Criterion Four—Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Core Component 4.A.

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

Consistent with its vision and mission, Ball State University grants doctoral, specialist, master's, bachelor's, and associate degrees through its seven academic colleges. All of the university's colleges, departments, and schools demonstrate responsibility for the quality of their educational programs. The following summary describes exemplary efforts as well as general explanations of how quality is exhibited at Ball State through such dimensions as program review and accreditation, credit evaluation policies, and the success of graduates.

Subcomponent 4.A.1.

The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.

Subcomponent 4.A.5.

The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.

Institutional planning and decision making at Ball State are amply supported by data obtained from continuous assessment by the university and individual units. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) is a fully staffed, internally funded unit that addresses the growing and evolving demands of both internal and external constituents for evidence regarding student outcomes and administrative decision making. Ball State uses multiple methods to systematically collect student feedback. Well-established procedures enable the university to undertake program-based, department-based, and university-wide assessment, and these procedures continue to be revised and refined to serve and strengthen the institution's planning efforts.

A major aspect of Ball State's ongoing assessment activity involves external reviews of academic programs and departments. Most of the university's 48 academic units are periodically reviewed for accreditation by national or regional organizations. Formal records of unit accreditation reviews are available for viewing.

In past years, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) also required an internal and external review of all academic programs every eight years, which ensured units not subject to national or regional accreditation still underwent formal outside review. ICHE has since made this review voluntary, but Ball State has maintained a cycle of academic unit reviews and has integrated the process with an

annual evaluation of progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the university's current strategic plan. Guidelines for academic program reviews specify the type of information to be provided. Copies of reports from these reviews since 2004 are available for viewing.

Subcomponent 4.A.2.

The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning.

Subcomponent 4.A.3.

The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.

All of Ball State's academic units have established clear procedures and protocols to ensure the appropriate evaluation of credit granted to undergraduates who transfer in and to graduate students who wish to have courses from other institutions applied toward Ball State degrees. Unit procedures and protocols comply with university policies related to credit evaluation.

Undergraduate Transfer

Ball State's policies and procedures governing undergraduate transfer credit are defined in the *Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog.* Undergraduate applicants with previous college experience follow the same application procedures as students with no postsecondary experience. Admission decisions are based on the applicants' academic records at all educational institutions attended. The following core policies determine a transfer student's admissibility:

- Transfer applicants must be in good academic standing and eligible to return immediately to the institution they last attended.
- Applicants must have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale for all transferable course work attempted.
- Remedial and vocational credits are not transferable, as well as courses from institutions that are not regionally accredited (i.e., Middle States Association, North Central Association, New England Association, Northwest Association, Southern Association, Western Association). However, transcripts from all such institutions attended are still required.
- Students who apply for admission to Ball State while enrolled at another college or university may be admitted with incomplete transcripts based on their cumulative GPA at their current institution. Admission granted under these circumstances will be withdrawn if the student's cumulative GPA falls below 2.0.

Transfer Indiana—Along with Indiana's other state-assisted colleges and universities, Ball State collaborates with the Transfer Indiana office in maintaining the Indiana Core Transfer Library, an electronic resource that lists more than 80 common undergraduate courses and how they transfer among all participating institutions. This course-by-course equivalency library does not have program-specific information, but it does provide prospective students with baseline course equivalencies by course and by institution.

Credit Evaluation—Only course credit can be transferred to Ball State; grades do not transfer. All admitted transfer students meet with a professional academic advisor before their initial enrollment. Official Ball State course equivalents are established by the academic advisor in consultation with the appropriate academic department. Department chairs or their designees approve all courses transferred to a program that are not covered by articulation agreements. Credits associated with the Indiana Core Transfer Library are automatically accepted without departmental approval. Students can go online to see if their classes will transfer.

An example from the School of Nursing illustrates how Ball State departments evaluate credit from other universities. Students admitted for a baccalaureate degree in nursing submit official transcripts of completed undergraduate course work for evaluation according to policies in the *Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog* and the *Baccalaureate Nursing Student Handbook.* An academic advisor evaluates transfer credits for relevance to the nursing program and University Core Curriculum requirements. The School of Nursing evaluates all transfer credits for relevance to the baccalaureate nursing program on the basis of didactic and clinical content and hours.

Transfer of credits for nursing courses from other baccalaureate nursing programs is considered on an individual basis according to a review of academic records and course syllabi. A student who wants to transfer nursing course credits from another program must submit the course descriptions, syllabi, content information, and related clinical information to the associate director of the baccalaureate nursing program for review. Following this review, the student receives a letter documenting the status of the course materials submitted for transfer credit.

Graduate Transfer

Policies and procedures governing graduate transfer credit are outlined in the *Ball State University Graduate Catalog*. Students who want to transfer graduate work completed at another institution for credit toward their Ball State degrees must ensure the work satisfies specific Graduate School policies, such as completion at a regionally accredited institution. The Graduate School does not give credit for experiential learning. Transfer hours cannot be used toward a master's degree at Ball State if they have been used toward a previous degree. Graduate School admissions personnel review potential transfer hours and indicate to the relevant academic department when transfer hours can be used toward a degree. Academic programs have discretion to allow transfer courses to count toward program requirements or electives.

Graduate students pursuing a master's degree requiring 44 or fewer credit hours may transfer up to 9 hours. If the master's degree requires 45 or more credit hours, students may transfer up to 15 hours. Students seeking a specialist degree may transfer up to 6 hours. Doctoral students must complete 48 of the required 90 credit hours at Ball State. Individual departments may have more restrictive rules that take precedence. Other transfer rules include:

- Students must complete their degree's research requirement at Ball State.
- Credit hours for courses with credit/no-credit or pass/fail options cannot be transferred unless the academic department approves.
- Credit hours for correspondence courses cannot be transferred.

- All work for master's and specialist degrees must be completed in a six-year time limit. All work for a doctoral degree must be completed within seven years, with a mechanism for "certifying" out-of-date classes by showing the student has been engaged professionally in the field.

Graduate students also meet with department representatives who determine the relationship of previous credit to a current course of study. For international students, the Rinker Center for International Programs provides initial screening and recommends transferable credits, but individual departments determine which courses are accepted in their programs.

Subcomponent 4.A.4.

The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.

Ball State's academic departments maintain authority over prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, and access to learning resources. This authority is exercised through continuously monitoring the curriculum and making changes as needed based on annual reviews of course evaluations, specialized accreditation criteria and external program reviews, and adherence to professional guidelines. Each unit initiates curricular additions and changes through departmental committees.

Examples from two different colleges illustrate authority over these assessment dimensions at the academic level:

- In the School of Nursing, baccalaureate and master's curriculum committees have authority over program curriculum. These committees and other faculty maintain authority over prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, and expectations for student learning. They review course evaluations annually, and course and curriculum changes are based on Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accreditation criteria, student and faculty feedback, and aggregate results of the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and nurse practitioner (NP) certification.
- Of the 115 courses listed in Ball State's catalog for the Department of Theatre and Dance, approximately 75 percent have prerequisites ranging from previous coursework to department chair approval. Prerequisites are maintained and carefully enforced for all relevant courses within each of the department's seven program options. Sequential learning of skill sets is managed to ensure progress from general knowledge of a topic to a more refined level of expertise. Rare exceptions to prerequisite requirements must be approved by the primary departmental advisor. Rigor of courses and expectations regarding student learning are maintained by individual faculty members and monitored by the department's curriculum committee. Master syllabi are created and maintained for all courses.

Each academic college at Ball State also has a curriculum committee to review and act upon changes

proposed by departments. The Graduate Education Committee and the Undergraduate Education Committee are University Senate subcommittees of the Academic Policies Council charged with reviewing, evaluating, and revising policies and programs at their respective levels. Their voting membership includes faculty and students.

Course Rigor

Ball State accepts responsibility for providing students with a rigorous education, and toward that end, a University Senate task force made up of faculty from each college plus student representatives was formed in January 2012. This group is collecting data about grade inflation, students' academic engagement, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, the new core curriculum, immersive learning, expectations of external accreditors, and other relevant issues. This work will culminate in recommendations to the university for how to maintain and enhance the rigor of a Ball State education. For more about this task force, see Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B.

Faculty Qualifications

Departments uniformly work across all programs to ensure faculty are academically and experientially qualified to accomplish the mission, goals, and expected student outcomes. Search committees maintain high standards and are committed to recruiting and retaining faculty with nationally recognized credentials. Ball State's policies governing graduate faculty status mandate that faculty quality remain consistently high. Faculty cannot teach graduate courses unless they hold at least associate graduate faculty status. Special status is required for regular and doctoral endorsement faculty, as outlined in the university's *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook.* To retain their status, graduate faculty must undergo regular review of their recent scholarly accomplishments. Ball State's Graduate Education Committee recently subjected all departmental graduate faculty policies to a thorough review.

The Center for Information and Communication Sciences (CICS), a graduate program in the College of Communication, Information, and Media, provides a model for faculty qualifications. Of the faculty members in CICS, 86 percent have a terminal degree in their discipline, 100 percent have relevant industry work experience of more than 10 years, 100 percent are engaged or have been engaged in relevant industry consulting experiences, and 100 percent have published or presented books, articles, or research on industry-related topics. For further information, see faculty vitae and course assignments.

Learning Resources

Two examples illustrate how Ball State maintains and exercises authority over access to learning resources. University Libraries provide access to learning resources for all students. The main facility, Bracken Library, is open more than 120 hours weekly, and students can access online course reserves, full-text databases, and other resources 24/7. Professional librarians provide research assistance both in person and remotely via chat, telephone, and text messaging. With authentication through a proxy server, students taking classes remotely have full access to online resources and may have print resources mailed to them upon request.

Ball State's information and communication technologies infrastructure also controls access to learning resources through policies and systems such as the following:

- User accounts are automatically generated once the users' affiliation with the university is verified, and these accounts are terminated when the individuals leave the university.
- Users access all learning resources with the same sign-on.
- Firewalls and intrusion detection systems are in place to protect systems and data.
- Data governance procedures allow access for only authorized individuals, and these procedures are reviewed regularly.
- Secure wireless and mobile access to learning resources is provided.

These systems are managed through a coordinated approach to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations as well as interoperability practices.

Dual-Credit Program

Ball State's dual-credit College Transition Program began in 2002 with a mission to foster partnerships between the university and high schools. The program promotes college preparation for high school juniors and seniors by assuring quality instruction and offering students an experience that is otherwise unattainable before they enter college. Dual-credit courses are available through two delivery methods:

- on-site distance education courses taught in high schools by qualified high school instructors certified by university academic departments
- online distance courses taught by Ball State faculty

Ball State currently partners with 18 Indiana high schools, primarily in east central Indiana, and had more than 1,000 juniors and seniors enrolled in online and on-site courses during both the 2010–11 and 2011–12 academic years. Through the dual-credit program, students enroll in more than 50 on-site courses and 30 online courses. They take the courses with other high school students rather than with Ball State undergraduates. The average class size is 12 students.

The dual-credit program is part of the university's School of Extended Education and is administered by two staff members: a full-time assistant director of online and distance education and a full-time program coordinator. The program is growing, and administrators are working to expand the number of courses offered and the number of high school teachers certified to teach on-site courses.

Academic Quality—To ensure the academic integrity of the College Transition Program, the policies and procedures established for it conform to the standards of the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), of which Ball State is a member. All high school instructors who participate in the program must have the same credentials as Ball State adjunct faculty. In July 2012, administrators of the program submitted an application to become accredited by NACEP. The university expects to hear from NACEP about the accreditation decision in April 2013.

Ball State is also listed as a preferred provider of dual-credit courses in Indiana. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) created the preferred providers list in December 2011 for high schools seeking quality postsecondary partnerships for dual-credit programs. ICHE compiled and approved the list after reviewing dual-credit programs statewide. This list includes all Indiana colleges and universities

that are accredited by NACEP or that submitted review materials to the Indiana Dual Credit Review Subcommittee for approval.

Course Equivalence—High school teachers participating in Ball State's dual-credit program use the same course materials that university faculty use, and they conduct courses using the same standards as on-campus courses. In addition, Ball State faculty members serve as liaisons to the high schools. These faculty liaisons—along with department chairs and college deans—review and approve applications from high school instructors. Faculty liaisons also coordinate orientation and professional development sessions for high school instructors who plan to teach in the dual-credit program. These liaisons visit high schools to observe dual-credit classes, and they answer questions from high school instructors via phone or e-mail. The NACEP accreditation body requires that faculty liaisons conduct an annual visit to schools, which is what most Ball State academic departments do. However, the Department of English has taken the requirement a step further as its liaison often conducts two visits per year.

An example from Ball State's Department of English illustrates how an academic unit determines the equivalence between on-campus courses and dual-credit courses taught in high schools. The English department has a dedicated faculty member for evaluating these classes. The director of the Writing Program reviews all applications and reapplications for instructors in the dual-credit program. Each instructor must meet minimum requirements for credentials and submit teaching materials that align with the Writing Program and University Core Curriculum (UCC-21) goals. Dual-credit instructors are mentored via a departmental liaison and are observed twice during the academic year. The instructors are required to follow all course policies that regular Ball State Writing Program classes follow for textbook selection, assignments, grading, student attendance, and student evaluations.

Subcomponent 4.A.6.

The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and AmeriCorps).

Ball State uses multiple methods at the unit, university, state, and national levels to evaluate the success of its graduates. Academic departments vary in the amount of data they collect. Some units (e.g., anthropology, geography, and mathematical sciences) maintain current records of employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs. Other departments acknowledge the need for further information and are partnering with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to improve the data stream.

Departmental Data

Three examples from different colleges illustrate departments' use of surveys and other data sources to ensure degree or certificate programs accomplish their purposes:

- The School of Nursing uses program outcome data and graduation rates along with student exit, alumni, and employer surveys to promote ongoing undergraduate and graduate program improvements. Pass rates on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) have been above the national mean, as required by the Indiana State Board of Nursing. Nurse practitioner (NP) certification pass rates approach or exceed internal benchmarks. Respondents to the exit and alumni surveys report they are employed, and employer satisfaction is consistently high.
- All departments in the Miller College of Business consult with business advisory boards one to three times per year to ensure students' preparation includes the skills necessary for employment in the relevant business specialty areas.
- The Department of Journalism uses alumni advisory boards to critique its curriculum and to ensure its programs prepare students effectively for advanced study or employment.

The use of outside input will spread throughout the university under the new *Strategic Plan 2012–2017*, which states in performance indicator 96 that every department will have an external advisory council.

Institutional Surveys

Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) administers a university-wide senior survey sent to all graduating students. This survey, first used in December 2011, asks graduates about their experiences at Ball State, their satisfaction with various aspects of their enrollment, their educational and personal growth, and their current/planned employment and further education. While a report of the results is not yet available, the survey itself is available for review.

OIE also administers alumni surveys to measure recent graduates' perceptions of their experience at Ball State, including how well the university prepared them for work and further study. The 2010 survey focused on 2009 graduates, and 2007 graduates were surveyed in 2012, five years after graduation. Results of these surveys include:

- After one year, 60 percent of the 2009 graduates were employed full-time; 16 percent were employed part-time; 11 percent held fellowships, assistantships, or other graduate school employment; 5 percent were enrolled in further education and not employed; and 6 percent were not employed and not in school.
- After five years, 63 percent of the 2007 graduates were employed full-time; 14 percent were employed part-time; 11 percent held fellowships, assistantships, or other graduate school employment; and 11 percent were not employed.
- Of the alumni employed full-time one year after graduation, 79 percent were working in their major or in a field related to their major. After five years, 76 percent were employed in their major or a related field.
- Of the graduates employed full-time after one year, 86 percent said they were very satisfied or satisfied with their current employment. After five years, 80 percent were very satisfied or satisfied with their employment.
- After one year, 65 percent of graduates were pursuing or planning to pursue a graduate or professional degree. After five years, this figure was 63 percent.

OIE has expanded its use of alumni surveys to include summer baccalaureate graduates. Separate

surveys cover students who graduated one year ago and five years ago, and both surveys ask about their current employment and further education. The one-year alumni survey asks about graduates' satisfaction with various programs, services, and experiences at Ball State, while the five-year survey asks if what the students learned at Ball State has helped them in their chosen professions. OIE also conducts a graduate student exit survey, and a graduate student alumni survey will be developed and regularly administered in the future.

Scholarships/Fellowships

Another indicator of graduates' success is the number of scholarships and fellowships they receive. Since 2010, three students were finalists for the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship—the first finalists in Ball State's history—and another student became the university's second-ever Truman Scholar. Over the past decade, Ball State has had eight Goldwater Scholarship recipients and six Udall Scholarship recipients.

Internship Participation

High rates of participation in internships also indicate student success. Since 2004, Ball State has granted internship credit to 8,241 students, and more than 1,000 students completed for-credit internships annually. Each year, for example, the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences places more than 120 students in internships that enable them to apply relevant knowledge and skills in the content areas of their specializations. Many other Ball State students participate in noncredit internships, although details about these experiences rely on survey responses or reports from employers and students. In addition, Ball State's Career Center collects information on students and alumni who participate in on-campus job interviews. Employers also visit the campus for job fairs and often return to Muncie for follow-up interviews. The Career Center makes every effort to verify the number of job offers and acceptances that result.

State/National Data Sources

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) uses state and national data repositories and networks to track the success of Ball State graduates. The Indiana Workforce Intelligence System (IWIS) recently created reports on the number of students at each Indiana public institution, by degree level, who remain in the state and are employed, along with their average salaries. The report is currently available only in aggregate and with results at one point in time after students graduate. Efforts are under way to make these results available at the individual student level so they can be summarized at the level of each major and each college and at multiple points in time following graduation. These results are available only for graduates who remain in the state of Indiana.

In addition, the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Student Tracker system is being used by OIE to report on the number of Ball State baccalaureate graduates who reenroll for graduate and professional school at other universities across the country and the number of these who subsequently graduate. NSC results were recently obtained for the past five years of Ball State baccalaureate graduates, and a report is being prepared. Data on earlier cohorts is also being collected and will be submitted to NSC.

Core Component Summary

The evidence shows that all colleges, departments, and schools at Ball State demonstrate responsibility for the quality of their educational programs. The university has consistently maintained specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes and a process of regular external reviews for other units. Since the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) policy regarding regular internal and external review of all academic programs is now voluntary, Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) and academic departments need to maintain a cycle of unit reviews in order to ensure program effectiveness for student learning and to promote continuous improvement throughout the university. Other challenges include:

Technology Use—Another challenge is the effective deployment of institution-wide software systems and emerging technologies to promote educational quality and continuous improvement. Ball State's response includes the new campuswide Banner data system (part of the university's Enterprise Resource Planning initiative, described under Core Component 4.C.). Banner was introduced in 2012 to help academic units maintain and exercise authority over course prerequisites. New Blackboard modules, including Blackboard Outcomes and Blackboard Analytics, will facilitate monitoring the connections between course assignments and specific curriculum goals and the evaluation of student learning.

Alumni Tracking—Tracking of alumni employment and post-baccalaureate educational outcomes has been limited by low return rates on voluntary surveys. Both the low return rate and the voluntary nature of the surveys call into question the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the survey results for assessing postgraduation student outcomes. Ball State supplements these surveys with data from the Indiana Workforce Intelligence System (WIS) and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), but the university could also work with individual academic departments to develop better means for obtaining reliable information on postgraduation outcomes from their alumni.

Credit Policies—Ball State's transfer-credit and dual-credit policies seem reasonable, but there is little or no empirical evidence showing that arbitrary limits (e.g., up to 9 transfer credits for graduate programs of 44 hours or fewer but up to 15 transfer credits for programs of 45 hours or more) are effective in balancing quality control with efficiency in persistence and degree completion in a way that enhances the use of Ball State's resources. Action plans for continued improvement involve standardizing how students qualify for dual-credit courses, assuring consistent and reliable access to the university's online student evaluation forms, and including dual-credit sections within departmental and university assessment initiatives.

Finally, the university accepts responsibility for providing a rigorous education, and a task force is collecting data and developing recommendations to ensure that a Ball State education is academically engaging and rigorous.