

## **Chapter 8. Institutional and Academic Assessment (Standards 7 and 14)**

### **Overview of Charge**

The working group charged with Standards 7 and 14 sought evidence in nearly 200 documents and web links including especially the administrative survey, analysis and results, reports to regional accreditors of the CN and NY campuses, IPEDS Reports and Institutional Profiles, all the assessment surveys identified on wiki.huc.edu, Learning Outcomes Network reports to institutional departments, student placement results, student loan repayment records, and other documents available at wiki.huc.edu, especially the assessment methodology postings.

### **Standard 7: Institutional Assessment**

#### *Research Question 7.1*

*Does the assessment of institutional effectiveness incorporate results from student learning outcomes assessments as well as assessment of results in other areas, as noted in the standards? Are these related to areas of emphasis in the institution's plan(s) and the established priorities for resource allocation and budgeting?*

### **Discussion of Research Question and Compliance**

#### *2006 Strategic Plan*

A comprehensive strategic plan was adopted by the Board of Governors in February 2006. As noted above in Chapter 3, the Strategic Planning Committee had been constituted in 2004 and consisted of eleven Board members (a majority of the Committee), seven key administrators, and a faculty member from each stateside campus. The report made use of the mission statement, site visit observations, a retreat, SWOT analyses of each program and library, national statistics from the Reform movement, and accreditation reports. It contained sections on creating accountability structures, achieving excellence, financial sustainability, the future, and recommendations. By far the largest section involved achieving excellence with subsections on students, faculty, leadership development, professional schools, academic support, partnerships, and "one institution with multiple campuses and multiple programs."

Follow-up documentation of the strategic plan has been weak. A campus cliché has it that the financial crisis of 2008-09 (precipitated by the "Great Recession" that began in December, 2007), which saw a 40% drop in endowment returns, derailed all aspects of the strategic plan except for financial sustainability. Follow-up of that section of the report has certainly been extensive through the New Way Forward plan and its annual updates. Nevertheless, clichés often overlook the facts. Numerous other initiatives arising from the plan have been implemented and documented, as noted in the Strategic Planning Update.

Major steps forward for "creating accountability structures" were taken with strategic recent hires in Human Resources, Registrar, and, at the peak of the financial crisis in 2009, an entirely new Office of Institutional Research and Assessment with a director nationally known in assessment research plus a full-time assistant. The work of these offices to advance excellence in students and in faculty and support services has been thoroughly documented and will be summarized

below. Major innovations in advancing leadership and professional excellence have occurred in the LA Education, the CN Rabbinical, and the NY Cantorial and Rabbinical programs.

Achieving “one institution with multiple campuses and multiple programs” is an important issue not only for academic excellence but also for financial sustainability. The Board of Governors charged the VPAA to undertake a model, evidence-based approach for merging the accreditation processes of the College-Institute, as documented in Chapter 1. The first of twelve major findings mentioned in the Complex Substantive Change Proposal submitted to MSCHE in March, 2011 and accepted the following June was that “single accreditation would bring an enormous benefit to the College-Institute by increasing the amount of collaboration of local faculty and administrators with each other to interpret and carry out the College-Institute’s mission.” Acceptance of this proposal shows that the strategic plan’s emphasis on advancing a single institution has been a major focus in the ensuing years. In short, the 2006 strategic plan, supplemented by the New Way Forward and several other initiatives documented in this chapter, served to inaugurate a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process as required by several parts of element S7\_01.

Another event that exposed weaknesses in the 2004-06 strategic planning process was the “Mandated Focused Visit” letter of March, 2009 to the College-Institute from the NCAHLC. This letter required evidence of progress in meeting the NCAHLC standards relating to finances, assessment, and governance. The Mandated Focused Visit revealed that the strategic plan was not sufficiently grounded in student learning outcomes. In retrospect, the NCAHLC action as well as responses to the 2008-09 financial crisis also revealed that the planning structure was too restricted to the Board of Governors and high-level administrators with not enough input from faculty, staff, and local communities. As one commentator put it, the plan was designed as “surgery rather than therapy.” To follow the analogy into MSCHE’s Characteristics of Excellence, an excellent plan would have provided a sustainable exercise regime that would promote the health of the institution. Thus, the third weakness, governance, became clear from the ensuing lapse in updating and revising the plan: it was neither designed nor sustained as an adaptive guiding process. These weaknesses resulted at various points in some recommendations, such as closing a campus, that, although conscientiously proposed, were met with overwhelming resistance both within and without the College-Institute.

### *Strengthening Assessment*

One of the recommendations from the 2006 plan that was implemented was to “strengthen HUC-JIR’s commitment to excellence by accelerating the development and implementation of student assessment tools in the Rabbinic Core Curriculum and extending them, where appropriate, to the other professional degree granting programs.” The College-Institute had undertaken two assessment initiatives prior to March, 2009. One was the completion in 2008, by an all-campus committee, of the Rabbinical Matrix: descriptions of 45 dimensions of rabbinical expertise, each with three levels of development. These dimensions were accompanied by Guidelines for Assessment. The implementation of these guidelines led to extensive individualized assessment of rabbinical students in Los Angeles.

The second assessment initiative was the New York campus’s commitment to use what could generically be described as an “authentic assessment” approach both to advance student learning and to discover needs for program changes (in response to the 2002 MSCHE visiting evaluation team’s demand for follow-up reports on learning outcomes assessment<sup>17</sup>). Thus the 2009 progress letter accepted by MSCHE indicated:

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<sup>17</sup>NY Campus Progress Letter 2009 and the 2007 Periodic Review Report.

Performance on examinations, research papers and projects, practica and theses confirms that students meet the high standards that the faculty establishes.... Faculty meet throughout the year with the Directors of the Rabbinical Program, the DFSSM and the NYSOE to review assessment results for each student and to gauge each student's progress. The faculty and Directors ascertain if individual students are meeting learning expectations and goals, prescribe remedial measures for students who are not, or conversely, create individualized learning opportunities for advanced students. Faculty then determine if student assessments require changes in course content and requirements, course schedule, instructional assignments, or the course of study itself.

At that time, the campus initiated a narrative assessment program that had been proposed in the campus's 2007 Periodic Review Report. That program, as well as the 45-dimension rabbinical matrix, provides detailed formative feedback for students. Both forms of assessment, while helpful in facilitating student-instructor dialogue, suffer from being difficult to aggregate into programmatic conclusions because the terminology varies so much from instructor to instructor, especially as the number of assessments is expanded to all four campuses. See the section on *Narrative Assessments* in Standard 14, below, for information on how narrative assessments were integrated with an innovative, sustained, comprehensive, and systematic institution-wide approach. As the New York Progress Letter indicates, narrative assessments of student learning contributed to establishing new approaches (e.g., interdisciplinary, team-taught, and multi-campus courses) and topics (more integration with professional skills). The narratives were supplemented with a multidimensional rating scale where levels for all dimensions were the same Likert-type scale<sup>18</sup> with five-points plus N/A. Such ratings are like grades, which are based on comparisons relative to class level rather than external standards, and thus are not accepted by accrediting agencies as valid assessment information for programs

In Cincinnati, the NCAHLC rejected the Rabbinical Matrix as a plan rather than an implemented assessment program because no results had been obtained using it on that campus. (In LA it was combined with guidelines for faculty-student interaction concerning learning outcomes that were applied, but those guidelines did not include aggregating the results into a form useful for program and administrative changes.)

These experiences show that manageable program assessment:

1. Relates to, but is more general than, faculty evaluation of students for teaching goals.
2. Begins with a clearly articulated program mission.
3. Includes statements of program learning outcomes that are:
  - a. related to the mission,
  - b. general enough to comprise a memorable set (roughly 7-15 statements),
  - c. defined clearly enough so that individual faculty members can reliably agree on whether a particular student effort is an instance of achieving the outcome,
  - d. defined so that every course addresses at least one program learning outcome,
4. Assesses every student in every course in the program by indicating whether or not the student work has demonstrated each outcome relevant to the course,
5. Is aggregated so that:
  - a. each student can see the number of times he or she has achieved an outcome,
  - b. each instructor can see what percentage of students in each course achieved the outcomes relevant to the course,
  - c. each advisor can determine what electives will help a student achieve more enduring mastery of each outcome,

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<sup>18</sup>See Bartoshak, Fast and Snyder (2005) for a methodological analysis of Likert-scale research.

- d. each program curriculum designer can identify innovations that lead to more enduring mastery.

New assessment processes were brought to the College-Institute by the new Director of Institutional Research and Assessment in summer, 2009. Learning Outcomes Networks (LONs) are a type of manageable program assessment that uses developmental interviews of experts to create multidimensional rubrics (see the four-decade history of these at LON References, and a fuller account of the process below at Standard 14). HUC-JIR refers to the “new professional” level of performance as the *Practical* level and expects students to function at this level by graduation.

#### *Survey of Administrative Functions*

An all-campus, systematic assessment of administrative functions was developed recently using a model similar to that for student learning. To create a systematic and sustainable annual survey of administrative functions, developmental interviews were conducted of key people in each function. The focus was on three questions, mnemonically condensed into College-Institute’s “3-R’s” of administrative functions: reliability (accuracy), responsiveness (speed), and respect (understanding of the role as well as the needs of those being served). The results of these interviews were used to define both levels of performance for each function and key challenges faced by each function. In total, 120 respondents filled out Survey Monkey forms. Respondents were divided evenly between students, faculty, and staff (equivalent to 10% of the students, 90% of the full-time faculty, and 30% of the full-time staff). The Administrative Survey Analysis shared with the National Assessment Committee (NAC) in April 2012 revealed that some functions (e.g., Accounting and Budgeting) needed more attention than others (e.g., the Library). The NAC decided that the best approach would be to have the OIRA summarize the main comments and have the VPAA meet with the directors of the functions to propose innovations that would improve the community’s responses. This has led to the proposal of numerous improvements, some of which have already been implemented. Thus, this tool enabled the College-Institute to fulfill S7\_02 and the remaining parts of S7\_01.

#### *Board Surveys*

Board Surveys were conducted in 2009 and 2012. The earlier survey was initiated in response to the NCAHLC mandated focused visit. A Governance Task Force of the Board was created at that time and recently added to the Regulations as a standing Committee on Governance. This committee initiated the 2012 survey. In both surveys, questions were phrased so that positive answers reflected compliance with best practices. The 2012 survey showed significantly more positive responses from Board members than just three years earlier. Still, they indicated that the Board needs more attention to MSCHE standards and the use of assessment to make decisions.

#### *Compliance*

The Administrative Survey is an organized and documented process for evaluating and improving the total range of programs and services of the College-Institute. Its deep connections with the mission/purpose statement were demonstrated using a method similar to that employed in the Cincinnati Campus’s 2009 Focused Visit study to show connections of course descriptions to the mission.<sup>19</sup> Table 8.1 shows the percentage of *Inspiring* administrative

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<sup>19</sup>The 2009 study showed that courses clearly related to the MODEL rubrics and the rubrics clearly related to the mission/purpose statement. Since the mission/purpose statements were very broad, an expert rater found each course to be an example of many elements of the statement. Since the MODEL rubrics were more specific, each

descriptions that related to the *Practical* or *Inspiring* levels of the rabbinical assessment rubrics. Clearly, administrative services are related more to the professional aspects of the rabbinical assessment rubrics (the top six dimensions) than to the scholarly ones (the bottom six dimensions). But in the professional areas, there is a strong connection. Also, all functions were related to some dimensions of the rubrics. Thus, there is much overlap between the learning life of rabbinical students (in this instance) and that of HUC-JIR administrative functions. While it is understandable that most administrators would not attend as well to the educational dimensions as faculty, the goal of helping students learn should be captured in the conception of *Inspiring* performance by every function in the College-Institute. The survey needs to be sustained annually. Future surveys would benefit by a clearer reminder of the educational dimensions in all College-Institute activities, by rephrasing the third interview question to be: "What do you do to support student learning outcomes?"

The Administrative Survey is supplemented in some areas by other forms of assessment. The Library and Archives keep detailed records of the main types of usage of their materials and services. Accounting and Budgeting work closely with the auditors to continually improve records. As recommended in the 2006 Strategic Plan, review of resources other than restricted funds has resulted in some programs (SJNM, SGS, and the DMin program) being required to be self-sustaining. Beyond the logical comparison with mission, the impact of this decision on learning outcomes needs to be assessed. Additional assessment information is provided by Financial Aid's reports to the US Department of Education and the OIRA's work with the Registrar's and Alumni Offices to generate accurate data for IPEDS, MSCHE, the US Immigration and Naturalization Services, the Union for Reform Judaism, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Strong support for the extensive collaboration of faculty with administrative assessment is underscored by the fact that 90% of full-time faculty members filled out the administrative survey and provided comments that helped to guide the leaders of the functions toward effective conclusions. The annual timetable for the administrative assessment survey combined with the term-by-term assessments of learning outcomes supports a sustainable process as does collecting the data through a survey easily accessed through the internet.

The improvement suggestions identified in response to the administrative survey by each function testify to the sharing of results with them and their use in planning, resource allocation, and renewal. This entire Self-Study Report not only serves as an update of the strategic plan, but it also provides a model for moving the planning process forward (and, indeed, is being used in the work of the Strategic Planning Oversight Task Force; see Strategic Planning Update Report). It has been comprehensive, deeply engaging of every role in the community, based on extensive evidence that has been subjected to high-quality analysis, and put to use with documented responses.

The institution uses results of learning assessments to allocate resources. Systematic data analysis has been conducted on the Cincinnati campus longer than on other campuses. The working group expects that systematic analysis of the NY narrative assessments combined with use of both Likert-type and MODEL-rubrics ratings will produce more detailed understandings of how resource allocation can contribute to student learning. The strategic plan from 2006 considered assessment results as required by S7\_03. An updating of this plan is currently in progress, as indicated in Chapters 2 and 3.

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course fit fewer categories. The connection of the MODEL rubrics to the mission made it possible to use the former as a proxy for the latter. Similarly, Administrative Survey statements were coded to *Practical* or *Inspiring* levels of the MODEL rubrics for the Rabbinical School as proxies for the mission/purpose statement.

## Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

### *Research Question 14.1*

*How effectively do all academic and support programs document that the curriculum or program helps students achieve each key learning outcome? How effectively does the institution provide students with clear information on how they are expected to achieve each key learning outcome (i.e., what assignments and learning experiences will help them achieve it)?*

### *Research Question 14.2*

*Are assessments of student learning of adequate quality? Do they yield direct evidence that is clear, tangible, convincing, and purposefully relates to the program's key learning outcomes, having results that are sufficiently accurate and truthful that they are used with confidence to make appropriate decisions?*

## Discussion of Research Questions and Compliance

MSCHE Standard 14 requires that each program's "assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have the knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals." Such assessment begins with the clear definition by each program of the learning outcomes standards that their students must achieve. Beginning in 2009 HUC-JIR has used a quick way to create initial compliance with this requirement, called Learning Outcomes Networks (LONs, described in the following paragraph). Such manageable program assessments need to be developed and refined over time to be most effective and enduring. Regardless of the individual method used, every program needs to be clearly aware that Middle States requires them (1) to develop program mission statements that relate to the College-Institute mission, (2) to specify learning standards in the form of observable learning outcomes, (3) to produce publicly defensible assessment methods that show each graduate has achieved the learning outcomes, (4) to aggregate the assessment results to show program performance, and (5) to use the aggregated results to improve their programs. Thus, there are several optional methods besides the use of the *Practical* levels of LONs to specify program standards, but programs do not have a choice about specifying learning outcomes—accreditation requires that they do so. Beginning in 2010, the National Assessment Committee initiated this work across all campuses by extending the Learning Outcome Networks approach to all programs and subsequently drafting the Rabbinical School mission statement.

### *The Learning Outcomes Network*

MODEL (Matrices Organized Developmentally through Expertise and Labeling) Rubrics were created on one campus for two programs in 2009: the Rabbinical School and the School of Graduate Studies. Every full-time faculty member was involved in one-to-two hour interviews that generated more than 130 dimensions of the development of their expertise, describing student behavior of beginners, learners, new professionals, and contributors to the field of expertise. Work in 2007 by the Cohen Committee (named after the previous Provost who chaired it), had generated 45 dimensions of rabbinical development. These were combined with dimensions from the interviews. They were first grouped into master dimensions and then abstracts and labels were provided for each of the four levels within each dimension, generating multidimensional rubrics that outline the development of the expertise (see the links with

“descriptions” in the title in section 6 of [wiki.huc.edu](http://wiki.huc.edu)). The master set of MODEL rubrics for the Rabbinical School had eleven dimensions.<sup>20</sup> The retiring and incoming program directors of the School of Graduate Studies eliminated five of the dimensions as professionally oriented, leaving the six scholarly dimensions.

These rubrics were used to rate the work of every student in every course in Cincinnati in the fall of 2009. That became the first term in the creation of HUC-JIR’s Learning Outcomes Network. A Learning Outcomes Network is an HUC-JIR innovation that requires ratings for every student in every course for as long as a student is in the program (see the links with “Rating Form” in section 6 of [wiki.huc.edu](http://wiki.huc.edu)). Since the same rating form is used for all courses in a program and contains 8-12 multiple choice items, faculty learn to complete it in a minute or two per student. The LON is used to identify program mission statements, calculate overall growth both within and between students, assess the impact of courses or requirements, get an overall view of the relationships between areas of development, discover learning links, track progress of particular students, and even test differences between different assessment methods.

Three lines of evidence indicate that the LON approach is sustainable by being of “sufficient quality that results can be used with confidence to inform decisions.” First, it has been adopted by an increasing number of other institutions of higher learning.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, the results have been used to implement broad-based changes in the program where they began. One change involved several faculty members teaching their students to use the MODEL rubrics to evaluate their own work and define areas where commitment to advance would be useful. Another involved getting support for a multimillion-dollar proposal to fund integration of service-learning with the Cincinnati rabbinical curriculum. The dimension of student learning with the third lowest percent of ratings at the *Practical* level was teaching. This likely reflected the lack of a School of Education on the Cincinnati campus and is likely to change substantially as the Service Learning Grant is implemented. The third line of evidence emerged from comparing the narrative and rating scale assessments of students, described in the next section, with the LON. The impact of this line of evidence is described in the section on analysis of results.

### *Narrative Assessments*

As noted above, narrative assessments were identified in the 2007 Periodic Review Report (PRR) to MSCHE as one of two critical areas for furthering the goal of formative assessment. The approach showed the New York faculty's commitment to personalized learning and their belief that narrative evaluations, though time-consuming for faculty, are “one of the best ways to maximize student growth” (as noted in the 2007 PRR). By 2009, deliberation had contributed to a tool to combine narratives with multidimensional Likert-type ratings (see note 19 above), which was implemented in the spring of 2009. Since then, approximately three narrative assessments per term have been done for each student resulting in a database exceeding 1000 narratives. These are valuable tools for student assessment, but are difficult to aggregate for program assessment.

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<sup>20</sup>There are currently twelve dimensions listed for the Rabbinical School listed in the Rabbinical Rating Form (see note 23 below). Detailed descriptions of these dimensions can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

<sup>21</sup>Savannah Technical College (GA), Savannah College of Art and Design (GA), Gainesville State College (GA), Wilmington College (OH), Texas Christian University (TX), Regis University (CO), Kapi’olani Community College (HI), Front Range Community College (CO). As a typical example, two workshops were provided to Wilmington College to help them with their Writing-Across-the-Curriculum assessment. They were able to implement a round-robin interviewing approach that helped all faculty in the program better understand the writing needs in other disciplines. To date they have now assessed nearly 400 student writing samples using the rubrics generated from these interviews.

The LON system for program assessment was extended to all stateside campuses in fall 2011 for spring 2012 ratings. Acknowledging the time-consuming nature of narrative assessment and of adding one more step to the several steps involved in the process for recording them, a streamlined single rating form was created through a collaboration of a NY faculty member, the NY Associate Dean, and the OIRA. Conveniently, streamlining also made it possible to study the more complex and longer-term problem of relating student assessment to program assessment in keeping with the MSCHE standards that specifies maximizing the use of currently collected data as much as possible for program assessment (cf., S14\_01).

The streamlined data collection created opportunities for ongoing assessment and improvement of program assessment as well, due to the synergy between MODEL rubrics and narratives. Narratives provide faculty with opportunities to go outside of the collective developmental framework created by the rubrics. The combined form alleviated separate storing of narratives and rubrics analysis that used (1) keywords in the rubrics definitions to organize the narratives, and (2) narratives to reveal what is missing from the rubrics.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, the new form provides a potential starting point for each program's faculty to create their program mission statements (as the new Rabbinical Mission Statement has shown) and refine their statements of program learning outcomes related to those missions.

#### *Analysis of Early Results and Rolling out Program Assessments to All Four Campuses*

The first step in analysis was to identify progress in each dimension separately. This was done on the first campus that used them in the report Learning Outcomes Network Aggregated Results. With the success of the initial results, the decision was made to roll out LONs for all the other programs in order to have a systematic data-gathering effort that would tie all assessments together yet still allow individual program differences. An expanded form with definitions based on interviews of all Rabbinical School faculty members was disseminated in spring 2012.<sup>23</sup> The program learning outcomes are still the *Practical* levels (that characterize "new professionals") identified on this form, but work by a faculty committee should be undertaken to refine them for clarity and reliability of use. That refinement process should be a key component of assessing the assessment processes currently in place (discussed two paragraphs below).

The first results from all campuses were obtained in the spring of 2012 and are documented in Results of Rabbinical Ratings. That document provides clear data that the collective Rabbinical School faculty were able to discriminate the MODEL rubrics from Likert-type ratings. The LON created the opportunity to discover "learning links"—acquisitions in two dimensions that occur together. Prior work over four terms on one campus ratings using MODEL rubrics (see Learning Outcomes Network CN Rabbinical Development (2009-12)) revealed that some acquisitions are much more linked than others. Identifying learning links helps programs to test new ways to organize offerings by learning impacts. Some dimensions move together developmentally while

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<sup>22</sup>In addition, the NY campus's comprehensive rating form also provided the opportunity to compare Likert-scale with MODEL-rubrics ratings. Uniquely defining levels within each dimension should improve discrimination between linked and unlinked learning, but this has never been tested. It would be expected that each dimension of Likert-type ratings should reveal student problems that might occur broadly in many of their courses. Program assessment, however, has the different goal of learning how each course contributes uniquely to a student's achievement of program learning outcomes. For that, showing what part of the curriculum is being addressed in each course means that many program assessment dimensions should not be relevant to each single course.

<sup>23</sup>Interviews were conducted on all campuses, enlarging the pool of dimensions from 170 in the 2009 Focused Visit Report to over 300. These were reorganized into 12 dimensions and new 100-word abstracts were written. A second round of abstracting produced 25-word, multiple-choice selections suitable for a survey tool.

others do not. One faculty member on the National Assessment Committee had experimented with expanding the amount of text work in the original Hebrew in a class at the expense of translated primary sources and secondary readings that deal with historical context. He used the analysis of developmental movement along with course evaluation information provided by students to decide among (1) continuing the experiment to emphasize Hebrew language sources, (2) returning to the original emphasis on the historical and cultural contexts, or (3) identifying a new approach.

As regards assessing the assessment processes themselves, term-by-term assessment completion reports show that for a sizable minority of faculty respondents, compliance requires persuasion, which some attribute to a generalized skepticism that occurs regardless of the type of assessment (e.g., narratives or generalized rubrics) or whether the assessment was organized by a faculty committee or the OIRA. Ultimately federal and accreditation agencies require full commitment by the faculty to the processes involved in program assessment. To accomplish this, faculty need to meaningfully and reliably participate in assessments of student work, as well as propose innovations to improve the assessment processes and the curriculum based on their results. Concurrently, the OIRA staff should travel to the other stateside campuses on at least an annual basis to meet with program faculty to get their suggestions for improving assessment, work on ratings definitions, explore alternative program assessment methods, and discuss the prior year's program-level learning results. In addition, the Office needs to continue to monitor faculty participation, demonstrate the helpfulness of the data, and, most important, enable the faculty to propose concrete and worthy steps for improvement in the fulfillment of the College-Institute's mission.

### *Compliance*

The MODEL rubrics provide clearly articulated statements of expected student learning outcomes at all levels and for all programs that aim to foster student learning and development (fulfilling S14\_01a). As one member of the NAC described their effect:

Having descriptions of the *Easy* and *Practical* approach across the dimensions of my course certainly makes my job easier. Some students think improvement is enough. But the program and not just me expects *Practical* performance in the dimensions I teach. I can now tell the students at the beginning of the course what is expected of them and agree with them at the end on whether they have just shown some progress or actually met the expectation.

The MODEL rubrics created in each program allow integration to be tested through the network (see Emergent Outcomes from LONs). Thus, the data revealed that Hebrew language was integrated at the *Easy* level, but less so at the *Practical* level. The meaning of this is just beginning to be explored by the faculty, but certainly will be part of innovations being considered for the Rabbinical School.

There are not huge national databases beyond HUC-JIR for results of educating rabbis, cantors, and students in other Jewish professional programs. Consequently, innovative approaches are needed to determine whether their assessment is "consonant with the standards of higher education and of the relevant disciplines." One approach to ensuring consonance with higher education standards (S14\_01c) that the OIRA has taken is to publicize the methods widely, engaging assessment specialists throughout the nation. The Director of Institutional Research and Assessment initiated a "Methodology" Community of Practice on the website of the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE), which the Association's executive director has reported is the most "lurked" section on the site. He has

also presented numerous publications and conference presentations, and is a frequent contributor to the 1150 member ASSESS Listserv. The AALHE postings have also been posted for the HUC-JIR community on [wiki.huc.edu](http://wiki.huc.edu) Assessment Methodology Postings.

The LON exemplifies systematic, sustained, and thorough use of a method that is simultaneously qualitative and quantitative (S14\_02a). By integrating the dimensions from the Cohen Committee with those of the developmental interviews and combining the LON results with those from the NY campus's narrative assessment form, the assessment maximizes the use of existing data (S14\_02a1). A project enabled by completing the sixth term of data collection in the Rabbinical and PhD Programs is to compare performance in the various dimensions of the LON with the type of placement that new graduates obtain. That the rubrics have been used for development of the all-campus Rabbinical School mission statement attests to their relationship to the institutional mission as required by S14\_01b and S14\_02a2.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the detailed analysis of Cincinnati course descriptions (for the 2009 Focused Visit study mentioned above) included a text analysis of the relationship between the mission/purpose and the Rabbinical School assessment rubrics. That there was only one line in the purpose statement not mentioned in the rubrics or courses shows both the rich relationship between the assessment and mission, but also the ability of the MODEL rubrics to reveal potential curricular issues. The unmentioned line was "contributing to the real-life decisions and growth of the Reform Jewish community worldwide" (see the discussion of *Research Question 1.1* in Chapter 2). It was concluded that the next time the Mission and Purpose Statement is addressed, the interrelation of this particular line with the curriculum should be re-examined, possibly resulting in changes in one, the other, or both. How the College-Institute advances and assesses education about outreach to a generation that is increasingly reluctant to affiliate with denominational institutions should be part of this discussion. Such a re-examination in face is proving to be part of the deliberations in the strategic planning update process noted in Chapter 3.

The preceding discussion showed various ways that the LON results have been used with confidence to inform decisions (S14\_02 a3). They also include direct evidence of student learning (S14\_02 a4), because each faculty member evaluates a capstone project for each student in each course. Because they are based on interviews of every faculty member, the LON results are strongly collaborative (S14\_02 b). There still are faculty members who resist assessment and the LON approach. The Cincinnati campus piloted the approach and therefore, has had more opportunity to use the results to improve teaching and learning. They recently added assessments of non-course student products such as dissertations, rabbinical theses, and capstone projects. They also introduced curricular innovations like student self-rating using MODEL rubrics, and will be piloting an integrated service-learning curriculum beginning during the academic year 2012-13, with the phase-in to be completed as the ensuing annual cohorts matriculate. As the LON approach becomes combined with the assessment procedures previously developed on the other campuses, such as narrative assessment, an increase in the number and variety of innovations to improve learning outcomes is expected.

The College-Institute has been able to progressively clarify and simplify the guidelines of the end-of-semester LON ratings because of unanticipated emergent results (S14\_02 c).<sup>25</sup> It is no longer necessary to ask faculty to post particular student products for some later reliability study, because the evaluations by later faculty can be used to determine whether the earlier ratings increases have been sustained. The rating forms now include text boxes for faculty to supplement or criticize definitions within the rating forms. This should enable program faculty to

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<sup>24</sup>See History of the HUC-JIR All Campuses Rabbinical Mission Statement Proposal.

<sup>25</sup>Emergent Outcomes from LONs

continuously improve the form's effectiveness. The OIRA also combined the rating forms of the NY Narrative Assessment with the LON to create a process that greatly simplifies demands on faculty time. Data from the LON will also determine whether there is a continued need to use both Likert-type and MODEL rubrics ratings or whether results can be obtained through just one type of rating.

The LONs obtain simplicity and practicality through repeated use (S14\_02 d). They obtain ownership through initial interviews, attending to documented comments, and disseminating aggregated results for use in classrooms. They achieve detail through the enormous potential number of learning links<sup>26</sup>. The overwhelming richness is being simplified, like a Google search, through network analysis, which is being continually improved.<sup>27</sup>

Periodic evaluation (S14\_02 e) of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of learning assessment occurs through five mechanisms: direct feedback, emergent effects of the LON, the co-analysis of the narratives with the LON, the comments within the LON rating forms, and the comments on the OIRA portion of the Administrative Survey. These have already generated numerous improvements in assessment as has adding optional comments to forms; dropping the need to upload student work; and including theses, capstone projects, and dissertations.

The value-added LON data<sup>28</sup> from the aggregated results provides convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes (S14\_03). This should be combined with the College-Institute's sterling record of student placement. Typically, every student in the core programs is placed in such high-paying jobs that the College Institute has a near perfect record of Federal loan repayment.

The reports footnoted in this document have been shared with faculty and led to important innovations, such as teaching the MODEL rubrics to students in order to help them clarify needed learning commitments (S14\_04). The new analyses now being used by some pioneering faculty members are likely to become more widespread as people get used to the opportunities that the data provide.

As indicated in the section on *Strengthening Assessment* in Standard 7, the use of student learning data for institutional assessment is in the early stages of its development. The VPAA has been closely involved with all aspects of the development, analysis, and dissemination of this data. This should help ensure ongoing compliance with S14\_05.

HUC-JIR's compliance with the fundamental elements of Standard 14 has been met through the use of Learning Outcomes Networks. As indicated in the section relating to Standard 7 on *Strengthening Assessment*, there other forms of manageable program assessment that might serve the College-Institute well and be somewhat simpler. Thus, a system would work that eliminates definitions of *Easy* and *Inspiring* levels and relies solely on faculty defining approximately a dozen learning outcomes for their program and then rating whether each student has shown evidence of reaching one or more of the outcomes in each course. Advancing such a system as disciplines and educational needs change over time would

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<sup>26</sup>Because each level is uniquely defined, 12 dimensions with 4 levels per dimension generates more than 4 million links.

<sup>27</sup>The OIRA examined links by weighting them based on the number of times both were coded together for the same student in the same course. New network analyses will help to refine knowledge of how prerequisites impact later courses and which courses are critical to the success of the program. Exploring directed links and network measures like robustness and centrality may look like a violation of the MSCHE simplicity requirement, but that is mainly because it is a relatively new approach. Network analysis has boomed from its use by Google and other internet analysts in the last two decades to the point that it is rapidly becoming as necessary for data-mining as basic statistics.

<sup>28</sup>LON\_Aggregated\_Results.pdf

primarily depend on faculty revising definitions of program learning outcomes. The ease of engagement afforded by simplifying discussions to just the program outcomes might help to improve faculty ownership and use of their program assessments. In addition, it would help to use software support such as eLumen, which would work with a variety of manageable program assessment methods including LON's and other approaches.

### *Conclusions*

All programs have in place innovative, solid, and convincing approaches to documenting their learning outcomes. Integrating the Learning Outcomes Networks with additional data-mining of syllabi and narrative assessments is likely to uncover highly targeted opportunities to further student learning. The ratings at the *Practical* or *Inspiring* level from all programs suggest that the College-Institute engages with students in an educational dialogue of considerable depth.

The spread of aggregated assessments of student learning throughout every program and every course is resulting in a database that is creating opportunities for insight with every new annual analysis. Integrating narrative and syllabus data with rubrics ratings through statistical and network-theory analyses is a pioneering approach to mining educational data in order to improve student learning. The AALHE response to this work showed that its assessment methodology is spreading well beyond the College-Institute. The College-Institute's plan is for the next Periodic Review Report to show refinements of the methods and results. Although the Director of the OIRA has very recently left the employ of HUC-JIR, the College-Institute is committed to the work of the Office and will make staffing arrangements going forward to ensure that its work on assessment is maintained at the same comprehensive level of rigor and, indeed, improved.

## **Suggestions for Improvement**

### *Standard 7: Institutional Assessment*

1. The OIRA needs to continue to improve integration of learning outcomes with existing data and new survey results from the diverse administrative functions.
2. Future administrative surveys should be created using a clearer reminder of the educational dimensions in all of College-Institute activities, by rephrasing the third interview question to be: "What do you do to support student learning outcomes?"
3. The impact of requiring some programs to be financially self-sustaining needs to be a special focus of analysis of the learning outcomes assessed below.
4. The administrative survey process of redesign, data collection, analysis, reporting, and follow-up innovations needs to be sustained annually.
5. Board surveys need to be sustained on a regular, but not necessarily annual, basis.

### *Standard 14: Learning Outcomes Assessment*

1. The ultimate responsibility for further promoting the culture of program assessment throughout the College-Institute should lie with the VPAA, deans and program directors, while making deep use of faculty expertise and communicating the value of the program learning outcomes to them and their students.
2. The director of the OIRA should meet annually with program faculty to discuss the prior year's program-level learning results, get their suggestions for improving assessment, and explore alternative program assessment methods.
3. The responsibility for overseeing term-by-term data collection in a timely, conscientious, and consistent manner should reside with each program director (and the Rabbinical School

directors collectively) and ultimately the deans and VPAA, based on reports of participation provided by the OIRA.

4. Each program director (and the Rabbinical School directors collectively) should convene a faculty committee to meet monthly to create over the next one or two academic years and run for three years between now and the PRR their own version of manageable program assessment with assistance from the OIRA, by (a) refining the definition of their program mission, (b) specifying the learning outcomes in simpler and more broadly acceptable terms than used by the *Practical* level of the LON's, (c) testing the definitions for reliable use by instructors, and (d) deciding whether to enrich the program standards by also defining the learning outcomes that show preliminary steps to achieving the standard and developments expected to occur later in the students' careers (as the *Easy* and *Inspiring* levels of the LONs do).
5. Each program should grow the use of their manageable program assessments to facilitate educational dialogue by (a) continuing to aggregate results, (b) showing their relationship with prior assessment approaches, such as narrative assessments and LON ratings, (c) integrating the manageable program assessments with additional data-mining of syllabi, and (d) use data analysis to identify potential ways to improve programs.
6. The OIRA should develop new types of data analysis to help identify courses that have the most impact as prerequisites or are critical to the success of the program.
7. The OIRA, the Director of Service Learning, and his working group should plan how ratings from the College-Institute's manageable program assessments will relate to the service-learning assessment by the field supervisors.
8. The OIRA needs to develop methods for assessing the long-term impact of the manageable program assessments on student careers.
9. Include manageable program assessments data as significant input to the strategic planning process.
10. Explore software tools for tracking learning outcomes, such as eLumen (see eLumen PowerPoint Presentation).