

Introduction

Reflections on the Reaffirmation Process.

Whittier began the process to reaffirm its accreditation status during the 2006-7 academic year. Much has transpired since that time, including changes in some senior college leadership, new and revised academic programs, expansions of athletics and co-curricular programming, and the implementation of a number of planning processes that have led to the “ [WHITTIER 2015: POSITIONING PLAN](#),” a strategic plan that followed the conclusion of Whittier’s ten-year strategic plan that ended in 2011.

The Accreditation process dovetailed with the College’s planning process, beginning with the initial development of the Proposal. Indeed, our choice of topics reflected our desire to use the WASC process to focus on things the College was already working on—to help us improve our student learning outcomes, to find information for marketing or fundraising, and to help the institution move forward. In essence, our Accreditation process provided an opportunity to assess things already being done at the College and to analyze systematically to help us formulate our new Positioning Plan. Bringing WASC together with the Planning Process created a holistic process that allowed the college to simultaneously build upon WASC’s core commitments, joining them with the core commitments of the college. Embedding the concepts of institutional capacity and educational effectiveness into the work of developing strategic goals reinforced the link from analysis of student learning to organizational planning and budgeting. Our overall (*Institutional*) goals were meshed into our Positioning Plan, and they include:

- To enhance the development and use of indicators of institutional performance and educational effectiveness.
- To enhance Whittier's use of indicators of institutional performance and educational effectiveness for our institutional planning and decision making.
- To engage the faculty on issues of assessing and improving teaching and learning and to help Whittier align support systems for the faculty more effectively.
- To identify and assess barriers to student success and graduation.
- To ensure that we live up to our commitment to diversity by identifying barriers to student success.

In the years since the Institutional Proposal was submitted, the college’s assessment program has moved well beyond the discussion of tools and procedures, to a focus on the use of assessment results. As will be discussed below, our academic programs use assessment in critical ways to address changes in their program’s curriculum and course content that will improve student learning. Our Academic programs make use of a variety of assessment techniques (from analytic rubrics, to portfolios, to externally validated exams, to external reviewers) and they report their findings annually. Academic support and co-curricular units have also engaged in assessment and program review, and the campus now recognizes the value of these efforts, as well as the need to sustain them. Ultimately, all of these efforts are aimed not only at student learning, but also at student success. The college has an established assessment system to track student learning, and a dedicated faculty-based Assessment Committee to help monitor persistence and success.

Our planning process has been intended to preserve and build upon the College’s longstanding strengths, and it has incorporated much of the evidence we have gathered from our Accreditation process:

- Quaker heritage to guide our curriculum, set the campus ethos, and link generations of Whittier graduates.

- Commitment to liberal learning, and the recognition that even non-traditional disciplines can and should be taught as a liberal art.
- Diversity that brings educational opportunity at every turn and makes Whittier a national model for campuses that will look like ours in the coming decades, by design or not.
- Commitment to breadth of educational opportunity, with our lab school Broadoaks also providing a laboratory and training ground for generations of Whittier faculty and students and the synergy enabled by graduate programs in education and law.
- Emphasis on educating the “whole student,” enhancing student development and leadership through the curriculum and the co-curriculum.
- Location in the dynamic economic, cultural, and social hub of Southern California, the portal to Asia and Latin America and a vital source of applied learning.
- A Tradition of innovation among the faculty and – perhaps most presciently – a tradition of interdisciplinary study, teaching, and thought central to an excellent education, wise citizenship, and professional accomplishment.
- A faculty who – across the decades – has dedicated itself to students’ success.

We cherish and celebrate our strengths, even as we recognize that we are in a time of rampant change surrounding higher education with external threats affecting every college and university in the nation. The threats already were visible in 2001 when Whittier created a ten-year strategic plan; they are unmistakable now. Our Plan, ratified by the Board at their 2012 meeting, comes at an auspicious time for the College, and our Goals and Hallmarks of Success reflect an institution committed to deep learning with a culture of evidence.

The year 2012 marks Whittier College’s 125th anniversary and a time to celebrate our glorious legacy. Established by Quakers and named after a poet who served as the conscience for the nation, we have adhered to our founders’ mission to educate graduates to respect people of all backgrounds and nationalities; to serve community; and to listen to disparate voices and learn. This year marks a propitious time to build on Whittier College’s achievements and, with full appreciation of this longstanding mission, to move the College in directions that those celebrating our 150th anniversary will applaud.

Theme Community

EER Theme 1: Educational Effectiveness Inquiries (Standards 1.2, 1.4, 1.7, 2.1-2.5, 2.7, 2.10-2.14, 3.4, 3.6, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7)

I. Introduction

Community was an important value for the essentially non-hierarchical Society of Friends who founded Whittier College. Yet, as an academic institution with both an intellectual and an administrative hierarchy, we balance the tension between our two historical traditions by placing a high value on community in our personal interactions by fostering the development of the whole life of individuals within our community, and by modeling the ideal that the life of the mind requires interaction with other minds. Community is valued enough to be embedded in our Liberal Education Learning Goals as one of the “4 C’s,” in which First-Year students become part of a Learning Community that introduces the idea of building connections across disciplines, as well as fostering the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the world.

Concern about retention—analyzing who stays and who leaves our community-- grows from our historical mission, and in the last five years, we have put substantial resources into a First-Year program to address student experiences, learning and retention issues. We believe that the sooner students find a niche in the institution, both academically and socially, the more successful they will be in identifying with the institution and its mission.

With our study of **Community**, we wanted to investigate how academic engagement and relationships are related to retention in the First Year, and beyond the first year. As we began our study and reviewed our data, we found that we are doing good work in engaging our students in academic endeavors and in building relationships with faculty and their peers. During the formulation of the CPR, we understood that while we did not have direct measures of the connections between retention and academic engagement, the scholarly literature validated the very positive effect on retention that we found in our survey and other indirect measures. Nonetheless, for the EER, we moved from identifying trends in student success and retention to looking for direct relationships with direct measures.

Our approach to the study of student success examined the attitudes, practices and performances of our first and second-year students. We know from the research that certain practices and attitudes lead to student success that includes such markers as better academic performance, improved graduation rates and overall learning. Academically engaged, socially integrated students who have an affiliation with the college have greatly improved chances of staying at the institution. (Gardner). Thus, our study examined the presence and the degree these factors existed. As a small private college committed to an education that is both personalized and meaningful, the College has many student-focused practices already in place. For example, Freshman Writing courses have been taught by faculty from throughout the college, since the mid-1980s. As a part of our curriculum revision of 2005, we instituted “linked courses” in which all students in a particular freshman writing section were co-enrolled in a second course, generally a course with some intellectual link to the writing section. Additionally, the student’s faculty mentor (first-year adviser) is the instructor in one of the two courses. More recently in 2006, we added the “living” component to the link so that all students in a particular link live near each other in the residence halls—called “Living-Learning Communities” or LLC. (Commuter students have access to the hall in which their group lives.) This arrangement has led to significant academic interaction among students in an LLC.

Moreover, our systematic assessment, where our data collection results in a looping back to create improvement, has resulted in a number of changes. These include the implementation of an early alert program in 2008, a change to the academic status policy to include Academic Recovery Programs for students on probation, an Advising Resource Center and a Director that oversees First Year Programs.

Our goals for Community:

1. After completing freshman writing and the class it is linked to, students should develop an understanding of, and competency in, the use of signs and symbols to construct, create, perceive, and communicate meaning.
2. Students will engage in the academic, social and co-curricular aspects of the college community.
3. Students will develop the skills, attitudes and dispositions to be successful college students and an educated community member. Students will grow intellectually, personally and interpersonally

Our Overall Research Question for the EER:

What specific practices improve retention? Using Direct Evidence

We have been collecting and carefully analyzing retention and student engagement data since 2006. Our data has been comprised of large scale analyses such as NSSE, Wabash and HEDS. Our work with these instruments has allowed us to identify trends and make many changes based on evidence, but it has not provided us with correlations for specific practices. With the help of the Wabash research team and Teagle Scholars we developed a methodology for the EER to use Direct Evidence to answer our research question. In addition, because of the importance of Community as learning outcome, in 2010, we implemented an additional step and asked students leaving the College to complete the [Community Assessment Survey \(CAS\)](#) to assess the level to which students withdrawing developed positive peer communities through peer relationships and institutional affiliation through the development of friendships, clubs, organizations, etc. This additional analysis, when complimented by the students who have persisted, has given us insight into the role that community development played or didn't play with these students and guide our efforts to more fully engage all students.

The role of retention:

Whittier's fall-to-fall retention of first-year students has been a focused concern for many years, and since the last WASC accreditation visit in 2001, the College has devoted substantial resources to improving retention. The aspects of Whittier College that make us distinctive as a national liberal arts college (e.g., location, practical liberal arts, interdisciplinary focus, diversity of our student body) have been promoted through investment in the first-year experience and additional attention to the engagement and success of sophomores. We designed an intensive program for first-year students that we term "links." This program was developed after a comprehensive assessment of the first-year writing program showed that certain groups performed differently and moreover, that these groups had substantially poorer retention rates. Now our "Links Program" has new students choose a first semester writing seminar that is linked with another course in which they are also enrolled during that semester. Students enrolled in the two courses also live near each other in a residence hall. This becomes their Living Learning Community (LLC); commuter students enrolled in the courses also have access the LLC and are included in all its activities. Students remain in the same residence hall for the entire year, but most of the LLC activities occur in the first semester.

As the new programs took effect, we saw a substantial improvement in First-Year retention ([Figure 1: First Year Retention 1989-2001](#)). After dropping to a low of 72.3% for the Fall 2005 entering class, first-year retention rose to 80.6% for the Fall 2007 class as the new first-year programs took effect. Rates have risen every year, and our Fall 2012 FY retention rate was 86%--a record for us. Improving retention rates is an especially difficult task for us--and our consultant, Dr. Darnell Cole from the University of Southern California has told us that we do an excellent job considering the demographics of our incoming student population. It is important to note that there is a strong correlation between retention and the academic quintile of incoming students. (The academic quintile is based on SAT scores and high school grade point average.) A portion of this correlation is due to the fact that financial aid packaging is based on quintile, with the better-prepared students also getting better aid packages, but it is also clear that better-prepared students do better academically.

Our analysis of the retention data confirms that we lose our students that are less academically prepared and poorly funded. This contributes to a large proportion of our first and second year attrition. For our study of **Community**, we wanted to investigate how academic engagement and relationships are related to retention in the First Year, and beyond the first year. The College systematically collects data through an Exit Interview survey on the factors influencing a student's decision to choose Whittier College, how well their expectations were met in both curricular and co-curricular areas, and factors influencing their decision to leave. We know that students choose to leave because of personal reasons (health of self or others, family obligations, distance from home), desire to major in an area that Whittier does not offer, or difficulty getting classes. Efforts to improve course selection have been implemented

Methodology:

From CPR to EER:

As Whittier College's *Capacity and Preparatory Report* noted, we began a capacity study in 2006 that collected student's perspective of their experience as well as carefully and comprehensively looking at many aspects of our first to second year and second to third year retention rates. These studies were aided by our participation in some national studies (NSSE, Wabash Study of Liberal Arts Education) and an instrument we developed—the Whittier College Community Survey.

Some of our findings include:

Engagement- Positive findings: students describe their strong positive relationship with faculty; the majority of our first year students report their classes are active and student focused; our students report they “value diversity and experience rich diversity experiences.” **Negative** findings: Wabash results show that student academic motivation decreased from the fall to spring of their first year; fortunately by sophomore year it rises slowly, increasing incrementally until the senior year; students are not studying to the degree their faculty expects and a percentage of students are not coming prepared to class. These findings were in line with the schools we benchmark with but we still consider them as areas of growth.

Retention- Positive: retention has increased since 2006 and is now at a record level. We retain our Hispanic population at the same or at higher rate than our majority population. **Negative:** the first-to-second year fall-to-fall cohort loses at least 14% of our students, and this cohort's population drops another 10 to 15% the following year. **Analysis:** trends show we do not retain students in our higher quintiles (lower academic preparation groups); men are not retained at the same rates as women; students who deposit late are more likely to do poorly academically.

For the *Educational Effectiveness Review* (EER) of WASC's re-accreditation process, we wanted to study with direct evidence some of the specific measures that contributed to our CPR analysis. We set also goals for improvement, including two NSSE benchmark areas, Supportive Campus Environment and Enriching Educational Experiences. Whittier College aims to score higher than NSSE as a whole in a given year and to sustain or achieve parity with its' Carnegie peers over the next eight years.

Methodology: Our First Year Writing Seminar (FWS) provided an ideal group to assess. First-year Writing Seminars at Whittier College introduce students to Whittier's writing program, and they are part of the First-Year program that consists of First-year Writing, a linked course, Living Learning Communities and First-year Advising. These seminars, themed courses designed by faculty from all disciplines, delve into challenging intellectual questions that freshmen explore in class discussions and in essays. Composition instruction emphasizes writing as a process involving the constructive critical collaboration of author, the author's peers, and the instructor. Seminar size is limited and seminars differ in content each year. Each seminar is 3 units and is taken for a letter grade. We have assessed this First-Year program repeatedly, and in a policy change from prior years, in 2011, our provisionally

admitted students were now being integrated into the FWS and required to take another course (INTD 90: a revised and combined course of a writing lab and Whittier Seminar) that would help to support them in their writing and adjustments to the demands of college.

We chose eight sections selecting approximately 120 students (25-30% of the entire first year class). We examined the students': (a) incoming attributes, academic experiences, attitudes and perceptions, (b) their overall academic performance, specifically their performance in our first year writing program, and (c) assessment of the retention of the student population, specifically the selected sample.

Table 1: Tools for Assessment of "Community" Theme for EE

Inputs	Environment Assessment of Student Perception: Curricular and Co-curricular	Outputs
<p>SSE fall 2011</p> <p>Provisional (i.e. quintile)</p> <p>SAT Score</p> <p>Family Demographics (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender)</p>	<p>NSSE 2012, 2013 Comparison by ethnicity, gender, peer group, Carnegie classification, overall NSSE</p> <p>Community Survey: Internal survey of student perception of academic engagement, social integration and institutional affiliation</p> <p>Interviews/focus Groups Fall 2012- qualitative</p> <p>HERI 2012 (sophomores)</p>	<p>1. LIBERAL EDUCATION: Community: Writing Program/Scores on Rubrics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammatically & Mechanically Sound • Coherent Thesis • Developed & Supported Thesis • Style • Citations • Multiple Perspectives • Define Relationships between elements of a problem • Synthesize Ideas and Information from Multiple Sources <p>2. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPA • Grades in writing course • Academic Status <p>3.ASSESSMENT OF THE RETENTION OF THE STUDENT POPULATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of First to Second year retention • Assessment of retention and academic progress by gender and ethnicity, athletics, misc. other sub populations. • Assessment by class status • Look at repeaters: Did they retake course? Did they succeed in course? Succeed overall? Are these the 12% of sophomore we lose? What is their diagnostic? <p>4. Co-curricular</p>

INCOMING ATTRIBUTES, ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTION

The data was disaggregated by gender, and ethnicity (See Appendix A below). We also assessed the impact of the integration of provisionally admitted students into the First-Year Writing Seminars (FWS or INTD100). In addition, eight faculty members who taught INTD100 were surveyed about their teaching experiences in their First-Year Writing Seminars.

A variety of questions were asked, which are relevant to the “Community” theme of the WASC review and to the impacts of the integration of provisional students into INTD100. In the following discussion, we use the designations of INTD90 (90s) for students admitted provisionally and INTD100 (100s) for all other FY students.

The data sources include: BCSSE, First Year Community Survey (of students in eight FWSs); a qualitative analysis of student responses; students’ grades in FWS; and an evaluation by faculty of students efforts in the course. All first-year students took the BCSSE during orientation, which asked questions about their high school experiences and their expectations for college. First year-students are also asked to complete the NSSE during Spring Term (we get results during the summer months). From the First-year Writing Seminars, students in eight sections were asked to complete the First Year Community Survey. (see Table 1).

The following report compares the results from the above for 104 FY students, 14 of which were INTD90 students. Although the sample is small, these INTD90 students comprised 13.5% of the sample, compared to 9.8% (42 out of 429) of the first-year class (see Table 2). It should be noted that of the 95 questions we examined, most revealed few differences between INTD90 and INTD100 students. Of these few differences, less than ten were statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$). The findings are grouped by the focus of the questions. Furthermore, the mean SAT Composite Score [\[i\]](#) of the 104 FY students was $M=1102.63$ with a $SD=173.90$ (males $M=1106.30$, $SD=167.75$; females $M=1098.75$, $SD 180.28$). The racial/ethnic make-up and sex of students was representative of our incoming first-year class.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of First-Year Students and Sample Studied

	Population Number of Participants	Population Percent	Sample Number of Participants	Sample Percent
Race/Ethnicity				
American Indian or other Native American	5	1	2	2.0
Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander	51	13	11	10.8
Black or African American	13	3	4	3.9
White (non-Hispanic)	143	36	40	39.2
Hispanic	124	32	31	30.4
Other/Unknown	60	16	14	13.7
Sex				
Female	217	55	67	65.7
Male	179	45	35	34.3

High-school experiences and college expectations

- On high-school academic engagement and expected academic engagement in college, INTD90 and INTD100 students were similar.

- Expected academic perseverance: INTD90 students were more likely to say that they would stay positive, even when they do poorly on a test or assignment, but were similar to 100s in their expected perseverance.
- There were no significant differences between students on expected academic difficulty and perceived academic preparation.
- Importance of campus environment: Although there were few differences between 90s and 100s on how important it was that the “college provide support to help you succeed academically,” for all students, women were more likely than men to say that it was important.

College experiences during the first semester of college

Academic challenge in college:

- INTD90 students more likely to report that they are academically challenged in their coursework, as well as saying that they worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations
- They were less likely to ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions (43% of 90s students reported “almost never,” compared to 14% for all students)
- Critical thinking—understanding another perspectives; “learned something that changed your perspective on an issue”—were similar for both groups, though the percentage of 90s reporting this was lower.
- There were no differences regarding: preparing two or more drafts of papers; or worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas.

Experience with discussion and active pedagogies: Few differences were reported by students, but this is not surprising because 90s and 100s students were in the same FWS sections.

Study time: Students reported similar number of hours studying and always coming to class having completed reading or assignments (62% of 90s, similar to 68% of 100s)

Faculty/student relationships: There were no differences between 90s and 100s in: talking to a professor about a grade or the readings; reporting good relationships with faculty; and attending office hours. Our Faculty Committee found this somewhat troubling, as these are practices that could especially help INTD90 students, and we marked it for further study.

Student-to-student relationships: Both groups of students reported similar experiences with other students, such as: quality of relations with peer mentors and other students; having conversations with students from another racial/ethnic group; bringing diverse perspectives into classroom discussions or writing; having serious conversations with people from a different background (e.g., religion, political); and wanting to join a club that would introduce them to others of different backgrounds.

Co-curricular activities and community building:

- INTD90 students were more likely to report that they found/built community in CAAS
- They were slightly less likely to spend time on co-curricular activities (especially clubs and organized sports), but the two groups showed no differences in participating in societies, field experience, or volunteer work.
- Importantly, there were not significant differences in overall relationships with Living Learning Community members/classmates

Writing experiences and learning strategies:

Student responses (in eight INTD100 sections) were asked to rate the extent to which certain pedagogies and activities helped them in their writing seminars. In examining the difference in means between provisional and regular students, provisional students had slightly higher means on 13 of the items; regular students on eight of the items (marked with * below). However, in these comparisons between provisional and regular students, none of the 21 learning experiences were statistically significant below the 0.05 level. Student responses to two overarching questions are reported below.

In response to “After taking this Freshman Writing class, I am able to . . .” (students replied to each skill on a scale ranging from 4=strong agreement to 1=strong disagreement).

- Outline my thoughts on paper (Mean=3.3)*
- Modify my style to meet the needs of my readers (M=3.3)
- Summarize and paraphrase materials (M=3.4)
- Identify my mechanical errors in writing (M=3.3)*
- Support main ideas with appropriate details or example (M=3.5)
- Apply other people’s comments to improve my writing (M=3.4; significant at 0.1 level)*
- Recognize language as a tool of critical thought (M=3.4)*
- Recognize differences in writing style (M=3.3)*
- Use library resources (M=3.2)
- Document references in my papers (M=3.5)

In response to “What practices in your Freshman Writing class helped you develop the ability to write well, clearly demonstrated the purpose, structure, content, mechanics of writing (select all that apply)?”

- Lectures (M=0.56)
- Class discussions (M=0.83)
- Informal in-class writing (M=0.5)
- Formal in-class essay exams under time pressure (M=0.2)
- Formal writing assignment to be done outside of class (M=0.52)*
- Revising drafts (M=0.74)
- Comments on paper by professor (M=0.79)
- Receiving peer reviews (M=0.64; significant at 0.08 level)
- Doing peer reviews (M=0.48)
- Reading assignments: texts, main reading source(s), short articles (M=0.43; significant at 0.1 level)*
- Other (M=0.34)*

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (GPA, ACADEMIC STATUS, FWS)

Comparison of grades of INTD90 & 100 students in INTD100:

[Figures 2 and 3](#) compare students’ grades for: Fall 2010 INTD100 (only 100s students); Spring 2011 INTD100 (only 90s students); and Fall 2011 for both 90s & 100s students in INTD 100.

Notes on grade of INTD90 students in INTD 100:

- Grades for 90s students (N=14) ranged from “A-” to “F” (1 of each) with most of the grades in the “B-/C+” range (median and mode)

- Final grades were related to the assessments by faculty of students' "participation in class, written work, academic motivation, and overall improvement." Not surprisingly, students with high grades had better written work, but were also higher on academic motivation (all had scores of 2 or 3; almost all students with grades below C+ scored a 1 on academic motivation).
- In terms of gender, the lowest grades were earned by men, the highest grades by women, with a mix in the B- to C- range.

FACULTY EXPERIENCES

The eight faculty teaching FWS in Fall 2011 (whose students completed the Community Engagement Survey) were also asked questions about their experiences with teaching FWS and using the common reading. (Two of these faculty were teaching FWS for the first time.) Faculty responses are mixed, as discussed below.

Half of the faculty felt that the writing skills of their students were similar to students in prior FWS. The others did not agree, but the question did not specify whether those skills were better or worse than prior students. Faculty reported a range of hours spent per week preparing for the FWS (2 reported less than 5 hours; 2 between 5 and 9 hours; 3 reported 10-14 hours, and 1 said 15-19 hours). When compared to prior experiences, 4 of the 6 faculty reported spending the same amount of time and 2 reported spending less time.

The FWS grades of the INTD90 students were: A-(1), B(2), B-(4), C+(2), C(1), C-(2),D(2), F(1). When asked about the barriers for student success, the reasons most often given were (faculty could list more than one reason):

- 6 faculty reported that students not academically prepared
- 6 said students did not come to class prepared
- 4 said students did not complete assignments
- other reasons were not turning in homework, and other issues that interfered with learning

Summary

The reasons why students persist or leave an institution have been a major source of inquiry in higher education. Although retention, in and of itself is not the goal, Whittier College is committed to student success and graduation. Our comprehensive examination of Whittier's Liberal Education Community component examines the effectiveness and impact of first year programs on student learning and retention. We found that integrating provisionally-admitted students into the same First-Year Writing seminars with our non-provisionally admitted students resulted in little statistical difference between the two populations with regard to final grades. Our aim in reorganizing the way we dealt with our provisionally admitted students by eliminating INTD 90 and integrating these students into the regular course with additional labs seems to have been successful.

Student engagement in higher education represents both their involvement in high impact practices that are associated with success, but also how the institution is organized to provide educational purposeful activities that contribute to student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation). Higher education has long recognized the importance of student engagement, the development of positive peer communities and institutional affiliation in contributing to student success (Austin 1977, 1985; Chickering, 1969, 1974; Kuh, 1981). Students enter an institution with a set of expectations about the college experience and this ultimately influences their behavior, which affects not only academics, both also their social adjustment and personal growth (Kuh, 1994, 2001).

Assessment of first to second year Retention in the context of overall assessment of Retention

Whittier College has high expectations for student involvement. Described as a meeting place that brings people, ideas, traditions, and experiences together, the College seeks to connect those experiences in the formation of a

strong community. The goals for community stress not only the development of academic engagement, but also social engagement but also through participation in college activities, traditions, and rituals known to positively influence institutional affiliation, development of friendships, and a commitment to student success and fair and equal treatment (Whittier College Liberal Education Program Community: Mission Statement, 2010).

We have been collecting data on overall retention of freshmen from the 2005 through 2011 entering classes and also on a subset of students from the 2011 class (students from eight freshmen writing seminars whose faculty volunteered to participate in the more focused study). Since not all of these classes have reached the graduation stage, our overall analysis of their retention must be tentative at this point. However, we can make some preliminary judgments about retention from the first to second year (as we indicated we would do in the CPR) and we have laid the groundwork for an extensive analysis of our overall retention rates (freshman to senior) that can be on-going in the future. Eventually we will be able to look at data on retention rates disaggregated, inter alia, by sex, ethnicity, on- or off-campus residence, participation in athletics, high school GPAs, and test scores and should also be able to compare these data with qualitative information gleaned from surveys and exit interviews, especially from students who have left the college, to try and discern patterns among those who are not retained. This, of course, will allow us to focus resources on those areas or types of students where our retention rates are weakest. In the meantime, based on the preliminary data we have, we can make some informed comments on our retention from first to second year, which follow.

As noted above, we have two sets of data: data for the entire freshman classes from 2005-2011 as well as data from the special subset. One positive note is that retention has gone up for first-year students over this period from the mid-70s to 85.6%, though there was a slight dip in the 2010 group to 81.4%. The subset from 2011 had an even higher retention rate of over 90%. We attribute this in part to the fact that women, who have been retained at a higher rate than men overall, made up a larger proportion of the subset (67.3% of the subset compared to 53.1% overall), thus probably skewing the data somewhat. What does appear fairly clear regardless of which group we look at is the following:

- women are retained at a higher rate than men;
- students from the lower quintiles (4th, and 5th) are retained at a lower rate than those from the 1st and 2nd quintiles,
- in-state students are retained at a higher rate than out of state students.
- Those who receive limited financial aid (who pay \$30,000 or more due to their ability to pay) are retained at a lower rate.
- There does not seem to be a major difference regarding ethnicity
- There is not much variation in retention rates based on the GPAs earned by members of the freshman class.
- Perhaps surprisingly given conventional stereotypes, athletes, both male and female, have higher retention rates than non-athletes, and women athletes generally have the highest retention rates among various sub-groups over time. One exception to this pattern may be the retention rate of football players, which is generally lower than that of other athletes, though one observer pointed out that their retention rate seems to rise and fall depending on the success of the football team, something traditional approaches to improving retention can't address.

One possible explanation for the improvement of retention rates overall is the greater investment the College has placed in our Center for Advising and Academic Success (CAAS) to provide improved advisement for incoming students as well as enhanced support services for these students once they reach campus. A second factor may be the increased emphasis the Athletic Department has placed on study skills and academic achievement.

These observations, if correct, would suggest that we should continue to invest in the programs being undertaken by CAAS and to promote an even more supportive environment for our athletes once they arrive on campus. It is gratifying to note that the Athletic Department is fully supportive of these efforts – in other words, we are all on the same page.

Our questions focus on the relationship between the development of positive peer communities and retention are designed to help us better understand which out-of-class experiences contribute to the development of community and retention. The [Exit Interview Survey](#) was administered as part of the withdrawal process for students leaving the College. The results showed a significant difference between the students who left and those who persisted. A logistic regression suggests that four of five principles of community influence the decision of students to stay at Whittier (open, caring, purposeful, and disciplined). Friends as a primary community do not provide the same “anchor” as organized clubs and organizations. In addition, gender and commuter/resident status tend to predict whether a student will stay at Whittier. Female commuter students tend to persist at Whittier at greater levels than male resident students. These findings are born affirmed in the out in annual exit interview summaries and actual retention analyses. Women are retained at a higher rate than men, particularly male residential students.

The next steps in this continuing process will be to further disaggregate the data we are collecting, to look more extensively at the four-year rates (we can only do that for the first few years noted above and we have instituted a number of the changes since those data were collected), and to compare the quantitative data with qualitative data being collected by various offices on levels of student satisfaction and exit interviews on why students leave the College. The Community Assessment Report also details some steps we will follow in the future.

APPENDIX A

The larger assessment of the Writing Program used both direct and indirect assessment techniques (see Appendix III: [Writing Program Self-Study 2012](#)) to assess both First-year Writing as well as the follow up “Writing Intensive Course.” In a year-to-year comparison, our students did not quite show the gains over the course of the FWS semester that we have been accustomed to seeing. One obvious possibility is a problem with last year’s assessment. The Director hypothesized that last year’s small sample size may have skewed the results upward. Increasing class sizes—both in FWS and in WIC—are another possibility. Our FWS were designed to enroll 15 students per section, and now regularly enroll 17 or 18. More students’ means less instructor time for each.

Moreover, as noted above, provisionally admitted students (who have been placed in the college-level FWS sections, not the developmental sections) are represented in the sample for the first time since we undertook this assessment. It may be true that the extra attention these students required detracted from the instructional effectiveness in some FWS sections; but there is really no way to demonstrate this one way or the other. The scores for the provisional cohort, however, are quite comparable to those of the regularly-admitted group, and in some cases better. It is clearly not the case that the averages for the provisional cohort “dragged down” the scores for the entire FWS cohort sufficiently to explain the drop in achievement from last year.

The Writing Director hypothesized that the greatest challenge facing our program is one of focus. Because the writing classes make a fine ready-made cohort for studying the first year experience or for pursuing first year initiatives, we are asked to do a fair amount in our seminars that is not writing-centered. Then there are the shifting institutional emphases—we are asked from one quarter to make a program that improves basic skills, then asked to make the courses more global in outlook, or to make the courses support our environmental initiatives, and now apparently to create courses that foreground research and information literacy. We must as a faculty ask ourselves, “What must be de-emphasized or even removed from the writing curriculum of our courses when these new objectives are put in?” This assessment demonstrates that in trying to do too much (and with students who, it must be remembered, are still making the transition to college), we may in fact not be doing enough in any one area to have a positive effect.

[i] SAT scores or ACT scores converted to SAT Scale

Theme Culture

EER Theme 2: Assessing the Liberal Education Culture Requirement (Standards 1.5, 2.2, 2.3-2.5, 2.10, 4.1-4.4, 4.6-4.8)

Fostering community requires an understanding of the people who constitute our community. Whittier was founded on a principle of inclusiveness and *diversity*, and currently almost half of our student body is made up of students of color. The college is designated a Hispanic Serving Institution, with about thirty percent of all students reporting Latino/Latina heritage (see [WASC Data Exhibit 1 Admission and Student Preparation](#)). It is recognized as one of the most diverse small liberal arts colleges in the country. This diversity is not by happenstance: [Whittier's Strategic Plan from 2002 to 2011](#) noted that Whittier “chooses to subsidize less affluent students in order to foster and maintain a diverse and talented student body” (p.3).¹ Our new Positioning Plan notes that “for decades we have focused on affordability, providing ample financial aid to students and keeping our cost lower than many peer institutions,” and that we continue to affirm that “Diversity... brings educational opportunity at every turn and makes Whittier a national model for campuses that will look like ours in the coming decades, by design or not.”

This richness of backgrounds, as well as the social diversity that comes from drawing community members from a variety of economic and geographic groups, matters to us partly because of our Quaker heritage and longstanding commitment to social justice. It also matters because we are committed to the belief, as noted in our Positioning Plan, that an education in a diverse setting best prepares students to comprehend and succeed in the world in which we live. Recent research shows that a diverse learning environment within the classroom leads to greater cognitive complexity for all students, and that prolonged contact, such as we have in our residential liberal arts community, may have a stronger effect on cognitive complexity than singular or intermittent contact.

Thus, diversity at Whittier College represents more than a social obligation—it represents a deeply held intellectual commitment to student learning. Putting our commitments into practice requires attention to both curricular development and co-curricular programming, and our work also has significant implications for recruiting and retention. The Liberal Education Program, re-envisioned in 2005, has five primary learning goals, including one that explicitly promotes students' knowledge of culture and diversity: *Goal IV-Students should develop an understanding of culture and the connections between themselves and others in relation to physical, historical, social, and global contexts* [2]

Our examination of *diversity as a theme for our reaccreditation overall effort* has three foci that derive from WASC's statement on the dimensions for diversity in higher education:

1. What is the experience of various student cohorts at Whittier (i.e., representation)?
2. What is the effect of our diversity on our campus culture (i.e. the nature of our campus community)?
3. Are we successfully providing the cultural competence we want our students to acquire (i.e., the impact of group membership on both individual development and the content of academic scholarship and study)?

Having determined our capacity during the CPR process, our particular goal for studying our Cultural Diversity Liberal Education requirement for the EER is:

- To determine the educational effectiveness of our courses for the Liberal Education Culture requirement.

Learning Goals for Cultural Diversity Requirement.

A. On October 26, 2011, EPC approved the following Learning Outcomes for the Cultural Perspectives Theme:

Students will...

1. develop the capacity to recognize, differentiate, and interpret multiple perspectives across cultures;
2. define and discuss the dimensions of culture and identify the connections between themselves and others in relation to physical, historical, social, and global contexts
3. apply theories, principles, and practices to contemporary and/or historical cultures;
4. analyze ways cultures influence each other; and
5. explain and challenge their own cultural narratives about the world.

The Assessment Committee (hereafter termed AC) focused most of its attention on collecting and analyzing data relevant to Learning Outcome 1 of the Cultural Perspectives Theme for the EER: *develop the capacity to recognize, differentiate, and interpret multiple perspectives across cultures*. To assess students' performance, we had four project goals that employed direct evidence:

1. Using Direct Assessment, a [rubric](#) was developed to evaluate first- and senior-year students' written responses to open-ended questions about a [vignette](#) describing an American student facing a cultural dilemma in a foreign culture (rubric indicators that were relevant to Learning Outcome 1 included Cultural Self-Awareness, Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks, Demonstrates Empathy Toward Other Cultural Groups; and Values Cultural Differences). Students' responses to open-ended questions were scored by three Whittier College faculty/staff on a 4-point scale from 1 = benchmark level, to 2/3 = milestone level, to 4 = capstone level.
2. Collect and analyze first- and senior-year students' responses to the [Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale – Short Form \(M-GUDS-S\)](#): A 15-item Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree) assessing respondents' Overall Openness to Diversity (mean of all 15 items), and three subscales: Diversity of Contact (e.g., "I would like to join an organization that emphasizes getting to know people from different countries"; "I am interested in learning about the many cultures that have existed in the world"), Relativistic Appreciation (e.g., "I can best understand someone after I get to know how he/she is both similar to and different from me"; "Knowing how a person differs from me greatly enhances our friendship"), and Comfort with Differences (e.g., "I am only at ease with people of my race"; "It is very important that a friend agrees with me on most issues" – all reverse coded);
3. Conduct and analyze data from (a) focus groups with community partners who work with Whittier College students to assess their perceptions of Whittier students' strengths, weaknesses, personal and professional performance, and competence when working with a diverse population of clients (qualitative data); and (b) community partners' ratings (0 = not able to assess, 1 = poor to 5 = excellent) of Whittier College students' skills and abilities in areas such as professionalism, active learning, written communication, oral communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, willingness to learn, and leadership (quantitative data); and
4. Collect and analyze instructors' evaluations of students' assignments/papers from CUL 1-7 courses (embedded assessment of students' performance).

B. Completing Project Goals 1 and 2:

During the fall 2011 semester, the AC created a set of demographic questions, two vignettes, and two corresponding dilemmas and sets of open-ended questions. These materials were constructed so that the two sets of vignettes, dilemmas, and open-ended questions were comparable with each other. The AC submitted an application to and received approval from Whittier's IRB/HSPC, and sent an email, through Qualtrics.com, to all first- and senior-year students announcing the on-line survey and offering, as an incentive, to enter all participants into a drawing for two iPods (one each for a participating first-year and senior-year student). AC emailed the link to the on-line demographics questionnaire, [M-GUDS-S](#), and open-ended questions about the vignettes to all first- and senior-year students in November, 2011. Students were asked to complete the demographic survey; select

and respond to only one of the two vignettes, dilemmas, and open-ended questions; and complete the [M-GUDS-S questionnaire](#). Students were sent one reminder approximately one-week after the initial email was sent, and the survey was closed in early December. In early spring, AC held a drawing of all participating first- and senior-year students and awarded an iPod to one student participant from each participating year.

During the spring 2012 semester, AC members created a rubric (Direct Assessment) to evaluate the participants' responses to the open-ended questions about the vignettes and dilemmas ("Vignette survey"). Six AC members used the rubric to evaluate participants' responses (3 AC members evaluated ½ of the first-year and senior-year participants' responses and 3 AC members evaluated the other ½ of the first-year and senior-year participants' responses). Inter-rater reliability was calculated using intraclass correlations (ICC coefficients ranged from 0.64 to 0.93). We calculated a mean value of the three rubric raters' scores for each open-ended vignette-survey item for each participant and data were analyzed using SPSS.

Not all participants responded to both the Vignette survey and the [M-GUDS questionnaire](#); some responded to both and some responded to only one or the other. Respondents to the Vignette survey included 18 first-year (6 males, 12 females) and 26 senior-year (8 males and 18 females) students (Table 1). The ethnic composition of the sample included 2 Asian-American, 1 African-American, 15 Hispanic, 17 European-American students, and 9 students who did not self-identify with any ethnic group. For the purposes of the present analyses, we recoded ethnicity to include 15 Hispanic, 17 European-American, and 12 "other" or unidentified students (Table 2).

Table 1. Gender Composition: Vignette Sample vs. WC Population

	First-Year -Vignette Sample	Senior-Vignette Sample	First-Year - WC Population	Senior - WC Population
Female	12	18	239	205
Male	6	8	203	170

Table 2. Combined First Year and Senior Ethnic Composition: Vignette Sample vs. WC Population

	Vignette Sample	WC Population
African American/Black	1	37
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	80
Foreign		18
Hispanic/Latino	15	268
Other	12	111
White/Caucasian	17	299

Results of independent-sample t-tests indicated there were no significant differences in rubric scores for first- and senior-year students' responses to open-ended questions about the vignettes (all p-values > .05). A visual inspection of students' scores indicates that students' mean scores – first-year as well as senior-year -- were relatively low on a scale ranging from 1= benchmark level to 2/3 = milestone level to 4 = capstone level (means ranged from 1.72 to 2.58). However, several gender differences emerged. Findings indicated that females received higher scores on Cultural Self Awareness (M = 2.20, SD = 1.13) than males (M = 1.71, SD = 0.70); Cultural Worldview Frameworks (M = 2.12, SD = 1.10) than males (M = 1.42, SD = 0.45); Empathy toward other Cultural Worldviews (M = 2.08, SD = 1.06) than males (M = 1.54, SD = 0.66); and Valuing Cultural Differences (M = 2.26 SD = 1.22) than males (M = 1.48, SD = 0.65); all p-values < .05 (Figure 1). Additionally, results of one-way analyses of variance indicated that ethnic differences in rubric scores for students' levels of Valuing Cultural Differences approached significance (p = .064) with European-American students receiving marginally higher scores (M = 2.53, SD = 1.18) than Hispanic students (M = 1.62, SD = 1.05).

Respondents to the [M-GUDS-S questionnaire](#) included 32 first-year (12 males and 20 females) and 45 senior-year (18 males and 27 females) students. The ethnic composition of the [M-GUDS-S](#) sample included 23 Hispanic, 26 European-American, and 28 “other” or unidentified students. Similar to the results for the Vignette Survey, analyses of the M-GUDS-S data indicated there were no significant differences in first- and senior-year students’ overall level of Openness to Diversity, or any of the three subscales: Diversity of Contact, Relativistic Appreciation, or Comfort with Differences (all p-values > .05). In this case, however, a visual inspection of students’ scores indicated that all students -- first-year as well as senior-year students -- self-reported very high levels of overall Openness to Diversity and all three subscales; all means ranged between 4.44 and 5.03 on a 1 to 6 scale. Additionally, as with the Vignette Survey, several gender differences emerged. Females self-reported higher levels of overall Openness to Diversity (M = 4.87, SD = 0.54) than males (M = 4.58, SD = 0.66); Diversity of Contact (M = 4.67, SD = 0.88) than males (M = 4.21, SD = 0.98), and Relativistic Appreciation (M = 5.03, SD = 0.96) than males (M = 4.79, SD = 0.88); all p-values < .05 (see [Figure 2](#)). No ethnic differences emerged for the M-GUDS-S data.

Finally, a repeated-measures analysis of variance (with [M-GUDS-S](#) subscale as the within-subject factor), indicated that students self-reported significantly higher levels of Relativistic Appreciation (M = 4.90; SD = 0.73) and Comfort with Differences (M = 4.86; SD = 0.93) than Diversity of Contact (M = 4.49; SD = 0.94).

C. Completing Project Goal 3

Based on recommendations by members of the Wabash team who had visited Whittier in early fall 2011, AC created a series of focus-group questions and a rating scale during the spring 2012 semester, so that community partners could (a) provide information about Whittier College students’ strengths, weaknesses, and ability to engage with a diverse community, and (b) rate Whittier College students’ skills and abilities in a variety of areas relevant to a liberal education. The AC submitted an application to and received approval from IRB/HSPC.

Using the resources of Whittier College's Center for Engagement with the Community – CEC-- and the partners who are part of our Service Learning Program, community partners were invited to participate in focus-group discussions on the Whittier College campus. Members of the CEC served as “recorders,” typing up participants’ responses during the focus group discussions. Four AC members served as facilitators for the 45-minute focus-group discussions with the 16 community partners who attended the event (e.g., Whittier Rio Hondo AIDS Project, Whittier Public Library, Boys and Girls Club, Health Partnership, the Aerospace Corporation, Whittier Chamber of Commerce). The focus-group discussions were audio-taped for later transcription.

Qualitative analyses exploring themes within the community partners’ oral responses to focus-group discussions were conducted during the summer of 2012, and by the fall of 2012, audiotapes of the focus-group discussions were transcribed and quantitative data from the community partners’ responses to the rating scales of Whittier College students’ skills and abilities entered into SPSS and analyzed (see below for Results).

Results. In response to a question about how Whittier students compare to others, one Community partner said our students “far exceeded” students from other colleges. There were positive comments about Whittier College students being well prepared, and their enthusiasm about how much they have worked with faculty members. Other responses noted that Whittier College student interns have good people skills, are “respectful and responsible;” they can be trusted to interact well with others. A few comments noted that a few students have had difficulty with committing to projects, and that an occasional student will not be organized or will need more preparation for the internship.

Whittier students come from diverse populations and they do very well in the Community. The bi-lingual students’ skills are highly valued. Community Partners discussed cultural differences that were more socio-economic rather than race-related. Whittier College students come from very diverse economic situations and learn that education can balance out those differences. Our students also have good “interpersonal skills” and are able to respond to and work with diverse patrons. For instance, one member of a focus group said, “working with people does not seem to be a problem” while another individual said “WC students generally have very good

people skills, are able to roll with situations. Their interpersonal skills are very good.” Likewise, Community Partners consider students trained in Liberal Arts versus Engineering to be better prepared and to engage in better interactions with people, arguing in favor of the “effectiveness of liberal arts and how well WC prepares students...to interact with others.”

One Community partner commented that he “had never experienced a Whittier College student who did not grasp the concept of diversity.” The students sought out real-life experiences, and want to work with a variety of people in their internships. The comments and conversations in the focus groups with the Community partners were very positive and support the belief that Whittier College student interns work well with diverse communities, are well prepared from their experiences in a real world setting, are enthusiastic about working in many types of internships, and that their liberal arts backgrounds serve them well in work with Community partners.

Furthermore, because only 16 community partners attended the event, and some community partners did not complete all rating scale items, analyses of the Likert survey were primarily limited to calculating means of ratings for each scale item and exploring differences among the means for the scale items. Results of the community partners’ ratings of students’ skills and abilities indicated that generally, Whittier College students received “good” to “very good” ratings from community partners (all means ranged from 3.45 for Written Communication Skills to 4.07 each for Professionalism and Teamwork on a rating scale ranging from 1 = poor to 5 = excellent). Results of a repeated-measures analysis of variance indicated that community partners rated Whittier students significantly higher in Professionalism ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.59$) than in Written Communication Skills ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.21$) and Critical Thinking ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.90$).

D. Completing Project Goal 4:

In spring 2012, the Assessment committee solicited instructors of CUL 1-7 courses to provide assessments of students’ performance in their classes via Moodle. A small number of professors indicated a willingness to assist; however, unfortunately, due to time constraints and other pressing business, this project was not completed.

Summary of Assessment for Cultural Perspectives Theme Learning Outcome #1:

To examine Whittier College students’ “capacity to recognize, differentiate, and interpret multiple perspectives across cultures,” the AC collected data from multiple sources: (a) self-report data from first- and senior-year students about their openness to diversity; (b) written responses to cultural dilemmas from first- and senior-year students, which were then scored by Whittier College faculty/staff according to a culture rubric; and (c) focus-group responses from community partners about Whittier College students’ performance, both professionally and personally, when working with community patrons/clients from diverse backgrounds. We were able to analyze the data from (a), (b) above and (c). Additionally, although the AC planned to collect graded assignments (e.g., papers, projects) from faculty who currently teach CUL 1-7 classes, we were not able to do so due to lack of time.

Results of the quantitative data indicated that there were no significant differences between first- and senior-year students’ outcomes for any of the M-GUDS-S or vignette data. Both first- and senior-year students self-reported very high levels of Openness to Diversity on the M-GUDS-S, particularly to the Relativistic Appreciation (e.g., “Knowing how a person differs from me greatly enhances our friendship”) and Comfort with Differences (e.g., disagreeing with “It’s really hard for me to feel close to a person of another race”) subscales. Although students also self-reported high levels of Diversity of Contact (e.g., “I attend events where I might get to know people from different racial backgrounds”), their self-reported scores for this subscale were significantly lower than for the other two subscales.

In contrast to the high self-reported M-GUDS-S scores, when asked to read a vignette and respond in writing to a cultural dilemma that required consideration of multiple perspectives, AC committee members’ (i.e., Whittier faculty/staff) scores for the students’ written responses were relatively low – achieving only the lower Milestones

level in most cases. Nevertheless, despite the lack of significant differences for first- and senior-year students, results revealed significant gender differences for both the M-GUDS-S self-report data and the vignette data. In all cases, females self-reported or were scored higher than males.

The exercise with the Community Partners and the resulting focus-group data provoked a discussion about continuing the assessment of our cultural perspectives themes to create focus groups of students who have completed internships with Community Partners. The focus groups would ask questions to ascertain if students had developed the capacity to recognize, differentiate, and interpret multiple perspectives across cultures; could apply theories, principles, and practices to contemporary and/or historical cultures; and/or were able to explain and challenge their own cultural narratives about the world.

Overall, these findings suggest that while students' self-reported attitudes about different cultures are very positive, their ability to take multiple cultural perspectives and express their thinking about a cultural dilemma in writing, is not very advanced. They further suggest that Whittier College female students are generally more advanced in their "capacity to recognize, differentiate, and interpret multiple perspectives across cultures" than are Whittier College male students. Finally, the Likert scale items from the service learning focus group survey demonstrate that our students are rated significantly higher in Professionalism.

The plan for closing the loop is to give this data to the faculty-based Educational Policies Committee for follow up with the Liberal Education sub-committee for their use in analyzing new courses seeking approval for the Culture requirement.

IV. Visit from Wabash College

On September 29, 2011, the AC met with members of the Wabash College research team to hear about their findings from the 2006-2010 study and to solicit their recommendations regarding our Cultural Perspectives Theme EER. In regards to the latter, as mentioned above, Wabash team members noted that Whittier College students enjoy many opportunities to engage with a diverse community, and recommended that AC incorporate community partners' voices into our Cultural Perspectives Theme assessment. They also provided us with extremely useful feedback on the construction of our Vignette Survey.

Regarding findings from the 2006-2010 study, AC was pleased to learn that Whittier College students scored higher on many indicators of Openness to Diversity than most other comparison institutions.

Theme URSCA

EER Theme 3: Connections at Whittier (Standards 1.2,2.2, 2.4., 2.5, 2.8, 2.9, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 4.8)

Connections expand the idea of *Community* by bringing together diverse groups and ideas through disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning. We emphasize *Connections* because this component of our curriculum forms a core foundation of Whittier’s values and educational objectives while also representing a higher-order goal that brings together integrative skills and interdisciplinary learning. Producing students who show *demonstrated abilities* in higher-order skills that require theory, praxis, critical thinking and communicative skills is one reason we chose this as one of our areas of inquiry in our 2009 Proposal to WASC. In particular, we chose to look at undergraduate research, scholarship and creative activity (URSCA) because it is an engaging approach that addresses multiple areas of student learning and development. Assessing and understanding our student outcomes and our institutional practices in URSCA is a way to set benchmarks and to strengthen our practices in this area.

Studies show that students involved in undergraduate research (UR) are more likely to think about post-graduate careers, get accepted and enroll in graduate school. This is also part of the larger group of “high impact practices” that Whittier College, like AAC&U and CUR, sees as helping the college achieve its strategic goals of higher persistence and providing the type of hands-on education that best prepares students today for lifelong achievement, and it is forming the basis of study of rigor by our new Committee on the Future of the Liberal Arts.

Whittier is dedicated to diversity, equity and inclusionary practices. The present study, as well as a look at the internal context and our continued effort to develop college infrastructure, shows that Whittier has made progress in setting the stage for further growth through better institutionalization of undergraduate research and creative activity. More importantly—and unlike many institutions who face challenges in attracting diverse learners to undergraduate research, [1] Whittier maintains its diversity through access to URSCA activities. The study also shows that Whittier has room to grow and improve URSCA participation and awareness on campus both among faculty and students.

II. Internal Context and Growth of URSCA at Whittier

As stated in our Proposal and CPR, Whittier took a fresh look at URSCA starting in 2009. Several dedicated faculty with long-term experience in undergraduate research formed an *ad hoc* committee to analyze the status of UR at Whittier and to begin work on planning and implementing a “Undergraduate Research and Presentation Day” that would serve to highlight UR activities in a way that goes beyond senior papers and presentations required of all students in the Lib Ed and Whittier Scholars curricula. In March of 2010 the college also invited Gerald R. Van Hecke (Harvey Mudd) to serve as an outside evaluator to help us better tackle the challenges we were facing. Van Hecke noted the following action items: 1) Defining URSCA; 2) Organizing a campus research/presentation day; 3) Increase dialogue between Advancement and faculty; 4) Seek to expand research across campus; 5) Regular meetings between the Dean and department chairs.

We are happy to report that we continue to make progress in these areas. In 2011 we had made progress in three of the five areas.[1] By 2012, we have made progress in all five areas, including the fundamental step of increasing the dialog between Advancement and the faculty and expanding research across campus. Notably, as part of an [NIH-BRAD grant](#), Whittier is demonstrating its commitment to undergraduate research by hiring a full-time grants manager to help the college—and especially faculty—obtain more research grants and provide better post-grant management. This is critical to our institution’s success in URSCA activities because a grants manager 1) assists faculty with the heavy burden of dealing with complex grant reporting and removes an important obstacle to writing research grants; 2) increases accountability and accuracy of grant reporting, making granting agencies more likely to fund faculty research grants; 3) demonstrates institutional commitment to developing faculty and student research infrastructure. This position, housed in Academic Affairs, thus represents an important bridge

between Advancement, the Business Office, and faculty, and is an important step forward in *institutionalizing* faculty-student research/URSCA practices. [See Appendix III [NIH-BRAD grant](#)]

Given the results that we have seen with URSCA, and with funding and support for faculty grants in place, the College began to study URSCA-type activities as a “Best Practice” (modeled on the work of George Kuh.) During the summer of 2012, a group of faculty began meeting to address some of the data revealed in our NSSE results. Two areas in particular related to URSCA—though our students rated us highly on academic challenge and building relationships with faculty, we believe that we could improve these scores. Specifically, our new Ad Hoc Faculty Committee for the Future of the Liberal Arts is currently studying the role of introducing best practices such as URSCA earlier in the curriculum—perhaps as early as the first or second year. [See Appendix III: [Summer Working Group Members](#)]

Our 2012 NSSE Results also confirm the substantial benefits of this “Deep Approach” to learning. Almost half of Whittier’s seniors reported that they had worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework—a proxy question for mentored research. In contrast, only 24% of seniors at NSSE schools and 36% of dashboard seniors reported this activity. Similarly, 32% of Whittier’s seniors reported participating in a community-based learning project as part of a regular class—again, significantly higher than benchmark or the NSSE schools. These scores were also reflected in Whittier’s NSSE “Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice,” with significantly higher scores for both first year and seniors in Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Opportunities, and Supportive Campus Environment. Moreover, data from our HEDS Senior Survey broke out the URSCA participation by division:

Table 1. URSCA Participation

	Social Sciences	Natural Sciences	Humanities
Presentation at an off campus research conference	30.8%	42.1%	15.8%

(see [NSSE 2012 Mean Comparison Report](#), [HEDS 2012 Reports](#)).

III. URSCA Presentations: Measuring Student Success

Our first step in determining the scope and success of Whittier’s *Connections* was to look at direct measures of students’ URSCA activities to ensure that we are living up to our own definition and mission for UR at Whittier [1]. In focusing on URSCA, the *ad hoc* committee developed questions based on AAC&U rubrics on critical thinking, directly evaluating student performance in areas related to critical thinking, research skills, analysis, theory and methodology. The committee asked,

Do Whittier students...

1. Demonstrate facility with English conventions and usage?
2. Demonstrate a sophisticated intellectual analysis of the world around him/her?
3. Demonstrate appropriate presentation methods for the field(s)?
4. Demonstrate appropriate use of methods for the field(s) in which the student is majoring (e.g., research, background literature, performance, original sources, etc.)?
5. Effectively situate the project within a broader theoretical context? [2012 data only]
6. Demonstrate conclusions and related outcomes that are logical and reflect the student’s informed evaluations of evidence and perspectives?

Answers to these questions helped us respond to the question posed in our CPR (“Are students learning to think critically and analytically from participation in undergraduate research?”) and gave us some fine-grained analysis

of potential problem areas. Also, since diversity and equity are fundamental values of a Whittier education, we also wanted to know if students participating in URSCA activities were representative of our student body as a whole in terms of ethnicity and gender.

Methodology

In 2011 and 2012 Whittier College held a day-long research presentation day called “URSCA Day.” Students submitted abstracts to a submission committee, and accepted abstracts were then organized into sessions for public presentations on URSCA day. Using a rubric based on the questions about critical thinking and methodology, faculty evaluated student performance for each presentation or poster.

Table 2. No. of Participants

	2011	2012	11-12 combined
# of student participants	38	60	98
# of faculty evaluators	14	23	37

The evaluations were collected and cross-tabulated with data on all participants’ gender, GPA, major, and ethnicity. While participation by ethnic group very closely follows Whittier’s overall demographic trends, participation by gender shows that higher percentage of women are present in this study’s sample. This gender gap is interesting and merits further examination. This is discussed in our results and discussion.

Table 3. Ethnicity by Year

	2011		2012	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
African American/Black	2	5.13	2	3.39
Asian American/Pacific Islander	4	10.26	8	13.56
Hispanic/Latino	12	30.77	22	37.29
Native American	0	0	0	0
White non-Hispanic	19	48.72	26	44.07
Other/Unknown	2	5.13	0	0
International	0	0	1	1.69

Table 4. Gender by Year

	2011		2012	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Male	12	31.58	22	36.67
Female	26	68.42	38	63.33

Data from the two initial years show that participation in URSCA day is obviously spread across almost all majors, but distribution is uneven. The results do not include participating majors for which no peer-review forms were received. However, lack of participation in the URSCA Day did not necessarily reflect a lack of participation elsewhere (such as SCCUR or Senior Presentations).

Table 5. Participation By Major

	# of Major Participants
Anthropology	6
Biology	10
Business	1
Chemistry	1
Child Development	7
Economics	2
English	9
Environmental Science	1
French	3
History	6
KNS	7
Physics	1
Political Science	5
Psychology	4
Religious Studies	7
Sociology	14
Spanish	3
Whittier Scholars	3
(blank)	8
Grand Total	98

Results

Given our goals of critical thinking, sound research methodology, and communication skills, we obviously want to know how our students perform. Evaluations reveal that Whittier demonstrated competency in every category for 2011 and 2012, where 1= Inadequately; 2= Inconsistently; 3= Adequately; 4= Well Demonstrated:

Table 6. URSCA 2011 & 2012 Mean

	2011 Mean	2012 Mean
Student demonstrate facility with English conventions and usage	3.65	3.85
Extent that student demonstrates sophisticated intellectual analysis of the world around him/her	3.41	3.50
Extent that the presentation employs appropriate scholarly apparatus for the field (e.g. illustration, surveys, graphs, etc.)	3.23	3.62
Extent that the project demonstrates appropriate methods for the field in which the student is majoring (or taking a class) e.g., research, background literature, performance, original source of documents, etc.?	N/A	3.61
Student situates the project within a broader theoretical context	3.29	3.44
Conclusions and related outcomes are logical and reflect students' informed evaluations of evidence and perspectives	3.38	3.57

Note that in 2012 we decided to add a question regarding the validity of the project (“To what extent does the project demonstrate appropriate methods for the field(s) in which the student is majoring (or taking a class), e.g., research, background literature, performance, original sources of documents, etc.?”). This enabled us to remove some confusion between research methods vs. presentation methods.

For the following table, because the data include group work, it is not possible to disaggregate them to determine whether significant differences exist between scores for men and women, or for different ethnic groups.[1] We are of course interested in the question and plan to develop a method for disaggregating individual presentations from group presentations in the future.

Table 7. Combined URSCA Mean

	Combined Mean
Student demonstrate facility with English conventions and usage	3.78
Extent that student demonstrates sophisticated intellectual analysis of the world around him/her	3.47
Extent that the presentation employs appropriate scholarly apparatus for the field (e.g. illustration, surveys, graphs, etc.)	3.48
Extent that the project demonstrates appropriate methods for the field in which the student is majoring (or taking a class) e.g., research, background literature, performance, original source of documents, etc.? [2012 only]	3.61
Student situates the project within a broader theoretical context	3.39
Conclusions and related outcomes are logical and reflect students' informed evaluations of evidence and perspectives	3.50

Discussion, Next Steps and Opportunities

A. Demonstrated Achievement in Higher-Order Skills

In our CPR we asked: “Are students learning to think critically and analytically from participation in undergraduate research?”

- The results suggest that Whittier students involved in URSCA are indeed demonstrating a complex array of skills that go into “critical thinking.” On the whole students are demonstrating superior skills in English (3.78) and adequate to well-demonstrated skills in all of the other areas: analysis, presentation methods, project methodology, theoretical context and logical conclusions, with grades varying between 3.4 and 3.59.

B. Growing Participation Across Ethnic Lines

Studies by the National Academy of Sciences (*Beyond Bias and Barriers; Rising Above the Gathering Storm*) make the case for the long-term persistence of ethnic and gender gaps in research. Furthermore, studies in undergraduate research have shown the potential of URSCA-type activities in helping to address the iniquity.

- Whittier is confronting this problem head on. With participation rates in UR that closely follow our overall enrollment trends, and as one of the most ethnically diverse private liberal arts colleges in the country, we feel that Whittier is growing in the right direction—that is, we are not leaving underrepresented groups behind. With our high participation rates by underrepresented groups, Whittier is again ahead of the national curve in broadening the impact of undergraduate research to minorities and our inclusion of minorities, though we have work to do. Moreover, Whittier is creating specific opportunities such as our Mellon Mays and McNair grants which fund undergraduate research projects for underrepresented

minorities. Evaluating these student grant recipients and their participation in URSCA events on campus and elsewhere is a logical next step to better understanding the role of UR and its outcomes at Whittier.

C. A Gender Gap and Some Opportunities

- The gender gap—women are overrepresented in our URSCA study and even more so in our SCCUR participation—is interesting and raises some questions that require further study, especially given some of the concerns and retention issues that Whittier (and all of higher education) faces in attracting and retaining men.[1] Are men less involved in high impact practices such as UR activities at Whittier? If so, where and when does this gender gap occur? Are there specific majors where we could intervene most effectively? Even though ALL Whittier students participate in UR through the senior paper and presentation, the absence of men in the larger Whittier UR **community** points to an area of needed improvement.

The gender gap in this study may simply be the result of which departments have participated more heavily in URSCA day, or the fact that women have generally been shown more likely to volunteer.

Conclusion and Next Steps

We have clear evidence that students participating in URSCA are demonstrating strong research and analytical skills. However, this does not mean that we should rest on our laurels or that we don't have plenty of room to grow—and growth in UR, studies show, will have a positive impact in retention and post-graduate success.

While our study has focused on URSCA-Day, which involves a broad range of students from Freshmen to Seniors, it should be noted that UR is present as part of senior papers and presentations in both our Liberal Education Program and our Whittier Scholars Program. But if we are to effect positive institutional change, we should probably set our sights on getting students engaged in UR earlier in their academic and post-academic careers. As we move beyond this EER and think about using assessment to further college goals, we are focusing on a number of concrete steps:

1. Continue URSCA day. It has proven popular with professors, students and their families, who often attend the sessions. Continue to assess direct learning outcomes such critical thinking and other important skills.
2. Continue analysis of departmental practices in developing UR skills in students. (How do our departments compare? Do we have untapped possibilities in some areas?)
3. Using indirect methods, assess how and when we introduce UR to students in our disciplines, with an eye to engaging students earlier in the process and to engaging more males. (How is our college-wide messaging on this issue? How can we track this data using Banner? Could the college benefit if some departments moved their methods courses to sophomore year? If so, what incentives could help encourage change?)
4. Since the college-wide URSCA initiatives are fairly new, really starting in 2009, it is time to better track and analyze post-graduate outcomes in this area. (Do Whittier URSCA students go to graduate school? Do their career outcomes differ?)
5. Assess the impact of numerous recent grants with an eye towards student outcomes and identifying institutional barriers to faculty-student research. (Are grants leading to student learning? What barriers are stopping faculty from doing more research with students? Etc.)

Expanding URSCA

Funded by a Presidential Initiative related to the 2015 Positioning Plan, faculty began analyses of these questions during the Summer of 2012. Her Charge to the Committee noted two objectives: Improving the quality of a Whittier education, and decreasing the cost of education. There were four foci:

- Ensuring students' involvement with key 'high impact' practices beginning with their matriculation;
- Communicating high expectations for achievement, esp in the first year
- Improving Whittier's preparation of students for career entry;
- With learning at the core, explore alternative means to attain academic excellence

The Annual Faculty Retreat at the end of summer was devoted to the findings of the Summer Working Groups. Fostering Undergraduate Research for first and second-year students continues to be a high priority for the faculty committee that continues the Summer Working Groups. [See Appendix III: [President's Charge to Summer Working Groups](#)]

APPENDIX A: Whittier Students at Regional UR Conferences: SCCUR (Southern California Conferences for Undergraduate Research)

As part of the context for understanding the growing role of undergraduate research in student life at Whittier, we analyzed student participation at SCCUR in 2008, 2010, and 2011. We wanted to see if there were areas of concern in terms of race or gender. We were pleased to find that participation by ethnic group shows strong participation by underrepresented minorities at Whittier. The largest area of concern is the gender gap. Combining 2008, 2010, and 2011 numbers, women made up 71% of all Whittier participants in SCCUR. This data corroborates the skew towards female participation shown in URSCA day at Whittier.

RESULTS:

Table 8. Annual SCCUR Conference Participation Gender and GPA.

	2008		2010		2011	
	# by Gender	Avg. GPA	# by Gender	Avg. GPA	# by Gender	Avg. GPA
Female	5	3.34	27	3.59	15	3.60
Male	2	3.59	7	3.42	8	3.18

Table 9. Annual SCCUR Conference Participation by Race.

	2008	2010	2011	Total
African-American		2	2	4
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	3	1	5
Hispanic	2	13	13	28
International			1	1
Other		1	1	2
White	4	15	5	24
(blank)		1	1	
Grand Total	7	35	24	66

Table 10. Annual SCCUR Conference Participation by Major.

	2008	2010	2011	Total
Biology		5	8	13
Biology and Environmental Science	4	10	3	17
Economics		2	1	3
English Language-Literature		1	1	2
French		5	2	7
History			1	1
Kinesiology and Nutrition Sciences			1	1
Mathematics		2	1	3
Modern Languages			4	4
Philosophy		1	1	2
Political Science		1	1	2
Whittier Scholars		2		2
Chinese		1		1
Anthropology		1		1
Sociology		2		2
Art History		2		2
Chemistry	2			2
Physics	1			1
Grand Total	7	35	24	66

[1] Many of these practices fall under the rubric of “high impact practices,” a phrase coined by George Kuh in a widely cited monograph *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008. Other articles verify the benefits specifically of undergraduate research. See, for example, Russell SH, Hancock MP, McCullough J. Benefits of undergraduate research experiences. *Science*, 2007;316:548-549, NRC, 1999). On retention, see NRC, 1999; on integration, see Hoke and Gentile, *CUR Quarterly*, FALL 2008 - Volume 29, Number 1, pp. 18-22; on under-represented groups, see: Russell SH, Hancock MP, McCullough J. Benefits of undergraduate research experiences. *Science*, 2007;316:548-549.

Program Review

(Standards 1.2, 1.7, 2.1-2.7, 2.10-2.12, 4.4-4.8)

Introduction

Assessment at Whittier College is meant to provide departments an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive analysis of student learning. The department review serves a culminating experience involving an integration of annual assessment results, analysis, reflection, sharing and change. Departments are encouraged to engage in assessment activities that will provide useful and meaningful products (results, narratives, and data) that will result in improving student learning, curriculum development and pedagogy. Our goal is for assessment is to be systemic, systematic, transparent and accessible. Our assessment practices are based on Astin's *College Impact Model* (1991). The two primary sources for our assessment programs have focused on:

1) *Inputs* – National data (NSSE, Wabash, HEDS), faculty resources, student characteristics, library resources, technology, etc.

2) *Outputs* – program efficacy, measures of student learning outcomes, and student success.

Much of the information required to examine our *Inputs* is being gathered on a campus-wide basis and is made available to Departments and Programs as needed for their review process. Our current assessment focus for Academic Affairs has been the assessment of learning outcomes at the department level and assessment of our liberal education program. The Whittier College Liberal Education Program includes four aspects of liberal learning--Community, Communication, Cultural Perspectives, and Connections. While our EER Themes address three of our four Liberal Education goals, assessing the fourth—communication—actually runs through the other three themes.

Curriculum objectives of each department and program relate to certain elements of our “Lib Ed” curriculum, and they have assisted us in the assessment of the College and Liberal Education Program as a whole (see Table 1). For example, Anthropology has identified seven objectives, of which all seven relate to Culture and three to Community.

Table 1. Department's Objectives connection to 4C's

	Culture	Community	Connections
Anthropology	7	3	
Art History	1		
Biology			
Business	2	4	
Child Development	1		2
Chemistry		3	4
Economics			2
English	2		6
History	1		2
KNS			5
Math			1
Modern Language	3	1	1

Music	1		1
Philosophy	3	2	1
Physics			2
Political Science			3
Psychology	1		
Religion	1		
Sociology	2		3
Social Work	2		
Studio Art			
Theater & Com.			3
Whittier Scholars Program			
Total Objectives	27	13	36

Department Level Assessment

Departmental assessment has become an ingrained process that has helped us achieve a culture of evidence. Regular reviews of academic programs are an essential element of ensuring that the academic programs at Whittier College are vital, current, effective, and challenging. Program reviews are intended to be comprehensive and thoughtful summaries of the current program, its recent history, and its future plans in the context of the discipline. In order to broaden campus-wide understanding of various programs and facilitate academic planning on a broad scale, reviews are submitted to the Director of Assessment and the Assessment Committee. The Assessment Committee then forwards the reviews to the Educational Policy Committee who along with the Assessment Committee will serve as the internal reviewers (see [Figure 1 of Five Year Department Review Process](#)).

Each department has a mission and learning outcomes specific to their discipline as well as to our liberal education program. Departments are asked to submit annual assessment plans that evaluate at least one of their objectives so that at the end of the four year cycle all of their outcomes have been assessed (see [Form Annual Assessment Plan](#)). Every fifth year departments are charged with conducting Program Reviews or “Self Assessments”. Departments are given the choice between two types of department reviews, [Traditional](#) or [Theme based](#). Theme based department reviews are a comprehensive examination of their curriculum, teaching or other issue or initiative, and departments are encouraged to choose a Theme- based assessment every other cycle.

In addition, each Department is asked to complete a [Curricular Map and Five Year Assessment Plan](#). The curricular map provides a visual of where and to what extent each of the department’s outcomes are being met.

Every academic program (department or interdisciplinary program) should undergo a full review at least every five years. Such factors as planned leaves and sabbaticals, scheduled accreditation visits, and distribution among the academic divisions will be considered in scheduling reviews. This schedule does not, however, mean that departments are to assess their work and make changes only as part of formal reviews. Rather, we believe that the formal review should rather be seen as analogous to the Faculty Personnel Committee's formal, periodic reviews of individual faculty; the self-study, like the professional growth plan, should be an articulation and summary of a continuous process. Assessment of student learning should be an important part of every review. In the fall of 2009 the first department followed the new review process ([See Figure 1](#)). As of fall 2012, 19 out of 19 departments and 4 out of 8 programs have completed the five year cycle.

Faculty members are using the assessment results and closing the loop. For example, Business Administration (BSAD) found that some courses, like BSAD 201 and BSAD 310 will be modified/adjusted to achieve the desired objective. The department also plans to develop a survey for business administration majors in their senior year, collecting information about students' satisfaction in curricular areas and instruction. The questions will be designed explicitly to allow BAF to assess how well students feel the Department's ten learning objectives have been achieved. In addition, the survey will include "open-ended" questions collecting students' qualitative comments related to the strengths and weaknesses of the business administration department. Finally, the process of the self-study has generated discussion on future plans for BSAD, including:

- Possible addition of a business writing course within the major to replace the current requirement for our BSAD majors to take ENGL 120 (Why Read?); this course could be taught by an adjunct on a regular basis;
- Adding BSAD 350 (International Business) as a required course and making BSAD 342 (Operations Management) an elective course; this change was instituted beginning with the current academic year;
- Addition of a course on "Introduction to Computing" that would be a foundation course for all of our BSAD majors which would enhance the students' computing application skills and prepare them to take upper-division electives requiring more advanced software and other application skills;
- Collaboration with the Math Department to retool "MATH 81: Math for the Management Sciences" so that it can better support our range of BSAD courses or develop and offer another math course by BSAD and/or ECON faculty.

Other examples of departments using assessment and closing the loop include the Department of History. With their learning objectives revised in 2008, the faculty members began the assessment of their objective 3: Appraise a secondary source, and identify its thesis/argument. Using a short essay written by students in their 200-level courses the faculty scored the paper on a scale ranging from 1 (very well), 2 (somewhat), and 3 (not at all). According to the faculty members, the results of this assessment demonstrated that "four out five of our students are able to appraise a secondary source... not a bad success rate, but we continue to puzzle through whether or not we should work harder on raising that achievement rate" (see Table 2 below). Additionally, this objective was scheduled for additional assessment in the spring of 2010 but due to under-enrollment the class was cancelled and assessment was re-scheduled for the spring of 2012.

Table 2. Spring 2009-Objective 2 Results

	n	Percent
Very well	92	40%
Somewhat	90	39%
Not at all	49	21%
Total	231	100%

One year later the faculty members' assessed Objective #5 (Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize primary documents). This is especially an important outcome to assess, according to the department, because primary documents are a "central form of evidence, and understanding how to make use of these documents, and to draw meanings from them, is central to the work of being an historian." Using a rubric they developed (see Table 3) the faculty found that "many of our 200-level students have become quite adept at analyzing primary documents, and at situating them in their historical context, and recognizing the historical significance of these documents.) The faculty members discussed the results (see Table 4) from this assessment in detail. Although not surprised, the faculty came to the conclusion that 31 out of 83 students who scored a 2 did so because they "stumbled in their ability to think through the historical significance of their documents." Even so the faculty points out that almost half of their students already have the knowledge/ability to grasp the importance of the question-*What is the historical significance of this document?* Still the department will continue to look into this objective over the next year.

Table 3. History Department's Rubric for Objective 5

Score of 1	Score of 2	Score of 3
The student set the historical context for the primary document; went beyond a simple summary of the document, and analyzed or discussed key ideas and terms mentioned in the document; and explained the historical significance of the document. The paper was well-written, and free of spelling and grammatical errors.	The student tried to set the historical context for the primary document; summarized the document, but offered little or no analysis; and attempted to explain the historical significance of the document.	The student made little or no attempt to set the historical context for the primary document; attempted to summarize the document, but offered little or no analysis; and had little or no understanding of the historical significance of the document.

Table 4. History Department Objective 5 Results 2009-2012

	n	Percent
Score of 1	38	45.8%
Score of 2	31	37.3%
Score of 3	14	16.9%
Total	83	100%

Next Steps

With the departmental review process firmly in place, our next step is to complete this process within our 8 interdisciplinary academic programs. Four of the eight programs have already completed their reviews, and the rest are scheduled for next year. Meanwhile, the process of implementing a substantial program review policy has created a culture of evidence-based inquiry. Considering the changes that have occurred at Whittier College, the Assessment Committee is recommending that:

1. AC continue to follow up with departments on a semester/yearly bases about annual assessment
2. AC will update our Traditional Review, plus its rubric, to eliminate redundancy
3. AC will streamline the External Reviewer Visit and Report.
4. AC will streamline the Internal Review Report and the Memorandum of Understanding between the Dean of Faculty and the Department.

Response to Capacity & Preparatory Review Recommendations

Though many of the Visiting CPR Team's recommendations were addressed in the Thematic Essays, this essay directly addresses the issues raised in their letter.

1. Aligning planning processes and integrating plans. (CFRs 3.6, 3.7, 4.1-4.3)

As the CPR team acknowledged during its November 2011 visit, Whittier College has been engaged in a number of planning activities that included both facilities and academic planning. The team noted that Whittier has been updating the last strategic plan to integrate the newer plans in specific areas into a more comprehensive plan. They requested that the updated Strategic Plan be completed by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review.

Consistent with WASC Standard 4, Whittier College conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. Our activities have always informed both institutional planning and they have helped us to evaluate systematically our educational effectiveness. We have a long history of using institutional inquiry, research, and data collection to establish priorities at different levels of the institution and to revise our institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.

Our latest comprehensive planning process culminated in the Board-approved "[Whittier 2015: Positioning Plan](#)". This strategic plan, approved by the Board of Trustees at the October, 2012 meeting, builds on three years of substantive discussions with multiple constituencies and is designed to achieve four interrelated goals:

- Become a model learning-centered college,
- Strengthen and spread Whittier's reputation regionally, nationally, and internationally,
- Shift Whittier's business model to boost the College's financial strengths, and
- Create an environment for learning and living to complement our extraordinary teaching.

With goals in place, hallmarks of success to track, and the strategies and many of the tactics outlined, the College has a document to focus attention and guide resource deployment. We deliberately refer to this document as a "positioning" plan. It outlines the steps that we will take over the next three years to implement parts of the plan and further refine others, with the ultimate goal of positioning Whittier to thrive in the rapidly changing higher education marketplace of the decade to come. As with any strategic plan, we intend to revise tactics as we learn from implementation, as circumstances change, and as opportunities arise.

The new [Positioning Plan](#) builds from Whittier's successfully executed [Strategic Plan of 2001-2011](#). The latter presented a three-pronged focus on the fundamentals: promoting distinctiveness, innovation, and excellence in the academic program; strengthening the student learning experience and enhancing campus culture; and assuring a strong financial foundation through prudent management and mission-based fund raising efforts. As the final report notes ([Strategic Plan 2001-2011](#)), much progress was made in achieving the goals espoused in 2001, and the Plan served the College and its mission well, guiding decisions about the academic program and the student experience, and focusing attention on the need to bolster financial resources. Among the most significant accomplishments have been: a new liberal education curriculum, increased study away (especially through faculty-led short courses), the breadth of service and other applied learning opportunities, creation of integrated living/learning units for all FY students, substantial renovation of classrooms on both campuses, improved IT and closer coordination with academic support services, a complete revamping of advancement operations and staff with a focus on mission, and a wealth of student life enhancements leading to improved retention and student satisfaction.

However, some goals remain, and new challenges have arisen. Perhaps most prominently we have not achieved faculty salary parity, a goal established well before the 2001 strategic planning process; nor have we addressed fully our intention to raise staff salaries to desired levels. In addition, despite significant investment in capital projects and refurbishment of classrooms and residence halls in the last decade, we have not kept up with needs identified in our aging buildings and infrastructure. Strengthening the College's finances and retooling our business model – and then directing resources to achieve these identified aims –are continuing goals and key drivers in the new positioning plan.

Much good work has been done in the last eight years to build Whittier's reputation, with enrollment the true hallmark of success. Beginning with a study by Maguire Associates the year before President Herzberger began her term and continuing with the creation of a new website and integrated marketing materials, a strategic initiative to boost athletic recruitment, a redeployment of enrollment staff to new markets, and a disciplined approach to messaging, Whittier College has grown enrollment from 1307 undergraduates in the fall of 2004 to 1672 undergraduates in fall 2012. Yet, with the demographic changes underway, we must redouble our efforts to maintain a national student body. Furthermore, with our Quaker ideals and founding mission to educate students to respect all peoples, the Board confirmed its commitment in 2006 to enrolling a diverse population, a goal that we want to build upon now through increased recruitment of international students.

The process of creating Whittier's new [Positioning Plan](#) began in earnest in 2009, when the President, the Board, Senior Staff, and Faculty began long-term planning discussions. In the midst of the "Great Recession," one of the major imperatives was that planning and financial decisions must be linked. James Dunkelman, hired early in 2009 as the College's Vice President for Finance, spent six months studying the situation, presenting a Report during that summer that provided a baseline for planning sessions to develop a course of action to address both the College's challenges and the College's aspirations for faculty salary parity and significant capital budget investment. To accomplish these important, and long-standing institutional goals, it was clear that in addition to traditional areas of financial planning for liberal arts colleges (enrollment modeling, advancement and campaign planning, addressing student retention, and ensuring sound and conservative fiscal practices) that long-term strategic positioning would also need to include discussions about the academic program.

That summer, the President began assembling a group of Trustees, Senior Staff, and faculty to launch three critically important long-range planning initiatives. These initiatives focused on three areas – 1. Higher Education and the Future of Educational Delivery; 2. Higher Education and Technology for Teaching and Learning; and 3. Financial Modeling for the Future. The idea was to begin to lay out key directions to be confirmed by the full Board at the November meeting. Through webinars and a one-day campus retreat, the plans were integrated in the context of the financial information. Summarized in the document "[The Whittier College Long-Term Planning Team: Key Thoughts From The Planning Sessions On September 20th And October 3rd, 2009](#)", the plan was disseminated widely to faculty groups throughout the fall and then presented to the Board at the November, 2009 meeting. Issues relating to faculty, pedagogy, technology, enrollment, the calendar, student life, physical plant maintenance and more were discussed in relation to the College's fiscal situation. New academic programs, particularly new masters and/or certificate programs and/or other non-degree-bearing "business ventures." were highlighted as important ways that the college could build significant additional revenue to invest in accomplishing institutional goals. The Board of Trustees Finance Committee had already laid out criteria for assessing the financial viability of new programs. ([See Key Elements in Assessing New Projects October 2009.](#))

Throughout the next 18 months, the Trustees, the administration, and the faculty (and staff) met periodically to educate the campus to understand the relationship between accomplishing two of the college's most important goals—faculty salary parity and funds for capital improvement—and the need for generating revenue beyond the usual areas that the college had relied upon. The importance of new and different kinds of academic programs was discussed by the faculty, and in December of 2010, the planning had progressed to the point where the President charged a group of faculty and trustees (known as the "December Group") to meet in a several-day retreat to begin to establish criteria for operationalizing new programs that could attract new undergraduates and set up viable graduate programs. The meeting concluded by asking:

- What questions deserve more exploration now? Soon?
- How can we involve others in conversations?
- How can we move some key decisions forward quickly?
- Faculty are burdened with many responsibilities; how can we help faculty participate in making smart decisions about future directions for our educational enterprise?

By November of 2011, the planning and educational sessions by the faculty and the administration came together in a draft of the "[Whittier 2015 Positioning Plan](#)." This plan sets out four interrelated goals critical to our students' and our College's future. Within these goals, action items are identified, and hallmarks for success are enumerated.

In summary, our Positioning Document, consistent with WASC Standard 4, especially 4.2, indelibly aligns academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technological needs with the strategic objectives and priorities of the institution. Whittier College recognizes that we must preserve and build upon the strengths we celebrate and cherish. And we must do so in a time of rampant change surrounding higher education including external threats affecting every college and university in the nation. The threats already were visible in 2001 when Whittier created a ten-year strategic plan, and they are even more visible now. Our document serves the campus in two ways: First, it outlines four goals around which to focus our attention over the next three years. The goals stem from a review of the achievements in the last decade, since the establishment of Whittier's 2001-2011 Strategic Plan, and from an assessment of remaining work to be done, especially in light of the new knowledge and circumstances of 2012. Second, the document has stimulated and guided continued discussions about the best means to achieve the goals, the metrics by which to judge success, and the intermediate benchmarks to track along the way.

2. Developing Assessment and institutional research. (CFRs 2.3, 2.6, 2.7, 4.4, 4.5). The CPR team observed that the "Law School's assessment efforts" were behind those of the rest of Whittier College, and the Commission recommended further work in assessment at the Law School. (Section A, below).

Furthermore, the Commission also urged expanded efforts in the direct assessment of student learning at the College (Section B. below), and increased attention to building a robust institutional research and assessment capability that could help Whittier gather, analyze, and interpret data to support decision-making and to improve educational effectiveness. (Section C. below).

A. The Law School.

Since the WASC team visited Whittier College and Law School in November of 2011, the Law School has undertaken several assessment initiatives at the institutional and the individual instructional levels.

1. MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT MEASURES

The Law School has two extremely important institutional measures that directly relate to student learning outcomes. First, is the bar pass rate of graduates on, primarily, the California Bar Examination. Second is the rate at which our students secure employment in the legal profession.

The bar pass rate of Whittier Law graduates long has been an issue that has received intense institutional focus. Although the Law School now has in place an excellent bar preparation program, we cannot know the full impact of that program until the California bar administration in July of 2014. Nonetheless, the Law School has not sat on its hands and waited until 2014 for results. For example, one critical part of the bar preparation program is a required course called Legal Analysis Workshop [LAW] that students take during their final year of law school. The California bar examination requires graduates to answer essay questions in several of thirteen different substantive areas, *i.e.*, torts, contracts, constitutional law, property, etc., etc. In the past the one semester LAW course attempted to prepare students for the essay portion of the bar examination on all 13

potential topics. A component of the course required students to write essays in each area upon which faculty provided feedback throughout the semester. When the faculty assessed these student essays, however, they found that so much coverage resulted in poor performance by students throughout the semester, and students showed little improvement from essay 1 to essay 13. Moreover, when the faculty evaluated the results that students achieved on the California Bar, they found that the LAW course, as currently configured, did little to address poor student performance on the multiple choice portion of the bar examination and only resulted in a 3% increase in the overall first-time bar passage rate. After much discussion, and as a direct result of these assessment efforts, the faculty redesigned the LAW course. Now the course focuses on just the 6 subjects that the California bar “double” tests on the essay and on the multiple choice portion of the bar exam.

The class also addresses the multiple choice as well as the essay aspects of these 6 subjects. The class has become much more interactive with students working collaboratively on problems and faculty providing both in-class and out-of-class feedback throughout the semester. The faculty, especially the Bar Preparation faculty, were delighted to learn in November of 2012 that the overall pass rate for those who took the Bar exam for the first time in July of 2012 is 70.2%. The average for first-time takers at all California ABA law schools is 77%; thus, our rate is well within the 15-point deviation allowed by the standard. Our current result is the highest first-time pass rate achieved since 1998 (which is as far back as our current data go), with the exception of 2008, when we had a phenomenal 84.3% rate.

As the above indicates, although we have a well designed bar preparation program [which the WASC Visiting Team acknowledged], assessment continues in this area. For instance, in an attempt to learn whether faculty who teach bar-related subjects actually provide course coverage on the issues frequently tested on the bar exam, the Assessment Committee recently surveyed the faculty to determine whether they covered those issues. This effort will allow us to determine what frequently-tested issues are not covered in the curriculum and help us design a curriculum more sensitive to those issues. However, we acknowledge that it is not enough to simply determine “gaps” in our bar-preparation curriculum; we also must determine whether filling those gaps also will result in better performance by our students. To that end, the Law School is carefully considering whether to hire a statistical consultant to help us answer several questions related to bar passage, such as (1) whether and how well the LSAT predicts bar passage; (2) whether and how well the first year cumulative law school GPA predicts bar passage; (3) whether students who take all the bar related subjects do better on the bar examination than students who do not; (4) whether students who have been exposed to a particular bar-related issue in law school actually respond better to that issue on the bar examination, etc. We will use these results to help us shape our curriculum, our policy toward required courses and our student recruitment efforts.

Through analysis of our bar pass data, the Law School determined that our students who have cumulative LGPAs after their first year between 2.5 and 2.8 have the lowest bar pass rate of all of our students. From talking with first year substantive and legal writing professors, as well as our bar preparation faculty, about the strengths and weaknesses they observed in this group of first year students, we concluded that these students struggled primarily with how to engage in legal analysis. As a consequence, the Law School implemented a required second year course just for students with a 2.5-2.8 cumulative LGPA after their first year. The course is called Legal Methods and it focuses on a narrow area of substantive law to which the students had exposure during their first year and emphasizes legal analysis of issues solely within that narrow area. The course is taught by staff in the Academic Support Department who provide specific individualized feedback to students throughout the semester on four in-class exams. Students must pass Legal Methods I during the Fall semester of their second year. If they do not, they must take Legal Methods II during the Spring semester of their second year. Assessment of the first year of this course indicates that 56% of the students increased their class ranking at an average of 12%. The class ranking of some students increased even more dramatically. We will not know the impact of this course on actual bar pass rates for another 2 years, but the improved law school performance of these students suggests a positive impact.

We also recognize our obligation to help our students succeed while in law school, not just on the bar examination. As a consequence, we have developed an Academic Support Program under the able leadership of

Jenny Homer. During the first year of the newly designed program, Director Homer assessed various aspects of the program in an attempt to determine which aspects seemed most effective in terms of improved student performance. She found that individual conferences with students produced the greatest improvement in student performance. Moreover, consultations with students indicated that they valued, but had to wait too long for, individual appointments. Accordingly, the Academic Support staff adjusted the program to devote substantially more hours to student conferences.

A second important institutional goal is employment for our graduates. Two years ago, the administration assessed the effectiveness of the Law School's Career Development Office by seeking the advice of a highly successful career development leader and consultant. The consultant concluded, among other negative findings, that the Career Development Office suffered from lack of initiative, a lack of effective employer outreach and a complete lack of student confidence. Soon thereafter, the Law School "professionalized" the office by hiring three new, highly educated and very effective staff. In the past year, the Career Development Office has put in place several creative and effective initiatives designed bring employers to campus, pair students with potential employers in a variety of setting, and, ultimately, improve the placement rate for our students. Importantly, students exhibit renewed confidence in the Career Development Office and seek services. The Office also has developed an ambitious, yet doable, five year strategic plan designed to improve job opportunities for our students. As a consequence, the Law School has assessed, and based on that assessment, has improved dramatically the administrative side of career development.

The faculty also has become increasingly aware of the need for our curriculum to provide students with the substantive knowledge and the skills required to position themselves in the legal employment market. The faculty understands that employers seek employees with substantive expertise in particular areas and the corresponding skill set. As a consequence, our Career Development Office and our Alumni Relations Office have identified the areas of law where our students most frequently practice and the types of law practices that hire them. We now have begun to deliberately shape our curriculum to help our students acquire the expertise most meaningful to their successful employment and develop the skills most relevant to those types of practice. For instance, many of our students practice in small or solo family law firms. Our curriculum supports careers in that area through the courses in our Center for Children's Rights, our national Juvenile Justice Moot Court Competition and our family-oriented clinical program. In the law faculty hiring process this year, we deliberately are attempting to hire a faculty member with expertise in this area in order to further enrich our curriculum. We also, for the first time this year, are offering a course in Law Practice Management, because we are mindful that many of our students need to be able to run their own, or contribute to the management of, a small law firm. This is but one example of how our faculty and curriculum are attempting to respond to the employment needs of our students. Much of the same development is underway in business law, environmental law and trial practice. As just one example, in their second year law students must take a Professional Skills I course. Originally that course offered simulated training for students in traditional litigation skills. Because many of our students do not intend to pursue careers in litigation and do intend to pursue careers in transactional areas, the Legal Writing Department developed a "transactional skills track" in Professional Skills I.

2. INDIVIDUALIZED ASSESSMENT

The WASC Visiting Team noted that the Whittier Law faculty as a whole, and with some exception, lagged behind the assessment efforts of Whittier College and encouraged the law faculty to become more knowledgeable and involved in assessment in their individual courses and programs. The law faculty has taken that encouragement to heart in several ways described below.

As a first step toward assessment, under the leadership of the Assessment Committee, the law faculty adopted a set of student learning outcomes. Because assessment is a relatively new phenomenon in law schools, subsequent to the adoption of the student learning outcomes the law faculty has met several times to discuss how to assess whether students actually achieved those outcomes. As a result of these discussions, two types of changes have occurred. The first represents curricular or course-delivery changes designed to provide students with more

formative assessment mechanisms and enhance student learning. Others represent actual assessment of student learning related to specific desired learning outcomes.

At the curricular or course-delivery level, the faculty consulted with students about the first year curriculum. That consultation revealed that students felt overwhelmed by the number of first year courses they were required to take [at that time five courses in the Fall and six courses in the Spring]. In addition, the faculty recognized that our students are not as strong as students at more highly ranked law schools and that our student may need more time than others to absorb and learn complex legal material. As a result, the faculty voted to decrease one first year course, Civil Procedure, to just one semester and to eliminate altogether a course in the Spring semester. The faculty also agreed that students in the first year should have a mid-term examination with feedback in at least one of their courses. When faculty review these midterms, in addition to providing students with feedback, they identify the students they fear might not succeed on the final examination and refer those students to the Academic Support Program. As a consequence, all students experience at least one formative assessment prior to their final examinations, and the weakest students receive additional individualized assistance from the Academic Support Program.

Faculty also recognized the critical importance of additional formative assessment and feedback, particularly during the critical first year of law school. As a consequence, this year the Law School implemented a small-section experience for each student during their first year. In essence, each first year student takes one of his/her required courses in a small section, *i.e.*, approximately 35-40 students rather than 70-80 students. In that small section, professors must provide at least 3 formative assessment experiences with feedback to their students.

The Law faculty thought that pairing the first-year legal writing classes with the first year substantive classes would help our students to master legal analysis and provide additional formative assessment opportunities for students throughout the first year curriculum. As a consequence, all of the first-year writing sections now focus their research and writing assignments [upon which student receive individual feedback] on a substantive area that corresponds to one of the student's first year required substantive courses. As a consequence, students actively engage in researching and writing exercises related to one of their courses, and they receive feedback on those exercises throughout the semester – in addition to the feedback described above now provided by the substantive faculty.

On a more individualized and course-specific level, several developments have occurred. All faculty now make specific reference to the learning outcomes they expect their students to achieve in the syllabi for their individual courses. All of these outcomes relate to the institutional learning outcomes formally adopted by the faculty. The faculty then grade their mid-terms and final examinations with those learning goals in mind. For the large part, however, the faculty have not yet developed formal rubrics by which to conduct their assessments, primarily because most lacked the expertise to do so. To remedy this lack of expertise, the Law School hired Barbara Walvoord as an expert consultant. Ms. Walvoord spent several days at the law school, assessed our assessment efforts, met with individual faculty and departments and gave a presentation to the faculty on “how” to construct and employ assessment rubrics. The Assessment Committee is now hard at work helping faculty determine how to implement Ms. Walvoord's recommendations.

In addition, the Assessment Committee has surveyed the faculty to determine whether and to what extent their courses contribute to the fulfillment of our identified student learning outcomes. In the upcoming months, we will discuss whether our curriculum truly contributes to the learning outcomes we desire, and if not, how to restructure what we do. After we fashion a curriculum that promises to cover our learning outcomes, we will construct rubrics by which to measure whether our students actually learn when we want them to learn throughout the curriculum.

In the interim, several faculty have administered pre- and post-class self-assessment measures to students that correspond to the learning outcomes articulated in faculty syllabi. These surveys focus on whether the students have, or “think” they have, acquired the substantive knowledge related to the particular course and whether they

have improved the skills identified by the professor in the syllabus. This is a new initiative at the law school, and we currently await the results from these faculty.

Finally, two faculty, Andrea Funk and Kelley Mauerma, have begun to master assessment. They conducted a formal assessment of one of the learning goals adopted by the faculty, *i.e.*, graduates will demonstrate competency in legal practice skills. They broke this learning goal down into four components: (1) Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct legal research; (2) Students will demonstrate the ability to conduct a faculty investigation; (3) Students will demonstrate the ability to interview, counsel, and negotiate on behalf of a client; (4) Students will demonstrate the ability to draft documents used in legal practice. For each component, they created a rubric with several criteria that defined student performance as exemplary, competent, developing or inadequate based on how well students performed on each component. These two faculty then individually evaluated student performances on each of these criteria and achieved an extremely high rate of inter-reliability. Overall their results indicated that students performed competently in Outcomes 1, 3 and 4, but not Outcome 2.^[1] Moreover, they identified 5 criterion within the 4 components upon which students needed improvement. The legal writing faculty have begun to discuss how to respond and reshape the writing program to improve student performance in this area.

This upcoming year the Assessment Committee will begin to assess the following Goals 1 and 5 and their corresponding learning outcomes:

1. Graduates will demonstrate knowledge of law and its role in society.
 - a. Outcome 1: In all courses, students will demonstrate an understanding of the terms, rules and principles of law.
 - b. Outcome 2: In doctrinal courses, students will read authority, identify the rules within the authority, and synthesize those rules into a logical framework for analysis.
 - c. Outcome 3: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the impact of legal rules on society and its various sub-groups.
2. Graduates will possess the requisite skills to recognize and resolve dilemmas in an ethical manner.
 - a. Outcome 1: Students will articulate the sources, structure and substance of law governing the ethics of the legal profession.
 - b. Outcome 2: When presented with a dilemma drawn from case-based or hypothetical facts, students will articulate the relevant and applicable ethical standards, apply those ethical standards and propose one or more resolutions that result in an ethical outcome.

Moreover, individual faculty will begin to develop formal rubrics to help them more deliberately and intentionally assess/grade their mid-term and final examinations.

B. Expanded efforts in the direct assessment of student learning at the College.

While Whittier College has been using indirect measures to assess student learning, such as the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS), and the WABASH National Study, our institution has been using direct assessment as evidence on student learning to improve our programs and practices. In our Departmental Reviews, faculty members analyze student work through the use of tests, papers and projects. For instance, the Music Department, which strives to actively engage students in the realities of the professional music through courses and/or internships. In 2009-2010 the faculty members created rubrics for each of their five objectives. With the aid of a paper, the faculty assessed objective 3 (demonstrate research techniques) using a rubric. The assessment of 28 students revealed that 90% of students either satisfactorily or significantly demonstrated exemplary or proficient work. Additionally, the department also assessed objective 3 with the aid of seven student presentations. The rubric included six criteria's: a) coherent, developed thesis; b) thesis is adequately supported and developed; c) presenter employs scholarly style; d) presenter incorporates, cites, and documents material from external sources, e) presenter is

aware of multiple perspectives on topic, and f) presenter is able to synthesize and organize ideas. A total of 39% of students showed exemplary work and 25% demonstrated proficient work.

Additionally, as a liberal arts college, Whittier has made a strong commitment to the 4 C's: Culture, Connection, Community, and Communication. Committees' composed of faculty and staff members have been charged with assessing the quality of our Liberal Education Curriculum. Prior to our CPR report measures had been in place to gather direct evidence about our student learning outcomes in Culture, Connection, and Community. For example, in the fall of 2010 the Assessment Committee (AC), charged with Culture, developed a set of vignettes and a rubric to assess the first outcome: Develop the capacity to recognize and differentiate multiple perspectives and interpretations of cultures. These vignettes and rubric were piloted in the spring of 2011. By fall 2011 the committee had decided on two vignettes and a rubric.

The Assessment Committee also conducted a focus group in the spring of 2012 with off-site Community Organizations (for-profit and non-profit organizations) working with Whittier students. The purpose of the focus group was to identify the different types of multiple perspectives Whittier College students' exhibit in the community (for-profit and non-profit organizations).

Another example is our assessment of Community which has been one of the charges of the Enrollment and Student Affairs Committee (ESAC). This investigation examines the effectiveness and impact of first year programs on student learning and retention. We have been collecting and carefully analyzing retention and student engagement data since 2006. Our data has been comprised of large scale analyses such as NSSE, Wabash and HEDS. This has allowed us to identify trends and make many changes based on evidence. With the help of the Wabash research team and Teagle Scholars we have developed a methodology for the EER that will allow us to answer our research questions. For this examination we plan to collect data from a sample of students using student identifiers to enable us to look at factors in relationship to each other. We will examine the students' incoming attributes, academic experiences, attitudes and perceptions and then their academic performance including their performance in our first year writing program. As stated, the first year program consists of Freshman Writing, Linked Courses, Living Learning Communities and Freshman Advising. Freshman Writing Seminars at Whittier College introduce students to Whittier's writing program. Whittier College's Writing Program director devised a portfolio system to assess the effectiveness of freshman writing and writing intensive classes directly. This past academic year (2011-2012), the Director of the Writing Program, along with his colleagues, invited faculty teaching the Freshman Writing seminar to participate in his yearly assessment. A total of eight faculty volunteered to participate with an average of 100 freshman writing students. One paper from each student was included in the portfolio. Four readers were selected and trained to do the evaluation. The criteria in the evaluative rubric emerged from focus group discussions led by the writing director and involving faculty from all areas of the campus (with exception of natural science).

During the current academic year (2012-2013) the committee plans to assess the Culture outcomes by collecting a series of essays from Culture Courses within the last year. Faculty members will be identified to score the essays based on the outcomes: develop the capacity to recognize, differentiate, and interpret multiple perspectives across cultures; define and discuss the dimensions of culture and identify the connections between themselves and others in relation to physical, historical, social, and global contexts; apply theories, principles, and practices to contemporary and/or historical cultures; analyze ways cultures influence each other; and explain and challenge their own cultural narratives about the world.

C. Building a robust institutional research and assessment capability.

C.1 Assessment Capability.

As Whittier's Proposal for Reaccreditation noted (and the CPR Team affirmed), the College has built a substantial assessment capability since our last accreditation visit in 2002. The language of assessment has become ingrained in campus culture. This culture is supported by a structure of support that includes staff directly assigned to

assessment as well as a standing faculty Assessment Committee. The Administration gave concrete support to assessment by naming an Associate Dean in 2006 whose responsibilities explicitly include assessment (half-time), as well as the First-Year Program. Additionally, a grant-supported Associate Director of Assessment position (at 30 hours per week) provided direct support for the College's efforts. The Assessment staff, together with the Faculty Assessment Committee, developed a comprehensive plan for assessment that began that year. Additionally, the College has integrated learning outcomes into programmatic reviews, and Whittier uses both indirect and direct measures in seeking to assess the effectiveness of the academic programs.

Departmental and program assessments have been an important aspect of our assessment culture, and our Inventory ([Appendix III: Academic Department Self-Study](#)) shows that all departments have completed at least one round of program assessment. Academic departments were required to develop mission, goals, learning outcomes and curricular maps, and learning outcomes were reviewed and included in a formal 5-year report "Self Study" that was submitted to the Assessment Committee. Each department also was reviewed by an External Reviewer, and the entire process was reviewed and assessed by the Assessment Committee as well as the Dean of Faculty. In addition to departmental assessments, the Assessment Committee assesses the Liberal Education Program. Each year, they have focused on one of the "4Cs".

An interactive course web site was developed to both showcase and house assessment work, allowing departments to view each other's progress and provide a mechanism for the Assessment Committee to work on department level assessment with faculty from each department through the web site itself. Members of the Assessment Committee provide input on the development of learning outcomes and methodology for assessing the outcomes, and they help in analyzing and interpreting data directly through the web site. A rubric was developed based on the WASC rubric on assessing learning outcomes. Each department's assessment project is "scored" based on the rubric.

Whittier College has concluded its third year of the Teagle Foundation's grant for Systematic Improvement in Student Learning. The two central goals stated in the 2008 proposal continue to be our focus. They are (1) the creation of an accessible institutional database for use by individual faculty, as well as academic and administrative departments and (2) the use of assessment to improve student learning. The College's Assessment Committee along with the Director of Assessment were able to make essential hires and develop working groups within the institution to accomplish this goal. These included hiring an Associate Director of Assessment, contracting the services of Darnell Cole PhD, a higher education professional with an expertise in evaluating diversity related impacts. Darnell is a faculty member at USC and an Assessment Expert associated with a Wabash/Teagle Project, and contracting program writers directly from Argos/Banner to develop reports. Whittier College worked with Envisions, an Argos consulting company, to develop the capacity to run Argos reports. In all, the college has developed several dozen Argos reports across campus. The reports are being used to look at gateway courses, grade distribution, student demographics, course offerings over time, enrollment, and many other items. There are also modules which enable us to examine critical areas of our first-year programs, including writing seminars, using data derived from Argos. The data allows us to run comparisons of students in the same courses such as, for example, athletes vs. non-athletes and provisional students vs. non-provisional. The Assessment Team also held a faculty workshop on creating rubrics. Participating faculty listened to workshop presentations and then worked together to develop and test grading rubrics for courses. As a result, faculty had solid grading rubrics in place for the beginning of the academic year.

In 2006, Whittier became one of 19 who participated in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Colleges (WNSLAC). Today there are 49 institutions that include liberal arts colleges, regional universities, research universities, community colleges, as well as both private and public, religiously-affiliated, single-sex, and minority-serving institutions. The study investigated factors that affected the intellectual and practical outcomes of a liberal education. The study surveyed incoming freshman in 2006 and followed them through the course of their four years at their respective institutions. According to the findings our students can expect to engage in moral reasoning, critical thinking, socially responsible leadership, need for cognition, psychological well-being, universality-diversity awareness, political & social involvement, openness to diversity/challenge, positive attitudes

toward literacy, contribution to the arts, contribution to the sciences, and academic motivation ([see Appendix III: WABASH Summary Report](#)).

C.2. Institutional Research.

Like many liberal arts colleges, Whittier has only recently built its Institutional Research group. Given the small size and financial constraints of our institution, we feel we have built an IR group that functions well for us. However, faculty and other staff support is limited, and the recent budget has identified salary and benefits for a person dedicated to IR and Assessment. The plan is to begin advertising for this person in early 2013.

From the 1980s through the early 1990s, Whittier's IR work was divided up and assigned to several different faculty members. By the early 1990s, these responsibilities were assumed by the registrar. The primary focus during the earlier years was studying retention and graduation and preparation of the college *Factbook*. The responsibilities expanded somewhat when the college joined the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS), though most of the reports generated through HEDS participation were little-used on campus. When the Registrar left the college in 1998, these duties were assigned to a mathematician (Dr. Fritz Smith) who was also serving as the Associate Dean for Liberal Education.

When Dr. Smith was appointed Associate Dean of Faculty in 2001, the position included time to spend on data issues, and he began to provide support for assessment and Institutional Research that was directed especially at modeling enrollment. With the hiring of a ¾-time Assessment person, most of the assessment work for the College was re-assigned, and the Associate Dean's IR responsibilities became much more focused.

His IR responsibilities include:

- Providing retention and graduation rate studies for the president, senior staff, and faculty committees.
- Providing the same group as above with short and long-term enrollment modeling, both long-term and short-term.
- Serve as the IPEDS keyholder. This involves ensuring that the various offices on campus get their data in on time as well as being responsible for the integrity of the data.
- Preparing or coordinating data reports for other outside entities such as the AAUP and US News as well as other survey organizations.
- Providing data to HEDS and disseminating HEDS reports to appropriate offices around campus.
- Organizing the annual Factbook (and now getting it online).
- Working with the assessment people on surveys like the NSSE and the HEDS Senior Survey.
- Providing whatever sorts of data are needed for institutional and departmental assessment and for the WASC effort, and for academic and administrative departments when they need institutional data. He also provides data analyses for various individuals on campus as needed.

Though Dr. Smith serves as the College's identifiable IR person, in actuality, several other offices on campus regularly generate data for their offices and for senior staff for long-term planning and assessment purposes, and serve as an "IR Team." These include Eric Boteilho, the data person in admissions and financial aid, LindaSue Nibbe, the data person in advancement, and Law School Associate Dean Judith Daar when Law data is needed for reports on this campus. In addition, the Registrar also helps with the data generating process.

The plan is for the new hire is that he or she will serve as as the College's Director of Assessment and Institutional Research, gradually assuming some of Dr. Smith's IR duties. As the "team approach" has worked well for the college, the new hire will be expected to coordinate these functions and ensure better utilization for faculty and staff.

[\[1\]](#) Professors Funk and Mauerman have published this study and have presented their work at several conferences.

Conclusion: Integrative Essay

From the beginning of the reaffirmation process, Whittier College has aspired to learn about itself and to use best practices for institutional learning. Whittier began the discussions for our next WASC review during the 2006-7 academic year, and the process as it evolved was a collaborative effort that included the entire campus. We have learned much during this process, and this collaborative process has continued throughout the last six years. On the outside, service on WASC Visiting Committees and the WASC workshops proved very useful. President Herzberger demonstrated her commitment to the accreditation process with service on two WASC Visiting Review Teams (October of 2007 and March of 2009) and the Dean of the Faculty, VPAA served on a Visiting Team in October of 2006. The college recognized the value of the WASC conferences--in the fall of 2007, the college sent the chair of the College's faculty assessment committee, the Associate Dean for the First Year Experience and Assessment, the Dean of Students, the Director of the Library, and the Dean of the Faculty attended a 2008 workshop, and in 2009, the President's Executive Assistant and the Associate Dean, together with two faculty attended another conference and workshop.

Examples of the college's commitment to institutional analysis, benchmarking, assessment, as well as the use of evidence-based decision making, planning and budgeting have been demonstrated throughout this report. Assessment expertise among faculty and administrators, more specifically, has increased immensely in the last 5 years through both training and practice. The college not only has the dedication of its faculty to sustain assessment, it is also well organized administratively. This year, we will establish an office of Institutional Research and Assessment that will report directly to the Dean of the College. The move will keep leadership for assessment on campus within Academic Affairs, while also providing a focal point for the College's distributed model of Institutional Research. The Law School has undertaken a substantial Assessment Program that reflects its commitment to access and to student learning. Outcomes-based assessment will continue to be part of regular operations, and it will help to track the progress of the college's new strategic goals as articulated by the 2015 Positioning Plan.

To bring the elements of our essays to a close, we review our progress using the WASC educational effectiveness rubric that examines the integration of capacity and effectiveness in relation to student and institutional learning. The following is an overview of where we place ourselves in regard to the specific educational effectiveness framework criteria.

1. Learning

A. *Student learning outcomes.* SLOs are well established, but also published, communicated, and in use. Most departments, including Student Services, include and publish SLOs. In addition, SLOs are used to justify changes to the curriculum and for decision-making for non-academic programs. They are also built into the budget modeling. As a result, Whittier probably ranks very near to "highly developed." At the Law School, where such assessment began much later, the label would be "emerging."

B. *Expectations.* The College takes seriously that high expectations for student learning are explicit. Most--but not all--programs communicate expectations about achievement levels related to learning outcomes. For the College, the high expectations are "highly developed." The School of Law is still working to build achievement levels into its assessment system. We believe that "developed" is an accurate description.

C. *Assessment.* "Developed" best characterizes the College progress at this stage as assessment plans exist for every program (academic and co-curricular) and assessment occurs on regular schedules using multiple methods. The program review rotation and the archives are available on the Moodle website, which demonstrates the consistency of the scheduled assessment and the openness of the results. Some programs are still considered "emerging" but the majority range from "developed" to "highly developed."

D. *Level of achievement.* This level of achievement category has variability but is "highly developed." We understand that while Whittier College has high entrance standards, a highly personable educational environment, and strong persistence and high graduation rates, these are not measures of achievement levels. Our benchmarking with our WABASH results show that in terms of alignment where expectations are communicated and achievement is assessed, we know that nearly all students achieve at or above levels set by our institution. Most faculty and other campus educators discuss assessment findings periodically, and we are particularly proud that our Latino students achieve at rates well above national norms.

2. Teaching/Learning Environment

A. *Educational experience aligned with outcomes.* "Well Developed" best characterizes our progress in this area because the educational experience is generally aligned with learning outcomes and expectations for student achievement. Alignment is becoming intentional, systematic, supported by tools (e.g. curriculum maps) and processes. In particular, the new Ad Hoc Faculty Committee "Committee on the Future of the Liberal Arts" is furthering our assessment results with its study the following issues

- The need for students to take ownership of their academic path at Whittier College.
- The need for career-minded preparation and information literacy with regards to majors/minors in connection to our curriculum.
- The use of high impact academic practices.
- The need to clearly articulate what high impact practices and high expectations (rigor/challenge) are to faculty.

B. *Curricular and co-curricular processes.* These processes have recently emerged as "well developed" and working towards "highly developed" as they are regularly informed by good learning practices. Faculty and staff regularly attend conferences and workshops to stay current and also to share their experience with improvements that emerge from scholarly reflection on outcomes and assessment findings. Both curricular and co-curricular processes fully participate and engage at this level.

C. *Professional development.* Faculty development processes are clear in their support for faculty and staff to develop expertise in assessing student learning. Faculty Personnel processes provide clear and detailed feedback for progress to tenure and promotion, and extensive funding has been made available for professional development in this area. In terms of the reward structure, we are in the "Well Developed Stage" for faculty, since tenure and promotion do assess student learning.

3. Organizational Learning

A. *Indicators of educational effectiveness.* Whittier College is not only to assessing the impact of our curricular and co-curricular programming on student learning, but also to using such data to improve our students' learning experiences. With the strong support of faculty and administrative leadership, we have institutionalized data collection and assessment procedures to provide us with a consistent look at how we are evolving, meeting problems head on, and facing up to new challenges. We have summaries of key indices with the Board of Trustees to enhance their role as governors and in providing oversight to our efforts.

Our commitment to the importance of useful assessment is indicated in many ways, among them our participation in national and state assessment efforts like the ongoing National Survey of Student Engagement, the Wabash Study of National Liberal Arts Education, and the California Diversity Scorecard Project. Understanding how Whittier College can contribute to and benefit from such efforts is part of our prevailing institutional ethos.

An award from the Teagle Foundation in 2009 enabled us to obtain Argos, which is an Operational DataStore/Reporting Datamart that is designed to be used with the Banner system of institutional data management. It can take data from different types of databases and relate them to each other. Argos has proved to be a very efficient way for administrative offices all over campus to share information—which is what we, and other institutions, want to do to gain a better understanding of how student learning is progressing.

The Associate Dean charged with oversight of Institutional Research collects and makes available extensive reports on strategic indicators and trends, based on survey results, information submitted to IPEDS or *US News & World Report*, critical economic and operational indicators, or interests of the staff and trustees. His analyses of student retention and persistence are crucial for budget planning, dovetailing with IR data from Admissions. He is responsible for the Fact Book and Common Data Set. Good use is made of the databases, search features, and peer analysis tools of IPEDS, *US News*, HEDS, and other online sources. HEDS and AICUP reports, with data on individual peer institutions, are shared with an understanding of confidentiality, hence are made available only to administrators for whom they are relevant.

In the administrative ranks,

- Human Resources Office regularly monitors job category information and provides an overall assessment of how the institution compares to similar institutions in terms of salary, benefits, and overall staffing. This office also supervises the annual employee evaluation process.
- Our Facilities Management Group (Sodexo Corporation) and our Business offices conduct regular benchmarking against peers on levels of service, staffing, and costs. This information has proved to be especially important for budget planning—both for capital and for deferred maintenance needs.
- The Business Office and Development Office both rely on industry standards (e.g., audits) and institutional priorities and financial targets as a means for setting short- and long-term goals, and in assessing progress towards those goals.
- The Admissions Office of the College sets enrollment goals based on and in support of the College's financial targets, as well as responding to strategic goals related to the College's Mission. Their success is measured not just by absolute quantitative standards (did the numbers of matriculated students meet the targets) but also in the quality of students enrolled, and in the plans used to recruit and retain these students. The Admissions Office's strategies and actions plan deliberately integrates recruitment activities with annual financial and enrollment goals.
- The Division of Student Life plays an important role in reinforcing the mission of the College. Each year the Division of Student Life engages in a process of self-assessment and reflection for the upcoming year. This process lays the foundation for yearly foci that are designed to align our work with the College's mission and vision for the future. The Division's annual goals and objectives emphasize student learning as a primary outcome—specifically persona, social, professional and leadership development. Imbedded is the importance of assessment as a means to measure student learning and improve delivery of programs and services. As our mission stresses, the importance of strengthening partnerships with the faculty, academic departments, alumni, community members, families and students is emphasized each year. Each department within Student Life is charged with the responsibility of developing annual objectives that support the goals of the division. During the annual personnel evaluation process, each objective is reviewed. Further, each department is expected to share one assessment project with the rest of the division at bi-weekly team meetings. Assessments are posted on Moodle and are used as a means to continually improve our teaching and learning environment. Goal-setting activities are guided by the results of assessment activities, and the extent to which goals are achieved factors into the administrative review process at the end of each academic year.

- In athletics, the department collects data and conducts reviews in a number of areas related to program excellence including recruitment, retention, academic performance of student-athletes (team and individual), graduation rate (team and individual), success of programs in relation to similar institutions, and the overall student-athlete experience. In addition, a core component of the athletics program assessment is the use of data submitted to the NCAA and the reports generated from the NCAA. This aspect of assessment is very much supported by the involvement of our faculty athletic representatives (FARs).

B. Formal program review. The program review system is consistent across the College and represents an area where we have made substantial progress since the last WASC Review. The assessment system for program review is “highly developed” but the application by programs varies and is thus primarily “well developed.” The review system is systematic, consistent, employed at the program curricular level, and connected to budgeting processes for the College.

C. Collection and analysis of performance data. Similar to program review, collection and analysis of data are “highly developed.” The systems for disaggregating and disseminating important information have been enhanced and refined by OIE and made available via the Internet. This has made possible consistent use by decision-making bodies for program improvement.

However, the analysis and use of data by programs also has variability and is thus generally “well developed.”

D. Culture of inquiry and evidence. Through the diligent efforts of an engaged faculty we have been able to produce the steady, sure, and positive movement presented throughout this report. In general, the faculty and administration of the College demonstrate a broad understanding of and sincere support for a culture of inquiry and “Well Developed” is the best descriptor for our status in this category.

E. Communication and transparency. Because data, findings, and analyses from assessment of student learning are available electronically to all of the community, “developed” best describes our communication and transparency. Garnering greater interest in a culture of assessment will be central to our becoming more “highly developed.”

The overarching theme of our educational effectiveness narrative has been steady, significant progress. Although we are understandably proud of what we have accomplished through our collective efforts, we also realize that a highly developed assessment culture requires on-going coordinated processes. We are a community where individuality is valued, tolerance is cherished, and the things that make each of us unique are seen as invaluable tools in seeking greater knowledge and understanding. The success of our students has always rested at the very heart of our mission, and thus we remain fully dedicated to assessing student learning; collecting and applying data in innovative ways; changing to meet our students’ needs; and working together to create a community that will equip students to be active citizens and effective communicators who embrace diversity and act with integrity.