The Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research Steering Committee

Erin Applegarth, Research Analyst, Institutional Research
Mohua Bose, Director of Outcomes Assessment
Jason Bryer, Senior Research Analyst, Institutional Research
Patricia Croop, Director of Grants and Research, Institutional Advancement
Scott Dalrymple, Dean, School of Liberal Arts
Lisa Daniels, Assistant Vice President for Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research (Chair)
Betsy DePersis, Director of Academic Advising Services
Susan Dewan, Executive Director, Center for Military Education
Patricia Edwards, Associate Dean, School of Nursing
David Elliott, Associate Dean, School of Liberal Arts
Stacey Farber, Associate Director of Outcomes Assessment
Laura Goff, Faculty Program Director, School of Health Sciences
Mary Beth Hanner, Provost and Chief Academic Officer
Patrick Jones, Vice Provost
Jane LeClair, Dean, School of Business and Technology
Michael Cheng, Director of Assessment and Program Evaluation, School of Business & Technology
Cheryl McPhillips, Research Coordinator, Outcomes Assessment
Joan Mikalson, Director of Faculty Development and Support
Laurie Nagelsmith, Associate Dean, School of Nursing
Erin Norwood, Research Analyst, Institutional Research
Maurice Odondi, Assistant Director for Research and Program Evaluation, School of Nursing
John Prusch, Associate Dean of Online Learning
Charles Reichardt, Database Developer, Outcomes Assessment
Li-Fang Shih, Associate Dean, School of Business & Technology
Deborah Sopczyk, Dean, School of Health Sciences
Jean Taylor, Director of Learning Assessments, School of Liberal Arts
Todd Thomas, Assistant Vice President for Budgets and Financial Analysis
George Timmons, Dean of Online Education and Learning Services
Executive Summary

Effectiveness can be defined as producing the intended or expected result. Institutional Effectiveness in higher education typically refers to the “process and structure used by a college or university to determine the quality of its students, academic programs, administrative functions, and support services” (as cited in Head, 2010, p.10). For institutions of higher education, student learning outcomes are a critical element of how an institution fulfills its mission, but other divisions and functions of a college aid in the achievement of an institution’s mission. The Excelsior College Institutional Effectiveness Plan, is designed to complement the college’s Institutional Assessment Plan for Student Learning (Excelsior College, 2011). While most college and university institutional effectiveness plans tend to focus on student learning and the administrative systems at a college designed to support that learning, Excelsior College documents these processes in two related documents, while recognizing the integrated nature of both learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Continuous improvement in the teaching and learning environment and continuous improvement in making the institution effective and fulfilling its mission are two critical, inter-related processes.

As a private, nonprofit institution of higher education, the primary question to be addressed by the Institutional Effectiveness Plan is “How effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources?” (Collins, 2001, p.5). That is, Excelsior's performance relative to its mission is the primary definition of success in regard to institutional effectiveness (Collins, 2001). The purpose of this document is to describe a strategic, systematic, and continuous process of improving institutional performance relative to the mission including the following key elements:

Continuous improvement

- Assessing and documenting internal effectiveness
- Assessing progress and change
- Communicating outcomes
- Demonstrating accountability and regulatory compliance

Excelsior College produces many comprehensive assessment reports that help to inform decision making. The collection of assessment data related to student learning and institutional effectiveness is key; however, the assessment cycle demands more. “Whether measuring learning or measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of human and fiscal resource deployment in support of teaching and learning, multiple measures are required, as well as multiple strategies for interpreting and communicating the results of those measurements” (Middaugh, 2010, p.20). The processes included in this plan help tie the assessment data back to the College’s strategic plan and resource allocation process (i.e. budget) to create a more systematic approach to the entire strategic planning process. The Institutional Effectiveness Plan is intended to close the loop.
Introduction

Context
Founded as Regents College in 1971 and chartered as a private, nonprofit institution in 1998, the College was renamed Excelsior College in 2001. Excelsior means “ever upward” in Latin, and it reflects the aspirations of its students and graduates.

Excelsior College is an accredited, recognized leader in removing obstacles to the educational goals of the adult learner. The college provides efficient and affordable access to higher education through multiple avenues to degree completion.

With more than 140,000 alumni worldwide, and current enrollments totaling approximately 33,000, Excelsior College is a recognized leader in online and distance learning. Excelsior awards degrees at the associate and bachelor’s levels in liberal arts, nursing, business, technology, and health sciences, and at the master’s level in liberal studies, nursing, business, criminal justice, and cybersecurity. Certificate programs are also offered by the Schools of Business & Technology, Health Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Nursing. Excelsior currently offers more than 30 flexible degree programs and 8 credit-bearing certificate programs. Non-credit bearing certificates are also available through the Center for Technology Leadership and Center for Professional Development. The college also provides credit by examination via testing services provided through its Center for Educational Measurement.

The college built its success in part on its ability to address the needs of adult students, and acknowledges that college level learning need not be limited to the boundaries of a classroom. The average age of Excelsior College students is 39. Approximately 30% are from groups historically underrepresented in higher education, more than 25% are active duty or reserve military personnel, and they are geographically dispersed.

Excelsior’s academic schools and centers are supported by functional areas including Enrollment Management, Online Education and Learning Services, Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research, Finance and Administration, Information Technology, and Human Resources.

Philosophy
Excelsior’s philosophy, “What you know is more important than where or how you learned it,” reflects its rich history as an assessment institution and its current status as a provider of a broader range of educational services to adults worldwide.
Institutional Mission

Excelsior College provides educational opportunity to adult learners with an emphasis on those historically underrepresented in higher education. The College meets students where they are—academically and geographically, offering quality instruction and the assessment of learning.

Institutional Vision

Excelsior College provides global access to quality higher education for adult learners, helping them to overcome barriers of time, distance, and cost.

A world leader in the assessment of student learning, Excelsior is nationally renowned for its facilitation of degree completion and its advocacy on behalf of adult learners.

Values Statement

Excelsior College contributes to creating and maintaining a diverse, educated society by valuing

- lifelong learning as a pursuit
- innovation as a source of improvement
- flexibility as a means of service delivery
- excellence as the path to success
- integrity, honesty and caring as the basis for lasting relationships

Institutional Effectiveness

The last three decades have demonstrated a growing trend toward accountability in higher education with an emphasis on institutional effectiveness, driven mainly by evolving requirements of accrediting bodies and institutional stakeholders including its current and prospective students, alumni, faculty, staff, board of trustees and others in the higher education community. Institutional Effectiveness in higher education typically refers to the “process and structure used by a college or university to determine the quality of its students, academic programs, administrative functions, and support services” (as cited in Head, 2010, p. 10). What follows is an effort to integrate institutional performance measures, many of which are extant, in order to create a comprehensive institutional effectiveness plan that is consistent with the mission and goals of Excelsior College; promotes systematic and continuous reflection and review; and reveals potential areas for growth and improvement. This institutional effectiveness plan should be guided by the college’s strategic plan.
Figure 1. Hierarchical Relationship Between Mission, Vision, Values, and Strategic Planning.
Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the hierarchy of the college’s Mission, Vision, Values, Strategic Plan, Goals, and Institutional Effectiveness Plan. All of these elements flow from the institution’s mission. The institution’s vision and values are a reflection of that mission and the strategic plan, which outlines a desired state, informs goals and objectives, which in turn determine strategic activities. Strategic activities are reflected in both outcomes assessment processes and institutional assessment processes as encompassed by the institutional effectiveness plan. The diagram demonstrates the significance of the strategic planning process in determining institutional effectiveness. Clearly articulated goals help to determine the types of strategic activities an institution will engage in to help fulfill its mission (Dooris, Kelley, & Trainer, 2004; Keller, 1983).

Institutional effectiveness at the college encompasses student learning outcomes assessment and assessment of the educational support services and administrative functions that support student learning. Excelsior College’s strong commitment to student learning outcomes assessment is articulated in its Institutional Assessment Plan for Student Learning (IAPSL) and has been documented elsewhere over the years (Nesler, 2004; Peinovich, Nesler, & Thomas, 1997). Systematic, planned efforts to identify and analyze student learning outcomes are a reflection of the college’s dedication to advancing and improving student success via the learning experiences that are offered. It also reveals that as an institution, Excelsior College is conscientious of outcomes assessment and “continues to nurture a culture that values outcomes assessment and is maturing as an institution that makes determinations about student learning and institutional performance based on data collected through various measures” (Excelsior College IAPSL, p. 3).

This document is intended to provide a framework for institutional effectiveness that extends the assessment cycle of student learning documented in the IAPSL to the administrative operations that support student learning by concentrating on efforts that holistically address institutional performance relative to the institution’s stated philosophy, mission, vision, values, and strategic goals. The purpose of the institutional effectiveness plan is to support continuous improvement across the institution, and provide a framework by which to achieve effectiveness and assess progress and change.

Literature concerning institutional effectiveness plans affirms that “ideally, institutional effectiveness activities are motivated by a sense of internal dedication to the improvement of the institution” (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003; p. 449). Furthermore, “perceptions of the importance of institutional effectiveness can be affected to the extent which these processes have been integrated into the overall fabric of the institution and become more enduring than the individuals who champion them” (ibid, p. 450).
The Institutional Effectiveness Plan is intended to be a centralized reference for the college community and its constituents, just as the IAPSL serves as a centralized reference related to student learning assessment. While institutional effectiveness is designed to be formative in nature—used for continuous improvement purposes—it is also summative in that it addresses accountability issues.

While the college has been engaged in ongoing assessments of institutional effectiveness measures, those activities remain largely decentralized. This document represents a more systemic effort to implement measures of institutional effectiveness, and is a reflection of the institutional environment, the changing needs of various stakeholders, the institution's commitment to continuous improvement, and changes in the higher education environment.

The Institutional Effectiveness Paradigm

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education indicates that “effective assessment processes are useful, cost-effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, carefully planned, and organized, systematic, and sustained” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005; p. 4). Moreover, components of assessment processes and planning articulate clear statements concerning goals and outcomes, followed by a plan outlining steps involved and resources dedicated toward goal achievement and evaluation (Middaugh, 2007).

In essence, assessment of learning is a continuous process whereby results from assessment activities are used to develop and revise goals. Continuous monitoring via systematized assessment permits determination of the efficacy of strategies that support these goals.

Figure 2. Institutional Effectiveness Paradigm
The same paradigm can be used to describe institutional effectiveness. The elements of the Excelsior College Institutional Effectiveness Paradigm address the question of “How effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources?” (Collins, 2001, p. 5) Excelsior College’s mission and vision are unique to the institution and the purpose toward which all of the strategic activities are directed. It is the deployment of the college’s resources toward fulfilling the mission that is the hallmark of institutional effectiveness. The mission and vision provide the institutional context for the college’s strategic activities.

The next element of the Excelsior College Institutional Effectiveness Paradigm addresses intended educational, support services, and administrative objectives. Each administrative unit has unit outcomes that align with the college’s Strategic Goals and have clearly defined activities and assessment measures. Feedback from the assessment results and the use of the results is essential to the assessment cycle as they serve to inform strategic planning and resource allocation decisions. The cyclical process is similar to that described in the Excelsior College IASPSL, but the focus is expanded to institutional effectiveness and overall college performance in addition to student learning, while including strategic planning and resource allocation as essential elements in the process.

The execution of institutional assessment requires institutional commitment to evaluation and reflection as well as documented evidence that the process exists, that it is appropriately linked to strategic and institutional goals, that it is broadly and effectively communicated to the college community, and that assessment results are thoughtfully used to substantiate further decision making and strategy.

Thus, the purpose of this document is to describe a strategic, systematic, and continuous process of improving institutional performance including the following key elements:

■ Continuous improvement
■ Assessing and documenting internal effectiveness
■ Assessing progress and change
■ Communicating outcomes
■ Demonstrating accountability and regulatory compliance

The Institutional Effectiveness Plan will serve as a key road map for continuous improvement at an institutional level. “Whether measuring learning or measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of human and fiscal resource deployment in support of teaching and learning, multiple measures are required, as well as multiple strategies for interpreting and communicating the results of those measurements” (Middaugh, 2010, p. 20). Data generated can inform where the institution has been, where the institution is now, and where the institution wants to go (Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, 2004).
The college operates on a fiscal year beginning July 1 of the current year and ending June 30 of the following year. The strategic planning cycle describes two overlapping processes—the implementation of the current annual institutional goals and budget, as well as the planning and development of the following year’s annual institutional goals and budget.

The planning process at Excelsior is a cascading series of distinct plans. Each plan is used as the foundation for the next plan in the process. The process and components are represented in the following chart. The timeline for the process is detailed in Appendix C.

The strategic planning process is designed to include input from all stakeholders of the institution. In the first quarter of the fiscal year the college community is invited to participate in Strategic Planning Open Forums to evaluate the threats and opportunities in specific areas of the institution’s environment including the legal and regulatory environment, financial environment, advancement, extended education, enrollment management, academic affairs, human resources, and information technology. Participation from all members of the college community is welcomed and encouraged.

The ideas and suggestions generated through the Strategic Planning Open Forums are collected and reflected upon by the Executive Staff and Deans. The Executive Staff Retreat in September allows key college administrators to set priorities, propose annual institutional goals, and revise strategic goals as necessary using the input from the open forums to guide discussions. The Operations Staff then convenes to address the environmental considerations and proposed strategic plan before review by the Strategic Planning Task Force of the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees meets in October to review the proposed annual institutional goals and refine adjustments to the strategic plan.
Late in the second quarter units begin formulating budgets for the next fiscal year based on the strategic priorities. By February the budgets are finalized, with final approval of the budget and annual institutional goals by the Board of Trustees in April. The end of the third quarter also marks an opportunity for the college to evaluate half-year performance and adjust budget expenditures as needed.

**Relationship between Strategic Goals, Annual Institutional Goals, Unit Activities and the Strategic Plan**

Excelsior College’s Strategic Plan 2012–2016 outlines a number of strategies and action steps that are indicative of aspirations to bring the college forward in terms of enhancing student success, diversifying resources, and advancing its formidable reputation as a leader in servicing adult learners.

Strategic planning at Excelsior College is an inclusive process, bringing together contributions from all levels, including the Schools of Business and Technology, Health Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Nursing, as well as Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research, Online Education and Learning Services, Advising Services, Office of Registration and Records, Military Education, Enrollment Management, Institutional Advancement, Human Resources, Finance and Administration, Information Technology and Extended Education. Planning for the future, Excelsior has developed six strategic goals that will enhance the college’s position as a recognized leader in providing quality, accessible instruction and assessment methods to adults seeking to realize their own educational goals.

**Strategic Goals 2012–2016**

1. Achieve exceptional student success.
2. Maintain and enhance a strong financial base.
3. Expand competitive advantage.
4. Leverage technology to achieve strategic objectives.
5. Position Excelsior as a national leader in online and adult education

Each of the goals noted above are complemented by an array of “multi-year action steps” and a number of related internal and external measures. These measures are supported by assessment processes and are the foundation of institutional effectiveness.
In addition to the long-term Strategic Goals, each year the college engages in strategic planning by which the Annual Institutional Goals are developed. These annual institutional goals (Appendix A) are the top several priorities that the college intends to direct its activities and budgeting toward in the coming fiscal year. Each of the annual institutional goals is directly related to one or more of the aforementioned Strategic Goals of the college.

Each administrative and academic unit also develops their own unit goals and activities that define the direction of the unit for the year. These are referred to as Annual Unit Activities. These activities are directed toward helping the college achieve its Annual Institutional Goals, and the long term Strategic Goals. In addition, units are asked to submit an Annual Unit Activities Report to the President in which the unit activities are each related to the Annual Institutional Goals. The Annual Unit Activities are documented by use of an institutional planning template.

Excelsior’s Planning Template

Good strategic planning includes “drill down” and “roll up” elements—unit and division planning and assessment processes (e.g., terminology, templates, and procedures) are essential for overall institutional effectiveness. Institutional goals and unit plans must be integrated with the overall institutional strategic plan. The Planning Template, which follows, operationalizes Excelsior College’s Institutional Effectiveness Paradigm discussed earlier, and helps achieve this aim. As such, the Planning Template formally records strategic goals, annual institutional goals, specific unit activities, unit measures, unit progress, and the resources it will take to carry out the needed activities and assessments. It also specifies who exactly is responsible for executing the unit activities. Finally, the Planning Template tool reminds us that once the assessments are carried out, they need to be recorded and reflected upon by appropriate personnel. Most important, the Planning Template provides a growing body of evidence of institutional effectiveness as assessment results are used to confirm that unit and educational processes and administrative services are related to the institutional goals and are achieving their intended outcomes. And it reminds us that when units or the institution fall short of intended program outcomes, recognizing the gap between actual and intended outcomes and detailing action steps for follow-up (program adjustments) are critical contributions to the ever-evolving body of evidence that Excelsior can point towards as demonstrable evidence of its overall institutional effectiveness.

The Planning Template is an integral part of the strategic planning cycle at the college. Unit managers are required to participate in a quarterly review with the president and members of executive staff in which they discuss their progress toward unit goals. The use of the Planning Template will facilitate this reporting and assure that unit managers continue to address and
track top unit priorities as they relate to annual institutional goals. In addition, the *Planning Template* also gives unit managers the opportunity to identify the resources needed to attain the goals deemed imperative to success.

Excelsior College uses TracDat™, an assessment management tool that allows for efficient storage and retrieval of academic assessment activities. This system can be employed to manage institutional program assessment as well. This system will allow for clear documentation of activities as well as the ability to quickly identify activities for each strategic goal. Effective use of this system will require additional staffing for wider implementation at the institution.

### Specific Activities in Support of Institutional Effectiveness

While this document demonstrates Excelsior’s commitment to institutional assessment, it is also evident through the examination of a broad chronology of events that demonstrate the evolution of assessment and evidence based decision making at the college.

“*Birnbaum argues that one of the most significant reasons that managerial strategies fail is that they do not succeed in attracting allegiance or support of large numbers of institutional administrators or faculty*” (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003; p. 445). Excelsior’s long-standing tradition to institutional commitment and support of institutional assessment processes is manifested by its triennial comprehensive assessments of Assessment of Service Quality administered since 1997. Not only has service quality across the institution been assessed systematically, the results of each assessment have been reflected on by the college community, and acted upon by college leadership. Unit managers are directed to address any areas of concern identified in the results of the assessment by indicating courses of action to be taken and resources, if any, needed to effect the change desired.

Beyond the broad brush stroke assessments afforded by the triennial Service Quality surveys, specialized assessments across administrative units supporting the academic mission, such as in Advising Services, Information Technology, Finance and Administration, and Human Resources further demonstrate Excelsior’s commitment to assessing institutional effectiveness (see Appendix D for a complete list of assessments). Beyond their well-documented and extensive assessments of student learning outcomes (stored in TracDat™), each school within Excelsior monitors its student enrollment profile, fiscal health, and administrative operations. The specifics of these essential activities are items that Brown (1996) and Taylor and Massy (1996) include among key performance indicators commonly used in higher education institutions to monitor both operational performance and strategic goal attainment.
Strategic Goals 2012—2016:

**Goal 1:** Achieve Exceptional Student Success  
**Goal 2:** Maintain and Enhance a Strong Financial Base  
**Goal 3:** Expand Competitive Advantage  
**Goal 4:** Leverage Technology to Achieve Strategic Objectives  
**Goal 5:** Position EC as a National Leader in Online & Adult Education  
**Goal 6:** Maintain EC as an Institution of Exceptional Quality

Annual Institutional Goals 2011—2012:

**Goal 1:** Meet expectations established by approved budget  
**Goal 2:** Successfully complete steps necessary to MSCHE accreditation  
**Goal 3:** Conduct a successful 40th anniversary celebration and fund raising campaign  
**Goal 4:** Plan and implement strategy to reclaim market share  
**Goal 5:** Increase student retention and persistence  
**Goal 6:** Move to 24/7 student support and marketing capability  
**Goal 7:** Address areas of deficiency identified by Aguinis Study
Excelsior’s academic and administrative units have established key performance indicators (KPIs) that they regularly track. Key performance indicators are brief, easy to understand indicators of the health of the institution that relate to an institution’s mission and strategic plans and objectives (Borden & Bottrill, 1994). The first step in determining an institution’s KPIs is the selection of indicators, which is the most critical component (Bourne, Gates, & Cofer, 2000; Doerfel & Ruben, 2002). Each school or major administrative unit uses its own KPIs to monitor their respective internal operations, as well as how they relate to the College’s strategic goals. The academic units and Excelsior executive staff also utilize financial dashboards produced by Finance and Administration which track enrollments, course credits, examinations, and revenue across the colleges. These units also benefit in assessing their own and institutional effectiveness on the financial front from monthly financial statements produced by Finance and Administration.

While the financial dashboards and monthly financial statements disseminated by Finance and Administration are particularly useful for monitoring institutional financial health and each school’s contribution to the financial plan, they are of limited utility in promoting conversations about the strategic direction of the Schools. The proposed key institutional metrics, below, developed by the Executive Staff are a good vehicle for grounding academic strategic plans around institutional goals, along with metrics to underlie conversations about them.

Table 1: Key Institutional Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fiscal</td>
<td>Dashboard (enrollments, grads, withdrawals, course credits, exams)</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fiscal</td>
<td>Financial budget to actual</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td>Institution level persistence rates</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td>12 month continuation rate</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enrollment Management</td>
<td>Conversion (1—inquiry to App) (2—App to Enrolled)</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Institutional Research</td>
<td>Institution level degree completion (graduation) rates</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E details suggested KPIs specifically related to the Strategic Goals 2012–2016. When viewed with a strategic, rather than operational or tactical lens, performance across these measures is captured over a multi-year period. A multi-year context informs conversation about prospective direction by taking stock of where the institution has already been, where it currently is, and what it might take to fully realize the strategic goals.
Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Resources

The need to establish infrastructure and resources committed to ongoing institutional effectiveness to ensure that the college continues to deliver on its mission is the driving force behind the proposed creation of an Office of Institutional Effectiveness (Collins, 2001). Nichols (1995) states: “probably the most important initial plan management decision or realization in implementation of institutional effectiveness is the need to appoint a single individual to coordinate the process” (p. 13). Consultants commissioned to look at the college’s assessment activities indicated that “the logical choice for this individual within Excelsior College’s current structure is the Assistant Vice President for Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research, with the possible re-titling of the position and office.” The consultants noted that “the current outcomes assessment and institutional research function at the college comprises a staff familiar with the fundamentals of institutional effectiveness along with the analytical capabilities needed to track, trend, and forecast the data needed to coordinate the implementation of this plan. Therefore, OAIR seems an ideal location to house leadership and responsibility for college-wide planning efforts.”

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, formerly OAIR, will oversee the implementation of an on-going, systematized, and sustained institutional assessment process to determine how well the college is carrying out its mission and goals. The unit will “provide leadership in enhancing strategic decision making based on best practices and analysis of data” (OAIR Vision statement, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to have appropriate resources dedicated to these assessment efforts.

A centralized Office of Institutional Effectiveness will ensure that the college is operating within the best practices in institutional effectiveness. The staff of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will continue to provide institutional research data and support in the assessment of student learning outcomes, while additional resources will allow the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to support administrative units in the development of quality outcomes and appropriate assessment methods. IE staff will work with units to close the loop in assessment, much in the same way that the outcomes assessment staff has supported this in academic areas.

The consultants’ recommendations also included changing the organizational reporting structure so that the Assistant Vice President for Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research (new Office of Institutional Effectiveness) reports directly to the president. They note, “Outcomes assessment and institutional research functions are strongest and most effective when they are viewed within an organization as independent entities. The current organizational structure has the unusual reporting structure of the Assistant Vice President for Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research reporting to the college provost, which, in essence suggests that institutional research functions as academic programs research, rather than serving the entire institution. While this structure works well with the current personnel,
the college should consider changing the reporting structure so that the OAIR division reports to the president. This will have the impact of changing the focus of the work of OAIR to be more strategic and independent of the academic affairs function, making the assessment of institutional strategies and priorities more legitimate in the eyes of other divisions and the college community as a whole.”

Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee

To assure congruence among the strategic plan, measures of institutional effectiveness, student learning outcomes assessment, and KPIs, an Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee will be formed. The Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee (IESC) will expand on and encompass the membership and function of the current Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research Steering Committee (OAIRSC). As such, the IESC will include members of the current OAIRSC as well as additional members representing other administrative units. Additional staff of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness will be invited to attend IESC meetings as will other members of the Excelsior College community who are interested in the activities of the IESC.

In addition to the IESC, two working groups will operate to address specific issues and concerns, to work on tasks and make recommendations to the IESC on the implementation of programs and initiatives. The Academic Assessment Working Group, established in 2010, will continue to operate as a sub-group taking on issues related to academic program assessment. This group is chaired by the Director of Outcomes Assessment. A parallel group, the Administrative Assessment Working Group, will be established to address issues and concerns related to assessment within administrative units. This sub-group will be chaired by a member of the IESC representing an administrative unit.

Responsibilities of the Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee include the following:

- Recommend actions to improve assessment processes
- Understand the requirements of external audiences, e.g. Middle States and other accreditors and agencies
- Monitor the quality of assessment across the institution
- Ensure assessment results are used to improve program quality, student services, and administrative functions
- Conduct periodic institutional audits to determine what assessment is underway
The IESC will ensure cross-unit communication between academic and administrative units to integrate the assessment of student learning with the assessment of other measures of institutional effectiveness. Additional sub-groups may be formed as needed.

**Implementing the Plan**

The fact that Excelsior’s budget process links data collection and analysis to resource allocation is commendable, and directly addresses a common component of institutional effectiveness standards. However, “The requirements for compliance with standards on assessing institutional effectiveness and student learning necessitate a systematic, comprehensive approach to data collection” (Middaugh, 2007; p. 17). This implies that institutions dedicate resources and staffing towards the acquisition of information (data) to support these endeavors.

Centralization of the institutional assessments at the college is necessary. Implementation of the plan requires a multi-phased approach. Central coordination will require dedicated resources and training to firmly establish broad baseline knowledge at the school, program and unit levels about the components of effective outcomes, goals, and measures. A multi-year plan is necessary for moving the ultimate responsibility for coordinating planning efforts at the college to an office of institutional effectiveness, currently OAIR.

**Phase One (in progress):**

- Disseminate the Institutional Effectiveness Plan to the college community and stakeholders.
- Continue to clearly articulate the strategic planning process to the college community and other stakeholders.
- Incorporate the use of the **Planning Template** into the existing quarterly reporting process.

**Phase Two (July 2012 to January 2013 with additional staffing):**

- Change the reporting structure so that the re-named Office of Institutional Effectiveness reports directly to the president.
- Transform the Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research Steering Committee into the Institutional Effectiveness Steering Committee and establish the Administrative Assessment Working Group.
- *With additional staffing to support the expanded scope of work*, shift responsibility for institutional effectiveness to the re-named Office of Institutional Effectiveness.
Phase Three (January 2013 to September 2013):

- Provide training to units to establish understanding of the critical components of effective outcomes, goals, and measures.
- Ensure that administrative units have high quality, measurable outcomes linked to strategic goals.
- Create a document repository in SharePoint to collect institutional assessment data reports.
- Establish a schedule for auditing administrative assessment data.

Phase Four (October 2013 to January 2014):

- Incorporate unit outcomes into the Planning Template with unit activities linked to unit outcomes and institutional goals.
- Implement the use of TracDat™ to track strategic initiatives, assessments, and follow-up actions to close the loop on continuous quality improvement.
- Audit institutional effectiveness data in TracDat™ to ensure quality.

Resource Plan

Implementation of the Institutional Effectiveness Plan will require the dedication of additional resources to the existing Office of Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Research as it expands to encompass the coordination of institutional effectiveness assessment activities. A common thread of institutional effectiveness standards across five regional accrediting bodies is “the insistence that assessments be used to underpin planning and resource allocation” (Middaugh, 2007, p. 17). Furthermore, “the standards most frequently cited for follow-up activity are...assessment of student learning, assessment of institutional effectiveness, and development of an institutional planning and resource allocation process that is predicated on assessment information” (ibid, p. 17). An appropriate level of additional professional staff will be needed to fulfill the responsibilities of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness as identified, as well as any additional assessment needs that may arise.

As the responsibility for institutional effectiveness shifts to the current OAIR office, it is recommended that professional staff positions be added to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. A highly functioning Office of Institutional Effectiveness will require a professional level staff person to work with units to ensure appropriate, measurable administrative unit outcomes. OAIR is not sufficiently staffed to take on the increased responsibility of institutional effective-
ness at this time. As the plan is fully implemented, additional professional staff will be needed to support administrative units and the assessments they require to measure effectiveness toward their own unit outcomes.

In addition to the resources indicated to support an Office of Institutional Effectiveness, an individual responsible for overseeing the entire strategic planning process is necessary. This individual designated by the President, currently the Chief of Staff, will continue to work closely with unit managers, the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, the budget director, and the president to ensure that budget planning is closely linked to assessment results.

**Using Results to Inform Strategic Planning**

The purpose of the Institutional Effectiveness Plan is to articulate a systemized process for assessing the effectiveness of the college towards achieving its mission and strategic and annual institutional goals. To be effective as an institution the college must identify clear, measurable outcomes (both learning and administrative), develop or select assessment measures, offer opportunities for assessment and use the results to inform strategic planning. The well-designed and implemented assessment process ensures that resources are used efficiently and effectively to support student learning at the college.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Excelsior College Annual Institutional Goals

Appendix B: Definitions related to Strategic Planning

Appendix C: Strategic Planning Cycle

Appendix D: Assessment List

Appendix E: Suggested Strategic Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Appendix A

Excelsior College 2011–2012 Annual Institutional Goals

Goal 1: Meet expectations established by approved budget

Goal 2: Successfully complete steps necessary to MSCHE accreditation

Goal 3: Conduct a successful 40th anniversary celebration and fund raising campaign

Goal 4: Plan and implement strategy to reclaim market share

Goal 5: Increase student retention and persistence

Goal 6: Move to 24/7 student support and marketing capability

Goal 7: Address areas of deficiency identified by Aguinis Study

Excelsior College 2012–2013 Annual Institutional Goals

Goal 1: Meet expectations established by approved budget

Goal 2: Increase student retention, persistence and graduation rates through an enhanced-student experience (multi-year)

Goal 3: Complete second phase of move to 24/7 student support and enrollment capability

Goal 4: Reposition and grow the ADN nursing program so that: students have options for instruction, as well as assessment from Excelsior; graduates may qualify for RN licensure in all 50 states

Goal 5: Further enhance the diversity of managerial staff and faculty

Goal 6: Respond to market demand for a less expensive baccalaureate degree (i.e. “$10K degree”)

Appendix B

Definitions related to Strategic Planning

*Strategic Planning Cycle*—the year-long process in which annual institutional goals are proposed, strategic goals are revised if necessary, progress toward annual institutional goals is measured, performance related to budget is evaluated, and annual institutional goals and budget for the coming year are adopted.

*Strategic Goals*—the six major long-range goals for the College as detailed in the “Excelsior College Strategic Plan 2012–2016.”

*Annual Institutional Goals*—a list of more specific *annual* goals for the institution to pursue, which are in keeping with and drawn from the overall goals in the five-year Strategic Plan. These affect how we plan budgets for each fiscal year. In the past these may have been referred to as either ’annual goals’ or ‘institutional goals.’

*Annual Unit Activities*—the goals and activities developed by each unit that support the overall annual institutional goals of the college.

*Annual Unit Activities Report*—a unit’s list of activities it plans to pursue in the current fiscal year indicating which annual institutional goal(s) each activity relates to and the measures the unit will use to indicate success in achieving each.

*Quarterly Reports*—quarterly reports to Executive Staff that concentrate on the three to five major activities conducted by the unit during the quarter, including the measured progress to date, and noting the resources needed to complete the activity.

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## Appendix C

### Strategic Planning Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strategic Plan</th>
<th>Institutional Annual Goals, Current Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Institutional Annual Goals, Next Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Unit Annual Plan</th>
<th>Individual Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>President reports to the Board on Annual Institutional Goal attainment for prior year.</td>
<td>• Executive Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td>• Executive Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td>• Review expenditures for month against budget</td>
<td>• Carry out work in accordance with current “evaluation year” goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>College-wide conversations with faculty, staff &amp; students to inform Strategic Plan review</td>
<td>• Conduct college-wide conversations to inform any changes that may be required in goals or their priorities.</td>
<td>• College-wide conversations are conducted to inform priorities and goals for next fiscal year.</td>
<td>• Review expenditures for month against budget</td>
<td>• Carry out work in accordance with current “evaluation year” goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>College-wide conversations continue</td>
<td>• Executive Staff, informed by above conversations, reviews institutional effectiveness metrics to determine if modification of current goals is indicated to ensure alignment with resources and strategic priorities.</td>
<td>“Conversations” continue.</td>
<td>• Executive Staff prepares a set of goals for the coming year which a) support the end goals of the Strategic Plan, and b) guide budgeting decisions.</td>
<td>• Review expenditures for month against budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### October

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Plan</th>
<th>Institutional Annual Goals, Current Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Institutional Annual Goals, Next Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Unit Annual Plan</th>
<th>Individual Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty, students, &amp; staff review proposed changes, if any, to Strategic Plan.</td>
<td>Unit heads make first quarter reports on progress toward Institutional Goals, using unit measures.</td>
<td>Proposed goals for next FY are reviewed by Board and are adjusted and/or given preliminary approval.</td>
<td>Unit managers report progress on current year goals.</td>
<td>Merit increases are made based upon performance assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op Staff reviews any proposed changes.</td>
<td>Measurements of institutional effectiveness are reviewed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President’s Advisory Council reviews any proposed changes.</td>
<td>Adjustments to current year activities, priorities and budgets are made, if indicated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board reviews and approves any proposed changes to Strategic Plan.</td>
<td>Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### November

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unit Annual Plan</th>
<th>Individual Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Op Staff informed of any approved changes to Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Budget is prepared to support those Annual Institutional Goals that support attainment of the five-year Strategic Goals.</td>
<td>Review expenditures for the prior month against budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit managers prepare plans and budgets to support activities/goals tentatively approved for coming fiscal year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td>Board reviewed/ revised annual goals are presented to Op Staff to guide budget preparation for the next FY.</td>
<td>Review expenditures for the prior month against budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carry out work/training toward attainment of performance goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### December

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unit Annual Plan</th>
<th>Individual Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td>Budget is prepared to support those Annual Institutional Goals that support attainment of the five-year Strategic Goals.</td>
<td>Review expenditures for the prior month against budget.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Plan</th>
<th>Institutional Annual Goals, Current Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Institutional Annual Goals, Next Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Unit Annual Plan</th>
<th>Individual Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>• Unit heads make second quarter reports toward current year Institutional Goals&lt;br&gt;• Exec Staff conduct budget review for first two quarters and initiate any needed adjustments.&lt;br&gt;• Institutional effectiveness metrics are reviewed. Priorities and budgets are adjusted, if indicated.&lt;br&gt;• Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td>• Budget is prepared to support those Annual Institutional Goals that support attainment of the five-year Strategic Goals.</td>
<td>• Unit managers report on goal attainment progress + unit effectiveness measures&lt;br&gt;• Review expenditures against budget.</td>
<td>• Carry out work/ training toward attainment of performance goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>• Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review expenditures against budget. Make any adjustments called for by mid-year budget review</td>
<td>• Mid-year reviews are conducted of progress toward performance and professional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>• Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review expenditures against budget.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Institutional Annual Goals, Current Fiscal Year</td>
<td>Institutional Annual Goals, Next Fiscal Year</td>
<td>Unit Annual Plan</td>
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</table>
| April | • Board is briefed on goal attainment progress | • Unit heads make third quarter reports of goal attainment progress.  
• Effectiveness measures are reviewed and budget or priority adjustments made, if indicated.  
• Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards | • Board approves proposed goals (after determining that no modifications are needed from what was considered in October) and the budget to support attainment | • Review expenditures against budget.  
• Report on progress toward year’s current Institutional Goals  
• Report on effectiveness measurements  
• Report on plans for next FY’s goals |  |
| May   |  | • Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards |  | • Review expenditures against budget |  |
| June  | • Exec Staff measure strategic goal progress in preparation for July Board meeting.  
• Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards | • Unit heads provide preliminary reports of goal progress.  
• Exec Staff reviews monthly dashboards | • Op Staff meets to consider actions needed in support of goal attainment. | • Budget review  
• Managers review current year performance  
• President and Exec Staff approve plans for next FY |  |
### Appendix D

**Assessment List, Fall 2010**

**Excelsior College Institutional Assessment Work Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Assessment Administrator(s)</th>
<th>Assessment Results User(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unit</td>
<td>Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Review</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nursing Systematic Evaluation Plan</td>
<td>SON</td>
<td>Associate Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITC Plan</td>
<td>OITS</td>
<td>Vice President of Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly Reports (Review of strategic plans)</td>
<td>Exec Staff</td>
<td>Chief of Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-study: IACBE</td>
<td>SBT</td>
<td>Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-study: NLN</td>
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<td>Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-study: ABET</td>
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<td>Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Development Revision</td>
<td>OELS</td>
<td>Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>(course review score card)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Statements</td>
<td>Fiscal</td>
<td>Asst. Vice President—Finance &amp; Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proficiency Profile</td>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Reviews</td>
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<td>Director</td>
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<td>Curriculum Reviews</td>
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<td>Library Survey</td>
<td>ECL</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
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<td>Advising Survey</td>
<td>Advising &amp; Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Evaluations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Evaluations of Courses</td>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Excelsior College Graduates</td>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey of Supervisors of Excelsior College Graduates</td>
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<td>Director</td>
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<td>Staff Satisfaction Surveys</td>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Vice President of</td>
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<td>Human Resources &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT Surveys (Help Desk, Training, and Tech support)</td>
<td>OITS</td>
<td>Director of Technical</td>
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<td>Services/Remedy Administrator</td>
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<td>Post-CPNE Survey Report</td>
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<td>Associate Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty Evaluations</td>
<td>Schools</td>
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**External Review**

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<th>Unit</th>
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<th>Unit</th>
<th>Contact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)</td>
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<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
<td>Provost &amp; Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service quality survey (Aguinis)</td>
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<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
<td>College Community</td>
<td>Operations Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSOL (Priorities Survey for Online Learners)</td>
<td>IR</td>
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<td>College Community</td>
<td>Provost</td>
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<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
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<td>Beginning Student Retention</td>
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<td>Assistant Vice President—Budgets and Financial Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Month Continuation Rate</td>
<td>Budgets &amp; Fin Analyses</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion Rates</td>
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<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence Rates</td>
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<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to Completion</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits/Courses/Exams Taken Per Graduate</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SON Employment Outcomes</td>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Director of OA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Completion Rates</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President—OA&amp;IR</td>
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<td>Enrollment Management Dashboard</td>
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<td>Executive Director of Admissions</td>
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<td>Finance &amp; Financial Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiscal Dashboard</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Assistant Vice President—Budgets and Financial Analysis</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Assessment Administrator(s)</td>
<td>Assessment Results User(s)</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly Financial Aid Reports</td>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Executive Staff/ Operations Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance Report for Financial Aid</td>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Executive Staff/ Operations Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marketing and Business Development**

| Number of New Inquires                          | Marketing                                                      | Schools & Units                                                | Executive Director of Marketing                              |
| Source of Contact (Web Site, Fax, Outreach)     | Marketing                                                      | Schools & Units                                                | Executive Director of Marketing                              |

**Student Services Reports**

| Smarthinking Reports                            | OELS                                                          | Dean                                                           | Schools                                                      | Dean of OELS                                                 |
| Volume of Visitors to the Web Site             | OITS                                                          | Director of Systems Architecture                               | EM                                                          | Director of Systems Architecture                             |
| Volume of Visitors Behind MY EC Login          | OITS                                                          | Director of Systems Architecture                               | EM                                                          | Director of Systems Architecture                             |
| ADA Accommodations Aggregate Report            | OELS                                                          | Disabilities Services Coordinator                               | OELS                                                        | Disabilities Services Coordinator                             |
| Faculty Activity Report (Annual Survey)        | Provost & Schools                                              | Dean—SBT                                                      | Provost & Schools                                            | Provost & Deans                                               |
| ACE Report                                     | CEM& SON                                                      | Executive Director of CEM                                      | CEM& SON                                                    | Dean—SON                                                     |
| Budget Reports                                 | Fiscal                                                        | Assistant Vice President—Budgets and Financial Analysis        | Schools & Units                                              | Operations Staff                                              |
| Ombudsperson Reports                           | Ombuds                                                        | Ombudsperson                                                  | Schools                                                      | Vice Provost                                                  |
Appendix E

Suggested College-Level Strategic Performance Indicators (KPIs)

All measures trending over 60 months as available and appropriate

Achieve Exceptional Student Success
- Retention Rates by Degree Level
- Persistence Rates by Degree Level
- Completion Rates by Degree Level (3-yr associates and master’s; 6-yr baccalaureate)
- General Education Learning Attainment (as measured by ETS’ Proficiency Profile)
- Future educational plans (from One Year Alumni Survey)
- Promotion on the job (from One Year Alumni Survey)

Maintain and Enhance a Strong Financial Base
- Revenue—Budgeted and Actual
- Revenue—Actual
- Expenditures—Budgeted and Actual
- Fund Balance
- Extended Education revenue and expenses
- Contributions by revenue producing units

Expand Competitive Advantage
- Applications
- Registration Headcount
- Course Credits
- Examinations
- Military market share

Leverage Technology to Achieve Strategic Objectives
- OITS Customer Satisfaction (Help Desk, Tech Support, Training)
- Metrics under construction by Executive Staff

Position Excelsior as a National Leader in Online and Adult Education
- Metrics under construction by Executive Staff

Maintain Excelsior as an Institution of Exceptional Quality
- Enrolled Student Satisfaction (overall rating of entire educational experience from PSOL)
- Trienniel Service Improvement Priority Index (Responsiveness, Empathy, Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles)
- Alumni Satisfaction (from alumni surveys)