

Institutional Research and Evaluation

2008-2009 Annual Report

The mission of Institutional Research & Evaluation (IR&E) 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 vision of the office is to be a national leader among liberal arts institutions in institutional research and the assessment of student learning. During 2008-09, IR&E advanced both its mission and its vision in a number of significant ways.

Supporting Institutional Planning

1. Gathering and reporting institutional survey data

- *HEDS Alumni Survey* – The Class of 2002 was surveyed in the Spring 2008 semester. In late Spring 2009, the IR&E Senior Research Analyst began data analysis and prepared a report for the President and the Advancement/Alumni Relations division leadership. Further data analysis and dissemination takes place during the 2009-10 academic year.
- *Parent Survey* – IR&E administered the internally-developed Parent Survey for the third time during the Spring 2009 semester. The survey was sent electronically to all parents from the classes of 2008-2012 for whom St. Olaf had a valid e-mail address, potentially including multiple parents per student. A paper survey was sent to a random sample of half of the parents for whom St. Olaf had only a mailing address. A total of 3,298 parents were contacted and 1,246 surveys were received, for an overall return rate of 38%. Data analysis and dissemination takes place during the 2009-10 academic year.

2. Conducting and assisting with institutional data analyses

IR&E conducted numerous analyses of institutional data to support administrative decision-making, and assisted work in other offices to ensure institutional data policy compliance and integrity. Examples include:

- Preparing summary statistics of St. Olaf students' SAT/ACT scores by ethnicity;
- Analyzing course enrollments by instructor appointment status;
- Conducting a query of HEDS members re: moving expenses paid by institution;
- Reviewing new Higher Education Act requirements and what specifically applies to IR;
- Working with Registrar, Admissions, HR and IIT staff re: implementation of new race/ethnicity coding for students and employees;
- Assisting in training of new Faculty Data Coordinator for data integrity and processes in the faculty information system.

Strengthening Student Learning

1. Gathering and analyzing assessment data

- *Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) administration to seniors – Spring 2009.* The 2008-09 academic year was the fourth year of our participation in the national Lumina study, in which the CLA was administered to a panel of St. Olaf students three times over the course of their college career (as entering first-years, spring-semester sophomores, and spring-semester seniors). We brought this project to a successful conclusion; 117 seniors completed the CLA, representing 85% of the original cohort of students who had completed the CLA as first-years, and 95% of those who had tested as sophomores, and who were still at St. Olaf and eligible to participate. This is one of the highest, if not *the* highest, longitudinal CLA retention rates in the country. Results will be provided by the Council for Aid to Education in Summer and Fall 2009.
- *Research Practices Survey (RPS) administration to first-years and seniors – Fall 2008 and Spring 2009.* We administered the RPS to entering first-years in Fall 2008 (response rate of 64%) and to both first-years and seniors in Spring 2009 (response rates of 56% and 51% respectively). Fall results were provided by the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) in late Fall 2008; preliminary spring results were provided in late May 2009 and incorporated in a workshop for instructors of Writing in the Disciplines (WRI) courses.
- *Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE), National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) –* Data collection for this suite of surveys was conducted during the 2007-08 academic year. During 2008-09 St. Olaf released its NSSE benchmark results to the public for the first time, through the USA Today and US News publications, as well as the public St. Olaf website. Detailed NSSE data results were also posted on the internal St. Olaf website. In addition, the IR&E Senior Research Analyst prepared the following reports for discussion at Dean’s Council:
 - Comparison of NSSE Benchmarks by Faculty for Seniors ‘08
 - Which Survey Items Accounted for Differences Between St. Olaf Faculties in NSSE 2008 Benchmarks?
 - Student-Faculty Engagement Report
 - How Do Students Understand Selected NSSE Items? Evidence from Spring 2008 Focus Groups

2. Promoting campus engagement with assessment evidence

- *Leading grant-funded assessment projects.* 2008-09 was the fourth year of our Teagle-funded CALL grant with Carleton, Macalester, and Grinnell, enhancing assessment activities and partnerships within and across our institutions. In addition to the completion of the longitudinal administration of the CLA as described above, Year 4 included an inter-institutional conference in April 2009 on “Assessing for Learning,” attended by 24 St. Olaf faculty and staff (many of which presented) along with other faculty and staff from our partner institutions. 2008-09 was also the first year of our new Teagle-funded *State Your*

Case! project, led by St. Olaf and continuing our partnership with Carleton and Macalester, intended to strengthen students' ability to develop and support a point of view (<http://serc.carleton.edu/case/index.html>). Significant activities included a CLA Academy led by researchers from the Council for Aid to Education in October 2008, and a "postlude" session at the April 2009 CALL conference described above.

- *Sharing assessment results with faculty and staff.* The Senior Research Analyst shared a summary of results pertaining to quantitative reasoning from the NSSE, BCSSE, and HEDS-Alumni surveys with department heads in Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Sciences as well as with former participants in the appropriate CALL team. The Senior Research Analyst also delivered a presentation concerning use of qualitative text analysis software during a CILA Faculty Conversation, "Assessment of Professional Activity for Tenure and Promotion: What We Learn from Departments' Statements for Professional Activity." In addition, IR&E led forums and discussions several times during the academic year, engaging faculty and staff in discussing assessment results.
- *Guiding and supporting department/program-level assessment.* The Director of Evaluation and Assessment worked with the rest of the Assessment Subcommittee to draft guidelines for gathering and reporting evidence of student learning in majors and concentrations. The draft guidelines were then reviewed and edited by the full Curriculum Committee and recommended to the Dean of the College. The Dean subsequently issued these guidelines as a formal request that departments and programs gather, consider, and act on this evidence. IR&E facilitated a variety of clinics, consultations, and "webinars," and expanded resources on its website, to support departments and programs in this effort. IR&E also provided assessment grants to eight departments and programs (CEL, Chemistry, Education, Great Conversation, Psychology, Romance Languages, Social Studies Education, Statistics).

3. Assessing student learning in grant-funded projects

- *Lilly-funded Lives of Worth and Service program.* In September 2008, the Director of Evaluation and Assessment completed an extensive evaluation report to the Lilly Foundation on the five-year Lives of Worth and Service program fostering "theological exploration of vocation" at St. Olaf.
- *NSF-funded Polaris Project.* In December 2008, the Director of Evaluation and Assessment completed an extensive report to NSF on student learning outcomes in the first year of the Polaris Project, an inter-institutional grant-funded project supporting undergraduate education and research, faculty research, and public awareness of Arctic eco-systems and global climate change.

4. **Assisting with course evaluations** – IR&E has continued to work with IIT to refine and improve Form Creator, and to advise faculty and staff in course evaluation development and administration.

5. **Conducting or assisting with student evaluations of teaching for faculty reviews** – IR&E has continued to assist with sampling, questionnaire supplements, administration, and reporting

of student evaluations of teaching for tenure and promotion reviews. The office expanded the use of Form Creator for these evaluations, resulting in more detailed responses from students and alumni without compromising survey response rates. The office has also continued to assist with sampling and advice for the student evaluation component of more comprehensive pre-tenure reviews.

Promoting Understanding of St. Olaf College

1. Preparing external reports required or optionally submitted to various agencies, organizations, and publishers.

This year IR&E staff submitted or contributed to 39 reports or unit-record data collections from institutional associations or consortia, 16 college guide surveys, 10 federal government reports, 3 academic department associations' data updates, and information for a high school counselors' guide coordinated by the State of MN (complete list available upon request). Much of this data was recorded in the Common Data Set (CDS) and St. Olaf's compilation of a CDS Appendix of "frequently asked questions," both of which can be found on the IR website at <http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/ir/cds.html>. In addition, the staff administered a survey to the Class of 2008 to gather information on their primary activities in the first year after graduation. For the first time this year, the survey was conducted online via FormCreator. The data from this survey is summarized longitudinally on the IR website (<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/ir/Graduates.htm>), as well as reported to the MN Private College Research Foundation for their annual report.

2. Disseminating information about St. Olaf through publications and the IR&E website

Another part of providing information about the college to external audiences is working with the Marketing & Communications staff on various college publications and maintaining an informative website. The IR&E website is continually updated with new data and reports on all aspects of the institution. Work on further integrating the former IRP and ARP website has continued this year; progress can be seen at <http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/ir-e/>.

Serving as Leaders in Institutional Research and Assessment

1. Leading inter-institutional assessment projects

- *Teagle-funded State Your Case! grant.* Carleton and Macalester faculty participated in both the CLA Academy and the CALL conference "postlude" session described above under the auspices of *State Your Case*. Other significant activities included the development of the project website, which was featured on the home page of the Teagle Foundation website for several weeks.
- *NITTE-funded Research Practices Survey grant.* The Director of Institutional Research and the Director of Evaluation and Assessment served as co-PI's for a grant from the National

Institute for Technology and Liberal Education, funding the transition of the Research Practices Survey to the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS). With guidance from our office, HEDS administered the RPS to more than 40 institutions in 2008-09, provided customized institutional reports, and developed the capacity to prepare benchmarking reports in the future. The RPS is now an institutionalized feature of the array of services provided by HEDS.

- *NITLE conference planning and presentation.* The Director of Evaluation and Assessment worked with NITLE staff to plan and present at an inter-institutional conference on “Assessing Information Literacy in the Context of the Liberal Arts Campus” (Chicago, IL) in June 2008.

2. Engaging in dissemination and professional leadership

- *Dissemination by the Director of Evaluation and Assessment.* FY 2009 presentations for national audiences included:
 - ✓ “Assessing and Improving Information Literacy: The Research Practices Survey,” HEDS, Denver, CO, June 2008
 - ✓ “Assessing and Improving Information Literacy,” AAC&U, Seattle, WA, January 2009
 - ✓ “Which Assessment Approaches Make Sense for Your Institution? A Rubric for Evaluating Assessment Alternatives,” AAC&U, San Diego, CA, April 2009
- *Leadership and dissemination by interim and current Directors of Evaluation and Assessment.* The two Directors partnered in two leadership/dissemination efforts:
 - ✓ Invited participants, AAC&U planning meeting to design new Institute in Engaging Departments with Advancing and Assessing Essential Outcomes, Alexandria, VA, July 2008
 - ✓ Co-authors (with Dana Gross), “Engaging Faculty in Department-Level Assessment,” presented by Mary Walczak and Dana Gross at the 3rd annual “Innovations in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” conference, Wabash, IN, March 2009
- *Leadership by the Director of Institutional Research.* Susan Canon was re-elected to a second term as a member of the Board of Directors of the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium.

Staffing Changes

2008-09 marked a major change in staffing for IR&E. As noted in our 2007-08 Annual Report, the resignation of the E&A Research Associate enabled us to reconfigure that FTE into an IR&E Senior Research Analyst position, which we posted in late summer and interviewed in early fall. Tonya Kjerland was hired and began work in November, 2008. Having served earlier in 2008 as our temporary E&A Research Coordinator, she brought experience and familiarity with our office, as well as relevant expertise. In August, 2008 IR Research Analyst Joy Johnson announced her retirement to be effective in September, which enabled us to post and interview for our newly-configured IR&E Office Coordinator position. Anna Scaramuzza was hired into that position, and converted from a temporary employee in the office at the end of October, 2008. As a 2008 St. Olaf

graduate and former student worker in the Provost Office, she also brings excellent experience and skills to her position.

In addition to the major reconfiguration of office staff positions, Mary Walczak completed her year as Interim E&A Director in December, 2008 and Jo Beld returned from her sabbatical in January, 2009. While all of these transitions have required some additional personnel management time, we are ultimately pleased with both the reconfigured positions and the new employees. We look forward to the further integration of our work and the professional development of all IR&E staff.

Looking Ahead

Goals for IR&E for FY 2010 include the following:

1. Create stronger connections with current and prospective users of IR&E data.
2. Further integrate the IR&E website, making data and advice and support more accessible.
3. Work with partners to prepare the NCA-HLC Progress Report on assessment, due January 2010.
4. Improve policies, procedures and education for the protection of human subjects.
5. Continue national leadership and dissemination.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Canon, Director of Institutional Research

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

Jo Beld, Director of Evaluation and Assessment (Interim, Spring and Summer 2009)