. This Prior Year Action Review report allows faculty to evaluate if the actions for improvement of student learning are in progress or completed. Some divisions have created improvement plans through course and program change. For example, the Nursing Program created a continuous quality improvement plan (pages 8-18) focused on improving expected

student learning outcomes, and the teacher education program developed an improvement plan based on the annual CAEP accreditation report criteria.

At an institutional level, two Assessment Days are built into the calendar year where the Director of Academic Assessment and academic divisions share findings of assessments with the purpose of creating a greater awareness of student achievements, areas for instructional improvement, initiatives to support student learning, and any possible common findings across the institution. Findings are shared with students via student senate, which has representation on a number of university committees working with assessment.

4.B.4

MSU demonstrates a unified effort for continuous improvement to assess student learning guided by MSU's vision of supporting academic excellence in a cooperative environment that responds to individual needs. MSU is accountable for academic quality of assessment, reporting the process to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the ND SBHE. Evidence transparency of assessment results and improvement plans are found on MSU's website. As well, each instructor's course syllabi contains course assessment information and changes made to the course as a result of assessment activities, and is transparent to students. Students are active stakeholders in the assessment process as it relates to student learning in courses and programs, but students and alumni also support institutional-level assessment activities by their participation in surveys and focus groups. Alumni program evaluation surveys provide useful feedback for improvement and satisfaction and the National Survey of Student Engagement maintains regular, collaborative work and dissemination of assessment results that provide further evidence of effective, ethical use of assessment results.

University program and course assessment processes are outlined in annual presentation and report documents which provide systemic evidence of collaborative efforts to continually improve student learning. Student learning outcomes for each program are affirmed through a collaborative review process. The participation of each instructor in the assessment process is evidenced by the requirement that faculty attend initial training and provide program assessment information for each section of each course for each designated SLO, in accordance with the institution's assessment cycle.

Division Chairs and Assessment Coordinators work collaboratively to compile findings and action plans of course assessments from essential studies and program specific courses in a reporting process that includes an inter-rater review of division assessment reports.

Assessment data is disseminated at division meetings, work retreats, and across campus at two yearly-scheduled Assessment Days, further demonstrating commitment to collaboration and capacity building. Cyclical assessment dates ensure collegial time is allocated. Because all faculty on the MSU campus gather to report on assessment data and planning for improvements that support student learning, many perspectives are shared and critical conversations are held across divisions that lead to thorough reviews and understandings of student learning toward SLOs. From initial course assessment processes to program assessment results, analysis, and sharing, MSU processes demonstrate substantive faculty and instructional staff involvement.

Attention to assessment and use of results must also include mention of representatives from MSU that participate on external committees and organizations related to assessment and data on student learning. The director of academic assessment has served on the ND General Education Council that recently developed general education proficiency statements used to guide essential studies learning outcomes across the NDUS. The director and assistant director conduct on-campus workshops to assist faculty in remaining current with their assessment responsibilities. Faculty within the education division are involved in American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) grant-funded research that supports the development of common assessments (page 8) and data management for teacher education programs throughout North Dakota.

The process of student assessment and the use of assessment results to improve student learning is the result of a well-planned change of assessment practices that improved the process of assessment and use of data at MSU. In

2009 the Director of Academic Assessment was created and release time was given to this faculty member to lead and oversee campus assessment. A Coordinator's Group comprised of a representative from each division was formed to provide multiple perspectives as the process of developing a thorough, campus-wide assessment system took shape. An assessment shell on Moodle was the interim site to collect assessment evidence across campus for the 2010-2011 academic year. Prior to 2010, assessment results among divisions were reported to the VPSA and consistent documentation of results was deemed adequate, as assessed by the last HLC review, but the sustainability of continued adequate reporting for the assessment plan was questionable without a campus-wide reporting system. Consequently, the coordinator's group developed MSU's assessment process using Taskstream software, after focused research was completed that included attending an HLC workshop, "Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as a Core Strategy" in 2010. The current academic assessment process was implemented fall of 2011 and provides a platform for continuous improvement of evidence-based assessment processes.

Core Component 4.C

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.

2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.

3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Argument

<u>**4.C.1**</u>

The MSU freshmen profile is similar to other four year, public, open admissions institutions, and MSU's educational offerings are compatible with the nature and quality of the student population. Articulated goals support the institution's strategic goal of enrollment development; i.e. *Increase the number of full-time students to 700, full-time equivalent to 850, and to maximize on-campus enrollments with a total headcount of 1300 by fall of 2016.*

Goals for student retention, persistence, and completion are defined in the Strategic Plan (page 3 Goal 1.B):

1. Freshmen to sophomore retention will increase by 5% by 2016.

2. Retention of freshmen to graduation will increase by 10% by 2016.

3. Retention of transfer students from initial enrollment to following year will increase by 10% and retention to graduation will increase by 20% by 2016.

4. Retention of special student population groups; i.e. culturally diverse, under- represented, will equal that of general student population.

IPEDS Retention data from the VPSA indicates an increase in freshmen to sophomore retention from 51% for the 2009 cohort to 54% for the 2013 cohort, a gain of 4%. Preliminary 2015 freshmen retention rate appears to have dropped to 49%. Data analysis of this change will occur; initial examination seems to be connected to higher numbers of minority students, an increase in freshmen athletes not continuing, and an increase in academic suspensions.

Retention of freshmen to graduation information from IPEDS indicates graduation *from MSU* has increased from 24% (Fall 2004 cohort) to 42% (Fall 2008 cohort), an increase of 18%. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, retention of freshmen to graduation for students who transferred out of MSU but graduated *from any institution,* increased by 13%; 44% in Fall 2004 to 57% in Fall 2008. Both measures exceed the stated goal of increasing 10%.

Retention of transfer students who enrolled at MSU from initial enrollment to the subsequent year has increased 4% from 61% (in 2009) to 65% (in 2014). This is moving toward the goal of 10% retention for this subset of students, but the goal does not appear to be attainable within the timeframe if the same results continue. The goal of retention of incoming transfer students from initial enrollment to graduation was set at increasing by 20% by 2016 with a baseline in 2006 of 28% graduating within three years, and 65% graduating within six years. Results indicate an increase of 9% of transfer students retained to graduation after three years (37%) and a decrease of 6% graduating within six years (59%).

Data on retention of special student populations (table 5-page 3) is reflective of changing demographic enrollment in this student subset. Averages over the last six years show retention of first time (35%) and transfer students (45%) who are members of special student populations remain below the general student population averages. General student population averages remain at 52% for first time students and 62% for transfer students, respectively. MSU will need to address efforts to close this gap in future strategic planning for institutional effectiveness.

Subsequent year freshmen retention of special student populations, which remains lower than the baseline at 40% in 2009, has dropped from a high in 2011 (48%) back to 32% in 2014.

Subsequent year transfer student retention of special populations has increased from a baseline of 36% in 2009 to 69% for Fall 2014, an increase of 33%. This is higher by 7% compared to all transfer students retained at MSU (62%). The six-year average retention rate stands at 45%, which includes the lowest year at 29% in 2013 and the highest at 69% in 2014.

Goals related to retention, persistence, and completion are compared to IPEDS, ACT, and other national data for similar types of institutions, and appear to be reasonable and attainable. For example, averages of recent freshmen classes show year-to-year retention at 55% compared to national rates of 58% for other four-year, public, open admissions institutions, as indicated in data obtained from the ACT Institutional Data File for 2010. Average persistence to graduation within six years for MSU students' is 33% compared to 28% for similar institutions. The tracking of retention and persistence to graduation data does indicate improvement in recent years; the 2016 goals appear to be achievable.

The NDUS has moved to a performance-based model for funding higher education based on credit hours completed. Both the state legislature in Senate Bill 2200 and the SBHE (page 5) have prioritized student retention and graduation. In accordance with the NDUS strategic plan, MSU has adopted new admission criteria based on NDUS guidelines for 2016-17. MSU's ongoing work related to retention may be adjusted in response to implementation. Retention, persistence, and completion will be analyzed in accordance with these changes. The ongoing strategic planning process will include exploration of best practices and campus initiatives to determine recommendations for enhancing student retention, persistence, and completion rates.

4.C.2

The majority of first time freshmen at MSU are full-time; most enter the institution during the fall term. Therefore, reporting and analyzing the retention and persistence data for freshmen is consistent with common practices. Tracking of freshmen cohorts begins on the first day of enrollment and is tracked throughout six years. Each semester, a "Leaver" report is generated to identify degree-seeking students who were enrolled in a current term, but did not enroll the following term. Information about this aggregate group is compiled each semester and reported to stakeholders. Information about specific freshmen cohort members is updated in the respective cohort data file. Information is compiled/reported after one year of enrollment. This freshmen persistence data comprises 'official' institutional, retention, data reports. Data about freshmen leavers is also reported to the National Student Clearinghouse and IPEDS and can be cross referenced to determine if leaving freshmen transfer to other institutions. MSU has not tracked completion disaggregated, by program and acknowledges a challenge in capacity to do so. With additional attention to program-level data, the institution may be able to seek new data-based interventions related to successful persistence. Findings of this self-study report will be considered by the strategic planning committee to define new institutional goals.

Student persistence to graduation is reported in two ways. The institution participates in IPEDS and annually updates information about leavers from each freshman cohort. Similarly, data is reported to the National Student Clearinghouse. IPEDS Graduation and Completion Reports only include data for students who have graduated from MSU, while reports from the National Student Clearinghouse also provide data about freshmen cohort members who have graduated from either MSU or another participating institution, or who have transferred, but not graduated.

Freshmen retention and persistence data are reviewed, with each report prepared and updated. Each Term Leaver report is analyzed by the VPSA and compared to previous term reports to determine if there are significant changes in the number or types of students who have not returned. Each freshman retention report is similarly compared to previous cohorts to determine if there are observable changes in the characteristics of students who have not returned; results over time are also reviewed. In 2010 MSU contracted with an external consultant for an extensive Data Analytics Project for three cohort groups of freshmen and transfer students. The results were used to identify specific student characteristics related to retention behavior. Data was utilized to guide development of several best practices for retention suggested by the consultant. The project results still guide the analysis of recent retention and persistence data.

Retention and persistence behaviors for transfer students is not as well reported, nor grounded, in comparisons with similar institutions. A large proportion of entering transfer students are online or in distance programs and tend not to follow a traditional enrollment regimen (e.g., enroll for a few terms, leave for full-time work only to re-enroll a few years later). Even transfer students enrolled in on-campus courses tend to be very diverse in that only about half come with previous associate degrees. The remainder might enroll as second semester freshmen or well into their junior or senior years or anywhere in between. Because of this diversity of academic experience, transient enrollment nature, and other factors, it has been difficult to conduct a realistic and accurate measure of retention and persistence for transfer students. Preliminary attempts are being made to segment the transfer student population and to examine and analyze retention and completion data. The Noel Levitz Data Analytics Project examined characteristics of transfer students who persisted, and who did not persist, and found that residency, status as a minority student, financial need, and the type of institution previously attended were all related to persistence. Future progress in retention, persistent, and completion at MSU should focus on guiding academic divisions to utilize and analyze program completer data.

4.C.3

Student retention and persistence data is reported frequently to all campus constituencies, including student government and is made available to both internal and external stakeholders. Results are shared with the campus and community during annual cabinet updates in conjunction with the President's State of the University Address.

Regular updates about progress toward retention and persistence goals are reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee, the Enrollment Management, and Retention Committee and the President's Cabinet. During the institutional Title III Strengthening Institutions Program (2007-2012), regular internal and external evaluations were also made of retention data (page 2) and of retention strategies/practices included in the federal grant. Reports have been used to modify, change, and/or add strategies. For example, a need for students to improve writing skills was identified by both internal and external evaluation processes as being linked to student academic success and eventual retention. Grant resources, along with institutional resources, were re-allocated in order to establish a Writing Center program, to hire a part-time director, and student consultants. The program has proven to be so useful that costs were integrated into the institutional budget, and program use has continued to grow.

Similarly, the Data Analytics Project resulted in the identification of new best practices, and has directly resulted in institutional improvements. Examples include: implementation and enhancements of the Seminar on Success (SOS), the implementation of an Early Alert System, improvements to training and professional development for Academic Advisors, and the re-vamping of developmental/remedial coursework in English and Math. The implementation of best practices has been reviewed at several levels within the institution, has acquired approval from the President's Cabinet and has become integrated into budget and operations.

4.C.4

MSU uses the federal reporting definitions of IPEDS to allow for consistent data internally and for peer comparison, and follows best practices related to data collection and analysis developed nationally by individual institutions and/or documented by professional or governmental entities. The document entitled Summary of Current Retention Practices and Processes at Mayville State summarizes the processes. MSU has complied with the NDUS Accountability Measures project, which includes reporting of retention and persistence data annually. MSU also complies with US Department of Education Consumer Protection legislation, which requires the campus to report graduation (completion) rates for freshmen cohorts and for sub sets of student athletes and members of underrepresented groups. The reports are published on the MSU website under Consumer Information including the IPEDS Data and National Center for Educational Statistics--College Navigator Data. Additionally, MSU has participated in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) and Student Achievement Measures projects (SAM), both of which provide comparisons of institutional data with other national data sources.

These multiple measures are extremely important because a significant percentage of entering freshmen transfer from MSU after one or two years. For example, 15% of entering freshmen in Fall 2014 transferred to another campus by the following year. Similarly, 18% of the Fall 2008 freshmen cohort transferred and eventually graduated from another institution, and another 6% were still enrolled elsewhere after six years. Some students come to MSU to complete their essential studies courses with the intent of completing undergraduate programs elsewhere.

Traditional IPEDS reports underestimate the success of freshmen in completing degree programs. The Student Clearinghouse reports integrated into the VSA and SAM projects provide a more accurate estimate of completion rates. These rates for VSA stand at 71.5% retention of first time full-time students starting Fall 2008 within four years (defined as all students who have graduated from MSU, graduated from another institution, still enrolled at MSU, or still enrolled at another institution) and 62.5% within six years. VSA rates for full time transfer students starting Fall 2008 are 81.1% within two years, 72.4% within four years, and 73.3% within six years. SAM reports first-time full-time retention for the same cohort within 6 years at 63% and full-time transfers at 71%.