Idaho State University

2024 Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report

Idaho State University

August 2024

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Introduction

For more than 120 years, Idaho State University (ISU) has been transforming the lives of students across Idaho, the nation, and the world. Founded in 1901 on the traditional lands of the Shoshone and Bannock peoples in Pocatello, the Institution extends educational access and opportunity to a diverse population of students and strives to build an inclusive community among those drawn to its five campuses as well as its online programs. ISU engages students through learning and research opportunities that improve the intellectual vigor, cultural vitality, and health of communities at the main campus in Pocatello; at other Idaho locations in Meridian, Idaho Falls, and Twin Falls; and in Anchorage, Alaska.

ISU is a Carnegie-classified high research activity, doctorate-granting university that offers exceptional academic opportunities in more than 250 programs across seven colleges. From technical education certificates and associate degrees to doctoral degrees and post-graduate fellowships, ISU's programs provide cutting-edge research and innovative solutions in fields including the health professions, nuclear research, natural resources, teaching, humanities, engineering, performing and visual arts, technology, biological sciences, pharmacy, and business.

ISU is the state's designated lead institution in health professions, medical education, and biomedical research, and ISU's Skaggs Health Science Center in Meridian is adjacent to the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine, Idaho's only medical school and a strong partner in health science education.

ISU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), and its most recent affirmation of accreditation occurred in 2021 after submitting a comprehensive Year Seven Self-Study and undergoing a full review, including an external evaluation visit. ISU received two commendations and two recommendations. These recommendations are addressed in the addenda to this report.

Since this reaffirmation, ISU has adopted an ambitious and aspirational Strategic Plan and, in January 2024, welcomed Dr. Robert W. Wagner as its fourteenth President. This Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report details the progress that ISU has made in fulfilling its mission, strengthening student achievement, and furthering the continuous quality improvement of its programs.

President Robert W. Wagner

Mission Fulfillment

Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Framework

In 2023, ISU implemented a new Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Framework, designed to support and further the University's mission. This integrated framework forms the basis for ongoing and systematic assessment, adaptation, accreditation, and improvement. The Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee is responsible for fostering a culture of continuous quality improvement at ISU through the implementation of this framework.

Figure 1 - Framework Planning & Institutional Effectiveness

University Strategic Plan

ISU's updated Mission, Vision, and 2023–2027 Strategic Plan were approved by the Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE) in June 2022. The Strategic Plan articulates a clear set of meaningful goals, objectives, and performance measures, providing overarching direction for unit and cross-functional planning efforts at the University.

With the adoption of this plan, the University phased out the use of Core Themes; all planning and institutional effectiveness efforts are now directed toward the Strategic Plan and NWCCU accreditation standards.

In Spring 2024, the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee reviewed and updated ISU's 2023-2027 strategic plan objectives and performance measures to (1) align with Mission Fulfillment Measures; (2) reflect SBOE system-wide measures; and (3) focus on meaningful measurable outcomes.

Mission

We engage students through learning and research opportunities that improve the intellectual vigor, cultural vitality, and health of our communities.

Vision

We inspire a passion for knowledge and discovery.

Values

Integrity – *Honesty in our actions and words*
Community – *Fostering connections*
Inclusivity – *Valuing all and building a culture of belonging*
Teamwork – C*ollaborating with compassion and respect*
Shared Responsibility – *All contributing to our success*
Learning – *Continuous growth and development*

Goals

Increase Student Access, Opportunity, Retention, and Success

We build a diverse and thriving student population by providing all students with the tools, opportunities, and environment to support their goals, learning, and achievement.

Strengthen Programmatic Excellence

Programmatic excellence is at the core of student achievement. The University continually evolves to meet workforce demands and recruit, retain, and support highly qualified faculty and staff. We allocate resources to strengthen programs and opportunities focused on student achievement and success.

Cultivate External Partnerships

We contribute to the betterment of all communities through strong collaborations and partnerships. The University will continue to foster existing beneficial partnerships and build new associations that advance Idaho State's mission.

Expand Research, Clinical, and Creative Activities

We change lives for the better by expanding our research, clinical, and creative activities. We focus on increasing human knowledge, serving the needs of society, and supporting artistic ventures.

Energize the Bengal Community

We engage and build strong relationships with all members of the Bengal Community to achieve academic success and innovation, advance learning and research, and enhance lives. The Bengal Community includes students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members, friends, and partners who engage with the University and support its success.

Figure 2 - Strategic Planning Goals Poster

University Planning

Project Charters and Institutional Plans address priority needs and opportunities for improving the University and achieving the Mission and Strategic Plan. These cross-functional efforts range from short-term to multi-year initiatives.

Unit, program, and department-level plans support ISU's strategic and institutional plans by articulating and operationalizing priorities, needs, and improvements at the program and service level. These efforts include all academic programs, which are assessed annually in accordance with NWCCU standards 1.C.1–1.C. 7 and SBOE Policy III.X. The process is both continuous and systematic, as evidenced by annual program reviews, seven-year self-studies for programs without specialized accreditation, and external reviews for programs with specialized accreditation. The Programmatic Assessment section of this report details these efforts.

Assessment activities are further supported by the ISU Program Health process which aligns with SBOE Policy V.B.11 and requires all Idaho higher education institutions to incorporate program prioritization into the annual budgeting and program review process and to provide annual updates to the Board. SBOE Policy III.F outlines the requirements for program prioritization, including criteria, timelines, and reporting requirements.

Alongside these academic processes, non-instructional units at ISU participate in a separate five-year strategic planning process of Administrative and Support Unit Review (ASUR). Annual updates provide a mechanism for units to assess progress toward established goals, objectives, and performance outcomes, and provide substantive opportunities for adjustments to their five-year plans as applicable. The ASUR structure provides a meaningful and efficient strategic planning process for non-academic units by combining planning, program review, program prioritization, and five-year review processes. This construct serves as the unit's strategic plan while also satisfying external SBOE and NWCCU reporting requirements.

Resource allocation in support of these strategic and institutional plans follows ISU's budget model and annual budget development process.

Strategic Plan Performance Measures

ISU's Strategic Plan Performance Measures provide detailed longitudinal data and benchmarks associated with Strategic Plan goals and objectives in alignment with SBOE policy.

These Performance Measures are reported annually to the SBOE. While the term of ISU's strategic plan does not change, the SBOE requires the University to present an annual Performance Measure Report with a five-year look ahead for benchmarks.

Mission Fulfillment Performance Measures

ISU's Mission Fulfillment Measures reflect the University's performance in nine key areas of institutional mission, each with specific fulfillment criteria that align with ISU's Strategic Plan. These performance measures are reported annually to the SBOE and published in an online dashboard:

- Fall-to-Fall Retention
- Gateway Math Completion
- Six Year Graduation Rate (150% Degree Completion)
- Degrees and Certificates Awarded
- Research Expenditures
- Foundation Fundraising
- Health Clinic and Pharmacy Visits
- Continuing Education, Professional Development, and Workforce Training Enrollment
- Cost of Attendance Covered by Grant or Scholarship Aid

ISU defines Mission Fulfillment as meeting or exceeding benchmarks for at least seven of the nine Mission Fulfillment measures *and* having plans in place for improving any areas where benchmarks are not met.

ISU is currently meeting or exceeding benchmarks for eight of the nine measures and has a plan in place (discussed in the Student Achievement section of this report) for improving degree completion. **Accordingly, ISU is fulfilling its Mission.** These results can be reviewed and explored in detail through ISU's publicly available, online Mission Fulfillment: Reflection and Goals Dashboard (similar to the image below).
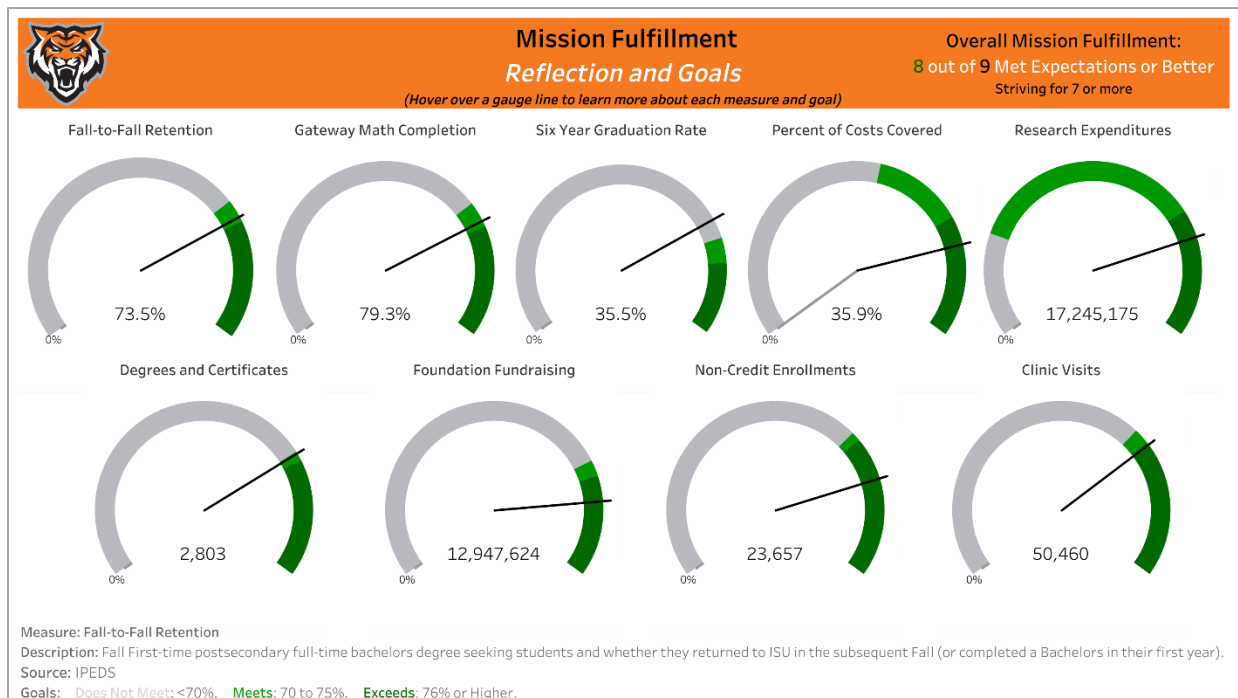
Figure 3 – Mission Fulfillment: Reflection and Goals Dashboard

Student Achievement

Student Achievement Measures

ISU's Student Achievement Measures include a subset of the Mission Fulfillment Measures along with additional measures for first semester GPA, persistence, and postgraduation success:

- Fall-to-Fall Retention
- First Semester 2.5+ GPA
- Gateway Math Completion
- Persistence
- Six Year Graduation Rate (150% Degree Completion)
- Degrees and Certificates Awarded
- Postgraduation Success

These Student Achievement Measures along with the Mission Fulfillment Measures can be reviewed and explored in detail through ISU's publicly available, online Student Achievement and Mission Fulfillment: Performance Measures dashboard (similar to the image below). This dashboard allows for disaggregation by age, gender, Pell Grant recipient status, first-generation student status, and race/ethnicity.
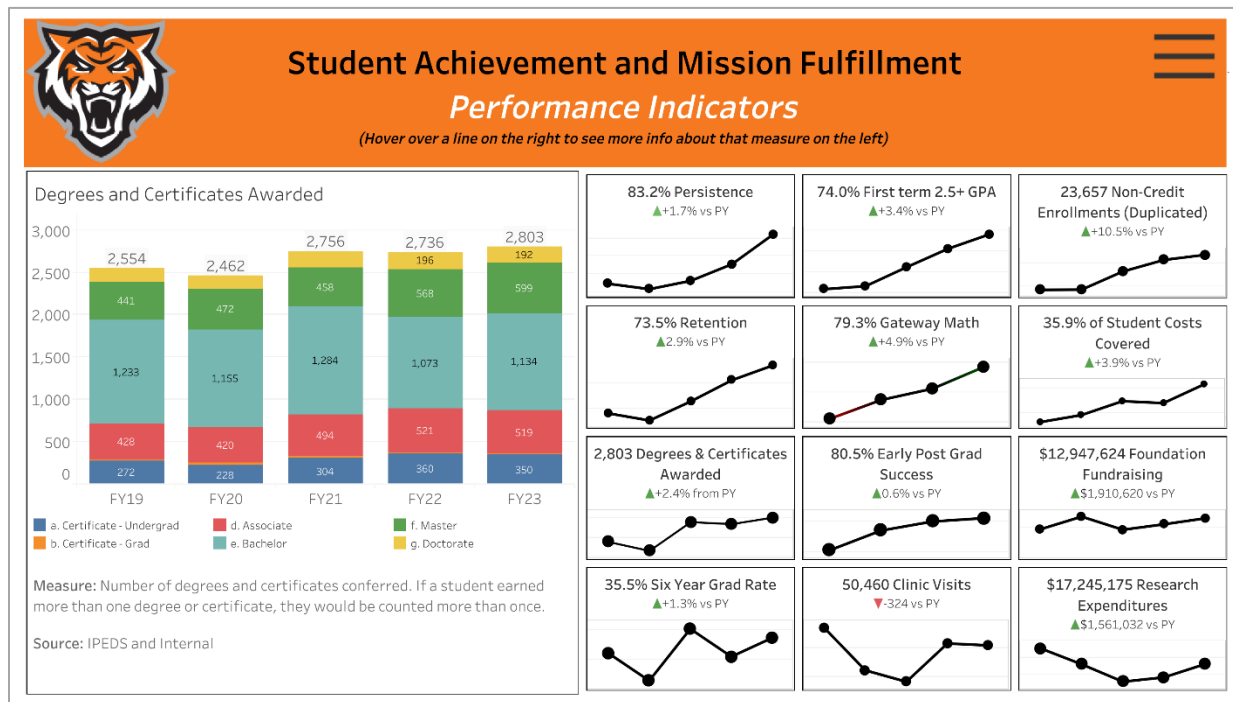

Figure 4 – Student Achievement and Mission Fulfillment: Performance Indicators Dashboard

Fall-to-Fall Retention

ISU's Fall-to-Fall Retention measure reports the percentage of Fall, first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who either return in the subsequent Fall or complete a bachelor's degree in their first year.

Over the past several years, ISU has demonstrated substantial progress for this measure, with the Fall-to-Fall retention rate improving from 64% for students returning in Fall 2019 to 74% for students returning in Fall 2023. Moreover, these rates have been improving for almost all demographic categories. For example, for students identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native, the retention rate has improved from 52% for students returning in Fall 2019 to 60% for students returning in Fall 2023. For students identifying as Black or African American, the retention has improved from 67% to 80% during this same period, and for students identifying as Hispanic or Latino, the retention rate has improved from 70% to 73%. A similar pattern of improvement can be seen for first-generation students as well as for students receiving Pell Grants.

Both female and male students have demonstrated improved retention rates, although female students have been consistently retained at slightly higher levels. Further multivariate analysis of retention rates across demographic categories suggests that much of the variance among these different rates is related to high school GPA, which itself varies across demographic categories. One interpretation of this is that, in recent years, ISU has made substantial progress in increasing retention rates for all students while also recognizing that students arrive at ISU with varying degrees of academic preparation and strength, which ultimately affect their probability of being retained.

The substantial progress that ISU has made with retention is likely the direct result of campus-wide efforts by the University to become more student-centric and to intentionally support student success through multiple initiatives. Along these lines, ISU has invested in two key programs that have made the retention of first-year students a top priority. First, in 2020, ISU began requiring that all new first-time undergraduate students participate in New Student Orientation (NSO) during the Summer before starting at ISU in the Fall. This program has helped to better introduce students to the University and to educate them about the resources and support available to them. Over the last few years, NSO has continued to become even more effective, while the focal point of meeting with an academic advisor for registration in support of a successful academic and social transition has remained at the core of the program.

A second investment that has contributed to ISU's increased retention rates has been the adoption of ISU Navigate. Navigate is an early alert and predictive analytics platform that ISU uses to identify students who are struggling early in their first semester. Corresponding to the adoption of Navigate, ISU has also invested heavily in professional academic advisors who implement a proactive approach to academic success. Together, these initiatives and investments are helping ensure that ISU systematizes retention as a top priority. As an indicator of the success of these efforts, ISU's increased retention rate has moved the Institution forward in comparison to its peers. As can be seen in the Peer Institution Review dashboard, ISU's retention rate was among the lowest in its peer group in 2019 but had improved toward the middle of this group by 2022.

First Semester 2.5+ GPA and Gateway Math Completion

In addition to retention, ISU uses three other measures to gain insight into student achievement as students progress toward graduation. The first two of these track closely together: (1) the percentage of Fall, first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who earn a 2.5+ GPA in their first semester; and (2) the percentage of Fall, first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students retained into their second year, who have completed their Gateway (general education, major specific) math course by the end of their second year. Both of these measures are important to ISU because further multivariate analysis indicates that students who earn a 2.5+ GPA during their first semester are more likely to be retained to their second year, and students who complete their Gateway math course within their first two years are more likely to graduate within six years.

The percentage of first-time students who earned a 2.5+ GPA during their first semester has increased from 61% for the Fall 2019 cohort to 74% for the Fall 2023 cohort. While female students continue to have a higher likelihood of obtaining a 2.5+ GPA as compared to male students, the difference is narrowing as both groups steadily improve. In addition, substantial gains can be seen both for first-generation students and for students receiving Pell Grants. During the 2019 to 2023 period, the former group improved from 49% to 65%, while the latter group improved from 54% to 67%. Similar patterns of improvement can also be seen for most race/ethnicity groups.

Progress has also been made in the percentage of students who complete their Gateway math course within their first two years. For the Fall 2018 cohort, 71% completed their Gateway math course within this time frame. This number increased to 79% for the Fall 2021 cohort. Although female students have a consistently higher completion rate of their Gateway math course as compared to male students, both groups have been steadily improving. In addition, substantial gains can be seen both for first-generation students and for students receiving Pell Grants. Between the Fall 2018 cohort and the Fall 2021 cohort, the former group improved from 65% to 73%, while the latter group improved from 62% to 77%. Similar patterns of improvement can also be seen for some race/ethnicity groups.

These improvements in the percentages of students who receive a 2.5+ GPA and who complete their Gateway math course within two years are the result of the strong focus ISU has placed on student success over the past few years. Moreover, this student-centric emphasis is not only resulting in these specific student achievement gains, but ISU further expects that these successes will soon be reflected in graduation rates as well.

Persistence

An additional measure that ISU uses to show student progress toward graduation is persistence. For ISU, persistence is defined as the percentage of all Fall bachelor's degree-seeking students who either return in the subsequent Fall or complete a degree during the year. As can be seen in the Student Achievement and Mission Fulfillment: Performance Measures dashboard, Fall-to-Fall persistence increases substantially as students progress from being Freshmen to Sophomores to Juniors to Seniors. At the same time, in the last few years, the

average persistence rate across all students has increased slightly from the 2018 to 2019 average of 81% to the 2022 to 2023 average of 83%. Additionally, ISU expects that some of the recent gains in Freshmen retention (as described above) will likely produce further average persistence gains in the years ahead.

When disaggregated by demographic categories, the dashboard shows that female students and older students have slightly higher persistence rates, and while there is some variation among race/ethnicity groups, most of these measures are moving in the right direction. Of particular note, the most recent overall persistence rates for first-generation students (80%) and for students receiving Pell Grants (82%) are now very close to that of all students (83%).

Six-Year Graduation Rate (150% Degree Completion)

One measure of student achievement where ISU has consistently been lower than most of its peers is the six-year graduation rate for first-time, bachelor's degree-seeking students. For the Fall 2011 cohort, 29% graduated within six years, and while this has improved somewhat in the most recently available data to 36% (for the Fall 2018 cohort), ISU still lags behind most of its peers.

When disaggregated by gender, this pattern continues relative to ISU's peers. Although female students have higher graduation rates (38% for the Fall 2018 cohort) as compared to male students (32% for the Fall 2018 cohort), both groups continue to lag behind their corresponding peers at other universities.

Disaggregation by other demographic categories reveals further equity gaps. While ISU's six-year graduation rate for all students in the Fall 2018 cohort was 36%, substantial race/ethnicity disparities can be seen for students identifying as American Indian/Alaskan Native (17%), Asian (62%), Black/African American (18%), Hispanic/Latino (30%), and White/Non-Hispanic (37%). In addition, for the same cohort, only 27% of first-generation students and 27% of students receiving Pell Grants graduated within six years.

However, multivariate analysis provides a fuller picture. When controlling for various characteristics of students prior to their arrival at ISU, this analysis reveals that (similar to the effect on retention as described above) much of the variance in six-year graduation rates can be attributed to high school GPA, which itself varies substantially by demographic category. Thus, while ISU clearly acknowledges the need to improve graduation rates across all demographic categories, the Institution also recognizes that students arrive at ISU with varying degrees of academic preparation and strength, which ultimately affect their probability of graduating in a timely manner.

Nonetheless, ISU is optimistic that the recent improvements in Fall-to-Fall retention, first semester 2.5+ GPA, and Gateway math completion are together not only likely to improve overall graduation rates in the years ahead but also to help mitigate equity gaps in graduation rates across demographic categories. A reduction in these disparities can already be seen in the ongoing achievements of students making progress toward graduation. In addition, the Institution is also exploring several areas of targeted strategic action that are described in detail below in Next Steps as well as later in the Moving Forward section of this report.

Degrees and Certificates Awarded

An additional measure of student achievement is the total numbers of degrees and certificates awarded:
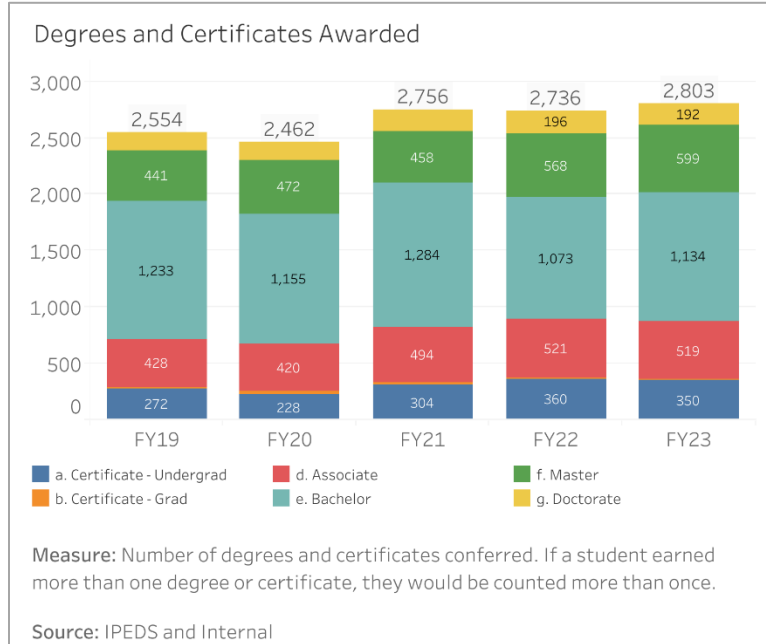
Figure 5 - Total Degrees and Certificates Awarded FY19-FY23

While there has been an overall increase in the past several years, two trends deserve further consideration. First, there has been a substantial increase in the number of degrees and certificates awarded to students identifying as Hispanic/Latino:
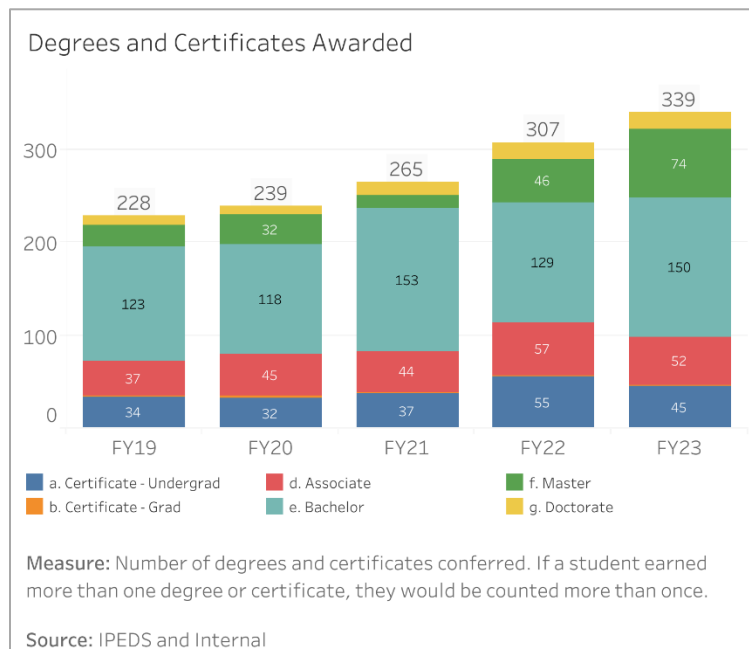
Figure 6 - Degrees and Certificates Awarded FY19-FY23 - Hispanic/Latino

13

Second, the number of degrees and certificates awarded to male students has declined:
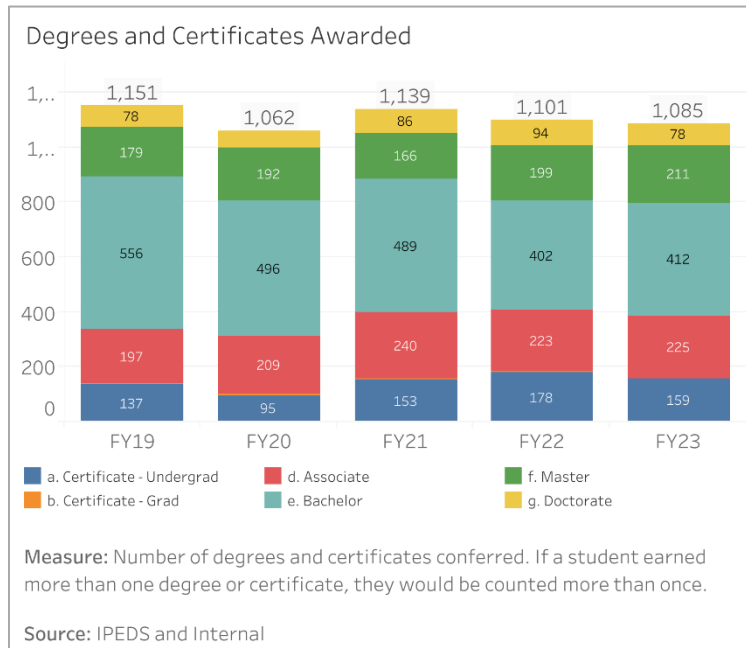
Figure 7 - Degrees and Certificates Awarded FY19-FY23 - Males

At the same time, the number of degrees and certificates awarded to female students has grown:
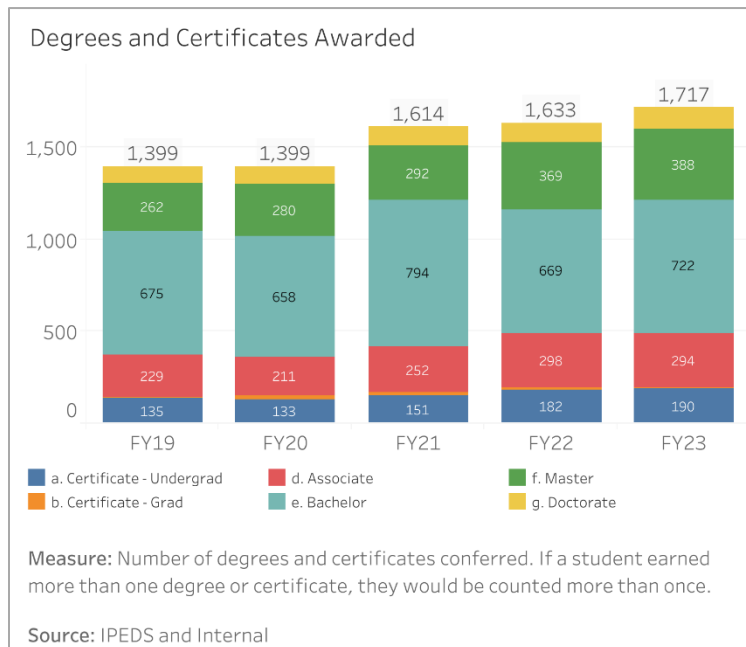
Figure 8 - Degrees and Certificates Awarded FY19-FY23 - Females

While these patterns need further analysis, the increase in the number of degrees and certificates awarded to students identifying as Hispanic/Latino suggests that ISU is making progress corresponding to the University's designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. In

support of this designation, ISU recently hosted a Hispanic Youth Leadership Summit (HYLS) and has expanded a new annual recruiting event called Rugir Con ISU that engages prospective Hispanic/Latino students and their entire families. For this event, ISU provides bilingual experts to explain information about the FAFSA and about scholarship opportunities and the admissions process.

The changes in the number of degrees and certificates awarded to male and female students do appear to be in line with broad shifts in higher education. However, these trends also suggest the potential need for initiatives and investments specifically focused on male students.

Postgraduation Success

The ISU Career Center uses the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) First-Destination Survey (FDS) to measure postgraduation success. The NACE FDS is the standard instrument for colleges and universities to acquire postgraduate data, and ISU follows the NACE standard six-month time frame to gather this information. The FDS survey is sent out one month before graduation, and follow-up surveys are sent out up to six months after graduation. Over the last five years, the average FDS response rate of 36% has been supplemented by Career Center staff with additional LinkedIn data in order to determine the official "knowledge rate." ISU uses this data to define postgraduation success as the percentage of graduates (any credential) who self-report as "working," serving in the "military," pursuing "continuing education," or "volunteering."

For students who graduated during fiscal year 2019, 75% had successful outcomes within six months of graduating. This measure increased to 81% for those who graduated during fiscal year 2022. When the findings are disaggregated by demographic categories, similar patterns can be seen for first generation students (73% to 77%), for students receiving Pell Grants (70% to 74%), for students identifying as American Indian/Alaskan Native (62% to 77%), and for both female (75% to 80%) and male (75% to 82%) students. In contrast, students identifying as Hispanic/Latino saw a slight decrease during this period (83% to 77%).


Attendees at the Career Fair hosted by the ISU Career Center

When compared to all institutions reporting NACE FDS data for 2022, ISU reported fewer graduates working (59%) as compared to the national average (64%). Instead,

ISU had a greater percentage of graduates continuing their education (21%) compared to the national average (19%), and a greater percentage of graduates still looking for employment (15%) compared to the national average (11%).

Strengths and Progress

In recent years, ISU has made substantial progress on Fall-to-Fall retention, first semester 2.5+ GPA, Gateway math completion, degrees and certificates awarded, and postgraduation success. Importantly, gains in these areas broadly apply across most demographic categories, and notably, achievement gaps between all students as compared to either first-generation or Pell Grant receiving students have substantially narrowed for some measures. In addition, there is good reason to expect that these gains are likely to soon be reflected in parallel improvements for ISU's measure of persistence as well as for six-year graduation rates.

As described above, much of this progress is attributable to initiatives such as New Student Orientation (NSO) and ISU Navigate as well as recruiting and support events such as the Hispanic Youth Leadership Summit (HYLS) and Rugir Con ISU. Together, these programs and initiatives show that ISU's investments in making the University more student-centric and in providing more support, both academically and socially, are clearly paying off. Student achievement measures at ISU are definitely moving in the right direction.

Challenges and Improvement

While ISU has much to celebrate in terms of student achievement, challenges and the need for improvement remain. Perhaps most critically, ISU's six-year graduation rate (36%) remains lower than those of many peer institutions, and increasing this rate must be a top priority for the Institution in the years ahead. In addition, equity gaps persist for some demographic categories, especially including race/ethnicity and gender.

As described above, multivariate analysis of some of these challenges suggests that some of these demographic disparities are strongly related to high school GPA. Accordingly, it is important to recognize that ISU's open admission practices propagate much of the variation that is found in the academic preparation and strength of high school students as well as of adult learners who continue their education at a later point. However, while acknowledging this reality, ISU remains committed to meeting the needs of all students and to supporting their success.

Next Steps

ISU will not only continue to invest in the successful programs and initiatives described above but will also continue to explore three areas of targeted strategic action.

First, in addition to current demographically-contextualized recruiting events such as the Hispanic Youth Leadership Summit (HYLS) and Rugir Con ISU, the University is investigating the development of further academic and social/cultural support programs that will work to increase persistence and graduation. Alongside the existing Bengal Bridge Program, which is especially focused on supporting first-generation, underrepresented, and underserved students,

ISU is exploring how the Student Success Center, Diversity Resource Center, Gender Resource Center, and Native American Student Services can each potentially offer additional programing and initiatives to support specific demographic groups.

Second, as an extension of initiatives such as New Student Orientation (NSO) and ISU Navigate, the University is looking to further develop and support professional advising services throughout students' undergraduate careers, especially during their junior and senior years as students also begin to interface with faculty advisors and program-level leadership. The idea here is that professional advisors would help guide students not only as they complete general education requirements but also as they complete major requirements, work toward graduation, and engage with additional resources such as the ISU Career Center on their path toward future employment and success. Adjacent to this increase in professional advising support, ISU has recently launched a new B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies that will further increase degree completion options, especially for adult learners with varied backgrounds and previous credits from multiple disciplines or majors.

Third, alongside the increased provision of professional advising services, ISU is also studying ways to increase faculty and program-level incentives and accountability for student success. Some of the proposed efforts include strengthening the relationship and communication between faculty and professional advising as well as prioritizing program-level reflection on topics such as optimal course sequencing and time to degree as well as enhanced internship and job-placement programs.

While by themselves, each of these initiatives is only part of the fuller picture, together these initiatives have the potential to equitably increase student success across all demographic groups, to improve ISU's overall graduation rate, and to prepare every student for postgraduation success.

ISU Ambassadors visit with students

Programmatic Assessment

Assessment Framework

Student learning outcomes are assessed annually in accordance with NWCCU standards 1.C.1−1.C.7 and SBOE Policy III.X. Consistent with ISU's Mission and Goal 2, student learning assessment is anchored within a framework of ongoing program review for continuous improvement. The process is both systematic and continuous as evidenced by annual program reviews, regular self-studies for programs without specialized accreditation, and external reviews for programs with specialized accreditation. The overarching goal of this process is to ensure continuous improvement of student learning and to enhance the overall quality of programs.

The assessment process supports and empowers faculty to gauge student learning and provides them opportunities to:

- Develop meaningful assessments for ongoing monitoring of student learning outcomes
- Document and guide continuous program improvement and curriculum delivery
- Evaluate the effectiveness of program assessment practices, reflect on program strengths, and identify aspects for improvement
- Implement action plans to enhance student learning

In addition, non-academic programs are also reviewed on a regular basis through the Administrative and Support Unit Review (ASUR) process. In accordance with NWCCU standards 1.B.1−1.B.4 and SBOE Policy III.F, ISU assesses non-academic programs that support the Institution's educational and student support mission. According to Policy III.F, both "instructional and non-instructional programs shall be evaluated . . . at least once every five years" (III.F.4−5). These assessment procedures represent a systematic and continuous process used to evaluate programs and services that align with and support the institutional mission.
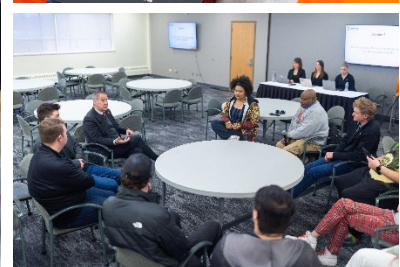
ASUR annual updates of non-academic programs provide crucial year-to-year information, helping facilitate units in conducting forthcoming five-year program prioritization reviews. These annual updates also serve as a mechanism for continuous improvement, inspiring changes, highlighting successes, and tracking advancement toward established goals, objectives, and performance outcomes.

Importantly, the success of these comprehensive assessment processes hinges on a shared and collective understanding between administrators and faculty that the primary purpose of assessment is to enrich students' educational experience and enhance their learning at ISU.

Principles of Assessment

Student learning assessment efforts are guided by the following principles:

Clarity - *Student learning outcomes are clearly stated.*

Faculty-Driven Design - *The formulation and directions of student learning outcomes are designed and led by faculty members.*

Equity and Inclusion - *Learning tasks are structured to ensure fairness and inclusivity for all students.*

Continuous Improvement - *Results derived from student learning outcomes are used to improve student learning and enhance program quality.*

Stakeholder Involvement - *Assessment practices and procedures are stakeholder-driven (administrators, faculty, students) to enhance student success.*

Examples of Continuous Improvement

A process of continuous improvement through programmatic assessment is exemplified in this report through three ISU programs. The first example is the B.A. in Psychology, which is an academic program assessed through the regular Academic Program Review (APR) process. The second example is the General Education Program, which while also an academic program, has its own specific General Education Program Review process. Finally, the third example is the Program for Instructional Effectiveness, which while providing support for academic programs across the University, is itself not an academic program and is thus assessed through the Administrative and Support Unit Review (ASUR) process.

Overarching analyses and integrative reflections are provided for these three examples below. In addition, each of these examples is described and assessed in detail within the three appendices of this report: Appendix 1 - Programmatic Assessment Example: The B.A. in Psychology; Appendix 2 - Programmatic Assessment Example: The General Education Program; and Appendix 3 - Programmatic Assessment Example: The Program for Instructional Effectiveness.

Program Review Process

All academic programs assess and review student learning outcomes annually and submit program review reports by November 1 each Fall semester. This annual Academic Program Review (APR) process also provides a pathway to a comprehensive seven-year self-study program review for improving both student learning and overall program quality. The General Education program has its own procedures that are similar to APR. ASUR, the non-academic program review process, shares key characteristics with academic program reviews, and these characteristics are included in the overall discussion. Specialized accreditation reviews are not included in this discussion.

Analyses

These three main types of program review, Academic Program Review (APR), General Education Program Review, and Administrative and Support Unit Review (ASUR), use similar processes but are at different stages of maturity. APR has been in place for a number of years and has undergone several updates. Until recently, APR was on a five-year cycle with no annual reports. It now follows a seven-year cycle that includes annual reports and a culminating review, in order to keep programs focused on their action plans throughout the entire cycle.

The General Education Program Review has been in place for many years and is currently in the middle of its second complete five-year cycle. It also requires a process that includes annual assessment reports as well as objective reviews and a comprehensive review. The non-academic program review process, ASUR, follows a five-year cycle with annual reports and has recently been updated to better meet the needs of non-academic units. While these three types of reviews vary in terms of length of assessment cycles, they all require annual reports, a consistent comprehensive program review cycle, and an external review process.

Faculty are charged with conducting APR and the General Education Program Review. They are engaged in assessment, and they use results to make improvements to curriculum and assessment processes. The General Education program assessment cycle is firmly established and reporting compliance is relatively high. Over the last five years, approximately 80% of students met expectations across all objectives. As an example within APR, the BA in Psychology program faculty are engaged in assessment and share results with the entire faculty in the department. Despite achieving satisfactory student performance, they have initiated several improvements to processes and curriculum. Furthermore, the Program for Instructional Effectiveness or PIE, a new non-academic program, has established performance goals and metrics and is collecting data based on its most recent program review.

Self-Assessment and Reflection

Each of these types of program review reveals strengths and weaknesses of current processes, and all need to increase incentives for meaningful participation. The APR of the BA in Psychology program describes a process in which the departmental assessment committee engages with the entire department faculty to create an action plan for improvement based on assessment results. The General Education program, meanwhile, needs to streamline processes

and offer university faculty more consistent guidelines and feedback to help improve their participation. PIE has metrics to evaluate the success of large events but recognizes a need to find a consistent process to evaluate smaller events. While assessment processes are in place for these three types of review, APR is further along in engaging participants. However, General Education and ASUR are making steady progress toward improvement.

Strengths and Progress

Curriculum changes, improvements in program quality, and updates to assessment processes demonstrate the strength of assessment across the Institution. The completion of one full 5-year assessment cycle in General Education drew attention to the need to streamline the process as well as the need to improve the clarity and consistency of instructions. The General Education Requirements Committee (GERC) made changes to guidelines and templates used by the faculty. The faculty themselves have reported changes in curriculum or in their own data collection processes as a result of analyzing assessment results. Commitment to assessment and the APR is strong in the B.A. in Psychology program, and they too reported using results to enhance the curriculum. Finally, the ASUR process is aligned with other assessment processes across the Institution and has made strides toward streamlining processes, better communicating with participants, and providing training and support for units to create their five-year plans.

Students in a General Education Course.

Challenges and Improvement

Challenges vary by type of review and by program. Turnover in faculty and administration has led to lapses in communication, inconsistency in data collection and reporting, and shortcomings in closing the assessment and review loop.

The B.A. in Psychology program reported needing additional support for their assessment coordinator, needing to compare the effectiveness of different course modalities on student achievement, and needing to determine which methods of communicating with students are most effective.

General Education courses are already asked to evaluate courses for all modalities, including Early College courses, and faculty have the support of Academic Affairs for assistance with assessment plans and processes. However, faculty engagement is still an issue in General Education assessment. While compliance is relatively high, more meaningful follow-up changes could be achieved. Simplifying and streamlining the processes may help.

Non-academic program review, as noted above, is not as mature as the other types of program review and was recently shifted from Academic Affairs to the Office of the President. Hence, the organizational shift will need evaluation to ensure ongoing stakeholder input and program success.

Next Steps

As participants of each type of program review experience different challenges, next steps vary. Greater accountability for assessing student learning outcomes should rest in the colleges and departments and programs as needs vary across the Institution. For example, the B.A. in Psychology program has identified specific steps that are applicable to their own unique situation. Likewise, PIE will establish a formal assessment plan for all events once permanent leadership is in place.

The General Education program has asked departments and programs to update assessment plans in order to identify ways to streamline their data collection and processes and ensure measures of student achievement are meaningful and actionable. GERC continues to provide guidance and support for faculty and seek improvements to processes.

As a whole, implementation of the assessment process depends on consistency, transparency, and continuity, independent of who fills specific roles. Policies and procedures of individual units should be followed to ensure that assessment is systematic and continuous to enhance student learning and program quality. The above examples serve as compelling evidence of ISU's dedication to meeting NWCCU standards, particularly 1.C.1., which emphasizes the importance of offering programs with appropriate content and rigor. These illustrations not only demonstrate commitment to meeting NWCCU standards but also showcase how the University's assessment framework guides faculty, students, and stakeholders toward continuous improvement for student learning and program quality. Aligned with the Institution's mission, this framework ensures that ISU's programs achieve a high level of quality and prepare students for success in their chosen fields.
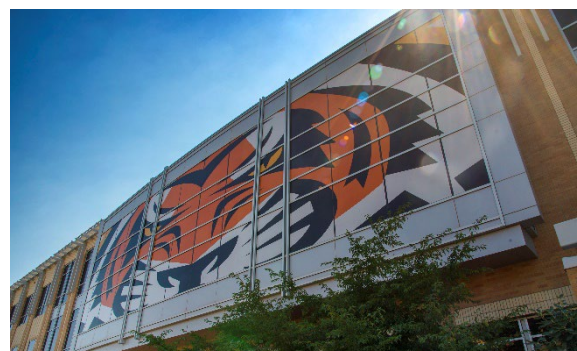
Moving Forward

Overview

ISU is at an inflection point midway through its accreditation cycle. The University finds itself facing appreciable challenges and significant opportunities that require looking to the Mission and Vision as articulated in the Strategic Plan in order to move boldly toward manifesting a much-desired institutional future. Guided by this plan, ISU will seek to:

1. Better align its portfolio of academic programs with its Mission and Vision—closing a budget deficit in the process;
2. Extend additional access and opportunity to students in the service region by expanding programming and enrollment at partner campuses in Idaho Falls and Twin Falls;
3. Increase graduation rates and close corresponding student achievement gaps through the implementation of targeted strategic action;
4. Continue to expand reporting systems to provide more efficiently disaggregated data and clearer information regarding institutional equity gaps; and
5. Strengthen assessment support.

In response to these emerging challenges and opportunities, many of which are discussed in the above sections of this report, ISU intends to execute the following.

Academic Program Portfolio Alignment

Goal 2 of ISU's Strategic Plan directs the Institution to "Strengthen Programmatic Excellence" by "Align[ing] ISU's programs with community, regional, and national needs," "Enhanc[ing] ISU's infrastructure," "Increas[ing] the number of nationally recognized programs," and "Attract[ing] and retain[ing] outstanding faculty and staff." Achieving these goals requires ISU to align its resource allocations with these priorities and rely on this vision—as well as key institutional initiatives related to it. In 2021, the University finalized an assessment of statewide workforce needs through the completion of a Project Charter. As the outcomes of this charter showed, over half of the in-demand jobs in the region are in health care fields, including as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, and physical therapists. In order to respond to the direction articulated in the Strategic Plan, ISU is working to expand programming in several of these fields and will continue to realize this expansion. However, doing so in the current budgetary environment is a challenge that will require adopting a dynamic and responsive approach to hiring and retaining faculty and staff. While recent enrollment gains suggest that ISU is capable of realizing modest enrollment increases in an ever-competitive market, additional significant allocations from state government are not anticipated. Thus, ISU must seek to leverage existing resources wisely to better align its programmatic portfolio with these needs, attracting notable faculty and building and expanding programs of repute. Closing the budget deficit while realigning programmatic investments and promoting excellence will be a significant challenge over the near future.

In order to better accomplish this task, the Institution has embarked on a budget optimization initiative that includes pursuing additional revenue sources, identifying and realizing efficiency opportunities. To navigate this initiative successfully, institutional leadership has sought to engage collaboratively with faculty representative bodies, in particular, Faculty Senate leadership, who have consulted with the Deans Council and the Provost's Office to establish the criteria informing our new Program Analytics Dashboard. This tool will be used to help us more effectively align resourcing decisions with emergent opportunities in the academic landscape. Through its use, we will be able to wed robust data-informed analyses to the priorities, values and vision articulated in the Strategic Plan when making ongoing resourcing decisions. This will then form the basis for a newly emergent program health and program prioritization assessment process in 2025 that will fully integrate programmatic assessment with the Strategic Plan and subsequent resourcing decisions. Once this process is completed in Spring 2026, ISU anticipates having a sufficiently articulated set of criteria for both resource allocation and program assessment to allow for generating a comprehensive Academic and Research Plan that will be supported by these efforts and sit synergistically under the vision of the Strategic Plan. These efforts will ideally be completed by the end of the seven-year review cycle.

Expanding Access and Opportunity Through Partner Campuses

ISU's partner campus in Idaho Falls has seen little to no growth over many years and recent conversations between institutional leadership and the campus community have clarified understanding of the existent need to better serve the students of that community through regionally relevant programming and increased campus support. As a result, the Institution

Touring Meridian campus.

has drafted a plan to revitalize this campus by increasing the number of degree offerings that create pathways into work opportunities in the local area. Key to this plan is implementing a course scheduling protocol that is more responsive to student needs and demands— offering courses in the modalities and at the times that students want them. This increase in student-centric academic programming should help ISU better respond to regional workforce needs

and allow the Institution to better fulfill its responsibility of providing educational access and opportunity for the residents of East Idaho. Along with this, ISU is currently identifying leadership for a new Chief Campus Administrator for Eastern and Southern Idaho position, which will further support these initiatives.

This multipart plan to grow academic programming on the Idaho Falls campus will allow the University to more robustly realize Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan, which is to "Cultivate External Partnerships." One of these key institutional partners is the Idaho National Laboratory (INL), which is located in the Idaho Falls area and with which the University already has several ongoing collaborations. INL is not only a key employer in the region but also a key research partner in the fields of energy research and industrial cybersecurity, among others. Institutional leadership anticipates that by developing more robust academic programming tailored to regional needs, ISU will see higher student placements in both internships and jobs at INL, further strengthening the ties between the University and this key external partner.

At the same time, ISU is also working to strengthen ties with the regional community college in Idaho Falls, the College of Eastern Idaho (CEI), in order to identify and secure pathways from CEI into ISU through co-admission, co-enrollment, shared programming, and articulation agreements. For example, initial work on the expansion of possible nursing pathways has already begun with CEI, and since starting in Fall 2023, there has been a co-located cohort of CEI students at ISU's Idaho Falls campus. This has been supported by securing two large classroom spaces and two offices on the ISU campus that CEI is using to deliver programming and advise students—all with the goal of strengthening the transfer pipeline. Cultivating external partnerships with both institutions—as additional student-centric academic programming and support is built out—will help increase access and opportunity for the students that both institutions serve.

Increasing Graduation Rates and Closing Corresponding Student Achievement Gaps

As detailed in the Student Achievement section of this report, ISU has recently made substantial progress on several student achievement measures. Importantly, gains in these areas broadly apply across demographic categories. At the same time, while ISU has much to celebrate in terms of student achievement, challenges and the need for improvement remain. Perhaps most critically, ISU's six-year graduation rate (36%) remains toward the bottom of its peers, and increasing this rate must be a top priority in the years ahead.

In addition, equity gaps in six-year graduation rates persist for most demographic categories. However, as described earlier, multivariate analysis helps explain these gaps and reveals that much of the variance in six-year graduation rates can be attributed to high school GPA, which itself varies substantially by demographic category. Thus, while ISU clearly acknowledges the need to mitigate equity gaps through improving graduation rates across all demographic categories, the Institution also recognizes that students arrive at ISU with varying degrees of academic preparation and strength, which ultimately affect their probability of graduating in a

timely manner. That being said, ISU remains committed to equitably meeting the needs of all students and to supporting their success.

To do so, ISU will not only continue to invest in the successful programs and initiatives that are expected to improve graduation rates in the years ahead, but as described earlier, the University is also exploring multiple areas of targeted strategic action through a variety of forthcoming plans related to recruiting, student support, advising, and program assessment and development. Institutional leadership anticipates that together these initiatives have the potential to equitably increase student success across all demographic groups, to improve ISU's overall graduation rate, and to prepare all students for postgraduation success.

Institutional Reporting

As part of the University's initiative to better understand and respond to current institutional opportunities and challenges, ISU is committed to continuing to modernize and build out its data reporting system through its Data and Analytics Plan and Project Charter. This Project Charter directs the Institution to "ensure we have the appropriate data systems that are capturing the data we need with the reporting capabilities necessary to make data-informed decisions," including data "related to student recruitment and retention . . . [and other relevant] outcomes we expect to measure over time." ISU is currently creating a centralized data repository along with a set of data definitions, and also building out a centralized reporting system utilizing numerous new reporting tools. One primary outcome of this is the creation of institution-wide dynamic dashboards that include disaggregated data, which units at all levels of the Institution will be able to use to better plan and implement responsive interventions. This system will soon include not only student metrics and measures but also institutional workload and budget information. Modernizing these systems will support all aspects of the Strategic Plan.

Strengthening Assessment and Accreditation Support

Finally, while ISU has historically supported assessment and accreditation through the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs (assessment) and through the Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness (accreditation), the University has recently added a Provost Fellow for Assessment and a Provost Fellow for Accreditation to assist in this work. The Provost Fellow for Assessment, appointed in 2023, is tasked with working closely with individual programs to assist in identifying how they can best assess their student learning and programmatic effectiveness and execute improvements in response—in coordination with the University's Program for Instructional Effectiveness. The Provost Fellow for Accreditation, again appointed in 2023, is tasked with working closely with Institutional Research and the Office of Student Affairs to identify data needs, institutional trends, and potential interventions associated with accreditation requirements.

In addition, ISU has recently hired a Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, to begin strengthening the ties between programmatic assessment activities and instructional approaches and student learning achievement. This individual will, under the direction of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, work with the Provost Fellow for Assessment to more

effectively assess student learning in programs, work with departments and programs to identify the teaching support needed to improve that learning, and work with other institutional partners in Student Success to build out or bring to bear more robust institutional student support services based on results from the assessment process.

Through all of the positions, ISU expects to strengthen the impact of the feedback loop that should always exist between the assessment of learning and the improvement of teaching. The University anticipates that doing so will help further increase retention and programmatic excellence—goals that are central to the Strategic Plan.

Summary

In sum, while ISU will likely continue to face budgetary challenges and the ongoing need to enhance student achievement and to respond to an always-changing economic and community landscape, ISU also finds itself better prepared than ever to respond to these challenges. Through the groundwork laid through the recent adoption of ISU's ambitious and aspirational Strategic Plan and through the various programs, plans, and initiatives stemming from it that are described in this report, the Institution is now at a point of data-informed, mission-driven action that will move the University boldly forward in the years ahead.

Addenda 1

ISU Response to Commission Recommendation 1: Fall 2021 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Commission Recommendation 1: Fall 2021 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Consistently disaggregate all indicators for student achievement by every category. (2020 Standard(s) 1.D.2)

NWCCU Standard 1.D.2

1.D.2 Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the Institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).

Response

In response, ISU has addressed this recommendation through developing and launching a real-time, interactive, public dashboard that clearly and graphically shows student achievement measures, including persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success (along with others), which can then be disaggregated by age, gender, Pell Grant recipient status (a proxy for socioeconomic status), first-generation student status, and race/ethnicity.
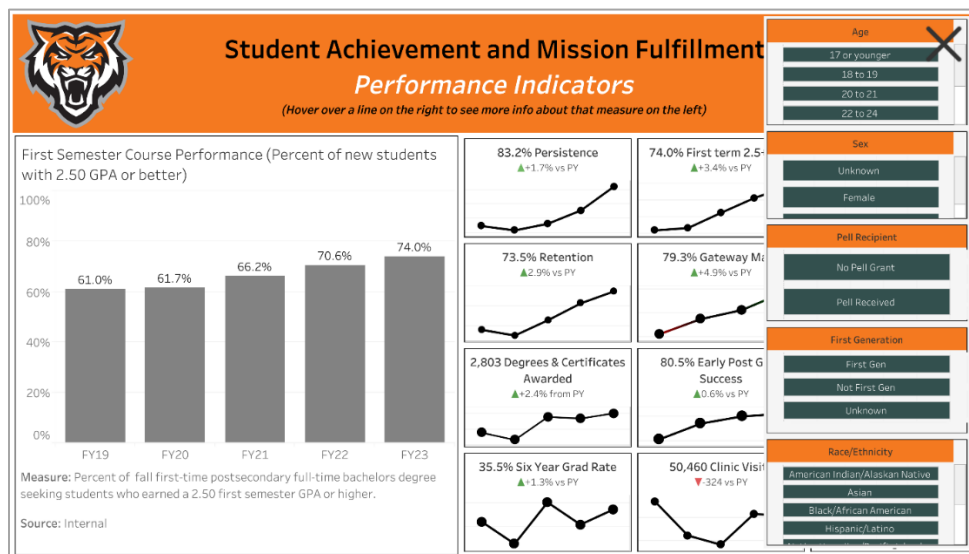

Figure 9 – Real-time, Interactive, Public Dashboard – Filter Options

With this interactive dashboard, the user can visualize and explore how each student achievement measure varies by different demographic categories. These findings are discussed in detail in the Student Achievement section of this report and briefly summarized below. In addition, and as discussed earlier, ISU Institutional Research has developed two multivariate analyses that further investigate the disaggregated effects of demographic categories on Fall-to-Fall retention and on six-year graduation rates.

Summary of Disaggregated Findings

Through disaggregating ISU's student achievement measures, several broad patterns emerge.

First, the most consistent overall demographic effect is that female students as compared to male students demonstrate higher achievement across almost all measures, including retention, first semester 2.5+ GPA, Gateway math completion, persistence, six-year graduation rates, and degrees and certificates awarded.

Second, while the numbers of students identifying with some racial/ethnic groups are so small as to preclude making significant statistical claims for all groups, members of race/ethnicity minority groups generally have lower retention rates and a lower likelihood of earning a first semester 2.5+ GPA or completing a Gateway math course within their first two years. However, the equity gaps revealed by these disaggregated measures have diminished some in recent years. Nonetheless, substantial disparities remain, especially as seen with graduation rates, where students identifying as members of racial/ethnic minority groups are substantially less likely to graduate within six years as compared to students identifying as White/non-Hispanic.

Third, for first-generation and Pell Grant receiving students the pattern is broadly similar to that of students identifying as members of racial/ethnic minority groups; however, equity gaps are closing faster for some measures, including first semester 2.5+ GPA and Gateway math completion. As discussed earlier, the expectation is that these improvements will likely lead to parallel improvements in six-year graduation rates in the years ahead.

Next Steps

ISU's response to this recommendation from the Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report has led to meaningful gains in the Institution's understanding of how demographic categories affect student achievement. These new insights have brought clarification to critical equity gaps and have already led to targeted strategic action, including demographically contextualized initiatives and events. In addition, and as described earlier, the University is investigating the development of further academic and social/cultural support programs that will work to increase student achievement and success across all demographic categories.

Addenda 2

ISU Response to Commission Recommendation 2: Fall 2021 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Commission Recommendation 2: Fall 2021 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Transition to a more aspirational strategic plan, that articulates one clear set of meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators to define mission fulfillment. (2020 Standard(s) 1.B.2)

NWCCU Standard 1.B.2

The Institution sets and articulates meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators of its goals to define mission fulfillment and to improve its effectiveness in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions.

Response

ISU completed a new five-year strategic plan that was approved by the SBOE in June 2022. The strategic plan took effect at the start of 2023 and carries the Institution through 2027. The development of the strategic plan represented a campus-wide, inclusive process that took approximately two years to complete. Efforts to draft the strategic plan were paused for one year during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Strategic Plan Committee (SPC) was formed that included broad representation from each college and unit on campus, from students, and from the Pocatello community. Members were selected based on recommendations from Faculty Senate, deans, and vice presidents. The SPC was led by a smaller steering committee. The steering committee members were charged with developing the process and leading the committee work.

Strategic Planning Committee Members/Representatives

Academic Affairs Leadership	College of Science and Engineering	Idaho Falls Outreach Campus
Academic Affairs Staff		Meridian Outreach Campus
Advancement Office	College of Technology	Pocatello Mayor's Office
ASISU Student	Community	President's Office
Athletics	Division of Health Sciences	Research Office
College of Arts and Letters	Enrollment Management	School of Nursing
College of Business	Faculty Senate	Staff Council
College of Education	Finance Office	Student Affairs
College of Health	Graduate School	Twin Falls Outreach Campus
College of Pharmacy	Graduate Student	University Libraries

Steering Committee Members

Associate Vice President for Human Resources
Chief of Staff
Director of Operations and Plans
Vice President for Finance and University Planning
Two Faculty Representatives

Development Process

The Strategic Plan development process was designed to ensure that the plan had ample campus engagement, feedback, and buy-in. Broad campus participation ensured that the new strategic plan represents ambitious, inclusive, and broad goals shared by campus constituents. To meet this goal, a seven-phase process was built and executed. Designed to be inclusive and transparent, the process sought input from the campus community, relied on faculty and staff to guide the outcomes, and requested stakeholder feedback at every step. Feedback from Faculty Senate, Staff Council, Associated Students of ISU (ASISU), Deans Council, and Administrative Council was sought after every phase. Additionally, communications were sent at every step to inform the campus of the project process. At the end of each feedback phase, approval from the Administrative Council was received. The Administrative Council is charged with institutional planning, administrative oversight, and issue management. Approval from this body was critical to ensure the plan aligned with the larger university landscape.

Phase 1 − Process Development, Fall 2019

- The Steering Committee developed the process, gathered campus feedback, and incorporated it into the process. Strategic Plan Committee members were nominated and finalized, and the process was shared broadly with all institutional stakeholders.

Phase 2 − Education Phase, Spring 2020

- The education phase was designed to help the University and its stakeholders understand trends in higher education. During this phase, the President provided an overarching vision including four essential elements to support this initiative: Student-Centered, Health and Human Experience, Relevant Research, and Career Readiness. A campus event was held where the President, a representative from the SBOE, and the NWCCU President discussed trends and insights into the landscape of higher education and the labor needs of Idaho and the surrounding region.

Postponement − COVID-19 Pandemic, Spring 2020−Fall 2021

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an approximately one-year postponement of the Strategic Plan development process.

Phase 3 − Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Values (SWOT-V), Fall 2021

- During this phase, SPC members facilitated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and values (SWOT-V) exercises with Faculty Senate, Staff Council, ASISU, Deans Council, college/divisions, and campus open forums. The SPC then

synthesized the SWOT-V data into a <u>single document</u> incorporating campus input. This document along with the four essential elements would become the source of information to complete the Strategic Plan. The SWOT-V phase was initiated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. When strategic planning efforts resumed in Fall 2021, the SWOT-V phase also included a review of additional learning and insights gained during the course of the pandemic.

Phase 4 – Mission, Vision, Values, Fall 2021

- The SPC drafted a mission and vision statement using the information gathered from the SWOT-V. Once drafted, feedback was gathered and incorporated before final approval by the Administrative Council.
- To draft the institutional values, a campus survey was sent to all faculty and staff asking the following questions:

  - Consider who you are. What defines you, what helps you make decisions, and who you are at your best? Based on this reflection, please identify your top three *personal* values.
  - Consider your hopes for the future of Idaho State University. What *organizational* values do we need to strive toward developing as a campus community? Please identify the top three.

- Data from the survey was synthesized and shared with the SPC to guide the drafting of institutional values. The draft values were sent for campus feedback and ultimately approved by the Administrative Council.

Phase 5 - Goals and Objectives, Spring 2022

- During this phase, the SPC drafted the goals and objectives for the Strategic Plan using the information gathered from the SWOT-V phase. Once drafted, feedback was gathered and incorporated before final approval by the Administrative Council.

Phase 6 - Measurements, Spring 2022

- Subject matter experts drafted measurements to correspond with identified objectives. Measurements were reviewed by the SPC. Feedback was gathered and finalized by the Administrative Council.

Phase 7 - Approval, June 14, 2022

- The SBOE approved the new five-year strategic plan, and the plan was submitted to NWCCU.

Strategic Plan Process Map
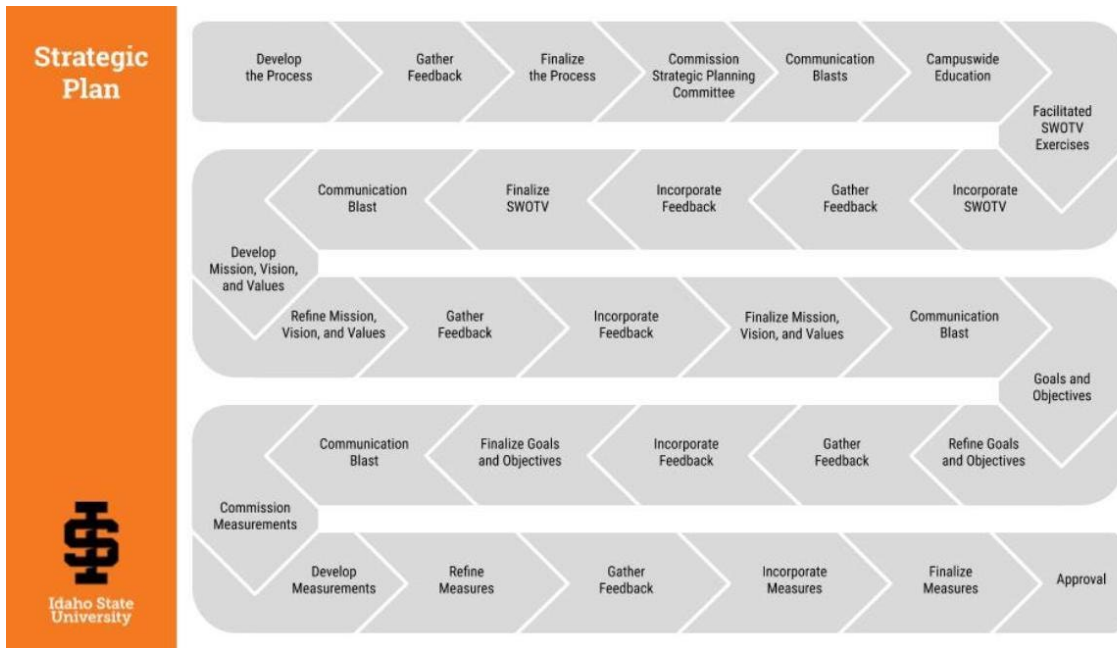
Figure 10 - Strategic Plan Process Map Infographic

Strategic Plan

Further description of the Strategic Plan is found in the Mission Fulfillment section of this report. The plan represents the broad aspirations of the university community and sets forth values and goals for all ISU faculty, staff, and stakeholders to work toward and to use to measure both individual and collective success.

Figure 11 - Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Information Poster

Appendix 1

Programmatic Assessment Example: The B.A. in Psychology

Institutional Context and Alignment with NWCCU Standards

The Department of Psychology offers both undergraduate and graduate programs. The undergraduate programs recently completed a seven-year academic program review and demonstrated significant progress in responding to the needs of their students. The department is housed in the College of Arts and Letters and offers an example of an undergraduate program without specialized accreditation that is evaluated through the Institution's Academic Program Review (APR) process. In alignment with NWCCU standard 1.C.3, the department clearly lists Program Objectives for undergraduate majors in the Academic Catalog.

The B.A. in Psychology emphasizes the importance of liberal arts in higher education and personal development. The department recently updated its Mission to ensure alignment with the University's overall Mission and Vision. The program's mission is centered on research, education, and providing services in psychology. The program's contributions to advancing psychological knowledge, student training, and community services positively impact the overall health of our communities.

Analyses

Faculty are engaged in assessment and use the results to improve their courses and programs. For example, they consistently and frequently assess PSYC 1101, Introduction to General Psychology, a General Education course. Assessment results are collected and analyzed for the required annual reports for the University's General Education Requirements Committee (GERC). Outcomes are shared with the entire department faculty, fostering discussions on how to enhance the teaching process.

Student performance across the curriculum has been satisfactory. For example, approximately 70% to 80% of students in the General Education course met all five learning outcomes for General Education Objective 6 over the past five years. Even though student performance has been satisfactory and consistent in recent years, several assessment improvements were initiated in January 2023. These enhancements encompass ensuring that all instructors incorporate clear course objectives and related assessments in their PSYC 1101 syllabi as well as modifying the design of the learning survey to enable item- and competency-specific analyses.

In addition to direct assessment of student learning outcomes, the program administers pre- and post-surveys for PSYC 2201, Careers in Psychology, and also surveys graduating seniors and alumni. The department's goal is to have at least 70% of respondents agree or strongly agree with survey items on the course post-survey, and this goal was met on all but two items. That benchmark was also met for all but one item on the alumni survey. Annual Academic

Program Reports of AY 2021-2022 and AY 2022-2023 are available on the Academic Program Review web page, under the section titled: Academic Program Review: Annual (APR-A) Reports.

Self-Assessment and Reflection

The program's learning outcomes, which encompass competencies such as basic knowledge of the Psychology major and related careers, psychological knowledge, skills in psychological science and critical thinking, effective communication, and appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism, are assessed in a variety of ways. These program learning outcomes are in place for all undergraduate courses and were recently updated in December 2022. Additionally, student achievement for these competencies is reviewed every three years by a department committee and shared with all department faculty for discussion and creation of an action plan for improvement.

Strengths and Progress

The recent program review confirmed that the B.A. in Psychology programs is strong. Despite facing challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, turnover in department faculty, hiring delays, as well as employee and financial issues at the college and university levels, the program managed to uphold and even enhanced the quality of its program.

One strength of the program is that the department is highly committed to evaluating students' learning needs using a range of assessment methods. Survey results have played a crucial role in enhancing curriculum and overall program quality. Other strengths include highly active research labs that welcome undergraduate students, curriculum and departmental offerings on par with peer institutions, and access to Career Path Internships that facilitate student involvement in meaningful research projects.

Challenges and Improvement

The review team identified three recommended actions for the B.A. in Psychology program: first, provide additional support for the undergraduate assessment coordinator in order to recognize the importance of this leadership position within the department and allow for more dedicated time to this task; second, review the balance of courses offered in different modalities, to see if student needs are being met; and third, assess whether current methods of communicating with students are sufficient, given that alternative communication channels, including social media, may be more effective.

Next Steps

As per the University's Annual Academic Program Report (APR-A) guidelines, and in alignment with NWCCU standard 1.C.7, the department will provide both a response to and an action plan for these recommendations in the 2024 Annual Report (due November 1, 2024). In addition to assessing and evaluating student learning, the department will also improve undergraduate advising and help continue the already implemented department Instagram account and improved website functionality.

Appendix 2

Programmatic Assessment Example: The General Education Program

Institutional Context and Alignment with NWCCU Standards

ISU's General Education program has made steady and significant progress in assessing student learning outcomes and achievement over the last eight years.

The General Education program consists of nine objectives, the first six of which are required by SBOE Policy III.N: Written Communication, Oral Communication, Mathematical Ways of Knowing, Scientific Ways of Knowing, Humanistic and Artistic Ways of Knowing, and Social and Behavioral Ways of Knowing, for a total of 31 credits. The remaining objectives consist of "institutionally-designated credits," of which students must complete 6 credits. Students must fulfill the Cultural Diversity Objective (Objective 9) and then choose between Information Literacy (Objective 8) and Critical Thinking (Objective 7). The full list of objectives and competencies (student learning outcomes) are available in the Undergraduate Catalog.

The assessment process begins with a review of courses' assessment plans by the General Education Requirements Committee (GERC), which is composed of representatives from across campus. GERC provides feedback to instructors and departments/programs regarding the appropriateness of direct assessment instruments, assessment schedules, and other aspects of the proposed plans. Once the assessment plans are approved, instructors and assessment coordinators collect and analyze data and submit annual assessment reports by November 1 of each academic year. GERC reviews the annual reports and provides feedback to instructors and assessment coordinators. Instructors use the assessment results to make improvements to their curriculum or assessment processes.

Objective Reviews are the next step in the assessment process. Each objective is reviewed on a schedule, rotating over a 5-year period. As of Fall 2023, all objectives have been reviewed once, and Objectives 1 and 2 have completed their second reviews. Objectives 3 and 4 are scheduled for review in Spring 2024.

Objective Review Committees (ORCs) consist of one representative from each department or program that offers a course in the objective and a representative from GERC. The ORCs review the 5-year Departmental Review Report and Annual Reports from each department/program to determine whether the courses in the objective have been adequately assessed, whether the courses meet the student learning outcomes, and whether the outcomes themselves are in keeping with the spirit of the objective. A template is used to report ORC findings to GERC.

Finally, a General Education Comprehensive Program Review is conducted once all nine objective reviews have been completed at the end of the objective review cycle. The Comprehensive Program Review self-study was completed in Spring 2023, and a program

review team consisting of internal and external reviewers will complete the evaluation and make recommendations in Spring 2024.

Analyses

Almost every General Education course has an approved assessment plan, and annual reports have been submitted for a majority of courses on a regular basis. Objective reviews have been completed according to the published schedule and results were analyzed in the Comprehensive Program Review self-study. The Annual Reports, Objective Reviews and Self-Study are available on the GERC [website](#).

The level of student achievement is fairly consistent across the objectives, with a little over 80% of students meeting expectations for learning outcomes. The percentage of students meeting expectations was below 80% for Objectives 1, 2, and 3 (Written Communication, Oral Communication, and Mathematical Ways of Knowing) and above 80% for the remaining objectives. Examples from annual and objective review reports and actions taken as a result of those reports are discussed in section V., "Student Learning Outcome Summary" of the [Comprehensive Program Review Self-Study](#).

Self-Assessment and Reflection

While a comprehensive assessment process is in place, there is room for improvement. The recently completed self-study found that many faculty members need assistance with simplifying or streamlining assessment plans and practices and more guidance from GERC in implementing them. Feedback from GERC has been inconsistent at times as members come from different academic disciplines that use different methods to assess student learning (e.g., multiple choice versus essay questions), have different backgrounds or experience in conducting assessment, and have served varying lengths of time on the committee. Hence, GERC is working to establish clearer and more consistent guidelines and feedback on assessment plans for faculty.

In some instances, faculty turnover resulted in missing data or results, or modifications in assessment plans that were not reviewed by GERC or even the departmental assessment committees. However, participation has improved over the five-year review cycle. Obtaining actionable information from Early College (Dual Enrollment) sections of some courses has been difficult in some cases.

Strengths and Progress

The assessment process that was put in place several years ago has now completed one full cycle and is well into the second cycle. Most courses have well-established assessment plans, regularly submit annual reports, and have taken actions to improve student learning. Faculty are invested in improving student learning, and many of them recognize the importance of assessment in identifying where improvements are needed and how to respond. In particular, faculty in programs with specialized accreditation are comfortable with and understand the value of assessment.

GERC has made progress in offering more consistent feedback and updating assessment plan templates to simplify assessment practices, but more remains to be done, for example, providing workshops or training for new members.

Assessment results have been used to make changes, both small and large. For example, the Objective Review for Mathematical Ways of Knowing recommended changes to the competencies and presented them at an annual Idaho General Education Summit. Working with colleagues from across the state, faculty proposed changes that were later approved by the SBOE. Assessments of individual courses have led to smaller adjustments, including the development of capstone assignments; changes to assignments and rubrics; and changes to assessment processes to resolve inconsistencies, improve clarity, and other issues. More detail is available in the Comprehensive Program Review Self-Study.

Challenges and Improvement

While many faculty recognize the role of assessment in improving student learning outcomes, getting everyone on board has been a consistent challenge. Part of the challenge is getting faculty to use assessment results to make *meaningful* improvements in their courses. If they are not finding assessment meaningful, the process needs to be improved.

In 2019, a National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) coach came to campus and held workshops with some General Education instructors in an attempt to address this issue. Workshop participants found it to be productive and useful, but only a small portion of General Education instructors attended.

ISU does not have university-wide software for collecting and analyzing assessment data. A Watermark product was purchased a few years ago but ultimately was disappointing and the license was not renewed. The current practice of submitting report information via Qualtrics works reasonably well for collecting data but is less desirable for analyzing data.

Next Steps

GERC will continue to update guidelines for assessment plans and processes and communicate those recommendations to the faculty. GERC recommends that all course instructors and/or assessment directors update assessment plans as most current plans are several years old and need simplification and streamlining. With the support from Academic Affairs and the Program for Instructional Effectiveness (PIE), GERC will continue to provide workshops to faculty to promote a culture of assessment across campus.

Appendix 3

Programmatic Assessment Example: The Program for Instructional Effectiveness

Institutional Context and Alignment with NWCCU Standards

In accordance with NWCCU standards 1.B.1 - 1.B.4, and SBOE Policy III.F, ISU assesses non-academic programs that support the Institution's educational and student support mission. According to SBOE Policy III.F, both "instructional and non-instructional programs shall be evaluated . . . at least once every five years." These assessment procedures represent a continuous and systematic process used to evaluate programs and services that align with and support the institutional mission. The primary strategic planning structure that ISU uses for this analysis is the Administrative and Support Unit Review (ASUR) (formerly called Non-Academic Evaluation Requirements).

As part of ISU's comprehensive planning and institutional effectiveness model, each unit under the ASUR umbrella follows a five-year review schedule in which a comprehensive Five-Year Plan and Self Study Report is submitted. These reports highlight progress, updates, and necessary adjustments for each unit to fulfill goals and objectives as well as institutional mission and success. This five-year schedule is aligned with the SBOE's institutional requirements for Program Prioritization. ISU's last five-year institutional Program Prioritization report was submitted during the 2021–2022 academic year and included a comprehensive review of non-academic support units.

All units scheduled to complete a Five-Year Plan and Self Study Report are contacted the year before the review is due by the Chair of the ASUR committee and a representative from Academic Affairs. ASUR representatives then schedule an initial meeting with the unit committee and provide information and the following resources to guide the review process: Overview of ASUR Strategic Planning; Step 1: Mission, Vision, Values, and SOAR; Step 2: Goals and Outcomes; and Step 3: Measures, Assessment, and Action Plan. ASUR representatives meet with each committee at various times to provide additional information and resources requested as well as support throughout the process.

By March 18 of each academic year, all units use a template to complete their Annual ASUR Update. The year-to-year information on the annual report helps units complete future five-year program prioritization reviews and provides a continuous improvement mechanism to help motivate changes, highlight successes, and identify progress toward established goals, objectives, and performance outcomes.

The example we have chosen is ISU's Program for Instructional Effectiveness (PIE). PIE was launched in Fall 2019 as a collaborative, university-wide program to promote effective teaching practices by supporting faculty professional development in relation to teaching and fostering campus-wide dialogue about teaching. PIE was originally housed in the College of Education and was moved to Academic Affairs during Summer 2020.

The first ASUR report that PIE created was the comprehensive Non-Academic Unit Review Self Study. This self-study provided an overview of the program that articulated the strategic planning process that occurred during Spring 2019 at the inception of the program. This overview also includes the mission and vision of the program; alignment with the institutional core themes and the University's Mission, and Strategic Plan; the unit outcomes; and the unit goals and objectives. This report was reviewed by the Non-Academic Unit Review internal evaluation committee. Annual updates for the program have been submitted since this time.

Strengths and Progress

Overall, these consistent evaluations have been very helpful in determining that this particular program has been well-received by faculty. Strengths of the program include: (1) continued support by leadership at the University; (2) strategic program planning that has focused on quality events aligned with stated faculty needs; (3) effective, positive, and productive working relationships with other units on campus that serve to support faculty needs (i.e., ITRC, student support, and academic units); and (4) an organizational structure shift to Academic Affairs to broadly support teaching needs across the academic curriculum.

Challenges and Improvement

The consistent evaluation of this program has also elicited several opportunities for improvement for this program to be maximally effective. These opportunities include: (1) the establishment of permanent or centralized leadership; (2) a permanent budget; and (3) a designated space to support program events.

Next Steps

The ASUR process has led to improvements in how this program supports and is aligned with institutional goals and objectives. First, the program is supported by an established budget. Second, the program has established consistent support from Academic Affairs. There are, however, additional steps still needed to ensure program effectiveness. Due to the lack of consistent leadership, a formal assessment plan has not been established. This needs to be addressed and prioritized. Second, a permanent and ongoing plan for leadership needs to be established. The unit will use the ASUR process to continue to modify and meet goals and objectives appropriately and align with the University's Strategic Plan.