

Institutional Research and Evaluation

Highlights from the 2007-2008 Annual Report

The Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation (IR&E) was established in the fall of 2007 to consolidate the former offices of Academic Research & Planning (ARP) and Institutional Research & Planning (IRP). The mission of the newly-combined office is to provide data, reports, and research that support institutional planning, strengthen student learning, and promote understanding of the nature and quality of education at St. Olaf College. The merger has strengthened an already strong partnership among staff and created opportunities for streamlining office functions.

Highlights from the year include applying for and receiving two major grants supporting inter-institutional assessment projects that will be directed by the St. Olaf IR&E Office:

- *The “CALL and Response” grant will focus on improving students’ ability to make effective arguments at St. Olaf, Carleton, and Macalester Colleges, funded by the Teagle Foundation.*
- *The National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE) funded the transfer of the Research Practices Survey to the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS).*

At the institutional level, the IR&E Office was active in several important initiatives to further our research, assessment and communication agendas:

- *Completion of the articulation of intended learning outcomes for all academic programs.*
- *Coordination of faculty-led assessment forums held throughout the year titled: “What Are We Learning About Student Learning?”*
- *Administration of two national surveys for the first time at St. Olaf: the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) and the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Tenure-Track Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey.*

Organizational development accomplishments during 2007-08 include the following:

- *Merging and reallocating the original IRP and ARP budgets*
- *Establishing a portal website for the newly-integrated offices*
- *Envisioning a new office staffing structure and drafting job descriptions*

The IR&E staff is enthusiastic about the accomplishments of 2007-08 and looks forward to continued partnership with other units of the College in advancing the College’s mission, the mission of the office, and the vision of the office to become a national leader among liberal arts institutions in institutional research and the assessment of student learning.

Institutional Research and Evaluation

2007-2008 Annual Report

The Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation (IR&E) was established in the fall of 2007 to consolidate the former offices of Academic Research & Planning (ARP) and Institutional Research & Planning (IRP). The mission of the newly-combined office is to provide data, reports, and research that support institutional planning, strengthen student learning, and promote understanding of the nature and quality of education at St. Olaf College (<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/ir-e/>). This includes two major areas of responsibility: Institutional Research, and Evaluation and Assessment. The principal activities associated with each area are as follows:

Institutional Research (IR)

- 1. Conducting regular surveys of students, faculty, staff, and alumni**
- 2. Preparing and submitting college data to external agencies**
- 3. Providing internal data and reports to committees and managers**
- 4. Guiding college data procedures**
- 5. Maintaining an informative website**

Evaluation and Assessment (E&A)

- 1. Leading the College's program of assessment**
- 2. Assisting with course evaluations**
- 3. Guiding student evaluations of teaching for faculty reviews**
- 4. Supporting academic program reviews**
- 5. Assisting with grant project evaluation planning**

This annual report highlights the activities of each area of the office in each of its five major responsibilities, followed by a summary of internal activities required to establish, maintain, and lead the office itself. A final section outlines potential new projects and looks at priorities, goals, challenges, and opportunities for the future. We should note that many of the activities and accomplishments described below were undertaken collaboratively, involving staff in both the IR and E&A areas, even when they are reported as falling principally in one or the other of these areas.

Institutional Research (IR)

1. Conducting regular surveys of students, faculty, staff, and alumni

A chief activity of IR is to conduct surveys - of students, faculty, staff, parents, and alumni - and to communicate results of these surveys to various college constituencies. Most surveys are conducted on a regular basis - annually, triennially or less frequently as appropriate. Most surveys (e.g., the National Survey of Student Engagement) are externally prepared and compiled, while a few (e.g., Recent Graduates Survey) are locally developed. Externally prepared surveys,

while generic in character, offer the advantage of comparative benchmarks that, when properly used, can be of help in improving the College's educational program.

Most surveys stretch over two years - one for administration, the next for compilation of the results. Thus this section includes both surveys conducted in 2006-07, whose analysis took place in 2007-08, as well as surveys conducted during 2007-08. Results from some of these surveys will not be available until next year.

- ***Recent Graduates.*** The IR office conducts an annual survey of the previous year's graduates for the Minnesota Private College Council (MPCC) and the St. Olaf Center for Experiential Learning (CEL). This survey collects information about the primary activity of our graduates (graduate school, employment, or volunteer work). The IR staff finalized reports on the Class of 2006 for MPCC and CEL last summer and posted summaries to the IR website. The Research Analyst is currently compiling the data for the Class of 2007 survey, which had a response rate of nearly 50%.
- ***HEDS Senior Survey.*** In Spring 2007 IR participated in the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium's Senior Survey. Summary results, including comparison data for the Classes of 2000, 2002, and 2004, were compiled by the Research Analyst and have been posted to the IR website.
- ***Staff Survey.*** This internally-designed survey was administered for the third time in May 2007. The Research Analyst prepared frequency distribution tables, with comparisons to results from 2001 and 2003, as well as provided sub-group results by college division. Preliminary results were presented at an Informed Workplace session in the fall semester and the full longitudinal report was sent to the President.
- ***American College Health Association's (ACHA) National College Health Assessment (NCHA).*** Although the survey data and institutional report were received from ACHA last fall, the data was embargoed until late spring 2008, when the national report was released. The Research Analyst compiled our data in comparison to the 2004 survey administration and the report was forwarded to the Dean of Students. Select items were also released to a faculty member for a student research project on alcohol consumption.
- ***Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE).*** Administered during Week One 2007 to all incoming students, this survey yielded a 75% response rate. Preliminary data was received in January and will be used with the comparison data from NSSE (see following item).
- ***National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).*** A spring semester follow-up to the BCSSE for first-years, the NSSE response rate for that class was 53%. Seniors were also offered the online survey; 50% of the class responded. Data from the survey should be received by late summer. This spring the IR Director also worked with two Sociology students to conduct two focus groups of each first-years and seniors to gain a better understanding of student interpretation of questions. The Director will begin analysis of those discussions this summer.

- ***Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)***. IR administered a pilot study of the FSSE to a random sample of 75 tenured, teaching faculty members. 71% responded; data will be received in late summer.
- ***Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Faculty Survey***. St. Olaf participated in this triennial survey for the fourth time this year; but yielded only a 25% response rate.
- ***The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Tenure-Track Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey***. St. Olaf participated for the first time this year in Harvard University's survey of tenure-track faculty. 21 of our 30 faculty responded (70%). The final report is due in early June.
- ***HEDS Alumni Survey***. During the spring semester 2008, IR administered the HEDS Alumni Survey, utilizing the online services of *getsurveyed.com* for the first time with this survey. This was a "five-years out" survey for the Class of 2002, and although we had e-mail addresses for over two-thirds of the class, only 23% of those contacted (114 alumni) completed the survey.

2. Preparing and submitting college data to external agencies

Every year IR works with the relevant offices and databases on campus to prepare and review reports for many external organizations and agencies. Data for numerous topics are reported, including general institutional characteristics, admissions, financial aid, enrollment, graduation, retention, faculty/staff compensation and demographics, endowment, finance, tuition and fees, and voluntary support. Most reporting is in summary form; some require submission of unit-record data for individual students.

- ***Publications***
 - *Common Data Set (CDS)*. The completed CDS is sent to many college guide publishers. IR also posts it on its website, together with longitudinal summaries of the data and other data asked for regularly by publishers.
 - *College Guides' Supplemental Surveys*. In addition to the CDS, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Peterson's*, *College Board*, *Princeton Review*, and many other college guides request much additional data.
 - *University and College Accountability Network (UCAN)*. New this year, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) published an online resource that included two pages of data and information about each participating institution, provided by the IR Office.
- ***Institutional Associations***
 - *American Association of University Professors (AAUP)*
 - *Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM)*
 - *College & University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR)*

- *College Sports Project*. The IR Director prepared a summary of the previous year's report for President Anderson and Dean May, as well as compiled the unit-record data for this year's submission. The report was the first data received from this project.
 - *Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)*
 - *Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association (NCA)*
 - *Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS)*
 - *Minnesota Private Colleges Research Foundation (MPCRF)*
 - *National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)*. In addition to the regular reporting to the NCAA, the IR Director facilitated a NCAA Membership Survey of the athletic staff regarding the Division III structure and standards and prepared a summary report for President Anderson, who responded directly to the NCAA.
 - *Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC)*. In conjunction with the Council for Aid to Education (CAE) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), IR provided transcript data for St. Olaf CLA participants to the SSRC.
- ***State & Federal Government***
 - *Minnesota Office of Higher Education (MOHE)*
 - *Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS)*
 - *US Department of Education: Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA)*
 - *National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES): Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)*.
 - *NCES: National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08)*
 - *National Science Foundation: National Survey of Recent College Graduates (NSF:NSRCG)*

Various other reports are submitted to institutional and departmental accreditation agencies, grant agencies, auditors and other organizations. These reports are either reviewed and supplemented by the IR office and then sent, or a final copy is sent to the IR office as the central repository for institutional reports.

Both the Director and the Research Analyst participate in ongoing electronic discussions regarding the Common Data Set and various data collection issues with HEDS members.

3. Providing internal data and reports to committees and managers

IR provides a variety of reports and data summaries for use by committees and managers, as well as responds to ad hoc requests for information from both within and outside the college. In addition to working regularly with the Marketing and Communications staff to check facts and proof-read college websites and publications, the IR Office also serves as a data-provider for other researchers on campus. Examples of these are as follows:

- ***Internal reports/data summaries***
 - Prepared the annual faculty salary summary by Faculty for the RPC faculty compensation subcommittee

- Worked with Provost and Human Resource Offices to revise anniversary date queries for recognition of faculty years of service
- Collected tuition and fees/room and board data of Annapolis Group institutions for Cabinet
- Summarized age of current tenure-track/tenured/special appointment faculty for CILA, Dean's Council, and website
- Prepared retention data for minority and female faculty to inform a department tenure-track search
- Advised Director of Student Services on preparation of a student transportation survey
- Created itemized spreadsheet of faculty FTE by department/program for 2007-08
- ***Unit-record data requests***
 - Fulfilled over a dozen requests for creation of e-mail aliases of random samples of students, utilizing various required criteria
 - Created 24 random samples of students for tenure and promotion reviews
 - Provided graduation, gender and ethnicity data for over 300 students who were tracked for the HHMI grant application
 - Helped prepare retention, graduation, and financial aid data for Student Support Services grant application
 - Extracted historical personnel-related faculty data for preparation of a database in the Provost Office
 - Provided Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) score and student transcript/activity data to Center for Integrative Research (CIR) students for more in-depth analysis of CLA results
 - Worked with the Collaborative Assessment for Liberal Learning (CALL) faculty teams to prepare for presentations of their findings to the campus community as part of the Teagle Foundation grant. In particular, provided unit record data from selected items on the NSSE, Alumni and Senior surveys, combined with transcript data for the Quantitative Reasoning team.
- ***External data requests***
 - The Research Analyst responds regularly to various e-mail list-serve queries from HEDS institutions. We receive summary reports from every query that we answer, and each summary is sent to the relevant office or department on campus. This year St. Olaf responded to over 50 requests, covering such diverse topics as asylum, how departments count faculty loads, use of audit firms, pass/no pass policies and mean GPA for the Class of 2007.
 - A student at Lake Forest College doing a study on the cost of textbooks requested information on how St. Olaf factored in book costs in determining financial aid.
 - The Research Analyst sent a template of the Common Data Set Appendix to a new member of HEDS for use in compiling additional questions asked for in college guides.
 - The office provided data on full-time and part-time faculty by minority and non-resident alien status.

4. Guiding college data procedures

A responsibility of IR is to help establish and maintain the integrity and consistency of data that is stored, transformed, and reported from several different computer systems. A primary portion of this work is for the IR Director to continue oversight of policy and procedures to ensure data integrity and appropriate relationships between the faculty database in the Provost's Office and the Lawson financial system in the Human Resources Office. A secondary relationship is to provide input to the IIT and Registrar staff on the functionality and suggested changes to the Student Information System (SIS). Actions taken this year include:

- Worked with database managers in Admissions, Human Resources, and Registrar Office in preparation for federally-mandated changes in identification and reporting of student and employee race and ethnicity categories
- Changed rank coding for visiting faculty in the Provost Office faculty database
- Provided input to IIT staff for changes in display of faculty rosters in the SIS
- Collaborated with Registrar staff to prepare a list of desired new fields in the SIS

5. Maintaining an informative website

An important function of IR is to provide readily available institutional data, for both internal and external audiences. The primary way to make this data available is through the IR website. Organized around eleven main categories of data on the left-navigation bar, the main page provides a search function within the IR site as well as notices of any new data posted or updated within the previous three months. Longitudinal summaries are updated annually and new reports are added as available. The eleven categories are: Overview, Institutional, Admissions, Enrollment, Academic Programs, Students, Graduates, Faculty, Administration & Staff, Finance & Financial Aid, and Alumni. An archive section contains data and reports from the former Office of Educational and Institutional Research.

Evaluation and Assessment (E&A)

1. Leading the College's program of assessment

Under the leadership of IR&E, in partnership with many others at the College, and with support from our Teagle-funded CALL collaboration with Carleton, Macalester, and Grinnell Colleges, St. Olaf continues to make excellent progress in its efforts to assess and improve student learning. Principal accomplishments during 2007-08 include the following:

- ***Securing two major inter-institutional assessment grants.*** Consistent with its vision of becoming national leaders in assessment among liberal arts institutions (<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/ir-e/>), IR&E staff applied for and received two major grants supporting inter-institutional assessment projects that we will lead.

- *The Teagle-funded “CALL and Response” initiative.* The Teagle Foundation issued a call for proposals for projects intended to foster systematic improvements in student learning, using assessment data to inform change and document improvements. On behalf of St. Olaf, Carleton, and Macalester Colleges, Jo Beld applied for a three-year grant focused on improving students’ ability to make effective arguments. The application was successful; Jo will serve as Principal Investigator, and David Schodt, Director of the Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts, will serve on the Steering Committee.
- *The NITLÉ-funded “Sustaining and Institutionalizing the Research Practices Survey” project.* Jo Beld and Susan Canon worked together to prepare an application to the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLÉ) to fund the transfer of the Research Practices Survey to the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (where Susan is a Board member), so it can be offered on a regular basis to HEDS member institutions. The application was successful and will subsidize the participation of up to thirty liberal arts institutions in the survey project during the 2008-09 academic year. Jo and Susan will serve as co-Principal Investigators. This project will assist liberal arts institutions nationwide in assessing and improving information literacy, or the ability to conduct effective academic research.
- ***Completing the articulation of intended learning outcomes for all academic programs.*** St. Olaf’s accrediting organization, the North Central Association’s Higher Learning Commission, has required the College to complete the articulation of intended learning outcomes for all academic programs by the time of our next progress report on assessment, due to the Commission in January 2010 (http://www.ncahlc.org/index.php?option=com_directory&Itemid=192&Action=ShowBasic&instid=1404). The Director and Interim Director of Evaluation and Assessment collaborated with the Provost and Dean of the College, the Curriculum Committee, the Assessment Subcommittee, and the Academic Leadership Team to accomplish this objective.
 - *Intended learning outcomes for General Education.* The process of articulating intended learning outcomes for each GE requirement was initiated by the General Education Task Force established by the Dean of the College in Spring 2004 to review the GE curriculum, and brought to completion by the faculty Curriculum Committee in partnership with the Director and Interim Director of Evaluation and Assessment during the 2007-08 academic year. A statement of intended learning outcomes for the Foreign Language requirement (FOL) was approved by the faculty at the April faculty meeting; revisions to the intended learning outcomes for Studies in Physical Movement (SPM) were approved at the May faculty meeting. Guidelines and intended learning outcomes for each GE requirement are now posted on the website of the Curriculum Committee (<http://www.stolaf.edu/committees/curriculum/ge/index.html>), and a link to this page is included in the assessment section of the E&A website (<http://www.stolaf.edu/committees/curriculum/ge/index.html>).

- *Intended learning outcomes for majors and concentrations.* All departments and programs were asked to write intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for their majors and concentrations. To support the development of the ILOs, E&A hosted two “clinics” on developing “mission-driven, meaningful, manageable, and measurable” statements of intended learning outcomes. Two clinics were offered:

Thursday, January 17, 3.15 – 4.30 pm; 14 faculty members from 11 departments/programs attended

Thursday, February 28, 3.45 – 4.45 pm; 19 faculty members from 17 departments/programs attended

The first clinic was structured as a large group discussion. Participants had questions about the purpose of the ILOs, requested examples of what kinds of evidence might be collected, and were curious about who had the responsibility for assessing the GE curriculum. The second clinic included small group discussions of draft learning outcomes. The participants were divided into small groups by Faculty. The majority of those who indicated they had attended an ILO clinic said that they found the clinic helpful.

All departments and programs have submitted ILOs and they have been posted on the website of the Curriculum Committee

(<http://www.stolaf.edu/committees/curriculum/ge/index.html>). The Registrar’s office has linked ILOs to the appropriate catalog sections and departments and programs have been invited to place a link to these statements on their home pages.

- ***Collecting and analyzing evidence of student learning***

- *Gathering data from St. Olaf alumni on the impact of study abroad on student learning and development (Fall 2007).* Eric Lund, Director of International and Off-Campus Studies and head of the St. Olaf Global Understanding Team, collaborated with the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation to engage St. Olaf students in three different studies attempting to assess the impact of study abroad on student learning. Two of the studies were designed to test the data collection instruments and were not intended to generate usable data for the participating institutions; these studies will be discussed briefly below. The third, however, yielded a substantial amount of data. In early Fall 2007, approximately 800 St. Olaf alumni (approximately 50% of those invited to participate, an impressive response rate) participated in the inter-institutional Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) project sponsored by the University of Minnesota. Participants completed a 45-60 minute electronic survey about the impact of their study abroad experiences on their subsequent personal and professional development, and in particular on their civic engagement and activities on behalf of the common good. Results have just been forwarded to the participating institutions, and we anticipate a lively discussion among members of the Global Understanding Team in Year 4 of the CALL initiative.

- *Analyzing and reporting information literacy assessment data (Fall 2007).* Teagle funds supported data analysis and internal dissemination of findings from the Spring 2007 administration of the Research Practices Survey (RPS) to first-year students at St. Olaf and Carleton. With Jo serving as Principal Investigator, funding from NITLE supported the conduct of focus groups with St. Olaf students drawn from all four classes about their research practices, beliefs, and attitudes. This grant also supported the analysis of Spring 2007 Research Practices Survey data for seven other institutions.
- *Analyzing and reporting revised Fall 2005 – Spring 2007 CLA data (Spring 2008).* The Council for Aid to Education re-analyzed the sophomore Spring 2007 CLA results for institutions participating in the four-year Lumina-supported longitudinal CLA project, which includes three of the four CALL consortium schools. We were interested in knowing more about the extent to which our St. Olaf results resembled or departed from results at other institutions, so we consulted with CAE staff to obtain comparative data. We then put together an expanded analysis and interpretation of our revised CLA results so that faculty who are unfamiliar with the CLA can quickly grasp the significance of the results. What we learned is that St. Olaf's results were, for the most part, similar to results at other institutions; our students' aggregate performance across all the CLA tasks improved from the beginning of their first year to the spring of their sophomore year, with their scores for all tasks in both years in the "at expected" range. Of particular interest was the finding that the smallest gain for St. Olaf students was realized in the "make-an-argument" writing task – again, similar to the pattern at other longitudinal CLA schools. This finding was a key factor in our decision to apply for a Teagle Systematic Improvements grant focusing on improving students' ability to make good arguments. We shared our St. Olaf CLA report with the CALL Critical Thinking team members, who in turn shared it with the larger inter-institutional Critical Thinking Team at its meeting in April 2008 (see below). We intend to share the report more widely in Year 4, in part to stimulate faculty interest in participating in the Systematic Improvements initiative (see below).
- *Assessing the student learning impact of the new Science Center.* In support of the St. Olaf College Science Facilities Assessment Project, students enrolled in biology, chemistry, computer science, physics, and psychology lab courses were asked to complete a short survey about their experiences in the lab spaces. Next spring, the students enrolled in these courses will also be asked to complete the survey.
- ***Sharing information about student learning with the wider St. Olaf community.*** Under the auspices of our Teagle-funded inter-institutional CALL project, led at St. Olaf by Jo and Susan, IR&E partnered with the Assessment Subcommittee and the Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts to launch a multi-session assessment forum we called "What Are We Learning About Student Learning?" Each of the CALL teams selected a set of assessment results germane to their learning outcome to share with the wider St. Olaf community. With the exception of the final session at the end of the spring semester, when attendance was light, each session averaged approximately 25-30

participants and included staff as well as faculty drawn from an array of departments and programs. Below is a summary of the topics discussed at each session in the series.

Session 1: Thursday, November 15, 2007

Student Proficiency in Research and Writing: What Are We Learning from the Research Practices Survey?

Nearly 75% of last year's first-year class at St. Olaf completed the RPS before they started classes, and more than 60% of the class completed it again at the end of their first year. Nearly 4000 students at nineteen other liberal arts institutions completed it in Fall 2006 as well. We now know a great deal about the research practices of first year students at the beginning and end of the first year of college, and we know how our entering students look in comparison to students at a wide array of other institutions. The CALL Effective Writing Team shared key findings from the survey and considered the implications for both library and classroom instruction.

Session 2: Thursday, November 29, 2007

Reasoning, Writing, and Problem-Solving: What Are We Learning from the Collegiate Learning Assessment?

The St. Olaf Director of Evaluation and Assessment introduced the Collegiate Learning Assessment to faculty and staff who were unfamiliar with it. Two students participating in the four-year longitudinal administration of the CLA shared their experiences and opinions about the instrument.

Session 3: Thursday, February 21, 2008

Critical Thinking: Are We Doing What We Say We're Doing?

The St. Olaf CALL Project Critical Thinking team discussed what we are learning about St. Olaf students' critical thinking abilities from the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) and other sources of information student learning, and discussed the implications of these findings for teaching and learning.

Session 4: Thursday, April 17, 2008

Global Perspective: What Is It? Can We Assess It?

What does it mean to have a global perspective? What does a course look like that incorporates a global perspective? What aspects of global understanding are amenable to assessment? These and other questions about this dimension of student learning at St. Olaf were addressed by the St. Olaf Global Understanding team.

Session 5: Thursday, April 24, 2008

Quantitative Literacy: What Do We Know So Far?

Do students feel that their St. Olaf experience has enhanced their ability to interpret and use numerical data appropriately to solve complex, real world problems? Do St. Olaf graduates feel that using quantitative tools is

important in their personal and professional lives? Are answers to the above questions dependent on a student's major or gender? How do we proceed at St. Olaf in our assessment of quantitative reasoning? The St. Olaf CALL Project Quantitative Reasoning team shared data about St. Olaf students' quantitative reasoning abilities from the National Survey of Student Engagement, the HEDS senior survey, and the CLA, and discussed the implications of these findings for teaching and learning.

- ***Supporting assessment projects in departments and programs.*** Departments/programs were encouraged to apply for an assessment grant funded by the E&A office. For 2007-08 five grants were awarded (Biology, Chemistry, Education, Psychology, Social Studies Education). So far, three departments/programs have applied for a 2008-09 Assessment grant (Education, Romance Languages, Social Science Education).
- ***Hosting an inter-institutional CALL team meeting on critical thinking.*** Each of the four CALL consortium institutions has responsibility for leading one of the four inter-institutional learning outcome teams associated with this project. St. Olaf is responsible for leading the Critical Thinking team; Mary Walczak serves as convener. The inter-institutional Critical Thinking team met on April 19, 2008 on the St. Olaf campus and included faculty from three of the four consortium institutions (St. Olaf, Carleton, and Macalester). Each campus team shared information about its activities and findings in assessing critical thinking on its own campus and discussed implications for teaching, learning, and future assessment.
- ***Participating in inter-institutional projects piloting new assessment instruments.*** St. Olaf contributed to two projects intended to advance the assessment of study abroad experiences. St. Olaf's participation was facilitated by Eric Lund, Director of International and Off-Campus Studies and head of the St. Olaf Global Understanding Team, in partnership with staff in the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation
 - ***The ACM "Impact of Study Abroad" project.*** In September-October 2007, 48 St. Olaf students returning from a semester of study abroad completed a pilot questionnaire developed by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest for a Teagle-funded project focused on the assessment of study abroad programs. Because the intent of this administration was to test the validity and reliability of the instrument, we will not receive a formal data report. However, the project allowed us to review a prospective instrument for the assessment of some elements of global understanding.
 - ***The BEVI project.*** In February 2008, 75 St. Olaf students returning from study abroad programs completed the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI), as part of an inter-institutional instrument validation project sponsored by the International Beliefs and Values Institute (<http://www.jmu.edu/ibavi>), the Forum on Education Abroad (<http://www.forumea.org/>) and the Office of International Programs at James Madison University (<http://www.jmu.edu/international>). The data will not provide direct evidence of student learning, but rather will be used to evaluate the usefulness of BEVI in assessing student learning in study abroad programs in the future.

Notably, St. Olaf had the highest participation rate relative to its size of all eleven participating institutions.

2. Assisting with course evaluations

Form Creator is a primary vehicle that faculty use for course evaluations. We had few requests for help in designing evaluations and more requests for technical help with Form Creator. We have worked with IIT staff to transition the FormCreator help function to the Help Desk. We have also made suggestions for programming changes in the following areas: help-related, form creation-related, template-related, and form feedback-related changes. We anticipate that a new, improved version of Form Creator can be launched sometime in Fall 2008.

3. Guiding student evaluations of teaching for faculty reviews

Over Summer and Fall 2007, student evaluation forms were completed by alumni and returning students for the 2007-08 candidates for tenure and/or promotion. The three-member student committees prepared summary reports for the candidate's dossier. Work is underway for the 2008-09 tenure and promotion cycle. This spring we met with the student committees for these faculty members and drafted additional questions for the form. Data collection from graduating seniors (class of '08) has been completed. This year, for the first time, we have invited graduates to complete the form on Form Creator using their existing St. Olaf usernames. Since the usernames expire three months after graduation, we initiated this phase of data collection on May 22, 2008.

Our office also assists departments conducting more comprehensive reviews by providing a sample of students selected by the criteria set forth by the departments. This year we encouraged departments to use a simple random sample of students to streamline the work in the office. Eight student samples were compiled and only one required a more complicated sampling procedure than a simple random sample.

4. Supporting academic program reviews

Since a great deal of guidance for program reviews is now available on the E&A website (http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/ea/program_reviews/index.html), there were few requests for additional assistance. Department chairs have publicly expressed appreciation for the program review resources E&A has posted.

5. Assisting with grant project evaluation

E&A staff assisted with the preparation of the evaluation section of several grant proposals in 2007-08, and also assisted with data collection and report preparation on several other grants.

- ***Assisting with proposal preparation.*** E&A provided assistance in the following proposals:
 - *Howard Hughes Medical Institute Undergraduate Science Education Program* – Proposal submitted October 2007.
 - *Providing Support Structures for Chemistry Majors, NSF 07-524* – NSF Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics \$583,414, 2008-2012, Mary Walczak (PI), Doug Beussman (co-PI), Kathy Glampe (co-PI), Submitted: 11/13/07.
 - *Launching an Integrated Mathematics-Biology Program: Research and Curriculum* – National Science Foundation Interdisciplinary Training for Undergraduates in Biological and Mathematical Sciences (UBM) Program, \$998,426, 2008-12, Steve McKelvey (PI), Anne Walter (co-PI), Mary Walczak (Senior Personnel).
- ***Conducting or supporting grant project evaluation.***
 - *Lilly-funded Lives of Worth and Service program.* With funding from the Lilly Endowment, Jo Beld is serving as the evaluator for the 5-year, \$2 million “Lives of Worth and Service” program. A substantial portion of her 2008 calendar year sabbatical has been devoted to data collection, data analysis, and report preparation, including interviews with thirty faculty and staff serving as Lilly Vocational Scholars, Lilly Teaching Fellows, leaders of Lilly-supported international service-learning programs, or in some other capacity.
 - *NSF-funded Polaris Project.* “The Polaris Project: Rising Stars in the Arctic” is an inter-institutional project funded by the National Science Foundation and led by the Woods Hole Research Center, intended to foster research, undergraduate education, and public awareness concerning arctic ecosystems and global warming (<http://www.thepolarisproject.org/>). John Schade, Department of Biology, is the St. Olaf Co-PI; Jo Beld is the project evaluator. In Fall 2007, Jo successfully applied for IRB approval from the four institutions where evaluation data would be collected from participating students in Spring and Summer 2008. During the subsequent semester, Jo collected assessment data from those students, including a cohort of students in a project course taught by John Schade.
 - *HHMI-funded project.* E&A assisted with data collection for a current project funded by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute examining the student learning impact of an interdisciplinary introductory course integrating the teaching of chemistry and biology.

IR&E Organizational and Professional Development

1. Organizational development

The merging of Institutional Research and Planning and Academic Research and Planning into a single Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation has strengthened an already strong partnership among staff and created opportunities for streamlining office functions. Organizational development activities and accomplishments during 2007-08 include the following:

- ***Initiating regular weekly staff meetings***, which has fostered information-sharing, more effective division of labor, and increased our productivity.
- ***Merging and reallocating the original IRP and ARP budgets***, establishing one account for institutional research expenditures and a second account for all assessment expenditures. In doing so, we have met a second requirement of the NCA Higher Learning Commission for our next assessment progress report in January 2010, which is to include “an explicit budget for the assessment program” (http://www.ncahlc.org/index.php?option=com_directory&Itemid=192&Action=ShowBasic&instid=1404)
- ***Establishing a portal website for the newly-integrated offices***, including a new mission and vision statement and indicating which staff members are responsible for which activities
- ***Converting the long-term temporary ARP/E&A Associate position to a regular E&A Research Associate position.*** The regular position was filled for a short time by Scott Johnson, but Scott elected to pursue a new position outside St. Olaf. IR&E elected to revert to a temporary hire again in order to re-think office staffing needs in light of the recommendations of our external evaluators during our 2006-07 self-study. To that end, we hired a temporary E&A Research Coordinator and will maintain that as a temporary position until our revised staffing plan has been approved and we have a regular appointment in place.
- ***Envisioning a new office staffing structure and drafted job descriptions.*** In consultation with the Assistant Provost and the Office of Human Resources, and informed by the results of our 2006-07 self-study, the Director of Institutional Research, the Director of Evaluation and Assessment, and the Interim Director of Evaluation and Assessment developed a long-term staffing plan.

2. Professional development

- ***Susan Canon, Director of Institutional Research***
 - *Grants, offices, papers, presentations*
 - Co-Principal Investigator, “Improving Students’ Information Literacy: Sustaining and Institutionalizing the Research Practices Survey Project,” inter-institutional

grant project funded by the NITLE Instructional Improvement Fund, June 2008-present

- Canon, S., and Beld, J. “Building Successful Faculty-Staff Partnerships in Assessing Student Learning.” Roundtable presentation to the AAC&U Network for Academic Renewal Conference on Sharing Responsibility for Essential Learning Outcomes, Savannah, GA, November 2007
- HEDS Board Member, June 2006 – present; HEDS Treasurer, June 2007 – present; joined monthly conference calls
- Steering Committee member, Collaborative Assessment for Liberal Learning (CALL) Teagle grant initiative, June 2005 – present
- *Additional professional development*
 - Participant, HEDS Annual Conference, Denver, CO, June 2008
 - Participant, HEDS planning retreat, Crystal City, VA, January 2008
 - Participant, MN Office of Higher Education Assessment conference, Minneapolis, MN, December 2007
 - Participant, Teagle-sponsored conference, “Exploring and Examining the Uses of the Collegiate Learning Assessment,” Crawfordsville, IN, July 2007
 - Participant, MPC IR Directors meeting, St. Paul, MN, July 2007
 - Participant, HEDS Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD, June 2007
- ***Jo Beld, Director of Evaluation and Assessment (Summer and Fall 2007; on sabbatical during calendar year 2008)***
 - *Grants, offices, papers, presentations*
 - Principal Investigator, “Collaborative Assessment for Liberal Learning [CALL] and Response,” inter-institutional grant project funded by the Teagle Foundation Systematic Improvements fund, July 2008 – present
 - Co-Principal Investigator, “Improving Students’ Information Literacy: Sustaining and Institutionalizing the Research Practices Survey Project,” inter-institutional grant project funded by the NITLE Instructional Improvement Fund, June 2008 – present
 - Steering Committee member, Collaborative Assessment for Liberal Learning (CALL) Teagle grant initiative, June 2005 – present

- Beld, J. “Assessing and Improving Information Literacy: The Research Practices Survey.” Presentation to the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) 2008 Forum on Assessment, Accreditation, and Accountability, Denver, CO, June 2008.
 - Beld, J. “Assessing and Improving Information Literacy: The Research Practices Survey.” Presentation to the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education Conference on Assessing Information Literacy and Fluency in the Context of the Liberal Arts Campus, Chicago, IL., June 2008.
 - Beld, J. “Using Learning Outcomes to Engage Faculty with Assessment and Strengthen Student Learning.” Presentation to the AAC&U Network for Academic Renewal Conference on Integrative Designs for General Education and Assessment, Boston, MA, February 2008.
 - Beld, J. “CLA Recruitment at St. Olaf.” Panel presentation for a Council for Aid to Education CLA Spotlight Webinar, February 2008.
 - Beld, J. “Assessing Information Literacy Across Institutions: The Research Practices Survey.” Presentation to the AAC&U Annual Meeting on Intentional Learning, Unscripted Challenges, Washington, DC, January 2008.
 - Beld, J. “Assessment in Minnesota: Reflections on the St. Olaf Experience.” Panel presentation to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education Conference on Assessing Results: Higher Education Learning Outcomes, Brooklyn Center, MN, December 2007.
 - Canon, S., and Beld, J. “Building Successful Faculty-Staff Partnerships in Assessing Student Learning.” Roundtable presentation to the AAC&U Network for Academic Renewal Conference on Sharing Responsibility for Essential Learning Outcomes, Savannah, GA, November 2007
 - Ciner, E., and Beld, J. “The CLA: Future Research Questions and Opportunities.” Panel presentation to the Ohio State University 2007 CLA Forum on Assessment: Building on the Past to Plan for the Future, Columbus, OH, October 2007.
- *Additional professional development*
- Participant, CAE-sponsored workshop, “CLA in the Classroom Academy,” Long Beach, CA, May 2008
 - Member, Oral Communication Rubric Development Team, AAC&U Valid Assessment of Learning In Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project, April 2008 – present

- Participant, Teagle-sponsored conference, “Exploring and Examining the Uses of the Collegiate Learning Assessment,” Crawfordsville, IN, July 2007
- **Mary Walczak, Interim Director of Evaluation and Assessment (Interim, Spring, and Summer 2008)**
 - *Grants, offices, papers, presentations*
 - Convener, Inter-Institutional Critical Thinking Team, Collaborative Assessment for Liberal Learning (CALL) Teagle grant initiative, June 2007 – present
 - *Additional professional development*
 - Member, Critical Thinking Rubric Development Team, AAC&U Valid Assessment of Learning In Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project, April 2008 – present
 - Participant, CLA in the Classroom Academy, Long Beach CA, May 2008
 - Invited participant, AAC&U Regional Sounding: Engaging Departments with Advancing and Assessing Essential Outcomes, Madison WI, April 2008
 - AAC&U Meeting: Integrative Designs for General Education and Assessment, Boston, MA, February 2008

Looking Ahead

With two new inter-institutional grants to lead, continued expansion of the College’s assessment program, increasing demand for institutional research data to support planning and decision-making, increasing national visibility for St. Olaf’s work in assessment, and the prospect of new staff, 2008-09 promises to be a fast-paced year in Institutional Research and Evaluation. In addition to delivering on these commitments, IR&E hopes to accomplish the following:

- ***Addition of a Senior Research Analyst to the IR&E staff.*** IR&E has received approval to hire a Senior Research Analyst, a new position that will bring significant research and quantitative data analysis skills to the office staff. This position will report to the Director of Institutional Research and will substitute for the temporary Research Associate position that reported to the Director of Evaluation and Assessment. The addition of this position will require no change in the total FTE assigned to IR&E and no change in the remaining three positions (IR Director, E&A Director, and Research Analyst).
- ***Enhanced internal dissemination and use of assessment and institutional research findings.*** With significantly more direct evidence of student learning and other institutional data at St. Olaf now available, the time is ripe to make this information more

available and integral to the ongoing processes of academic and administrative decision making at the College. Doing so will not only result in more informed decision making, but will also help us meet two other requirements for our January 2010 progress report on assessment to our accreditors: “(1) specific documentation relating to the engagement of faculty in assessment of student learning, and (2) real and specific examples of how assessment data inform academic decision-making.” At a minimum, IR&E intends to:

- Integrate and reorganize the IR&E website to make data and reports easier to find
- Revive and regularize *brief* e-mails to the community about the work of our office and findings with significance to academic and institutional life.
- Continue to partner with the faculty Assessment Subcommittee, the larger Curriculum Committee, and the faculty-staff Assessment Interest Group to find ways to make the use of assessment data a built-in, organic feature of academic decision making in courses, programs, committees, and other academic units of the College
- ***Continued improvement in policies and procedures for the protection of human subjects.*** IR&E has significant responsibility for the protection of human subjects in inquiry projects undertaken by faculty, staff, students, and guests of the College. The Director of Evaluation and Assessment serves as IRB chair; the Director of Institutional Research is an additional Board member; and IR&E maintains the IRB website. College policies and procedures have evolved significantly in the past few years, but there is considerable work still to do in streamlining the work for all persons involved, educating faculty and staff, and decentralizing the review of inquiry projects requiring only intermediate (i.e., non-IRB) review. IR&E may apply for grant funding in 2008-09 to support these efforts.

The IR&E staff is enthusiastic about the accomplishments of 2007-08 and looks forward to continued partnership with other units of the College in advancing the College’s mission, the mission of the office, and the vision of the office to become a national leader among liberal arts institutions in institutional research and the assessment of student learning.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Canon, Director of Institutional Research

Jo Beld, Director of Evaluation and Assessment (Summer and Fall 2007)

Mary Walczak, Director of Evaluation and Assessment (Interim, Spring and Summer 2008)