 Criterion Four. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement
The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environment, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Assurance Evidence
CSU recognizes the complexity of student learning and agrees with the triangulation of educational programming, the learning environment, and student support services as critical quality components of Criterion Four. In this criterion, we demonstrate that CSU takes responsibility for the quality of each of these critical components not only through its increased ability to conduct assessment activities for each, but more importantly, in its integration of assessment findings to strategically inform our institutional initiatives and programmatic changes. The Strategic Plan has evolved to include Goal 7: Undergraduate Learning Outcomes and Goal 13: Graduate Student Success Outcomes as evidence of our commitment to the assessment of learning outcomes and the use of assessment results in our strategic planning and budgeting activities. Many other components of the Strategic Plan also reference learning assessment either directly as specific initiatives (such as a commitment to using NSSE) or indirectly, as metrics for evaluating initiatives, especially those related to the Student Success Initiatives (SSI).

Assessment activities have become pervasive, integrated elements throughout the culture of the institution as we have developed a strong desire for (1) data-informed decisions, (2) careful and deliberate analysis of data to benchmark progress in achieving goals, (3) increased public transparency and accountability, and (4) evidence that tracks changes and informs adjustments in strategic initiatives. This high level of integration is unmistakable as the assessment processes and analysis of results are discussed throughout this self-study, often as the evidence to substantiate assurance arguments for the various criteria and components. For example, Component 3.D focuses on the provision of student support services and Component 3.E focuses on co-curricular learning (a part of the learning environments), and therefore, the comprehensive assurance evidence for these components also presents the processes of assessment and evaluation of these activities. Criterion Five presents the processes for and the results of assessment and evaluation of the broadest components of the teaching and learning environments: physical resources, financial resources, institutional operations, and institutional sustainability.

We find guidance for this section of the self-study, not only in the criterion statement and its components, but also in HLC’s Guiding Values: "Focus on student learning" and "A culture of continuous improvement." We have, therefore, attempted to envision a robust goal for our campus assessment processes to demonstrate the quality and efficiency of our academic programs, student learning, and student achievement. We believe that high-quality academic programs contribute positively to the individual and the public good (students and external stakeholders), by meeting the educational needs of a global society within the scope of the degree program and institutional mission while fostering growth (personal and professional) within individual students. Therefore, external constituents (the public, employers, alumni, and the profession or discipline) must be consulted to define specific, measurable learning goals. The specificity of the learning goals should differentiate programs in different disciplines and degrees at different levels within a discipline.

We have concluded that the evaluation processes for determining the quality of programs and student learning should follow the scientific method of research and discovery: (1) make observations (gather data and evidence), (2) analyze the findings to understand what they might mean, and (3) identify what to do with the results, either (a) celebrate the validation of quality, and/or (b) design strategic initiatives for improvement. Then, we expect that the process should repeat with more observation/data collection to test the validity of the hypotheses that led to change. We also desire that all evaluation processes must be efficient, meaningful, reliable, and strategically informative for continuous improvement.

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Responses to the components of Criterion Four are constructed to demonstrate how we take responsibility for maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence for Component 4.A includes the process for comprehensive review of academic department operations (aka program review on the campus) and related processes for quality control and improvement of academic programs. Evidence for Component 4.B focuses on teaching and learning assessments of general education, learning within specific courses, and learning outcomes for academic programs. Our approaches to student success (retention, persistence, and graduation as components of student learning) require that our response to Component 4.C be much broader and more integrative of the many facets we consider as essential components of the institutional commitment to improvement of student success. The responses to Components 3.D and 3.E required description of assessment activities of student support services and co-curricular learning that are used to gather evidence of accomplishments in those facets of student learning, and should be considered part of our response to Component 4.C.

Sources

- Strategic Plan 2012 (Page 11)
- Strategic Plan 2012 (Page 15)