WASC Institutional Reaccreditation Report
Degrees offered by Academy of Art University

**AA, BFA & MFA**
Acting  
Advertising  
Animation & Visual Effects  
Fashion  
Fine Art  
Game Design  
Graphic Design  
Illustration  
Industrial Design  
Interior Architecture & Design  
Jewelry & Metal Arts  
Landscape Architecture  
Motion Pictures & Television  
Music Production & Sound Design for Visual Media  
Photography  
Visual Development  
Web Design & New Media

**BFA & M.Arch**
Architecture

**BFA & MA**
Art Education

**BA & MA**
Multimedia Communications

**BFA only**
Art History
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1 Ensuring the Integrity, Quality and Rigor of AAU’s Degrees</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 2 Achieving AAU’s Core Competencies</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 3 Defining and Promoting Student Success at AAU</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay 4 Ensuring Institutional Capacity &amp; Effectiveness in the Future &amp; Planning for the Changing Environment for Higher Education</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Conclusion</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Welcome

Academy of Art University (AAU) is the largest regionally-accredited art and design school in the United States, offering Associate, Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in 21 different areas of study. The university serves over 17,000 students, who have the choice of studying onsite at AAU’s urban San Francisco campus, online through CyberCampus, or moving between onsite and online learning as they pursue their degrees. As of fall 2012:

- 56% of AAU students enroll in at least some of their coursework online
- 37% enroll exclusively in online classes

AAU’s student body is highly diverse, with no visible student majority and a substantial international population. As of fall 2012, 51% of AAU’s student body consists of minority or international students. Our students are drawn from 118 different countries, all 50 of the United States and the District of Columbia. Students’ educational goals and chosen paths to degree are also varied:

- 56% of AAU students are full time
- 6% of undergraduate, degree-seeking students are first-time, full-time freshmen
- 29% of undergraduates are transfer students
- 34% of students are enrolled in graduate programs

AAU has been accredited by WASC since May 2007. AAU is also accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), with programmatic accreditations through the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) for the Master of Architecture degree and through the Council on Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) for the BFA and MFA degrees in Interior Architecture and Design. AAU operates as a for-profit, proprietary institution dedicated to academic excellence in the fields of design, communication and the arts. While we recognize certain procedural differences from more traditionally structured institutions, we also affirm our common commitment to academic excellence, engaged learning, institutional integrity, and continual improvement.

1 Of the total degree-seeking undergraduate population (11,517), 3,388 are transfer students (29.4%).
Introduction

History and Mission

In 1929, fine art painter Richard S. Stephens and his wife, Clara, founded the school as the Academy of Advertising Art in San Francisco. The founders’ philosophy was that aspiring commercial artists, with hard work, dedication, and rigorous instruction, could learn the skills needed to become successful professionals. To make this vision a reality, Stephens hired established professionals (familiar with the realities and demands of the marketplace) to teach future professionals. Within a few years, the Academy had attracted a distinguished faculty of practicing artists and one of its core educational practices had proven successful.

Today, AAU continues its essential ties with the Stephens family through President Elisa Stephens, the granddaughter of the founder. AAU has seen tremendous success in the 83 years since its founding. Although the university’s student body, degree programs and methods of educational delivery have evolved considerably since its inception, the core beliefs of the founders continue to be actualized. By its mission, AAU is committed to egalitarian access to an education by artists for artists, and maintains an inclusive admissions policy at the undergraduate level. AAU thus serves students who might not be admitted to other art and design colleges. AAU offers a rigorous curriculum commensurate with selective art schools; however, students enter with mixed levels of skill and academic preparedness, unlike selective art schools that require an accomplished portfolio and a set GPA or test scores for admission.

2 Serving as President from 1992-present.
We believe that this commitment to equal access to a quality education in the arts, as well as AAU’s commitment to maintaining a faculty of working professionals, helps to define our place within the higher education community. A good indicator of the rigor and quality of our degrees is the tremendous success that AAU alumni have achieved in the art and design industry, locally, nationally and internationally. We feel this is a remarkable phenomenon, especially in light of AAU’s inclusive admissions policy. Undergraduate students enter, in most cases, without a portfolio, and graduate with the skills they need to contribute to their field.

Our students’ success is a direct result of the talent and dedication of AAU’s faculty. The academic programs are designed and managed by a corps of academic department directors and full-time faculty (approximately 23% of AAU’s faculty members are full time). In addition to teaching, some full-time faculty members serve in departmental leadership positions (e.g., coordinating specialized curriculum tracks). The university employs a total of 1,376 faculty members, the majority of whom teach part time, continuing to work in the industry. All faculty members are encouraged to contribute to curricular development, assessment and improvement efforts at the course and program level (see AAU faculty job responsibilities). Teaching excellence is supported by AAU’s innovative faculty development program, tailored to the needs and experience level of instructors who view themselves primarily as art and design professionals (rather than as teachers).

The role of the artist in society is to create beauty, record and shape human ideals, provoke imaginative response and the full range of emotions, inspire wonder and transform perceptions. AAU upholds a long tradition of educating artists by providing a diverse population of students with a comprehensive education that includes mentorship by experts in their field. Students engage with their creative practice as an art, a craft and a mode of thinking and expression. AAU’s programs deliver a meaningful understanding of the field and the ability to produce creative work at a professional level.

AAU is committed to supporting academic success and completion. In one of the strongest examples of AAU’s resources being aligned with its mission and educational objectives (Standard 3), the university devotes substantial resources to educational support programs through the Academy Resource Center (ARC). ARC’s 43 staff and 176 faculty members serve an impressive number of students and faculty both onsite and online. In addition, AAU provides complimentary, one-on-one student success coaching to targeted populations of incoming students who are academically at risk. Over the past 5 years, over 16,000 thousand students have benefitted from weekly success coaching in their first semester, provided by InsideTrack—an outside vendor specializing in university retention efforts.

The stability of our faculty is demonstrated by an average length of service of five years (including part-time and full-time). The majority of full-time faculty members have served more than 5 years and 37% have served 10 years or longer (data as of fall 2012).

As of fall 2012.
Strengths, Challenges & Strategic Priorities

As part of the self-study preparations, the ALO surveyed AAU’s academic and administrative leadership team about the university’s strengths, main challenges and strategic priorities. The responses were remarkably aligned.

**AAU’s Strengths**

**Mission + Shared Teaching Philosophy**
- Hands-on, industry-driven skill acquisition taught by working professionals

**Forward-Thinking Approach to Education**
- Continual innovation of curriculum to keep pace with industry changes; cutting-edge subject matter that students are excited to learn; focus on a portfolio-driven education, explicitly linking academic work to student’s goals beyond school; pioneering approach to learning art and design online

**Talented Student Body Drawn from Highly Diverse Backgrounds**
- Highly accessible model of higher education reaching a diverse student population (domestic, international, onsite, online); preparing students to function in an increasingly global environment; a diversity of creative ideas and approaches

**Dedicated Department Directors and Faculty**
- Current professionals teaching future professionals

**Commitment to Improving AAU’s Environment for Teaching and Learning**
- Frequent input from faculty and industry professionals allows each department to upgrade its curriculum and technology; resources not commonly available in academic settings
- Longstanding support of working professional faculty to develop their teaching skills through faculty development; years of field research and published advice from faculty developers on best practices and opportunities to improve AAU’s unique teaching environment (effective critiquing practices, rubric development, the effects of online teaching on onsite teaching practices, working with international students)

**Innovative Educational Support Programs**
- Extensive range of educational support services; language support for students entering with low English proficiency, available through the Academy Resource Center; one-on-one success coaching for targeted populations of at-risk students, provided through InsideTrack
### Strong Financial Resources
Ability to fund the needs of academic and support departments

### Flexible Practices
Willingness and ability to adapt and improve quickly as an institution

## AAU’s Main Challenges

### Change Management
Communicating change: difficult to get everyone on the same page in an increasingly busy and fast-paced environment; siloing of information

### Scaling Administrative Practices to Match Growth
Increasing speed of approvals to implement desired changes and meet student needs; effectively sharing knowledge and managing administrative tasks

### Improving Customer Service
Providing a seamless student experience of registration, advising, financial aid, housing, etc.; updating administrative practices to reflect 21st century student expectations

### Undergraduate Completion Rates
Increasing overall graduation rates and those for Under Represented Minority and online students

### Communicating Planning Priorities
Aggregating and communicating strategic priorities from academic and administrative areas

### Matching Available Classroom Space to Onsite Program Growth
Alleviating challenges related to classroom space and proximity (facility space is a pressing issue for the Schools of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Interior Architecture & Design)\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Resolving issues regarding building permits and land use codes is a complex process requiring ongoing discussions between AAU and the City of San Francisco.
Continuing to Improve Public Perceptions

- Minimizing negative press (primarily local) related to misperceptions of for-profit education and ongoing issues with the City of San Francisco Planning Commission over land use zoning
- Maintaining a website that dynamically represents the academic departments

AAU’s Current Strategic Priorities

Implement Integrated Persistence Plan

- Creating a holistic, student-centered approach to persistence will increase overall graduation rates and those for URM students (integrated student record, formation of 360 degree student support teams, targeted social networking to engage at-risk subpopulations, updating administrative practices to provide a convenient and seamless student experience)

Update Organizational Models to Make the AAU Experience Scalable

- **Administrative**: Optimizing Customer Relationship Management across all platforms to serve our students better and improve internal communications; digitizing workflow and authorizations; moving toward more team-based (rather than siloed) approaches to the student experience
- **Academic**: Finding creative and scalable solutions to balancing teaching expectations for academic directors with the substantial time commitment required by rigorous assessment and curriculum quality assurance (onsite/online course development and review); developing more effective training for new academic directors

Remain Academically Current

- Continuing to grow and evolve as a university, including recruiting new populations of students and adding new majors and specialized areas of study within existing majors, in line with industry needs
- Integrating appropriate areas among academic departments in order to share assets; increasing opportunities for well-managed, collaborative projects among departments and industry

Preparing for the WASC Reaccreditation Review

AAU approached the reaccreditation report as an opportunity to synthesize a massive amount of analysis and feedback from key areas of the university. The WASC essays required us to articulate our current thinking and plans for improvement at a deeper analytical level than is usually possible given our busy daily routines.

AAU has been pleased with the results of our decision to pilot the WASC Reaccreditation Redesign process. In particular, we have benefitted from participating in the WASC pilot of the Lumina Foundation’s Degree Quality Profile. This experience, part of AAU’s focused inquiry into the quality, integrity and rigor of AAU’s degree programs (Essay 1),
has been immensely rewarding, as you will see from the interactive exhibit of student work meeting the DQP outcomes. This project will continue to engage AAU for the next two years.

Essay 2 allowed AAU to review, at an institutional level, cumulative learning results from each major and degree program over the past two years. AAU has implemented an intensive academic retreat process associated with program review, so the data and analysis from individual departments was readily available; the ALO noted that this was a major improvement since the last WASC report in 2006. Essay 2 also helped AAU to articulate the successes and challenges of implementing a revised process of systematic, digitally-driven assessment; this has helped us define important next steps.

AAU benefitted from the increased attention to retention and graduation rates (Essay 3 and the Retention and Graduation Narrative, submitted in September 2012) by rethinking our strategies for supporting persistence and completion. Essay 4, with its focus on sustaining resources and educational effectiveness and planning for the changing educational environment, will assist AAU in contextualizing its long-range planning.

As you will see from our report, AAU harnessed the majority of the WASC self-study activities to ongoing, evidence-based improvement efforts (assessment reporting, the annual President’s Academic Retreats, program review, institutional research reporting, retention team planning). It is a powerful indicator of AAU’s growth since its initial accreditation by WASC (2005-2007) that this kind of integration was possible. In 2006, for example, AAU did not have an Office of Institutional Research or systematic program review and assessment practices. The substantial development of these areas since 2007 is a direct result of WASC guidance and positive intervention through the 2005 and 2007 site visits and the 2007 WASC Commission Action Letter.

Because AAU’s leadership team has internalized the value of the self-study process, the experience has been consistently valuable and worthwhile. Obviously, any effort of this scale requires a significant commitment of time and resources. However, we have found that the tremendous amount of energy expended (just as in 2005-2007) pays off in resulting improvements to educational and organizational practices.

WASC is providing the team with the 2007 WASC Commission Action Letter and the 2010 Interim Report Committee Letter, which will serve as valuable reference points to measure AAU’s progress on key items identified by the WASC Commission: Enhanced Program Review (CFR 2.6, 2.7, 2.13) and Better Understanding the Academy’s Diverse Community (CFR 2.6, 4.3, 4.7). AAU reports its progress on these items within the body of Essays 1, 2 and 3 and in the Conclusion.

A comprehensive list of participants appears on the Contributors page. AAU used an overlapping team structure to produce this report.

- The WASC Oversight Team guided the reaccreditation process and brainstormed major projects and analytical approaches.
- The report was prepared by a writing team and edited into a single voice by the WASC ALO (with conceptual feedback and proofreading support from an editing team).
- Research teams conducted specific inquiries associated with the Self-Review under the Standards (team leaders were appointed by the ALO and participation on these teams was open to interested staff).
- All academic departments (art and design and Liberal Arts) contributed data and analysis for the assessment and student success essays; this involved the department directors as well as faculty midpoint and final review committees.
- Faculty also contributed ideas through an open session on WASC and NASAD reaccreditation strategies at AAU’s Teaching Conference in August 2012.
The ALO surveyed all members of the academic and administrative leadership team to reach consensus on proud points, areas for improvement, strategic priorities and plans for the changing educational environment.

The Compliance Audit was led by Vice President of Accreditation Compliance Cathy Corcoran, with appropriate evidence provided by managers in most administrative areas of the university.

The DQP was run as its own, freestanding project led by WASC ALO Melissa Sydeman, Academic Vice President of Liberal Arts Eileen Everett, Executive Director of the School of Interior Architecture & Design Laura Blumenfeld and Assessment Director Rachel Platkin. Four academic departments piloted the DQP. For gathering the student work and providing invaluable curatorial detail, the ALO would like to thank: Gregory Mar, Associate Director of the School of Web Design & New Media; Will Mosgrove, Graduate Director and Alyson Belcher, Associate BFA Director, School of Photography; Laura Blumenfeld, Executive Director, and faculty members Stephanie Smith-Haenel and Agustin Sanders, School of Interior Architecture & Design; Chris Armstrong, Executive Director, Tom Bertino, MFA Director and Sean Gillane, Video Production Manager, School of Animation & Visual Effects. The DQP project was transformed into an interactive exhibit by Mark Bumanglag, a 2012 BFA alumnus from the School of Web Design & New Media, and Bob Rigel, Director of the Art Teaching Credential Program.

The ALO would like to acknowledge the invaluable service of: Vice President of Accreditation Compliance Cathy Corcoran, who led the Compliance Audit Project and a number of research teams, including the graduate degrees team; Academic Vice President of Liberal Arts Eileen Everett, who contributed the essay on achievement of general education competencies and curated a large part of the DQP exhibit; Director of Curriculum Denise Cottin, who led several key research teams, including Student Policies; EVP of Educational Support Kate Griffeth and the directors and staff of the Academy Resource Center who contributed analysis to this report (ARC, English for Art Purposes and Online Language Support, Student Academic Support, Training and Tutoring and Faculty Development); AAU’s retention team. Director of Retention & Online Academic Development Toby Silver and Chief Information Officer Erik Viens, who steered two presentations to the Board of Directors over the past year, which helped shape the Integrated Persistence Plan presented in Essay 3.

AAU’s increasingly robust culture of evidence-based decision making is made possible by the sustained support of President Elisa Stephens, EVP of Financial Aid and Compliance Joe Vollaro and AAU Board of Directors Chairman Nancy Houston. The WASC ALO would like to acknowledge the remarkable efforts of: Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness Joan Bergholt (who leads program review and the President’s Academic Retreats); Assessment Director Rachel Platkin; Institutional Research (IR) Director Bill Cash and Assistant Director of IR Jessie Eckardt. Cumulatively, their evidence-based analysis of student success over the past two years laid the foundations for Essays 1, 2 and 3 as well as AAU’s Retention and Graduation Report (September 2012).

Finally, AAU is grateful for the mentorship provided by WASC during and after the initial accreditation process (2005-2007). President Stephens and the ALO, Melissa Sydeman, would particularly like to thank Richard Winn for his many years of insightful leadership as AAU’s WASC liaison; Richard’s patient guidance and straightforward advice have proven invaluable to AAU’s continued evolution. AAU also welcomes our new WASC liaison, Christopher Oberg, who has been remarkably available and reassuring during the redesign pilot.

As you will see, AAU has identified our strengths and best practices, as well as areas we would like to improve. We welcome the opportunity for evaluative feedback and coaching from the visiting team. AAU appreciates the team members’ significant contribution of time and expertise to help AAU and WASC pilot the Reaccreditation Redesign process. We are confident in their ability to help make AAU a stronger institution.
Ensuring the Integrity, Quality and Rigor of AAU’s Degrees (CFR 2.6, 2.7, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8)

- Part I of this essay discusses how AAU piloted the Lumina Foundation’s Degree Quality Profile (DQP) as a tool for analyzing degree quality and rigor.

- Part II discusses the processes used to ensure the integrity, quality and rigor of AAU’s degrees. These include: a uniform approach to curriculum design, driven by the mission; periodic review of curriculum design and student learning results by national and programmatic accreditors of art and design schools; annual review of student learning results by industry representatives and employers; a long-term commitment to clarifying student performance standards through course-level rubrics; mandatory program review that includes analysis of assessment results and other indicators of program effectiveness; and ongoing assessment activities at the program level.

- Evidence of student learning is discussed in the DQP section below (see interactive exhibit of student work) and in Essay 2: Achieving AAU’s Core Competencies.

I. Piloting the Degree Quality Profile (DQP) at an Art and Design University

The DQP, developed by a panel of nationally-recognized education experts, articulates the types of knowledge and skills that students should be able to demonstrate at the Associate, Bachelor’s and Master’s degree levels, regardless of their academic discipline or the type of institution they attend. In this sense, the DQP offers a national standard for quality and rigor of college degrees. AAU piloted the applicability of the DQP at an art and design school as part of our reaccreditation self-study activities.

For the purposes of the DQP project, we grouped AAU’s 21 different departments under four disciplinary umbrellas and targeted a representative degree from each:
We asked the directors of these pilot departments to gather BFA portfolio work and MFA thesis projects that demonstrated achievement of the DQP outcomes. The project leaders then worked with the directors to curate a DQP exhibit and analyze the alignment of AAU’s programmatic outcomes with the DQP.

The research questions AAU sought to address with this project were:

- To what extent do students across a range of art and design disciplines meet the DQP outcomes?
- What does student work look like that meets the DQP outcomes at the BFA and MFA level?

The answers to these questions can be found in the attached DQP Exhibit of Student Work, which is contextualized by an accompanying essay on AAU’s DQP project. Curatorial text is derived from discussions with academic department directors and, where possible, from students’ websites, where they describe their own design goals and process. AAU has been invited to feature this exhibit as an example of good assessment practices on the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) website in early 2013.

II. Processes Used to Ensure the Integrity, Quality and Rigor of the Degree

A. Alignment with Peer-Reviewed, Disciplinary Content Standards

The majority of degree programs at AAU are required to meet disciplinary content guidelines set by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), which accredits all degrees at AAU except the following: Acting; Architecture; Multimedia Communications; Landscape Architecture; and Music Production & Sound Design for Visual Media. The Architecture program must prove that it meets the curriculum design and student performance standards of its programmatic accreditor, the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB). The program in Interior Architecture and Design must prove that it meets similar standards set by its programmatic accreditor, Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). The program in Landscape Architecture is planning to apply for programmatic accreditation from the Landscape Architectural Accrediting Board (LAAB) and has designed its curriculum accordingly.

These accrediting agencies have articulated nationally-recognized disciplinary competencies and use a system of periodic peer review to verify acceptable curricular design and student learning results. Meeting the expectations of these accreditors provides external verification of the quality, rigor and integrity of AAU’s degrees.

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1 Essay 2 discusses how AAU’s core competencies can be viewed through the lens of the DQP.

2 AAU defines “integrity” as coherent program design, in line with WASC suggestions at the April, 2012 ARC workshop for institutions piloting the new reaccreditation process.
Peer review teams from NASAD, CIDA and NAAB typically visit AAU every 5-10 years. These teams offer detailed written feedback and suggestions for improvement of the curriculum and particular learning results. AAU uses the reports from these peer reviews as the external feedback component of our program reviews (CFR 2.7).

B. Alignment with Industry Needs and Standards

To meet its mission, AAU must ensure that the curriculum aligns with current needs in the art, design, and communication industries. President Stephens and the department directors routinely solicit feedback on program content and currency from industry representatives and employers. Annually, AAU faculty and a large number of industry stakeholders evaluate the quality of student work through the Spring Show (a juried exhibit which showcases the best student work from each department and is open to the public).³

The President also seeks annual feedback through a Presidential Advisory Board Meeting, held in conjunction with the Spring Show exhibition. At the Advisory Board meeting, industry professionals debrief the president on their findings and recommendations based on viewing the work and talking to students over a full day. These advisors evaluate student work in terms of its technical and aesthetic sophistication and its innovative qualities. They also provide important feedback on whether the student work reflects current trends in the industry.

Feedback from the Presidential Advisory Board meeting and employers attending the Spring Show is discussed by the academic department directors, the Chief Academic Officer and the President over the next few months, allowing time for major recommendations to be factored into the following year’s budget process. Actions taken as a result of Advisory Board feedback include: introducing new courses, areas of specialization and degree programs; hiring faculty with in-demand expertise; and acquiring cutting-edge technology and equipment to remain current with industry expectations.

Based on trends in the quality of student work at Spring Show, department directors also offer recommendations for improvement. Actions taken as a result of their feedback include: refining assignments; adding or removing courses; refining course sequence and prerequisites; adding track specializations; hiring new faculty; purchasing new equipment or software; and upgrading department facilities. AAU departments also seek industry feedback through events such as the Film Festival, Fashion Shows and department-specific Winter Shows.

C. Setting Performance Standards through Curriculum Design

AAU’s program curricula are designed by the academic department directors, who are recruited from the industry. It is the responsibility of the academic directors to ensure the rigor of degrees and their relevance to industry needs and expectations. The following chart outlines AAU’s program development process.

³ In the jurying process, no distinction is made between student work created onsite or online. Students studying in both modalities have won top honors at past Spring Shows.
New Program Development

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<td>Program director</td>
<td>Designs the program objectives and learning outcomes, required courses, course sequence and recommended electives. These are identical for onsite and online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Academic Officer</td>
<td>Formally approves the program after reviewing required material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Curriculum &amp; Executive Director, Graduate Services &amp; Administration</td>
<td>Ensure accurate program design in terms of number and types of units, prerequisites and alignment with institutional requirements. Create student and advisor guides and website material to communicate academic requirements of the new program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Director</td>
<td>Offers feedback on program learning outcomes and supports curricular mapping and assessment planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Faculty Development</td>
<td>Approves course learning outcomes and supports development of new syllabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Vice President of Liberal Arts</td>
<td>Recommends Liberal Arts courses that reinforce and complement the disciplinary learning (in partnership with the new program director)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVP of Compliance &amp; WASC ALO</td>
<td>Obtain official approval for all new programs (onsite and online) from AAU’s accreditors, including WASC substantive change approvals</td>
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The academic directors set performance standards through published program learning outcomes lists (CFR 2.6). These lists are based on current industry practice within each discipline. The Assessment Director helps the department directors chart the development of each program outcome through a progressively demanding series of courses. The resulting curricular maps also indicate the points of formative and summative assessment of student work. These maps are evidence of degree integrity, which AAU defines as the process of coherent curriculum design, focused on building students’ skills to the required level.

As part of the periodic program review process, departments are given feedback on the quality of their program learning outcomes by a team consisting of the Assessment Director, the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and the WASC ALO. The WASC Rubric for Evaluating Program Learning Outcomes is used as a guide for this feedback. Sample evaluations can be seen in the attached program reviews. Based on assessment results, the Assessment Director works with the department directors to improve and refine their outcomes lists and curriculum design.
Systematic course approval process

All new courses and course changes are approved by the Chief Academic Officer (CAO). A course outline must be submitted and approved by the CAO before a course can be offered either onsite or online. The course approval process mandates measurable course learning outcomes, explicit assessment strategies and department-approved course content (topics). The intended course learning outcomes, syllabus, course content, assessment features and pace of learning are the same for onsite and online courses and are determined by the faculty and academic department directors. All course learning outcomes and outlines for new courses are approved by the Director of Faculty Development, who performs this quality control function for the Chief Academic Officer.

Course development process

All courses, onsite and online, are developed by academic directors and their faculty. Both full- and part-time faculty are eligible to develop courses; course developers are chosen by the department director. In line with AAU’s mission to provide an education “by artists, for artists,” faculty members in the majors are working professionals. In addition to being mentors for students, working faculty provide relevance, currency, and professional context for learning. The Office of Faculty Development provides instructional design support to faculty creating new courses; CyberCampus content editors and instructional designers provide extensive support to faculty building and improving online classes (see below).

Support for online course design

Online course development has its own set of quality assurance practices. The Online Education Department (also known as CyberCampus) provides substantial technical training, support and resources for faculty who are developing and teaching online courses (Online academic roles & qualifications). Similarly, services in support of online student learning are extensive; these are discussed in Essay 3. The attached chart details the function of each area of online support (Using technology to improve teaching & learning).

Before developing an online course for the first time, instructors complete a special online training about the build process and collaborating effectively with the online course build team (Instructional Web Designer and Content Editor). This team works with the instructor throughout the course development process. In addition, a Faculty Developer helps the instructor with structuring the syllabus and assignments. The instructor writes the content of the course (online lectures, assignments, tests, discussion topics and other course activities).

A CyberCampus Content Editor/Content Writer and Instructional Designer collaborate with the instructor to build the web pages and other visual media through which the course content will be presented online. The faculty member also collaborates with the CyberCampus Video Team to produce video content that supplements the written module material.
Conceptual design of online curricula

All online courses are designed within a standardized delivery format that mirrors the structure of onsite courses (Online Class Components). Innovative use of technology allows for the instructor to demonstrate key skills in engaging video segments, publicly evaluate (critique) student projects, provide formative and summative testing, conduct graded class discussions, and even assign live student presentations.

Online course approval process

Online courses are reviewed and approved by the faculty member, the online director/coordinator (representing the academic department), and relevant online education staff members before the course goes live. The online build and course approval process is overseen by the Executive Vice President of Online Education, working with the department directors. Course rebuilds are also approved through the same channels.

Online course improvement

New online courses are regularly refined by the instructor, partnering with the online instructional development team. Courses are rebuilt and revised as requested by the department and new demonstration videos are created. Feedback for course improvement comes from: faculty teaching and reviewing the course; student course evaluations; director review; assessment and program review recommendations; and the Content Editors, Instructional Web Designers and Research and Development Team at CyberCampus. Student queries to the Help Desk and comments to advisors are also factored into specific course modification decisions.

Student feedback

Detailed student course evaluations are conducted twice per semester in the spring and fall and once in the summer. These evaluations provide valuable indirect, qualitative data on course content, instructor performance, the learning environment (onsite and online) and desirable technological changes to the online systems.

Quality standards for online courses

Currently, most courses that can be taken onsite have been translated to the online environment. For students, these classes represent the same content and quality as onsite classes, with more flexibility. Two-thirds of all AAU students now complete at least some of their coursework online and approximately one-third complete all their classes online.

AAU has ensured alignment of online offerings with onsite offerings in the following ways:

- It is AAU policy that all academic programs shall be offered both onsite and online (subject to accreditation approval for new programs).
- Program design, program mission and objectives, program learning outcomes and course learning outcomes for each academic program are identical for onsite and online. Students may take classes both onsite and online as they pursue their degree. Many faculty members teach both onsite and online, while others specialize in one learning platform.
• Academic department directors work with online directors or coordinators (faculty who are members of their academic leadership team) to ensure that the onsite and online versions of the same program are consistent.
• The online learning environment uses innovative technology to mirror the campus learning environment.

In 2005 and 2007, WASC Visiting Team Reports and the official WASC Commission Letter on Initial Accreditation (May 2007) commended the quality and innovation of AAU’s online programs and extensive academic support services. Visiting peer review teams from NASAD and CIDA have also officially recognized the effectiveness of the Academy’s online delivery of academic programs (NASAD, 2006 site visit for online education; CIDA, 2012 initial accreditation for the Master of Fine Arts-Interior Architecture and Design program). The Council for Interior Design Accreditation approved AAU as the first school in the nation to offer an online, programmatically-accredited BFA and MFA degree in Interior Architecture & Design.

The chart below details improvements in AAU’s Online Education Department since the 2007 WASC visit.

Improving Support for Online Learning: 2007-2012

**New Course Design** (Adobe CQ Content Management System)
Simplifies the organization and presentation of course content (text, images, videos, interactive media, assignments & rubrics, discussion topics) and provides sophisticated tools for tracking students’ progress through an online class. All new online classes are built in CQ; existing classes are being phased in at a rate of approximately 300 courses per year. New capabilities include progress questions that must be answered to proceed, search tool, new assignment interface.

**Online Portfolio Tool**
Allows students to create online portfolios for Midpoint or Final Review. Students can upload files, name and sort them, and provide narration for a slideshow presentation. Once the department has reviewed their work, students can see their feedback, including an action plan and course recommendations.

Students, both online and on-site, are encouraged to maintain their student portfolios throughout their tenure at AAU.

**Midpoint & Final Review Tools**
Allows academic departments to review a student’s Midpoint or Final Portfolio, assess it against relevant PLOs and communicate feedback to the student —including an optional action plan.

**The Whiteboard Critiquing Tool**
Facilitates robust critiques for online art and design classes. This custom tool allows instructors to comment quickly, add audio commentary, and visually mark up image files that students have submitted. The critiquing space offers robust mark-up functionality—including a zoom tool, real time audio recording over the Internet, uploading of additional images for comparison with student work, and a more stable working space. A built-in video recorder allows instructors to record videos of themselves giving feedback, without any recording software on their home computer. An additional Whiteboard for providing feedback on student videos is currently in development (2013).
| **Department Director Dashboard** | Provides department directors with a range of tools to evaluate online classes, view student information, review onsite course syllabi, evaluate students’ Midpoint and Final Review status and results, review student course evaluations, post announcements, review student work flagged for Spring Show consideration and advise graduate students on their daily online journals. |
| **Instructor Dashboard** | Gives instructors direct access to a range of tools to support online teaching and track student progress (attendance, grades, the Student Pulse, student evaluations). Similar to the Department Director Dashboard, above. |
| **Student Pulse** | Provides immediate, visual feedback to online students about how they are performing in each of their online classes, based on a range of factors, including assignment grades, exam and quiz scores, discussion participation, learning module progress, and attendance. |
| **Advisor Alert Report** | Alerts advisors to student progress issues; alerts triggered by grades, attendance, improper EAP registrations. |
| **Online Teaching Library** | Provides on-demand resources to support online instructors: supplemental training materials (tutorials, checklists, cheat-sheets, sample files, etc.); access to upcoming online teaching workshops and recordings of past workshops; an online teaching FAQ. More than 100 pages of content have already been posted, and new resources are continually being developed in response to instructor requests, Instructional Review & Improvement Team referrals, learning management system updates, & perceived need. Supplements the core training on Teaching Online. |
| **Online Teaching Workshops** | Offer support for online instructors through a series of online workshops each semester, led by Instructional Development staff in collaboration with Faculty Development. Workshops are offered online throughout the semester; sessions are recorded for later review, with links to recordings and related materials posted in the Online Teaching Library. |
| **Spring Show Flag** | Allows instructors to flag and retrieve student work for AAU’s annual Spring Show. |
| **Supplemental Media On Demand** | Allows students and teachers to download the media files for their online classes directly from the LMS (e.g., slideshows and video demonstrations). This on-demand method of distribution has replaced the practice of mailing out CDs and DVDs to online students and teachers (except in classes with exceptionally large media files). To support this new distribution system, supplemental media files are being systematically converted to support better cross-platform compatibilities, including video formatted for playback on media players. |
| **Online Course Planner & Registration** | New online registration application that allows students to set up their weekly course schedule and then register for all selected courses at once and pay required fees online. Guides both students and advisors through the course registration process. If the academic director has recommended or required specific courses as the result of either a Midpoint or Final Review, these are noted on the draft schedule. Includes links to course information |
web pages that provide information such as: course description, course learning objectives, program learning objectives, course fees, pre-requisites and all supplies and materials that students must purchase (links to the Online Store).

**Online Store**
Integrated with the AAU course catalog. Lists all items required for a given course (onsite or online). Students can click on specific items from the course supply list that they want to purchase.

**Virtual, Real-Time Meeting Rooms**
Adobe Connect meeting rooms allow online students to conduct real time audio visual presentations in targeted courses, required by most degree programs. Presentations can be recorded. Links are then provided in the online discussion area for all students to see.

**Virtual Offices for Online Directors and Instructors**
Virtual offices offered to all online directors and faculty. Online directors are required to keep virtual office hours for students to "drop in".

**Lessons from Delivering Online Learning**
AAU has learned a number of lessons about delivering online art and design education since it first began offering online classes in 2002.

**Matching or surpassing the onsite learning environment**
Considerable resources and technical support are required to deliver engaging art and design education online (visually engaging web pages, cutting-edge slideshows, a high volume of video demonstrations). The Online Education Department built a proprietary Learning Management System (LMS) to serve the needs of art, design and communication students studying online.

**Offering both asynchronous and synchronous support for online learning**
AAU has made a substantial investment in technology that allows real-time, audio-visual communication. This is used, for example, in graduate Midpoint and Final Reviews and in graduate directed study classes. The Online Education Department has appointed a Graduate Studies Coordinator and a team of technical specialists specifically to support this endeavor. The technical specialists set up the appointed online meetings and run the technology to allow the participants to focus on the student's work. AAU has invested in a number of individually-purposed servers hosting the Adobe Connect two-way, audio-video application.

**Continually improving the online learning environment**
Successes include the Whiteboard for providing faculty feedback on student work and two-way audio and video communication allowing for real-time meetings with students.
Providing substantial teaching support

Assistance for faculty who are building and refining online classes is provided by Faculty Developers, Content Writers, Instructional Web Designers and a Video Production Team. Instructional Development staff support faculty who are teaching online for the first time through a Teaching Coach program for new online instructors, a series of online teaching workshops each semester and the Online Teaching Library. The Faculty Development Department also supports online faculty in effective teaching practices.

Ensuring appropriate levels of faculty-student interactions in online classes

Quality Assurance Auditors check online classrooms every day and enforce policies for faculty participation.

Providing a 24/7 Help Desk with real-time telephone and email support

Using Adobe Connect, Help Desk personnel can see what a student is doing on the computer in real time as the student explains the problem. This technology also permits staff to take over the student’s computer (with the student’s permission) to correct problems with the student’s system or to demonstrate how to complete the task properly.

Adapting academic support services and technology to meet student needs

Staff members from Online Language Support (OLS), Student Academic Support and the Online Writing Lab have been essential in supporting online learning. CyberCampus also hired a team of full-time staff to create captioning for hearing impaired students and changed the format of demonstration videos to allow for captioning to be turned on/off.

Recognizing the comparative difficulty of graduating online students

CyberCampus has created orientations and sample online classes and has worked with Admissions and Student Services Advisors to better communicate the reality of online classes to students, including workload and expectations for student achievement.

Adapting business practices to growth

CyberCampus shifted from postal delivery of thousands of demonstration CDs per semester to download on demand.
D. Validating Student Performance at the Course Level

Course-level assessment

Onsite and online, instructors use embedded assessment strategies that allow students to demonstrate how well they have mastered intended course learning outcomes (projects, presentations, essays and exams). Faculty members provide formative and summative critiques of student projects. Online classes feature mandatory participation in discussion topics (usually accounting for 20-30% of a student’s grade) and weekly quizzes on each module.

As needed, department directors organize faculty reviews of a particular course or course sequence through a Department Action Team (DAT) meeting. These faculty meetings result in actions for improvement such as: revised course learning outcomes, assignments, course topics or prerequisites; and offering additional assistance to students through complimentary workshops. During the President’s Academic Retreats associated with program review, departments also receive charts showing their highest and lowest ranking courses (based on student course evaluations).

Grading

Grade comparisons between the same courses online and onsite are conducted each semester and reviewed every 1-2 years as part of the President’s Academic Retreats. In cases where faculty members teach the same course onsite and online, equivalent grading standards are assured.

Academic probation

The Records Department monitors all student grades electronically for compliance with progress standards. Students failing to meet the Academy’s standard for cumulative grade point average (GPA) are placed on academic probation and referred to their student services advisor for consultation. Undergraduates on academic probation are required to enroll in LA 151 Seminar for Success, a course on time management, study skills, and identifying personal goals. Students who fail to meet progress standards for two successive semesters are sent a formal dismissal letter.

E. Encouraging Clear Performance Standards: the Proliferation of Rubrics at AAU

The 2007 WASC Commission Action Letter and the 2010 WASC Interim Report Committee letter commended AAU for its development of rubrics in the Foundations department and encouraged AAU to continue development of course-level rubrics in other departments. This section reports progress and research on rubrics at AAU since the Commission Action Letter.

History of rubrics at AAU

First, to orient the team, we offer a brief history of rubrics at AAU. In August 2004, faculty developer Natasha Haugnes and Foundations Director Alana Addison presented AAU’s first workshop on rubrics. Since 2004, every AAU Teaching Conference has included a workshop on how to create and use rubrics.
In the Foundations Department, rubrics were originally created to clarify weekly class objectives and expectations. The rubrics were developed by full-time faculty members specializing in the subject matter of a given course with the assistance of the department director. They were then shared with additional faculty members, who provided input. Instructors participated in the development of rubrics and grading criteria through formal grade-norming sessions. During these sessions, each faculty member brought examples of graded assignments for peer review and discussion.

There were some early bumps in the road as Foundations instructors learned how not to use rubrics. Eager to implement their first iteration of the rubrics, instructors introduced very detailed, text-heavy rubrics on the first day of class. This not only discouraged the students, but also frustrated the instructors, fostering a counterproductive student fixation on the letter grade rather than the spirit of the rubrics. This scenario is in line with observations by Alfie Kohn, who cites “a line of research in educational psychology showing that students whose attention is relentlessly focused on how well they are doing often become less engaged with what they are doing.”

Over the next year, with the faculty’s thoughtful input and the director’s guidance, the Foundations rubrics were thinned out—verbiage was pared down so that the text was less dense and overwhelming. Instructors agreed that it was best not to introduce the rubrics at the very beginning of these predominantly freshman-level courses—that it was more important to build students’ confidence and gain their trust before focusing their attention on evaluation tools.

The faculty found that posting visual examples of graded assignments (rather than working with exclusively verbal rubrics) better served their students. Over the next few years, the department compiled a large bank of student work that clearly exemplified different stages of skill development. Today, the department provides large poster boards for instructors to check out and display in the classrooms as quality reference points for students and teachers. The poster boards feature examples of student artwork (A, B, C and D-level assignments) tied to brief, written commentary that echoes classroom critiques (and is tied to consistent department grading standards). This approach has proven to clarify student performance expectations in a motivational way. In Foundations, the content of the rubrics guides the teaching and evaluation process, but the grid-like document itself has become almost invisible.

Now, ten years later, Foundations instructors know not to begin a freshman class with a dense matrix of words. They understand that students’ curiosity and interest need to be piqued and their confidence built up before they are presented with the rubric. Student grievances about grades, which dropped off significantly after the introduction of rubrics in the Foundations department, continue to be minimal. The sheer quantity of outstanding student work presented in the annual Spring Show is an indicator that the Foundations department is meeting its goals for student achievement.

The success of the rubrics program in the Foundations department is largely attributable to the director’s flexibility and willingness to respond to feedback from teachers and students, who experienced the rubrics in practice. The important lesson here is that rubrics themselves are not a magic bullet. Like all systems, they benefit from being examined and refined on an ongoing basis.

The quality and extent of assessment activities in the Foundations Department—including the use of rubrics with visual examples of student work at each level of quality (A/A-/B+/B/B-/C+/C/C-/D/F) for every assignment in every Foundations class—is remarkable (Sample Rubric and Visual Examples of Student Work from Foundations). Today, students can be seen regularly examining the exemplars of student work during and after class. A deep commitment to implementing and learning from program-wide assessment is evident in this department, and the

considerable achievements within Foundations are a testament to the leadership of Department Director Alana Addison and her ongoing partnership with Faculty Development.

Best practices from the Foundations department have been shared with other AAU departments. For example, Foundations instructors have moved beyond simply developing rubrics; they have devoted substantial time to enhancing and improving them over a 10-year period, and have also made certain to leverage the value of the rubrics as teaching tools in all classes. The director has also developed a self-assessment form to help students better understand and evaluate their work in terms of course learning outcomes (Foundations 110 Student Self-Assessment Form).

The Foundations Director was the earliest adopter of rubrics at the department level. This department now has a clear culture of assessment and well-tested and refined rubrics for all required classes. There is regular grading calibration at faculty meetings. The Foundations department presents evidence of sustaining a multi-year assessment plan and closing the assessment loop (including offering feedback on the assessment activities themselves), making this department AAU’s most developed in terms of assessment practices. More recently, the School of Interior Architecture and Design and the School of Architecture have also worked to generate rubrics for required courses (2011-2012). The Liberal Arts department has developed rubrics for all required courses and has also implemented a multi-year assessment plan including programmatic assessment rubrics (discussed in Essay 2).

Instructor-specific rubrics

Unlike the director-driven rubric initiatives featured above, most rubrics at AAU have been developed at a grassroots level, by individual instructors. Typically, these rubrics are developed when instructors attend Faculty Development trainings, work one-on-one with a faculty developer, are urged by their directors to make their performance standards more explicit, or independently decide to develop a rubric. Because these rubrics are dependent on the individual instructor, their scope, use, and quality vary widely.

For some instructors, their biggest take-away from a Faculty Development rubrics training was the notion of clearly describing their criteria and being more explicit when justifying grades. For this reason, they developed related tools such as checklists or feedback forms. Faculty Development discovered through 2008 research that these tools, though excellent assessment practices, were often being referred to—incorrectly—as “rubrics.” Faculty Development did not want to stifle any movement towards better assessment processes, so developers continued to foster good practices in development of assessment tools while not correcting what faculty chose to do or imposing a particular style of rubric on the faculty. It was felt that half-hearted implementation of rubrics was likely without this encouraging approach.

In 2006, the Faculty Development department conducted interviews with the faculty to find out how rubrics were being implemented. Instructor responses fell into two categories: 1) Rubrics help focus the instructor’s teaching; 2) Rubrics improve communication with students. Although Faculty Development trainings explicitly introduce rubrics as feedback sheets that can be given to students, the researcher was surprised to learn that many instructors who develop rubrics initially do not hand them out to students. Instead, these instructors regard the rubric as a useful tool to focus their own teaching and the class critique sessions. While direct written communication with students was not taking place in such situations, faculty noted that the increased focus and specificity of their assignments and comments had a positive effect both on their teaching and on student learning.
AAU’s Progress on Rubric Development, 2006-2012

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<tr>
<th>IN 2005…</th>
<th>BY 2006…</th>
<th>BY 2012…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The bank of rubrics developed by AAU instructors contained submissions for 10 courses in fall 2005</td>
<td>The bank of rubrics grew to more than 50</td>
<td>The bank of rubrics grew to approximately 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Development worked with the Foundations department to develop rubrics</td>
<td>Faculty Development worked individually with approximately 25 instructors and directors to develop rubrics (2004-2006)</td>
<td>Faculty Development worked on rubrics with dozens of individual instructors in 2012 alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubrics trainings reached approximately 15 instructors</td>
<td>Rubrics trainings reached approximately 150 instructors</td>
<td>Rubrics trainings reached approximately 600 instructors</td>
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Rubrics research
Since the 2007 WASC Site Visit, the Faculty Development department has conducted two major research studies on the use of rubrics at AAU.

Study 1—Student perception of rubric effectiveness (SPORE, 2008)
In spring 2008, AAU faculty developers Jennifer Russell and Natasha Haugnes conducted a survey on Student Perceptions of Rubric Effectiveness. Their objective was to investigate student and teacher perceptions of whether/how the use of rubrics improved teaching and learning at AAU. With the help of the Director of Institutional Research, the faculty developers surveyed 2,619 students enrolled in classes in which their instructor reported using a rubric. They received between 319 and 425 responses to each item on the survey.

The broadest question students were asked was the most important: How does having a rubric affect your learning? Survey results indicated that:

- 75% of students report that they learn more when they have a rubric.
• 60-70% of students agreed with the following statements: they are more organized, produce stronger work, work harder, and have fewer questions about assignments when a teacher uses a rubric.  

• 82% of student respondents report that they read “most of” or “all of” the rubric before submitting their work.

The question of whether rubrics might inhibit creativity used to arise regularly in introductory rubric trainings at AAU; therefore, Faculty Development wanted to explore this issue. According to the survey responses:

• 56% of students said that rubrics had no effect on their creativity.
• 28% reported that rubrics helped them to be more creative.

Students’ comments in this section revealed a general feeling that when they know what is expected of them, they can put more energy into being creative. Also, there were a number of students who noted that the creative parameters placed on them with the rubric (which mimic real-world, client-driven assignments) actually helped their creative process. Not to be ignored, of course, are comments from the minority of students who found that rubrics stifled their creativity by focusing their attention on getting a good grade rather than being creative.

Another survey item asked: “What can teachers do differently to make rubrics more useful to your learning?” The most common responses suggested that the following practices would benefit students: handing rubrics out earlier; referring to them more; and including more personal comments and examples. Eleven students noted a need for more consistency between the rubric, the assignment and the critique. This feedback suggests that just having a rubric is not enough—the performance standards need to be integrated into every aspect of the course. This is an important lesson that is being applied in the development of the LMS Rubrics Tool (built by CyberCampus) and the First Year Rubrics Initiative; both projects are discussed later in this essay.

The context of the SPORE research was very broad. The students surveyed were encountering a wide variety of rubrics and teaching practices. While the SPORE results gave AAU confidence that rubrics were enhancing student learning in specific ways and were not, as some faculty feared, extinguishing students’ creativity, the researchers realized that AAU needed to know more. Exactly how are teachers using rubrics to foster creativity at AAU? What types of rubrics in what types of courses are most beneficial? These questions led to the second rubrics study, discussed below.

Study 2—AAU rubrics census (2011)

While the Faculty Development department had some hunches about best practices in creating and using rubrics, the researchers wanted to discover what types of rubrics and other assessment tools were in use at AAU. The 2008 SPORE research revealed a wide range of artifacts and practices that were being referred to as “rubrics” at AAU. To investigate this phenomenon, Jennifer Russell and Natasha Haugnes conducted a Rubric Census in fall 2011. At the time of this self-study, detailed results of the Rubrics Census are still being analyzed; preliminary findings are discussed below.

Until the 2011 Rubrics Census, Faculty Development had been very liberal in the use of the term “rubric.” Faculty Development felt strongly that the value in a rubric is not in having the artifact itself but rather in the process that goes into creating it. In practice, Faculty Development has found that instructor buy-in is vital to the development, effectiveness and ultimate application of a rubric. Therefore, the department was reluctant for many years to be

5 Each of these items was rated separately on the survey.
prescriptive about how instructors used their rubrics or indeed what they labeled as a rubric. Instead, Faculty Development encouraged all productive assessment conversations and waited for word-of-mouth promotion of rubrics to take hold. If an instructor created a teaching tool that was helpful in assessing student work, Faculty Development was not picky about how to label it (whether it was technically a rubric, a checklist or a grading sheet).

In the “Situational Leadership” framework described by Andrea Osburne, Faculty Development adopted high relationship behavior (“opening up channels of communication [and] providing socio-emotional support”) and low task behavior (not being very directive or prescriptive). This strategy was gauged to appeal to the state of readiness of the majority of AAU’s teaching population at that time, which would be described in Osborne’s terminology as “able but unwilling or insecure (self-doubting).” See the attached diagram on Situational Leadership and Group Readiness.

Ten years into the rubric development process at AAU, many more instructors are comfortable with assessment in general and rubrics in particular. Now is a good time to advocate for more widely-shared and consistent terminology around rubrics. In working with AAU instructors to create and refine their rubrics, Faculty Development is now shifting from a Low Task, High Relationship leadership approach to a High Task, High Relationship leadership approach by setting up clearer guidelines and communicating best practices from the outset to foster success.

In response to the 2011 Rubric Census, Faculty Development received 267 rubrics in more than 118 classes (representing almost every department). Faculty Development analyzed these artifacts according to type, length, and number of assignment criteria. The rubrics ranged in length from 11 to 1875 words, with the average being 333 words. The average number of rubric criteria was five. Rubrics from Liberal Arts, Foundations, Art Education, and Interior Architecture and Design comprised 58% of the rubrics received. These departments have benefitted from director-led rubric development initiatives (rather than the organic, instructor-driven approach employed by other departments).

Faculty Development discovered 3 major categories of “rubrics” at AAU:

- **Checklists:** These are essentially a “to-do” list for students, often consisting of one column of information. Levels of achievement are only described by letter grades or points. There is no explicitly-described differentiation between levels of achievement.

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9 There were also several that were not submitted as part of this census, but of which the researchers were aware in practice.

10 Faculty Development is now able to address constructively how much rubric text is effective through the vehicle of the First Year Rubrics Initiative (discussed below), related trainings and instructor consultations.
• “Fill in the blank”: These are rubrics that typically repeat a large amount of verbiage (~75%) across columns, with only the judgment words being altered. For example: “Student applied color principles *professionally*”; “Student applied color principles *adequately*”; Student applied color principles *inadequately*.

• **Qualitative:** These are analytic rubrics with distinct descriptors of student work characteristics at multiple levels of achievement. Generally, these rubrics describe performance specifically, without judgment words.

Additionally, Faculty Development discovered a large number of “rubrics” in online courses that were actually exemplars of student work with accompanying critiques. This excellent teaching practice, seeded by the EVP of Online Education and building on the work of the Foundations Director, has now been coupled with the development of actual rubrics through the custom-built LMS Rubrics Tool and the related First Year Rubrics Initiative (discussed below).

**Rubrics Received by Type**  
**AAU Rubric Census, Fall 2011**

- 37% Qualitative  
- 34% Fill in the blank  
- 25% Checklist  
- 4% Not a rubric

**Next steps**

Faculty Development’s initial objective, to cross-check types of rubrics against specific types of courses and disciplines, proved to be too ambitious given the number of rubrics received. Faculty Development is refocusing the next stage of rubrics research on instructor practices. In 2012, Faculty Development embedded a rubric item on AAU’s student course evaluations. The ultimate goal is to study in depth the courses and instructors who receive consistently high marks to see whether a pattern of best practices emerges. This research will continue through the fall 2014 semester.

**Current catalysts for rubric development**

Over the past decade, ongoing Faculty Development consultations, teaching seminars and research have helped to popularize rubrics at AAU. Roughly 20% of AAU’s departments have developed a healthy culture of rubrics usage as a result of director policy.

Recent policy changes, which have committed additional resources to assessment efforts, are rapidly improving practices university-wide:
1. The development of the LMS Rubrics tool (a joint project led by CyberCampus and Faculty Development), allowing for elegant, online display of rubrics and sample critiques (exemplars of student work);
2. The associated First Year Rubrics Initiative (initiated by President Stephens and EVP of Online Education Chris Lefferts and led by CyberCampus, Faculty Development and the Director of Online Academic Development);
3. Clear feedback from the Assessment Director about the need for improved assessment practices;
4. Academic retreats encouraging increased accountability (initiated by President Stephens and the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, with support from the Directors of Assessment and Institutional Research).

These actions for improvement are discussed below.

**Development of the rubric tool in the Learning Management System**

Faculty Development and CyberCampus collaborated in summer 2012 to narrow the definition of what will be called a rubric at AAU. AAU terminology, moving forward, is as follows:

- A **reference rubric** is a 2, 3 or 5 column grid with assignment criteria listed down the left column and levels of achievement listed across the top row.
- A **grading rubric** is a reference rubric that has been filled out with feedback regarding an individual student’s work.
- **Sample critiques** are exemplars of student work, with a grade assigned and the accompanying rubric verbiage pasted into the text area.

At the request of President Stephens and Executive Vice President of Online Education Chris Lefferts, CyberCampus built an intuitive, visually elegant Rubric Tool, housed in the Learning Management System (LMS). This tool requires all assignments entered in the system (onsite and online) to have a uniform format with clear deliverables and explicit student performance criteria spelled out. The LMS Assessment Tool also encourages faculty to provide visual exemplars of student work at various achievement levels, along with accompanying sample critiques from the faculty. This tool represents a major assessment breakthrough for AAU. Ultimately, each major course assignment will have both a reference rubric and sample critiques uploaded to the LMS. The rubrics and sample critiques will be available to both online and onsite students.

**The first year rubrics initiative**

CyberCampus rolled out the rubrics tool and provided demonstrations for all academic directors in fall 2012. While many AAU departments were excited about the Rubric Tool being released, Faculty Development and CyberCampus saw the need to provide intensive, hands-on support to departments as they began to use the new tool.

Specific concerns identified were as follows:

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11 The LMS Rubrics Tool and related First-Year Rubrics Initiative will help separate “checklist” (or quantitative) elements from qualitative descriptions in current rubrics.
• The majority of rubrics posted would be of the “Fill in the Blank” variety, containing unhelpful descriptors such as “excellent work” and “average implementation.”
• Instructors who were relatively new to a department would create rubrics on their own that were neither aligned with department standards nor approved by the department director.
• Multiple instructors of the same course would be asked to use a new rubric but would not be “normed” on its use.
• Instructors building courses would create extensive rubrics and sample critiques for every assignment in every module. Instructors needing to create these rubrics would become overwhelmed with the workload.
• After initial excitement about getting rubrics written and uploaded to the LMS, the enthusiasm and collective wisdom about implementing them would be lost.

Since instructors were going to be posting rubrics as official course content for multiple instructors to use in the LMS, Faculty Development realized that its previously tolerant, grassroots approach to rubric development needed to evolve.

After a series of meetings, a rubrics planning team from CyberCampus, Faculty Development, Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness and Online Academic Development recommended a rubric development strategy focusing (initially) on developing rubrics for first-year classes being built or rebuilt online. President Stephens adopted these recommendations and initiated the First Year Rubrics Initiative, providing considerable staff resources to accomplish this project. The goal of the First Year Rubrics Initiative is to have normed, director-approved rubrics and sample critiques for major projects posted in the LMS for all first-year core courses by fall 2013.

In addition to the obvious benefits of articulating and illustrating clear performance standards, there are positive secondary effects of the First Year Rubric Initiative. As part of engaging with the project, instructors cross check major assignments across sections and look together at student work samples during norming meetings. In many cases, these activities are a catalyst for the faculty to align assignments and grading practices across multiple sections of the same course in order to achieve consistent learning results. The Faculty Development department is supporting departments in this curricular alignment work; however, these activities are slowing the originally scheduled pace of the First Year Rubrics Initiative. It is likely that the initial timeline of having rubrics and sample critiques for all freshman courses by fall 2013 will need to be extended. By fall 2013, however, the first-year rubrics uploaded to the LMS will be of high quality—normed and embedded as part of a solidly-designed curriculum.

**Recommendations from Faculty Development**

2013-onwards  Continued support for DAT meetings where teachers of multiple sections of a course assess work together using a rubric. Both student work and the pool of instructors will evolve and change. Rubrics should be viewed as organic documents that need to be refreshed so that they do not become obsolete

2013-2016  Development and use of rubrics at the Midpoint and Final Review level (graduate & undergraduate)

2014-2018  Development of rubrics for major assignments in all required courses (undergraduate & graduate)

2015-2016  Research on the effectiveness of rubric implementation in first-year courses
F. Validating Degree Quality through Program Review

AAU evaluates degree quality through a mandatory program review process. Each academic program is reviewed on a 5-6 year cycle. A copy of the academic and co-curricular program review schedule is included. AAU’s program reviews focus on direct evidence of student learning (assessment results) and indirect indicators of program effectiveness (grading trends, employment and internship data and course evaluations), as well as key data on enrollment, finances and staffing. The key questions for department leaders are: what is happening in your program and how can we make it better? Required data for academic program reviews is outlined in the attached template.

The focus on academic quality and program effectiveness is supported through the regularly scheduled President’s Academic Retreats (3-4 retreats per year, with four departments attending each retreat). Since March 2011, a total of six academic retreats have been held, and each academic department has attended at least one retreat. A schedule of the academic retreats is included.

Departments are invited on these intensive offsite retreats every 1-2 years, depending on the academic needs of the department and irrespective of the scheduled timeframe for the next program review. The President’s Academic Retreats enable department leaders to spend focused time over a weekend evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their curriculum, student learning results and priorities for the future. The objectives and outcomes of these retreats closely align with the program review process; both processes are managed by the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, with support from the Office of Institutional Research and the Assessment Director.

Typically, four departments attend each retreat. Each department is allocated a facilitator who takes notes, enabling the President, Board Chair, Chief Academic Officer and other members of AAU’s academic leadership team to participate fully in the review of each department. These formalized reviews help to keep the department’s academic priorities and vision for the future in focus and allow AAU’s academic management team to follow up on recommendations arising from program review.

In advance of each academic retreat, the leadership team in each department is provided with a comprehensive packet of statistical information from the Office of Institutional Research and the Assessment Director. These packets include enrollment trends, student demographics, retention and graduation patterns, faculty data, assessment results, grade distribution for required courses (comparing onsite sections with online sections), and a chart for directors and full-time faculty to outline their workloads. This information enables a department to conduct a self-study for program review and create an action plan built on evidence-based understanding of current strengths, limitations and opportunities for improvement.

Following the retreat, each department records their Priority Action Items on a chart, including items that need to be integrated into future budget requests (the template is included). These action items are shared with the President, Board Chair, and Chief Academic Officer for follow up; some items are identified as needing presidential approval, others can be implemented independently by the department.
AAU has made considerable progress on academic program review since its 2010 WASC Interim Report. Sample program reviews are attached as evidence (School of Architecture, BFA; School of Architecture, M.Arch; School of Interior Architecture and Design, BFA; School of Interior Architecture and Design, MFA; School of Illustration, BFA; Liberal Arts, undergraduate and graduate).\(^\text{12}\) A full set of reviews will be available in the team room. Progress since the last WASC Commission Action Letter (May 2007) is also addressed in the conclusion of this self-study.

G. Validating Student Performance through Programmatic Assessment (CFR 2.4, 2.6, 4.6)

Data on student performance in relation to program outcomes is collected each semester through mandatory assessment processes at the Bachelor’s and Master’s levels. This data is then analyzed and used to make judgments about the effectiveness of program design.

All students in AAU’s Bachelor’s and Masters’ programs are individually assessed through a Midpoint and Final Review process (formative and summative reviews). Two- to five-member faculty committees evaluate student performance in relation to the program learning outcomes. Both full-time and part-time faculty members are invited to participate. The review committee chairs digitally record the results for each student in AAU’s Learning Management System (LMS). Sample assessment forms used at the undergraduate and graduate level are attached.

At the graduate level, nearly all programs require students to make a Midpoint and Final presentation before a faculty review committee.\(^\text{13}\) At their Midpoint Review, students are expected to propose a thesis project worthy of the Master’s degree and demonstrate the skills necessary to complete their thesis (or a plan to acquire those skills). Graduate students come to Midpoint Review after completing a year and a half of prescribed course work. At their Final Review, graduate students present their completed thesis project as evidence of achievement of the program learning outcomes.

The custom-built assessment tool in the LMS allows for both synchronous and asynchronous assessment of student work. Graduate reviews are synchronous (occurring in real time) both onsite and online.\(^\text{14}\) Undergraduate assessment is asynchronous. Students upload specified work to a digital portfolio which is then evaluated by the department director or track head\(^\text{15}\) and at least one additional faculty reviewer. Undergraduate Midpoint Review of student work occurs in a

\(^\text{12}\) Undergraduate and graduate program reviews are separate, although they share much of the same information regarding faculty (many of whom teach in both programs), faculty support, student support services, and facilities. Additionally, industry trends and the future vision generally cross over both programs. The university does not distinguish between the undergraduate and graduate programs when determining the budget; consequently, there is only one budget per academic department.

\(^\text{13}\) A small number of graduate programs rely on embedded assessment in a capstone course.

\(^\text{14}\) Online graduate reviews are conducted using AdobeConnect, allowing students to present their work in real time to a faculty review committee.

\(^\text{15}\) Departments where students can specialize in certain areas of the industry (e.g., Motion Pictures and Television, with its specialty tracks in Editing, Cinematography, Screenwriting, Producing and Directing) employ track heads to manage
“trigger class” that falls in the students’ fourth semester. Final Review occurs in a portfolio course (capstone) at the end of the program.

The online assessment tool aggregates assessment results and also provides outcome-specific feedback and overall comments to students on their Midpoint and Final Review presentations. Once aggregated data became available (2011-2012), the Assessment Director began providing analytical commentary for each department in an assessment results package. This commentary helps to focus the academic directors on the most significant findings.

Program-level assessment activities are managed as a partnership between the academic directors and the Assessment Director. Substantial administrative support is provided by CyberCampus (managing the design and operation of the digital assessment system) and centralized Midpoint and Final Review Coordinators in the Graduate School (managing scheduling of students and committee members).

The Assessment Director meets with the academic department directors after each fall and spring semester to discuss departmental progress and areas for improvement. At these meetings, assessment results are contextualized by discussing three questions:

1. Are we asking the right question (is the outcome worded correctly)?
2. Are students bringing the work we need to see to evaluate the skills (are the review guidelines accurate)?
3. Where can we add opportunities for skill-building into the curriculum?

If the answer to the first two questions is yes, the directors consult their curriculum map to judge where to embed improvement initiatives. The department directors work with the Assessment Director (mandatory) and Faculty Developers (optional) to design strategies for improvement. Directors work with their faculty to address deficits in the curriculum through Department Action Team meetings.

Assessment results from each department and plans for improvement are discussed in detail with the President and her academic management team at the President’s Academic Retreats (departments attend these retreats annually). Sample analysis of BFA and MFA assessment results at both the formative and summative level, along with related actions for improvement, are featured in Essay 2.

development.

the curriculum content, interact with faculty and students on the track. Track heads are also known as Curriculum Coordinators, depending on the department.
Achieving AAU’s Core Competencies
(CFR 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6)

- Part I of this essay defines the skills and knowledge that AAU students must demonstrate in order to graduate (core competencies). This section also examines how AAU’s curriculum develops these competencies: solely within the majors, solely within Liberal Arts (LA) or across both LA and the majors. This analysis, conducted as part of the DQP project, is being used to design institutional assessment practices that bridge existing assessment efforts in LA and the majors.¹

- Part II discusses achievement of disciplinary competencies and presents case studies of how departments have used recent results to improve teaching, learning and assessment.²

- Part III discusses achievement of core competencies in LA (undergraduate general education).

I. Defining Core Competencies

AAU has a defined set of institutional learning outcomes that are closely tied to the mission and apply at both the undergraduate and graduate level. These abilities define the meaning of AAU’s degrees for stakeholders and the general public. In line with the university’s mission to prepare aspiring artists and designers for success in the industry, AAU’s degree programs deliver a set of distinctive, discipline-specific outcomes; these map to the institutional outcomes. Liberal Arts (general education) outcomes, required at both the undergraduate and graduate level, also map to the institutional outcomes.

¹ Research in support of this institutional assessment planning is discussed in Part III of this essay. Research, Oral Communication and Quantitative Literacy competencies will be the focus of this project.

² Complete assessment results for a number of departments may be viewed in the program reviews included with the Appendix. A full set of MFA and BFA assessment results from each department will be presented in the Team Room.
**MFA, MA, M.Arch**

Key competencies for the Master’s degree are primarily defined through program learning outcomes in each discipline. Required courses in Graduate Liberal Arts contribute additional learning outcomes to the degree.

**BFA, BA**

Key competencies for the bachelor’s degree are defined through both Liberal Arts program learning outcomes (general education) and program learning outcomes in each major.

**AA**

For the Associate degree, a less-advanced set of AA program outcomes and AA Liberal Arts learning outcomes is expected.

Student achievement of discipline-specific competencies is assessed within the major through the Midpoint and Final Review process (formative and summative evaluation), used at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Sample results are analyzed in Part II of this essay.

Student achievement of Liberal Arts outcomes is assessed at the undergraduate level. Results for five core competencies aligning with CFR 2.2a are discussed in Part III of this essay.

**Using the DQP as a lens**

The DQP is another lens for understanding institution-wide outcomes. In the course of the DQP project, AAU found that regardless of major or degree level, students were demonstrating the following universal competencies:

- Problem solving
- Technical proficiency
- Communication fluency
- Professional readiness

These universal competencies, visible in the DQP exhibit of student work, link to published institutional outcomes and program outcomes in all majors.

The attached charts outline the extent to which other, overarching competencies are achieved across majors (*To What Extent Do Students Meet the Translated DQP Outcomes?*). AAU is currently working to involve the rest of the university’s 21 departments in gathering typical examples of student work that meet the DQP outcomes. Depending on

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3 The DQP project focused on AAU’s Master’s and Bachelor’s degrees.

4 Some majors specify Research as a distinct outcome; others subsume it within the Problem Solving category, as this is how it is assessed in a disciplinary context (e.g., Did they student conduct sufficient research to solve the problem/execute the project?).

5 Includes both technical and design skills.
the findings of this next stage of the DQP project, AAU may wish to propose additional institutional learning outcomes. One likely candidate is Interdisciplinary Solutions.

**AAU’s degree programs are designed to foster students’ technical and aesthetic fluency and encourage a resilient approach to creative problem solving.**

**Teaching and Assessing AAU’s Core Competencies**

At the undergraduate level, Technical and Design skills are developed solely within the context of the majors. The following competencies, introduced and formatively assessed in Liberal Arts, are developed to their fullest potential and summatively assessed within the disciplinary context of each major:

- Problem solving (identified as Critical Thinking and Analysis in Liberal Arts classes)
- Communication fluency (identified as Written Communication in Liberal Arts classes)
- Professional readiness (identified as Employment Communication in Liberal Arts classes)

The remaining general education outcomes are, in most cases, developed and assessed solely within Liberal Arts courses, though AAU’s DQP project revealed clear ties with the work that students go on to do in their majors:

- Art historical awareness
- Historical awareness
- Cultural awareness
- Quantitative literacy

At the graduate level, learning occurs primarily within the context of the discipline. Common competencies among all the graduate programs (Development of an Original Thesis or Capstone Project, Research, Problem Solving, Visual Communication, Presentation Skills, Technical Skills, Professional Readiness) align with the outcomes cited under CFR 2.2b. Graduate programs also require classes in the Graduate Liberal Arts (GLA) program. The GLA curriculum provides students with relevant theoretical and practical knowledge in the arts and humanities, cultural studies and business practices.

AAU’s understanding of communication fluency is oriented toward 21st century industry expectations and extends beyond traditional written or oral communication outcomes to include both visual and integrated (holistic)

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6 While NASAD, CIDA and NAAB require outcomes related to aesthetic sensitivity, art historical awareness and knowledge of the history of the student’s field of art or design, only a few majors articulate this competency in their program learning outcomes (because the competency is usually assessed in Liberal Arts).

7 GLA courses address the following skill areas: Research, Written Communication, Art Historical Awareness and Aesthetic Sensitivity, Critical Thinking and Analysis, Cross-Cultural Understanding and Professional Practices. See the GLA homepage: [http://www.academyart.edu/degrees/graduate-liberal-arts-learning-outcome.html](http://www.academyart.edu/degrees/graduate-liberal-arts-learning-outcome.html).
communication strategies. This understanding would likely be shared by other art and design schools in the WASC region.

II. **Achievement of Core Competencies in the Majors**

The Assessment Director prepared five case studies of assessment results for this WASC report.

- MFA Fashion Design
- MFA Photography
- MFA Industrial Design
- BFA Animation & Visual Effects
- BFA Illustration

Please click on the red text below to review the assessment result case studies.

The **MFA case studies** accurately reflect the spectrum of experience with the graduate programmatic assessment process adopted at AAU over the past two years (2010-2012). The **BFA case studies** address typical successes and challenges among the undergraduate departments as they adopted a systematic, digital assessment process in 2012.

Graphs of assessment results are excerpted from the full set of results published each semester for every department. While programmatic assessment is still in the emerging stage at AAU (see analysis below), we have been able to make substantive program improvements based on the preliminary results. Specific examples of improvement are featured in the case studies (e.g., refocusing course content, changing course sequencing, adding new courses).

At an institutional level, teaching and learning have been improved in a number of ways through AAU’s systematic assessment efforts.

**Teaching**

- Reviewing assessment results every semester has helped the university promote an environment of evidence-based decision making. The formalized reports have validated many of the academic directors’ thoughts and feelings about trends in their departments. Academic directors have used assessment results to pinpoint problems within the curriculum and clearly communicate them to both faculty and the academic management team.
- Academic directors have revised their program learning outcome lists to express expected competencies in a meaningful and measurable way (based on review committee discussion and feedback from the Assessment Director).
- Faculty reviewers have engaged hands-on with the revised outcomes lists—giving participating faculty a more comprehensive view of the program goals.
- DAT meetings addressing assessment findings have engaged part-time faculty in program-level effectiveness efforts.
- Curriculum maps have helped the directors to visualize how the sequencing of required courses advances students’ skill development and contributes to formative and summative achievement.
Learning

- Students have been given clear expectations (PLO lists and revised review guidelines).
- Students have been given additional opportunities to practice skills in key courses as a result of assessment findings.
- Sequencing of key courses has been reevaluated in some departments to improve scaffolding.

AAU’s redesigned assessment process has already deepened AAU’s understanding of learning results in a way that would not have been possible under the previous approach.

Analyzing AAU’s Culture of Assessment (CFR 2.4, 2.6, 4.6, 4.7)

Graduate Programs

AAU’s graduate programs have a long history of formative and summative student assessment in the form of graduate Midpoint and Final Reviews. These reviews require students to present their work before a faculty committee; the faculty reviewers provide students with personalized feedback on their thesis projects. Historically, the faculty committees were also asked to rate students’ presentations on four, universal skill categories (Technical, Aesthetic, Concept, Presentation) using a 1-5 Likert scale. The results, though recorded manually, were never aggregated.

The move to assess graduate student performance in relation to discipline-specific program learning outcomes (PLOs)—and to record and aggregate the results—began in fall 2010, with manual recording of data. Tabulating the manual data was cumbersome and often confusing, as committees were reviewing items idiosyncratically (they had total control over the forms—whereas the current digital system is programmed to reject irregular submissions). In spring 2011, AAU rolled out the online assessment system built by CyberCampus and provided university-wide training on the new electronic assessment process.

In the Graduate School, conversion to the online assessment system was relatively smooth because of the longstanding culture of committee-based assessment. There were, however, some common process issues that interfered with the first attempts:

- Connectivity issues in various AAU buildings were inhibiting use of the online assessment system. This was resolved when universal Wi-Fi was installed in academic buildings in spring 2012.
- Various departments experienced timing problems. The old Midpoint and Final Review procedures focused almost entirely on providing individualized, in-person feedback to the student. The one-hour timeframe allotted for these reviews did not allow the committee enough time together to evaluate the student work against all the learning outcomes (which is done when the student is outside the room). This issue was resolved by a policy change in spring 2012: review times were increased for academic departments experiencing time constraints.

A number of issues were identified through analysis of the initial graduate assessment results in 2011:

- Midpoint and Final Review guidelines were unclear or outdated resulting in students submitting work that did not address PLOs.
- Students’ thesis presentations were not approved despite students having successfully passed all of their GDS (thesis preparation) courses.
- Not enough students were meeting key thesis and portfolio outcomes.
• Students with incomplete thesis projects were reviewed informally with the assumption that they would be ready to present the next semester. These “informal reviews” affected assessment results in two different ways. From spring 2011 – spring 2012, some departments were rating all outcomes at these reviews “Not Rated” while others rated them as “Does Not Meet.” In fall 2012, AAU made the policy that the academic departments could no longer have “informal reviews” and that all students at 63 units must present and be rated at Final Review. This resulted in higher rates of “Does Not Meet” at the Final Reviews in fall 2012 (because students were used to the system where they could have additional time to finish their thesis).  

The Assessment Director conducted Midpoint and Final Review observations in every academic department in fall 2012 to gain insight on the struggling departments and identify best practices from the successful academic departments.

The most successful graduate programs have certain features in common:

• Seasoned directors who are clear on their program design and how it relates to the quality of work they expect from their students
• Consistent review chairs and faculty membership on Midpoint/Final Review committees
• Committees consisting solely of faculty teaching in the graduate program and ideally the faculty member(s) teaching the “prep” course for Midpoint/Final Review
• Group Directed Study (GDS) sequence structured with at least one required “anchor” course in each semester between Midpoint and Final review

The Assessment Director found a range of issues impacting assessment results in other graduate programs:

• Academic director turnover
• Weak or uneven curriculum design in the first half of the program (it is imperative that the first three semesters of the graduate programs are designed to build students’ skills and knowledge to the level necessary to create a successful thesis proposal)
• Approval of weak thesis proposals at Midpoint Review; these projects go on to be unsuccessful at Final Review (departments with a veteran review committee who understand the program and know what concepts can be fixed in Group Directed Study do not have this issue)
• Lack of a designed approach to Group Directed Study sequence in the second half of the program
• Challenges with student collaborations (in a few graduate programs, students cannot complete thesis projects without working with a team—e.g., Animation & Visual Effects, Motion Pictures & Television)

AAU is working to improve graduate student success in a number of ways:

• Institutional Research (IR) is working on a project to identify the scope of the issue. IR is researching students who have 63 or more units but have not yet graduated from the university. Prior to putting any new policies in place, the research will be reviewed to confirm that the barriers to student success identified anecdotally are in fact wider problems.
• Academic administrators are meeting on a regular basis to discuss departments that are struggling, review assessment and IR findings, and develop new graduate program policies based on hard data and observed best practice.

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8 All assessment results in the WASC report are combined spring/fall.
• Now that the university-wide observations are complete, the Assessment Director will focus on supporting reviews led by new academic directors and those in programs with a recently redesigned curriculum.
• The Online Synchronous Learning Coordinator has been working with the academic departments to standardize and update review guidelines. This project will improve the alignment of student work presented during reviews to the PLOs.
• In addition to implementing comprehensive curriculum redesign in programs with problematic results (e.g., Motion Pictures & Television), AAU is piloting a hands-on, preapproval and mentorship program for students who progressed under the previous program design (beginning spring 2013 and continuing until it is no longer needed).

The new graduate assessment process brought to light the challenges some graduate programs are having. The continuous collection and analysis of student learning data has been an effective catalyst for substantive discussions about how to improve learning results at AAU through curricular improvement and policy interventions.

**Spotlight on Assessment—Industrial Design, MFA**

The MFA director and his faculty review committee in the School of Industrial Design (IDS) initially struggled to evaluate the same skill set at different points in a student’s career. While summative evaluation was familiar to the IDS review committee, formative expectations had not been adequately discussed or defined by the faculty.

In spring 2011, when AAU adopted a digital assessment process tied to program learning outcomes (rather than idiosyncratically to either program outcomes or a criteria list generated independently by the department), IDS faced some obstacles to effective assessment, including:

• An overwhelmingly long list of program learning outcomes (PLOs)
• Lack of clarity about which outcomes should be evaluated when (some outcomes are only evaluated formatively, e.g. thesis proposal; others should be assessed at both Midpoint and Final Review, but it was a common problem for committee members to be confused or idiosyncratic in their initial ratings)
• A review process that did not support in-depth, candid committee discussions on student learning. (Prior to the online assessment system, committee members rated student projects privately on an evaluation form, without discussing their assessments with each other. While this process allowed for independent judgments, it resulted in a lot of “split votes” and there was insufficient opportunity for committee members to discuss the rationale for their ratings or reach consensus on expectations.)

The assessment results gathered in 2011 clearly manifest the level of confusion in the department.

Based on the 2011 assessment experience, MFA director Mark Bolick was partnered with the Assessment Director to rewrite his program learning outcomes and with faculty developer Natasha Haugnes to develop a rubric that would

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9 Logistically, the Industrial Design reviews are open (any student in the department may attend). The director was conducting these reviews back-to-back so there was no time for any private committee discussion. Based on feedback from the Assessment Director, the department adjusted the review process to allow for private, in-depth discussion on each student. The new process is very collaborative and thorough.
clarify the department’s expectations for Midpoint Review. In DAT meetings addressing this project, the faculty welcomed the opportunity to discuss student work and expectations of graduate students in IDS. The department piloted its Midpoint rubric in spring 2012 and shared the rubric with the Midpoint Prep class (IDS 605 Thesis Preparation) in fall 2012. The review committee has since enthusiastically embraced the new assessment process and use of rubrics.

The first round of accurate Midpoint Review assessment results was collected in spring 2012. Having these results has helped the MFA director to identify weaknesses in his curriculum and address them with the support of faculty development. Adjustments made to address deficits shown in spring 2012 Midpoint Review results include alignment of the three design courses leading up to Midpoint and a revised course outline for the Midpoint Prep class. The course now better prepares students to generate and develop appropriate thesis ideas.

The assessment process has also helped the department to define its expectations for student presentations at the Final Review. The MFA review committee piloted a Final Review rubric in fall 2012 and will be sharing the rubric with the Final Review Prep course (Group Directed Study: Implementation) in spring 2013.

**Undergraduate Programs**

In spring 2012 the digital assessment system was launched to collect aggregated, outcome-specific assessment results from all undergraduate programs. Since the undergraduate assessment process is asynchronous, the logistics are more complex than at the graduate level, where all students make mandatory, real-time presentations. The undergraduate process faced additional implementation issues because there was not a robust, preexisting culture of committee review to link to new digital review requirements.

To promote the successful launch of the BFA assessment system, the Assessment Director met with all undergraduate academic directors to:

- Determine formative assessment points
- Identify faculty reviewers for the assessments
- Revise program learning outcomes to align them with rating forms being used in some departments (where applicable)

**Undergraduate Formative Assessment**

Only a few academic departments had established formative reviews as part of their culture at the undergraduate level in spring 2012 when the assessment system was implemented. To date, participation in Midpoint Reviews has been stronger in the departments that already had an established culture of review.

**Undergraduate Summative Assessment**

Identifying the correct place to collect undergraduate summative results was also initially challenging. Historically, undergraduate programs required senior portfolio courses (capstones) where individual students were offered feedback on their final portfolio work. These results were not recorded and thus could not be aggregated for the purposes of analyzing
program effectiveness. Undergraduate programs also required a mandatory petition to graduate meeting with the department director, where the student’s portfolio was reviewed.

In the meeting time allotted for the petition to graduate meetings, the academic directors could not review enough student work to evaluate all of the learning outcomes and the synchronous process of one-on-one petition to graduation meetings (spring 2012) did not allow for assessment of student work by multiple reviewers.

In fall 2012 summative reviews were moved from petition to graduate to the capstone or portfolio course, where it is more appropriate to assess and provide outcome-specific feedback to students. This is a better fit for a number of reasons:

- Directors are more comfortable giving candid feedback when the students are still working to perfect their portfolios.
- The feedback is more valuable to students in the class context because they are receiving it while they are actively working on compiling their final portfolios.
- This is an embedded assessment process, so the instructor can easily communicate expectations and deadlines.

### Lessons Learned in the 2012 Undergraduate Assessment Pilot

Key issues uncovered in the first round of undergraduate programmatic assessments:

- Low student participation at the undergraduate level (not enough results to assess)
- When the undergraduate review process was implemented, academic directors/fulltime faculty were not given any course release time to complete student reviews. Undergraduate programmatic assessment has been stalled in some departments due to lack to time to complete the reviews
- In certain programs, curriculum designed without a clear core of required courses made it difficult to identify assessment points that would catch all students

The undergraduate programs most successful in completing their programmatic assessments had the following things in common:

- A dedicated person responsible for overseeing Midpoint/Final Review submission and completion
- A pre-existing culture of review
- Core curriculum structured so that all students take the same set of required courses leading to the formative review

The Assessment Director found a variety of issues impacting departments that are struggling with assessment:

- A lack of clarity in core curriculum design
- Lack of consistency across sections of first-year courses and major core courses
- Ambiguous expectations of skill sets required at different levels throughout the program

AAU is working to improve undergraduate student success and assessment in the following ways:

- Course learning outcome (CLO) added to all undergraduate Midpoint and Final Review trigger courses to increase student participation (spring 2013)
- Faculty Development will be working with the academic departments to create or adjust assignments to support the new CLO
• First-year rubric initiative
• One-on-one DATs process to encourage part-time faculty to develop curriculum with Faculty Development
• Mandatory DAT meeting between onsite and online faculty for course builds and re-builds to confirm consistency of the final assignment
• Dedicated faculty/director to complete undergraduate student reviews
• Partnership/support from student services to increase student participation and understanding of Midpoint and Final Review

AAU is still calibrating the undergraduate assessment system—clarifying submission guidelines, refining learning outcomes, and working to fully embed the process into the undergraduate culture. Compliance with the requirement of formative and summative assessment is uneven but improving. Mandatory rating of student performance in relation to the list of program learning outcomes is a new process for the undergraduate departments and will take time to become embedded in the culture.

Lessons Learned: Converting to a Rigorous, Digital Assessment Process

Common challenges faced by the graduate and undergraduate programs since converting to the new assessment practices in 2011-2012 included the following:

• Program learning outcomes lists (used as the assessment criteria) did not accurately express department expectations. These lists have been revised as a result of the assessment experience.
• Committee members misused the Not Rated option on the first iteration of the digital assessment form. These forms are now preset to eliminate confusion.
• Departments struggled to determine appropriate formative expectations at the Midpoint Reviews. Struggling departments have been referred to Faculty Development to develop rubrics for Midpoint Review expectations.

Next Steps in Programmatic Assessment at AAU

Summer 2013
Develop an introductory guide of best practices for new directors and committee members.

2013-2014
Develop Midpoint and Final Review rubrics.

Fall 2013-ongoing
Hold annual meetings with review committees to discuss results. Assessment Director will answer questions and offer analysis and logistical support.

2013-2014 calibration, then ongoing
Collect and share consistently valid data (based on calibrated outcomes & improved guidelines) to start improving teaching and learning at the undergraduate level based on assessment results.

2014
Embed assessment of the minority of outcomes needing to be reviewed in situ (e.g., Collaboration Skills) into the curriculum.
III. Achieving Core Competencies in Liberal Arts

Definition
AAU’s Liberal Arts (LA) program highlights skill and subject matter correlations between general education courses and the art and design disciplines. Students earning a Bachelor’s degree are expected to achieve a distinct set of LA outcomes (defined below) in addition to the discipline-specific skills they acquire in the majors.¹⁰

1 Written Communication
Write with conciseness and clarity and apply the conventions of standard written English to communicate effectively and support an idea. Write a short story.

2 Oral Communication
Clearly present creative ideas and analytical information to a variety of audiences.

3 Critical Thinking & Analysis
Raise clear and precise questions, use abstract ideas to interpret information, consider different points of view, reach supported conclusions. Understand and define a problem or argument and apply acquired knowledge to generate solutions.

4 Research & Retrieval of Information
Gather, assess, and apply relevant information and reference material in coursework.

5 Quantitative Literacy
Recognize, comprehend, and generate quantitative information in a variety of representational forms.

¹⁰ See AA outcomes in program learning outcomes attachment.
6  Art Historical Awareness
Identify artwork from various periods and styles and make distinctions and connections among them through stylistic and cultural analysis. Analyze the ways art can affect and/or reflect cultural, political and humanistic issues and recognize how cultural context influences artistic development.

7  Historical Awareness
Develop and draw upon historical knowledge in order to analyze relevant contemporary issue(s).

8  Cultural Ideas & Influences
Identify, interpret and analyze cultural ideas, influences and artifacts.

9  Employment Communications
Acquire knowledge of current business practices and demonstrate professional behavior within the context of employment communication and practices.

Outcomes 1-8 align with the WASC core competencies outlined under CFR 2.2a. Outcome 9 is specific to AAU’s mission. The chart below shows the alignment of LA program outcomes (PLOs) with AAU’s institutional outcomes (ILOs).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ILOs</th>
<th>LIBERAL ARTS PLOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates of the Academy of Art University will demonstrate the ability to…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solve creative problems within their field of art and design, including research and synthesis of technical, aesthetic, and conceptual knowledge.</td>
<td>Critical Thinking &amp; Analysis Research &amp; Retrieval of Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate their ideas professionally and connect with their intended audience using visual, oral, and written presentation skills relevant to their field.</td>
<td>Written Communication Oral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize the influence of major cultural and aesthetic trends, both historical and contemporary, on art and design products.</td>
<td>Art Historical Awareness Cultural Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn the professional skills and behaviors necessary to compete in the global marketplace for art and design.</td>
<td>Employment Communications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching and Assessing Core Competencies in LA

For the WASC reaccreditation self-study, the LA Director chose to write about assessment results from the five outcomes most closely aligned with CFR 2.2 a. Each of these core competencies is introduced, reinforced and formatively assessed within the LA curriculum by the end of the sophomore year. With the exception of Quantitative Literacy and Art Historical Awareness, the core competencies are reinforced and applied in all LA courses, especially those targeted as programmatic assessment points.

The LA assessment map and detailed assessment reports for these five competencies are attached.

Liberal Arts Assessment Results

To date, 8 of the 9 LA program outcomes have been summatively assessed, allowing the faculty to get a baseline reading of student achievement. These assessments revealed positive results in art historical awareness and quantitative literacy and the need for improvement in critical thinking, expository writing and fundamental research skills (particularly the mechanics of citing source material). Below is a chart showing the dates of the most recent assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>MOST RECENT ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling (Written Communication)</td>
<td>Winter, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expository Writing (Written Communication): Formative</td>
<td>Summer, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Ideas &amp; Influences</td>
<td>Summer, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Literacy</td>
<td>Summer, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Historical Awareness</td>
<td>Summer, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expository Writing (Written Communication): Summative</td>
<td>Summer, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>Summer, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Retrieval of Information</td>
<td>Summer, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 The Oral Communication PLO was added in late 2012. An assessment plan for this outcome is in development (spring-summer 2013).
LA faculty followed up each of the above assessment activities with a series of Department Action Team (DAT) meetings and curriculum improvement projects. This allowed them to design and implement actions for improvement, including changes in academic policy, course sequencing and prerequisites, course content and assessment strategies. Both full-time and part-time faculty members have welcomed the opportunity to participate in the assessment process and have found the experience extremely meaningful. Overall, the LA faculty found that the assessments, when properly designed, can help them get a clearer perspective on what students are actually learning. This helps the department make necessary adjustments to meet the academic needs of AAU’s diverse student population. AAU serves nearly 18,000 students in 21 majors across two learning platforms (onsite and online). All students take LA courses (the role of Graduate Liberal Arts—GLA—is discussed briefly at the end of this essay). The university maintains a mission-driven commitment to inclusive admissions—broadening access to a quality art and design education for students who may not have had exposure to art education in high school (and hence would not be eligible for admission to selective art schools). Some of AAU’s students have had a poor experience in high school and enter college unprepared to succeed—especially in traditional academic subjects—without additional support. Additionally, AAU serves a large population of international students, many of whom are learning English for Art Purposes (EAP). AAU provides support for these students in the form of a scaffolded LA curriculum with remedial options, mandatory placement testing, dedicated EAP sections with embedded support teachers, free workshops and tutoring, academic coaching (e.g. time management, study skills), an online writing lab, presentation groups and English conversation groups. These services are provided through the Academy Resource Center (ARC), discussed in Essay 3.

Especially in the area of expository writing (which overlaps with the critical thinking competency—see assessment analysis below), these characteristics of AAU’s student population represent a challenge for the LA faculty. Most students who enter with low English proficiency and/or poor writing and analytical skills are still developing these skills in their second year. This impacts the student performance results on the LA assessments, which are embedded within the sophomore curriculum.

The LA Director notes that student achievement of the Critical Thinking, Research and Communication competencies is best judged—at the summative level—in the authentic context of student work done in the majors. Two AAU majors require the type of academic writing typical of Liberal Arts colleges. The majority of AAU students are trained to communicate to a high standard of visual communication, integrating other modes of communication (speaking, writing, listening) as appropriate to their discipline.

12 Beginning in summer 2013.

13 For graduate students, there is also a Midpoint/Final Review Lab.

14 These are Art Education and Art History, both traditional Liberal Arts degrees.
The LA results are indicators of formative learning in the first two years of general education, but the whole story of what students are learning at AAU is not visible without looking at summative results in the disciplines. A more accurate indicator of what students are learning at AAU can be obtained by viewing the students’ final portfolios. These offer a better predictor for students’ success in the workplace, since the student work was created in a real-world context that fully engages them in a task they feel passionately about; students came to AAU to build a portfolio so that they can compete for a job in the art and design industry. That is their dream.

A summary of the LA assessment results is presented below; detailed assessment reports for each outcome are presented in the Appendix.

**Written Communication**

The LA writing faculty has experimented with various approaches to assessment over the last several years. Detailed formative and summative assessment reports on Written Communication are included in the Appendix. Below is a brief summary of findings for this competency:

The writing faculty summatively assessed this competency in summer 2012, sampling student work from two expository writing courses. The results revealed that 66% of student work met the written communication outcome. The reasons student work did not meet expectations varied; the main issues were sentence structure errors and incomplete or undeveloped arguments.

Both written communication and critical thinking were assessed through the same assignment. While faculty used a separate rubric to evaluate the two competencies, it was clear that students’ ability to demonstrate their writing skills was enmeshed with their critical thinking abilities. It proved impossible to separate these competencies for assessment purposes. In the debrief session, instructors noted that if the student work had been assessed solely on the basis of grammar and syntax, achievement rates would perhaps have been higher. However, such a narrowly focused assessment strategy would have contradicted the department’s pedagogical commitment to train students using real-world written communication scenarios.

The department recognizes that 66% of students meeting expectations is not acceptable. The writing faculty has set a target of 70%. While the 2012 result was discouraging to the writing faculty, student performance has gone up from previous assessments. Achievement rates should continue to improve as a result of improvements that have been implemented throughout the writing curriculum (refined topics, assignments and rubrics). Other actions for improvement have included changing prerequisites and lowering class caps. These changes were direct results of recommendations made in the assessment reports, as outlined in the chart below.

The writing faculty conducted a formative assessment of students’ expository writing skills in the summer of 2009. Evaluation of student work from LA 108 Composition for the Artist showed that 84% of students met or exceeded the department’s expectations. Instructors determined that samples not meeting expectations were failing in the area of

15 LA 202 English Composition: Creative Persuasion and LA 280 Perspective Journalism. To date LA 429 Architecture Theory has not been part of the assessment as the Architecture cohort group has not been large enough for this course to run consistently to yield meaningful data.
critical thinking; in the assignment being evaluated, students were unable to make connections between their evaluation of a work of art and the artist’s intent.

The LA Director noted this unusual result: an 18% drop in student performance between the formative and summative assessment of expository writing. She concluded that the formative assessment, led by a previous coordinator of the writing program, probably set the bar too low on writing mechanics. Conversely, the summative assessment probably set the bar slightly high on critical thinking skills, using an assessment rubric based on exit-level college competencies rather than on AA-level competencies, which would have been more accurate. It should also be noted that the faculty used different assessment rubrics for the formative and summative evaluations of expository writing. The Assessment Director has suggested that, in the next round, the department give a very similar assignment in LA 108 Composition for the Artist and LA 202 English Composition: Creative Persuasion and use the same assessment rubric. This will allow the faculty to get a more accurate picture of student development.

Recent recommendations have been made to develop critical thinking skills through increased use of reading comprehension exercises—especially as these relate to students’ ability to evaluate and support arguments in their writing. Formative assessment of this outcome will take place again in the summer of 2013. Changes to course skill-building exercises, assignment parameters and rubrics in the years since the last assessment should yield positive results.

The 2012 summative assessment of written communication also revealed the need to improve writing mechanics; this has been recognized as an ongoing issue in writing across the curriculum. In various iterations of the curriculum for LA 108 Composition for the Artist, the writing faculty has alternated placing more teaching focus on writing mechanics or critical thinking (developing a thesis statement and supporting an argument). The current curriculum places more emphasis on developing fundamental writing skills, so the department expects to see improvements in this area over time.

**Narrative Storytelling**

In the 2008 assessment of narrative storytelling, 68% of student work met the expected level of achievement. This result fell slightly short of the department’s target of 70%. Creative writing faculty recommended and received approval for changing the order in which writing courses are taken. Students now take the storytelling course at the end of the writing sequence, which gives them the opportunity to hone their expository writing, grammar and syntax skills before taking on creative writing. The new course order gives all students time to mature intellectually and international students have an additional semester of exposure to the cultural expectations informing western narrative. The faculty also responded to the assessment findings by refining both the assessment and assignment rubrics. Creative writing faculty have tested and further refined these rubrics in follow-up DAT meetings.

As a result of recommendations arising from assessment, a 2011 President’s Academic Retreat and the LA program review, a number of policy changes have been approved. These changes address student performance in the course

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16 It should be noted that while this change was approved by faculty consensus, faculty teaching the expository writing courses have questioned how this re-sequencing has impacted student achievement in their courses, which are now taken one semester earlier. The more time students have to develop their writing skills—obviously—the better they will perform.
sequence where the writing, research and critical thinking competencies are taught. It is too early to measure the impact of recent changes. However, initial faculty feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

**LA ASSESSMENT: DRIVING CHANGES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACULTY RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
<th>APPROVED FOR…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the class cap in LA 108 from 20 to 15</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the class cap in LA 110 &amp; LA 280 from 20 to 18</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require students to pass LA 108 with a grade of C- or higher</td>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce the class cap in LA 202 from 20 to 18</td>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require mandatory writing placement exams</td>
<td>Approved for Summer 2013 (pending development of online testing platform)</td>
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In fall 2013, LA will begin offering a course in short form writing to give students an additional avenue for meeting the creative writing outcome.\(^{17}\) A plan assessing short form writing skills is in development (2013).

**Critical Thinking & Research**

Critical Thinking and Research have proved the most challenging competencies to assess. In 2012, the LA faculty redesigned both the Critical Thinking and Research assessment rubrics in response to the department’s work with the DQP. The LA Director correctly observed that since these outcomes were being assessed at the end of the student’s second year, the faculty’s expectations should align with the DQP language for Associate degrees.

In the previous round of assessment (2011), faculty had not articulated realistic expectations for formative assessment. Instead, they phrased the expected level of achievement as it would be demonstrated in a senior-level course. This led—unsurprisingly—to disappointing assessment results for the less mature sophomore work being evaluated. The actual assignment rubric, however, was phrased appropriately and student performance was satisfactory. The LA Director therefore concluded that in the first round of assessment, the assessment and assignment rubrics were misaligned.

The most recent assessment of the Critical Thinking and Research outcomes occurred in summer 2012. Assignments embedded in two different courses were used to evaluate both competencies.\(^{18}\) Faculty members who had participated in

\(^{17}\) The addition of a short form writing option was a result of collaborative sessions between LA and the Advertising, Web Design & New Media and Multimedia Communication departments at 2012 President’s Academic Retreats.

\(^{18}\) The same assignment is also used to assess, summatively, the Written Communication competency.

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Academy of Art University
the first round of assessment were eager to consider student work against the new rubric, which more accurately reflected sophomore-level skill development. Unfortunately, while the student work did fare better than in previous assessments, only 54% of students met expectations in the area of Critical Thinking. For Research and Retrieval of Information, just 48% of student work met the department’s expectations. This was a surprising and disappointing result.

In the debriefing session, the faculty concluded that the poor Research results were attributable to discrepancies between the course assignments being evaluated. These issues are fully explained in the attached assessment report. Faculty discussion revealed that the journalism course (LA 280) was not requiring Modern Language Association (MLA) citation in their capstone assignment because MLA does not reflect journalism industry practice. While understandable in the course context, this created a problem for the assessment, which focused on MLA citation. This discovery explained the disappointing 48% result.

The revelation led to a discussion among the writing faculty about the value of MLA citation for students earning degrees in art and design. Instructors pointed out that students were using different forms of research in their major classes and wondered how relevant MLA citation would be to students in the real world. Would they ever even use it in their careers? Though all instructors agreed that the ability to cite using the MLA format is not a skill relevant to most art and design industries, the ability to gather, evaluate, and apply research is an essential skill for all graduates to possess. This suggests that overall research skills are more important to assess than source formatting.

The counter argument among the writing faculty was that these courses still bear the burden of preparing students to conduct research in the remainder of their LA courses, where MLA citation is required. The faculty ultimately recommended that MLA citation continue to be taught and assessed, with a slight shift in teaching strategy; instructors will use the analogy to the “industry standards” students learn in their majors to contextualize the MLA citation rules.

The LA Director, Library Director, English Coordinator and Assessment Director have subsequently embarked on a university-wide search for answers to the following questions:

- What kinds of research skills are needed in each art and design discipline?
- How is achievement of the research competency measured in the majors?
- Should discipline-specific modes of research be introduced in general education courses, alongside more traditional learning outcomes, such as MLA formatting?

The work product from this project (which is being facilitated through the DQP project and the President’s Academic Retreats) will be a plan to assess research skills in both LA and the art and design departments, with LA faculty participating in or observing summative assessment efforts in the majors (assessment will begin in spring 2014).

AAU is designing a new approach to assessing Research skills. The LA Director notes that research methodologies and applications are specific to each industry and it is only in the majors where students can be observed applying their research to solve problems and complete projects directly related to their field. In the current model, formative and summative assessments are silo-ed between Liberal Arts and the majors. The LA Director, Library Director and Assessment Director are partnering with the art and design directors to design an institutional assessment plan for the Research competency (spring 2014).

Faculty concluded that the poor Critical Thinking results were attributable to flawed assessment design. Student work samples were drawn from two different courses. In both courses, the outcomes of the embedded assignments were not aligned with the assessment rubric. These issues are currently being addressed. The assignment was intended to judge
critical thinking ability (in particular, “use of abstract ideas”) by asking students to analyze a real-world problem and propose a solution. In the faculty’s debriefing discussion, it became clear that some raters had marked the Critical Thinking competency Not Met because the solutions that students proposed to difficult, overarching social problems would not necessarily be feasible in the real world. In the course of the discussion, instructors agreed that this was not necessarily an indicator of a lack of critical thinking skills, but more likely indicated the maturity level of the students and their understanding of how the world works.

While the Critical Thinking assessment showed that students were meeting and (in some cases) exceeding outcomes in the rubric item related to knowledge of course content, the application of that knowledge to solve a problem or analyze an issue was lacking across the board. Overall, instructors agreed that the scope and phrasing of the capstone assignment needs to be more strictly defined so that students are explicitly asked to demonstrate a progression of logical ideas within the assignment. Future Critical Thinking results should be enhanced by improving and aligning the assignment language and by curricular updates to ensure both courses (LA 202 English Composition: Creative Persuasion and LA 280 Perspective Journalism) on both platforms (online and onsite) are in alignment.

Quantitative Literacy
Quantitative Literacy was assessed for the first time in the summer of 2010. Student work samples were drawn from multiple courses. Assessment results showed that 83% of student work met expectations. The department was pleased with this result. There were no courses in particular that underperformed or needed immediate attention.

Since the 2010 assessment, four new quantitative literacy courses have been added: three at the request of the Architecture department and one to offer students an option in life science. The upcoming Quantitative Literacy assessment (late 2013) will include work from these new courses and should measure the effects of curricular improvements made in response to the 2010 assessment.

Art Historical Awareness
Art Historical Awareness was reassessed using a new rubric in the summer of 2011. The majority of the student work (76%) met expectations. This result represented a slight improvement (3%) between the 2007 and 2011 assessments.

It appears that this improvement was attributable to two factors: 1) adding a prerequisite (LA 108 Composition for the Artist) for all art history courses; 2) an advising trend ensuring that most students take LA 120 Art History through the 15th Century prior to enrolling in LA 121 Art History through the 19th Century (the course in which the Art Historical Awareness assessment is embedded). In addition to teaching foundational writing, critical thinking and research skills, LA 108 introduces the “compare and contrast” essay format and teaches thesis development; both are applied methodologies in art historical analysis. It is not surprising that student’s essays improved after taking this course. LA 120 introduces students to stylistic and cultural analysis and art history terminology and requires students to practice the “compare and contrast” essay format.19 Thus, students who took LA 121 in 2011 possessed better writing skills and had more exposure to analytical writing than those who took the course in 2007.

19 LA 120 also increases students content knowledge of the precursors to the Western art movements covered in LA 121.
The department feels that the Art Historical Awareness achievement rate of 76% is acceptable for a sophomore-level humanities course, especially given the high percentage of non-native speakers, many of whom have no prior exposure to Western cultural history. Additionally, LA 121 does not have an advanced expository writing prerequisite (LA 202). Students have two further opportunities to develop this competency; along with a course in the “history of” their major, students are also required to take an additional art history elective (12 units of art history total).

The art history faculty is committed to raising student achievement and as a result of the 2011 assessment has redesigned the LA 121 final research paper rubric as well as the series of assignments preceding the final paper. The faculty’s goal is to scaffold the skills that are measured in the final paper more effectively, especially critical thinking and analysis. Instructors have already reported improvement in their students’ work since the implementation of these changes. The department looks forward to the next programmatic assessment of the outcome, which will include new faculty in art history and may incorporate student work from the major-specific, art and design history courses.

Summary and Next Steps

Since the 2007 WASC visit, the LA department has made major changes in the way its curriculum is delivered and assessed (course offerings, sequencing, course content, pedagogy, assignment parameters and rubrics). These changes were a direct result of more rigorous assessment practices. The LA faculty is to be commended for being early adopters of more systematic approaches to assessment. They have remained enthusiastic despite hitting obstacles. The LA Director and the Assessment Director agree that LA faculty members are very willing to assess student work and simply need more training and support on assessment design.

In particular, the faculty coordinators in each area (who lead the assessments) need specialized support from the Assessment Director on understanding why their past approaches to assessment have gone wrong. They can then apply that understanding to move forward with more coherent assessment design. Analysis of past assessment experiences has revealed two recurring problems: 1) the misalignment of assignment and assessment goals; 2) uneven assignments across different courses designed to fulfill the same program outcome.20 There was also—as with the majors—an initial problem with articulating performance standards appropriate to the formative level; this has since been corrected through the LA Director’s work on the DQP project.

The Assessment Director has been assigned to work with the LA Director and her faculty coordinators beginning in spring 2013 to improve their ability to design effective assessments. As discussed in Essay 3, this has been a common obstacle university-wide. Creating the centralized Assessment Director position (2011) represented a major advance in AAU’s capacity to gather and assess student performance data in each department. The Assessment Director anticipates that the LA faculty’s growth in mastering assessment practices will accelerate over the next two years.

20 While the summative assignment in some courses directly demonstrated skills reflected in the assessment rubric, others only met part of the criteria listed on the rubric, and some none at all. Faculty determined that the assignments themselves were not requiring students to demonstrate these skills or were requiring them in an indirect way.
The LA Director has targeted improvements in expository writing, research and critical thinking. Her goal is for 70% of sophomore students to meet each of these outcomes at the time of the next summative assessment (representing a 4% to 22% improvement for each outcome).

With senior-level portfolio work in the majors demonstrating that students are meeting applied research and problem solving expectations, AAU has evidence that students are acquiring the necessary skills to demonstrate this core competency in a meaningful way. Within LA, the department will consider assessing capstone projects in upper-divisional elective LA courses, where junior and senior level students who have fulfilled their expository writing requirement are taking courses in subjects that appeal to them. Such investigation would measure the extent to which writing and critical thinking skills (as defined in LA) develop across the 45 units of general education.
Defining and Promoting Student Success at AAU

(CFR 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.10-2.14, 4.3-4.7)

Where it seems expedient, this essay features context and analysis drawn directly from AAU's Retention and Graduation Narrative (submitted to WASC in September 2012). Click on the red text above to view the full report.

• Part I of this essay examines the characteristics and achievements of AAU’s students and defines what constitutes “student success” within the distinctive context of AAU’s mission.

• Part II outlines the extensive educational support services provided by the Academy Resource Center (ARC).

• Part III addresses how characteristics of AAU’s student body affect completion results. This section contains an update on the issues identified in the fall 2012 report from the WASC Retention and Graduation Review Team. Strategies for improvement are outlined, along with a timeline for action.

I. Defining Student Success (CFR 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 2.13)

If an outsider were to ask the academic department directors—or any administrator at AAU—what they are most proud of about the university, they would likely all answer “the student work.” Each year, thousands of students polish their final portfolios and demo reels and use these professional-quality showcases of achievement to seek opportunities in the industry. The types of jobs students are able to compete for after graduating define one aspect of student success at AAU.1 Below are some well-known employers of recent AAU graduates:2

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2 Employment data in this chart is for 2010-2011 AAU graduates. This data is tracked by the Office of Compliance and the Alumni Office. Employment data in this chart is for 2010-2011 AAU graduates.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertising</th>
<th>Fine Art</th>
<th>Interior Architecture &amp; Design</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBDO Worldwide</td>
<td>Carnegie Art Center</td>
<td>Applegate Tran Interior</td>
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<td>Draftfcb</td>
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<td>Grey Group</td>
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<td>Hirsch Bedner Associates</td>
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<td>Ogilvy &amp; Mather</td>
<td>Tesla Motors</td>
<td>Restoration Hardware</td>
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<td>Publicis Groupe</td>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
<td>U.S. Green Building Council</td>
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<tr>
<th>Animation &amp; Visual Effects</th>
<th>Graphic Design</th>
<th>Motion Pictures &amp; Television</th>
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<tr>
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<td>ATTIK</td>
<td>Current TV</td>
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<td>Electronic Arts</td>
<td>Banana Republic</td>
<td>Disney Channel TV Network</td>
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<td>Lucasfilm Ltd.</td>
<td>Intel</td>
<td>HBO</td>
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<td>Nickelodeon Animation Studios</td>
<td>Landor Associates</td>
<td>Sony Pictures</td>
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<td>Pixar Animation Studios</td>
<td>Penguin Group USA</td>
<td>Telemundo</td>
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<td>Sony Pictures Imageworks</td>
<td>Warner Music Group</td>
<td>The Walt Disney Company</td>
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<tr>
<th>Architecture</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Multimedia Communications</th>
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<td>Google Inc.</td>
<td>E! Entertainment</td>
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<td>Nike</td>
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<td>Ministry of Architecture and Planning, India</td>
<td>SEGA</td>
<td>KPIX-TV (CBS San Francisco)</td>
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<td>Skidmore Owings &amp; Merrill LLP</td>
<td>Walt Disney Animation Studios</td>
<td>San Francisco Giants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studio O+A</td>
<td>Zynga</td>
<td>Yahoo!</td>
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Alumni achievements—which demonstrate students’ ability to apply what they have learned to gain accolades from other industry professionals—also define student success at AAU. Among many substantial accomplishments in the art and design world, AAU alumni have designed the advertising campaign of the decade, won the Pulitzer Prize in Feature Photography, directed major fashion labels, and worked on a number of well-known Hollywood films. These alumni success stories, highlighted in the feature below, are just the tip of the iceberg.

AAU students, most of whom enter the university without a portfolio, are able to learn rigorous skill sets relatively quickly, and compete successfully in national competitions against students from other universities. AAU students have won a number of prestigious competitions, including the Student Academy Award and the Student Emmy Award. While still in school, AAU students are able to apply their learning to real-world, collaborative projects. See features below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fashion</th>
<th>Industrial Design</th>
<th>Photography</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balenciaga</td>
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<td>Ford Models</td>
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**Web Design & New Media**

- Apple
- California Academy of Sciences
- CBS Interactive
- Facebook
- Google
- Visa
- Yahoo! Mobile
Spotlight on Alumni: School of Advertising

Jason Sperling (School of Advertising MFA 1998) led the team from TBWA/Media Arts Lab that created the ad series recently named Campaign of the Decade by Adweek: Apple’s “Get a Mac” campaign. Launched in 2006 and appearing in a variety of media, the “Get a Mac” campaign won nearly every award in the advertising industry, including a Cannes Gold Lion and a One Show Gold Pencil. The recognition by Adweek implicitly acknowledges that the campaign revolutionized technology advertising and marketing in much the same way that Apple turned the computer industry upside down with its products. Jason’s association with AAU continued beyond his MFA degree; he taught graduate-level Advertising courses from 1995 to 2000.

Apple’s “Get a Mac” campaign – John Hodgman, Jason Sperling, Justin Long
Spotlight on School of Animation Alumni

Guilherme Jacinto (School of Animation, BFA 2007) helped to create many of the characters in Disney/Pixar’s *Up* when he was only 23. Guilherme says the biggest challenge with *Up* was its animation style, which was very different from those he had worked on in the past: “It was way more stylized. I worked on a lot of different characters that I had never done before. We had to do a lot of research to get everything looking right.” Guilherme entered AAU with no credits to his name. In his junior year, he sent in a reel of his work to Pixar, earning him an internship. Upon graduating the following year, he was hired to work on the 2008 film *WALL-E.*

Behnam Shafiebeik (School of Animation, BFA 2005) contributed to the visual effects wizardry on *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1,* traveling to Australia to work as a compositor. Compositors take multiple pieces of film or digital footage and combine them into one seamless image. Once compositors are finished with their work, a scene (which may be a combination of anywhere from two to more than 30 elements) appears to the viewer as a single, fluid piece. Behnam has worked on an impressive array of films, including *Night at the Museum,* *The Incredible Hulk, Cowboys & Aliens* and *The Golden Compass.* The visual effects team for *The Golden Compass* won an Oscar for best VFX in 2008. Behnam credits his instructors at AAU with preparing him for his career. “I not be here without these would wonderful people,” he said.
Deanne Fitzmaurice (School of Photography, BFA 1983) won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography. Her photo essay series for the San Francisco Chronicle documented the medical journey and personal heroism of a 9-year-old Iraqi boy who was horrendously injured by an explosion and subsequently brought for treatment to Children’s Hospital in Oakland, California. Deanne recently returned to speak with current AAU students about her new book Freak Season, which documents San Francisco Giants pitcher Tim Lincecum and the team’s run to the 2010 World Series.

http://www.pulitzer.org/biography/2005-Feature-Photography

LEFT: Saleh and Raheem caught sight of Hadia and the children at San Francisco International Airport for the first time in more than a year. “There she is!” Saleh squealed as he and his father raced toward the long-awaited reunion. In his hand, Saleh held tight to a ring he’d bought at Wal-Mart as a present for his mother.

RIGHT: Saleh’s recovery went better than anyone expected. One night at Children’s Hospital, he and a custodian, Khaled Abdorahibe, played soccer in the hallway until a nurse caught them and sent Saleh back to bed.

© 2004, San Francisco Chronicle
Spotlight on Alumni: School of Fashion

Monica Magdas Miller (School of Fashion BFA 2002) grew up in Eastern Europe during a period of economic hardship. Her mother would piece together remnants of worn garments to create new outfits each year, instilling a love of fashion in Monica at a young age. Her grandmother taught her to embroider, weave, and hand crochet, jumpstarting an education that Miller would later continue at AAU. Monica is currently Design Director of Development at BCBG MAX AZRIA GROUP. Heading up both the apparel and accessories teams at the company, Monica oversees a team of 40 designers, associates, and assistants as they design the collections each season.

Norman Ambrose (School of Fashion BFA 2003), who started his own couture line in 2006, debuted his first runway show at Lincoln Center as part of Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week. Norman began sketching clothes at the age of 12. Driven to develop and refine his skills, Norman moved to New York and found the guidance of two skilled masters; one a pattern cutter, the other a tailor who had worked under Cristobal Balenciaga and Bill Blass. Norman won the Fashion Group’s Rising Star Award in 2012.

Jamie Mihlrad (School of Fashion MFA 2005) is currently the Design Director at Shoshanna. She has also worked as the designer for Ready-to-Wear and Soft Goods for Kate Spade. Jamie’s senior collection was shown at the first AAU Fashion Show during New York Fashion Week. In 2005, Jamie was selected by Carla Sozzani for an internship in Milan; this experience enabled Jamie to become the sole designer responsible for the signature 10 Corso Como line of apparel and products, including collaborative projects with MAC, Converse and Diesel Jeans.
“Dragonboy” Wins Gold Medal

Bernardo Warman (School of Animation, MFA 2010), Shaofu Zhang (School of Animation MFA 2010) and Lisa Allen (School of Animation MFA 2010) won a Gold Medal in the 38th annual Student Academy Awards, sponsored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Their animated film Dragonboy is the story of a dragon that falls in love with a princess (the characters are actually children acting in a school play). The 3D animated short evokes the wonder of young love and the triumph of good over evil. “We were looking at our feelings as kids and how scary it was to be in love for the first time,” said Bernardo.

Animation and Visual Effects instructor Bob Steele served as a mentor for the project. “Bob helped us through a year of mess with the Dragonboy story. He taught us that story is king, and without a solid story, everything else falls apart,” Lisa said.

Lisa is currently working at Disney on a new film in their Prep & Landing series. Bernardo is a Creative Director at Kapponga in Los Angeles. Shaofu is an animator at Sony Pictures Imageworks, where she worked on the movie Arthur Christmas.
Animation Alumna Wins Student Emmy Award

AAU School of Animation MFA alumna Ting Chian Tey won first place in Animation at the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation 32nd annual College Television Awards (the Emmy Awards), which honored the nation’s best student-produced work in video, digital and film production.

Ting’s winning animated film Bridge is a depiction of four animals attempting to cross a bridge. “It’s a production that’s meant to be a metaphor for daily life where we face disagreements, and it’s a cautionary tale about the possible results of pride and compromise,” Ting said.
Industrial Design MFA Students Collaborate with NASA

Mark Bolick, Director of the Graduate School of Industrial Design, and a team of eight students designed a user interface to help astronauts remotely operate robots from space. NASA will use the students’ work next year when astronauts on the International Space Station will test operate a robot on Earth.

Bolick noted that this type of hands-on experience prepares students for their professional careers: “We are trying to run this project exactly like a consultancy. I’d like to think that by the time this is over, we have two very happy camps and some solid deliverables to hand over and that these students are ready for an actual job, not just with NASA but anywhere.”
Pantone, the global authority on color and provider of professional color standards for the design industries, partnered with AAU’s School of Graphic Design in support of “Color in Action,” a project designed to explore the positive influence of color on social change.

Eight teams of students, led by AAU instructors Tom Sieu and John Barretto, were formed to explore pressing social issues including education, tolerance and the environment. Pantone donated its worldwide color standard PANTONE PLUS SERIES and PANTONE FASHION + HOME guides to be used for the project and awarded the winning team a $10,000 scholarship.

Student Elizabeth West, a member of “Team Bullying,” said: “Color in Action allowed us to apply our skills toward something bigger than ourselves. I think each team’s work proves that graphic designers are more than capable of helping solve for social change, and that color can be a powerful tool. We are grateful to have been part of this, and hope that other young designers can be given similar opportunities.”
Thirty-one Academy of Art students from the School of Animation & Visual Effects designed visual effects for the Academy Award-nominated film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012). The students worked through their holiday vacation to make sure the film would be ready in time for the Sundance Film Festival’s grand opening, where it won the Grand Jury Prize for Drama.

Animation & Visual Effects instructor Catherine Tate has contributed to the visual effects of more than thirty films. For the School of Animation & Special Effects, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is the latest installment of an ongoing program involving students in real-world film productions. “We’ve worked on five feature films that have appeared in the Sundance Festival and are currently working on two more features selected for Sundance Labs, so they have a good chance of getting into the festival. We’ve contributed to many more features that have screened in festivals all over the world,” Tate reports.

As an instructor and an industry professional, Tate recognizes the value of recruiting students to meet the needs of low-budget, independent films: “Independent films don’t have a fortune for visual effects, often nothing at all, so it’s a mutually beneficial relationship for us and the filmmakers. We’re actually championing independent film by helping these low-budget productions get made to a better level of execution than would otherwise be possible.”
These types of accomplishments also define student success at AAU, demonstrating students’ ability to produce professional-quality work even before they graduate.

**Balancing Achievement of Rigorous Outcomes, Inclusive Admissions Standards and Graduation Rates**

Looking at the range of impressive student projects featured in the DQP Exhibit in Essay 1, it is easy to see the level of sheer hard work that AAU students must put in to accomplish each art and design project…and cumulatively, their senior portfolio or Graduate Thesis Project. Their ability to demonstrate this type of sustained work ethic and accomplishment in pursuit of their dream is another definition of success at AAU.

Not all of AAU’s students make it to graduation; in fact, the majority of them do not, which is not surprising given AAU’s inclusive admissions policy. As students often say of AAU, “It’s easy to get in and hard to graduate.” AAU offers students an equal access opportunity to apply themselves to a rigorous art and design education, overseen by working professional faculty. Considerable educational support is available at AAU; the university is committed to helping all students succeed. However, at the end of the day, it takes a certain type of student to become a working professional artist or designer; AAU knows that some attrition is a natural part of students’ self-selection process, as they learn more about what the industry requires. Graduation rates and the particular characteristics of AAU students that contextualize those rates are discussed in Part III of this essay and in the attached *WASC Retention and Graduation Narrative*.

**Success in Repaying Student Loans**

Another indicator of student success is the ability to pay back student loans (cohort default rates, tracked by the EVP of Financial Aid and Compliance and released annually by the U.S. Department of Education). AAU’s most recently reported 3-year cohort default rate (2009) was 11.1%. AAU’s cohort default rate outperformed the average rate for proprietary schools (22.8%) and all schools (13.4%) according to data from the U.S. Department of Education.

II. **Promoting Student Success (CFR 2.3, 2.10-2.14)**

The strategic development of the Academy Resource Center (ARC [arc.academyart.edu/](http://arc.academyart.edu/)) has been a successful, 23-year partnership among EVP of Educational Support Kate Griffeath, President Elisa Stephens, and her father, former President Richard Stephens. Founded in 1990 as an English as a Second Language support program, the ARC is now made up of eight departments that are an integral part of the AAU experience. Each of ARC’s support departments grew out of the process of assessing teaching and learning needs, designing for improvement, allocating appropriate resources, and monitoring feedback on each of the educational support programs.

Today, ARC’s 43 staff and 176 faculty members provide extensive educational support services to thousands of AAU students and faculty, with a focus on:
• Supporting AAU students who are academically at risk, enter with low English proficiency, have documented disabilities, or begin as freshmen studying exclusively online

• Training AAU’s working professional instructors to engage effectively with students from various demographic groups

ARC’s educational support services are detailed below.

A. Support for Non-Native English Speakers

Most international students plan on returning to their country of origin following graduation. Acquiring English language proficiency, while valuable, is a secondary goal for these students; their primary goal is to acquire the skills to get a job in the art and design industry in their home country. To address the academic priorities of low English proficiency students, former President Richard Stephens requested that Kate Griffeath (now EVP of Educational Support) develop a department that could nurture the specific language skills students needed to understand their art and design courses. Griffeath and her staff have developed an innovative, internationally-recognized English as a Second Language program known as English for Art Purposes (EAP) that offers both content-driven English language courses and in-class support services for AAU’s standard curriculum. These services extend to art and design, Liberal Arts and Graduate Liberal Arts courses, both onsite and online.

When international students enter college courses designed for native speakers of English, they often find instructors who concentrate on the native-speaking majority. These instructors are often unable, unwilling or simply without the necessary training to make the subject matter comprehensible to low English proficiency students. Conversely, many intensive ESL courses do not teach the specific skills these students need to be successful in their majors, so low English proficiency students may lose valuable time without making significant progress in reaching their academic goals. AAU has found a way to ramp up these students’ academic success by designing an educational support program tailored to meet their academic needs. AAU has directed substantial financial and staff resources to develop and sustain the EAP program over the past two decades.

Students with low English proficiency enroll concurrently in EAP courses and art and design courses which are supported by EAP faculty. EAP courses offer 18-30 hours of English language instruction per week, focusing on art-driven content and relevant aesthetic vocabulary. Courses are capped at approximately 15 students and students are placed according to their performance on a preregistration test assessing their speaking, listening, reading and writing proficiency.

EAP courses help students learn basic English vocabulary along with specific skills and expectations of American classroom culture (e.g. participating during classroom critiques). Speaking and listening skills, critical to a successful career in the visual arts, are emphasized throughout the sequence of EAP courses. Pertinent U.S. cultural issues are discussed as they arise in the context of art projects. Intensively studying in these areas helps non-native English-speaking students succeed academically in their majors.

Students enrolled in EAP courses are concurrently enrolled in EAP-designated sections of art and design courses that are conducted primarily in visual, rather than verbal, learning environments. As students progress through the EAP

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3 Academically at-risk students are on academic probation and receiving a C- or below during a progress grading period.
sequence, they are concurrently enrolled in courses that necessitate an increasingly higher level of English proficiency. EAP faculty address both academic subject matter and English language instruction. This approach is helpful for second-language learning in the following ways:4

1. The content-based language curriculum takes into account the interests and needs of the learners
2. It incorporates the eventual uses the learner will make of the target language
3. It builds on the students’ previous learning experiences
4. It allows a focus on uses as well as on usage
5. It offers learners the necessary conditions for second-language learning by exposing them to meaningful language (i.e. language used in students’ college courses)

EAP teachers develop language-learning materials out of the art content of first-year courses. Audio and video recordings of art instructors are used in these EAP courses, as well as slides and other visual media. A significant portion of coursework in these courses consists of critiquing and writing about art and design and doing oral presentations.

The most unique aspect of the Academy’s approach to serving English language learners is its in-class, EAP support program. Certain sections of art and design courses are designated EAP, which means that an EAP instructor is assigned to work in tandem with art and design faculty. Depending on the activity and faculty needs, the EAP instructor may assist students in the classroom or quietly observe and take notes regarding activities, homework assignments, concepts and vocabulary. After class, the EAP instructor holds study sessions to clarify homework assignments and reinforce the language skills, concepts, and terminology for the course.

It is important to note that art and design courses for EAP students are identical to those taken by all other AAU students, with one exception: an EAP instructor is present in the classroom. In fact, although designated as EAP sections, these courses are open to all AAU students; often there are native English speakers enrolled in these sections as well.5

EAP programming serves a large population of students onsite and online. In the fall 2012 semester, there were:

- 1,094 students enrolled onsite in English for Art Purposes courses
- Over 550 onsite class sections served by EAP support faculty
- 163 sections of 40 different courses supported by Online Language Support (OLS)

The attached chart outlines the learning support services provided by the EAP and OLS departments.

B. Student Academic Support and Online Student Academic Support

The onsite and online Student Academic Support departments target the needs of students who are academically at risk; these students need help with study skills, time management, project planning, improving their grades, communicating

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5 EAP-designations are not static. An instructor may contact the EAP Department to assess the need for a support teacher two weeks or more into the semester.
with instructors and online learning strategies. Students may self-refer or be referred by an instructor.\(^6\) Students who have completed less than 30 units who are on academic probation must enroll in *LA 151 First Year Seminar for Academic Success*, a course taught by Student Academic Support staff.\(^7\)

Instructors regularly pilot new ways to help students turn around their academic careers in *LA 151*. During the summer and fall 2012 semesters, a group of peer leaders were invited to speak with students in the *LA 151* courses about their own experiences; they also spent time outside of class supporting the *LA 151* students. A major-specific, first-year experience course was also piloted in 2012 in the School of Illustration (for more information, see *Overview of Persistence Support Programs*).

### C. ARC Training and Tutoring

The Academy Resource Center offers free, small-group, remedial tutoring to all AAU students, both undergraduate and graduate. Tutoring services are available for all majors and courses, in the form of onsite and online labs. Tutoring is provided by current faculty members, alumni and technical staff. Students are also encouraged to make use of other available academic support, such as academic department workshops.

Students seek tutoring for the following reasons:

- Need help understanding course material
- Need help with software used in class
- Fell behind due to absence(s) and need help catching up
- Instructor requested/recommended additional instruction for student
- On academic probation/taking *LA 151*
- Currently receiving a low grade in the course
- Previously failed the course or received an Incomplete in the course
- No department workshops available or unable to attend workshops because of schedule conflict
- Student athlete who missed course time for officially excused absences
- Limited English proficiency
- Documented disability (paperwork on file with Classroom Services)

### D. Classroom Services

Classroom Services assists students with disabilities in managing the academic and personal challenges of attending an art and design university. AAU’s inclusive admissions policy allows students who have not succeeded academically in the

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\(^6\) Student Academic Support staff coordinate with admissions and academic advisors and InsideTrack (a company providing student success coaching to support persistence—discussed later in this essay) to serve as many “at-risk” students as possible. Since 2009, the Student Academic Support Department has partnered with InsideTrack to raise its rate of establishing contact with students who are referred for academic support.

\(^7\) Students on academic probation who have completed more than 30 units are contacted by phone about available Student Academic Support services.
past a chance to start over in college with the support of ARC and Classroom Services. Classroom Services facilitates equal access for students with disabilities to educational programs at AAU. Staff supports students with assistive technology guidance, supplementary reading and writing assistance, time management/organizational skills and referrals to disability-related resources in the community.

### E. Faculty Development

Faculty development provides a wide range of services supporting AAU’s working professional faculty, both onsite and online. These are detailed in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Conferences</td>
<td>Day-long teaching conferences held twice a year (Fall Teaching Expo and Spring Teaching Essentials Workshops)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive sessions, roundtable discussions, reading groups, multimedia presentations, a vendor fair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Past sessions have included: 4-Step Lesson Planning, Critiques, Dynamic Demos, Time Management, and Communicating with Gen Y Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Development Website</td>
<td><strong><a href="http://faculty.academyart.edu/">http://faculty.academyart.edu/</a></strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive listing of teaching resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Faculty Orientation tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archive of weekly teaching tips since 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Approaches to Teaching and Learning</em>, a comprehensive self-study guide for teaching at the Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Visits</td>
<td>Non-evaluative classroom observation for all new, onsite faculty conducted by faculty developers, followed up with a one-on-one consultation with the new instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation also available for continuing instructors by self-referral or director request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultations</td>
<td>One-on-one consultations providing non-evaluative feedback and coaching for both onsite and online faculty, in conjunction with a class visit for new faculty or more informally for returning faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help with lesson planning, activity development, grading, time management and motivating students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERVICE</td>
<td>SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Teaching Tips</td>
<td>Weekly email with practical ideas and strategies for onsite and online teaching (over 1,200 total faculty subscribers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Essentials track (597 subscribers)— for teachers who are new to AAU and/or new to teaching (short ‘beginner’ tips with user-friendly designs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refining Your Teaching track (625 subscribers)— for veteran faculty who want to hone and expand their teaching tools (includes best practices from AAU faculty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Development</td>
<td>Help for faculty to create rubrics for their courses and for programmatic assessment activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Rubric Initiative</td>
<td>Help for faculty to create and norm rubrics for all required first-year courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Design Assistance</td>
<td>Support for onsite and online faculty to design, build and revise courses (help with writing course learning outcomes, developing and organizing topics and ideas, outlining course plans, developing assignments and brainstorming activities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Department-Specific Trainings and Workshops on Demand | Customized trainings and workshops for faculty by department request  
http://faculty.academyart.edu/resource/MenuFacDevTrainings.html |
| Grading Support               | Help creating grading guidelines for assignments and courses  
Training on Easy Grade Pro, a software program for calculating grades and managing records                                                                                                                                            |
| New Faculty Orientation       | Onsite orientation facilitated by Faculty Development three times a year (attended by 176 new AAU instructors since first offered in 2006)                                                                                          |
|                               | Online New Faculty Orientation tutorial on the website for new faculty who are unable to attend the onsite events:  http://online.academyart.edu/nfo/                                                                                 |
| Drop-In Hours                 | Informal drop-in hours at buildings across campus for informal advice, conversation and brainstorming                                                                                                                                     |
| Freshman Faculty Mentor Program | Teaching strategies shared by faculty mentors with other freshman faculty plus non-evaluative peer observations guided by a faculty developer (128 instructors in 11 departments helped to date) |
Feedback loops

All ARC departments gather and apply feedback to improve educational support services; strategies are detailed in the attached chart.

III. Achieving Student Success: Graduation Rates, Context and Plans to Improve
(CFR 2.6, 4.3-4.7)

An important indicator of student success and one receiving increasing national attention is, of course, graduation rates. This section discusses AAU’s graduation rates in the specific context of the feedback AAU received from the WASC Graduation and Retention Review Team in fall 2012. AAU’s 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshmen is 32%. The 8-year graduation rate rises to 39%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT TYPE</th>
<th>1-YEAR RETENTION RATE</th>
<th>6-YEAR GRADUATION RATE</th>
<th>8-YEAR GRADUATION RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-time, full-time freshmen</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in AAU’s Retention and Graduation Narrative, international students and domestic Asian students are outperforming all other groups (with 63% of international students and 44% of domestic Asian students graduating within 8 years). By contrast, the retention and graduation rates for the following demographics are below overall rates.

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8 Retention and graduation rates are tracked and analyzed by the Office of Institutional Research in partnership with the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, who reviews this data with the academic department directors through program review and the President’s Academic Retreats.

9 Per the specifications of the WASC data tables, these figures represent a 3-year average (Fall 2008-Fall 2010 IPEDS data).
First-time, full-time freshmen: Varying rates by subpopulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-YEAR RETENTION</th>
<th>GRADUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAU average</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>32% in 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>30% in 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Latino</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>20% in 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell Grant recipients</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>23% in 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29% in 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>19% in 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33% in 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>25% in 6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The WASC Retention and Graduation Review Team noted that "AAU’s retention and graduation rates are positively influenced by the much stronger showing by non-resident aliens (<international students>)." International students are likely graduating at higher rates than domestic students at AAU because they face fewer obstacles to academic success:

1. They are required to show proof of sufficient finances to pay for their education prior to being issued a student visa and therefore are less likely to encounter some of the financial issues that may create a challenge for some domestic students.  
2. They likely have more family support for finishing the degree, including financial support.  
3. They do not need to work, so there is less interference with their studies.  
4. They make more of a commitment to the degree by traveling to another country—so the degree likely means more to them.  
5. There is likely more cultural pressure to graduate (in their home countries).

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10 When interpreting the rates disaggregated by ethnicity, it is important to note that these groups are small cohorts.

11 Consistent with national statistics, Hispanic/Latino students are a higher risk population and are graduating at lower rates. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010, Graduation Rates component.

12 It should be noted that the fall 2003 cohort was not included in the average due to the small cohort size.

13 Whereas 78.1% of AAU’s domestic students receive some form of financial aid.
6. Few of them enroll exclusively online (AAU has found that it is harder to graduate online-only students, in line with national trends).

AAU’s Office of Institutional Research has demonstrated through their analysis of student outcomes that a specific set of risk factors (particularly when multiple factors are present) explains the comparatively weak performance of domestic students, including both White and Under-Represented Minority (URM) students. AAU’s student body is highly diverse with no visible student majority and a substantial international population. As of the latest reporting of AAU’s IPEDS data (2011-12), 46% of the student body consists of minority or international students. This fact, along with student surveys that have failed to uncover any evidence of campus climate issues, suggests that a combination of social, academic, financial and noncognitive risk factors impacting students’ motivation and resilience are the key barriers to student success at AAU.

AAU’s institutional researchers have performed analyses that indicate that the more risk factors students have, the lower their retention and graduation rates. Research at the federal level and at other open-admissions schools has shown that persistence to degree is more challenging for the following student groups:

- Economically disenfranchised students (using Pell Grants as a proxy)
- Financially independent students (no parental financial support)
- Working students
- Students who are parents (both single and married) with children at home
- First-generation collegians
- Part-time students
- Students who delayed enrollment
- Students who earned GEDs
- Veterans (and active service members) who went into the military after high school

Based on extensive analysis of persistence patterns, AAU’s institutional researchers have identified the following additional high risk groups:

- Students studying exclusively online
- Domestic students from under-represented minorities
- Students entering with a High School GPA lower than 2.50
- Students with poor English speaking/writing skills

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14 At AAU, this category is somewhat clouded because dependents are also classified with this group.

15 This research is presented in detail in AAU’s Retention and Graduation Narrative, submitted to WASC in September 2012.

16 AAU’s online freshmen are at the highest risk of not persisting to graduation (21% graduated in 6 years). AAU has partnered with InsideTrack to obtain detailed qualitative information about obstacles to persistence among these students and has implemented policy changes based on the findings (e.g., the Student Pulse Indicator in the LMS, which gives a continually updated, visual indicator of student progress in each online course).
Students with alternative learning styles (300 students formally request disability services, but reporting from the educational support staff suggests a much larger number of students actually belong to this group)

Because of its mission and longstanding commitment to inclusive admissions, AAU will always face the challenge of serving at-risk student populations. However, adopting an early alert system would allow AAU to be more effective in extending proactive assistance to students with multiple risk factors. This strategy is discussed in AAU’s persistence plan, presented at the end of this essay.

It is important to understand AAU’s graduation rates in context. As detailed in the Retention and Graduation Narrative, AAU’s graduation rates overall and for online-only students match or slightly exceed what would be expected at similar schools both nationally and in the WASC region. AAU maintains an inclusive admissions policy and serves students who enter the university with the desire to pursue higher education, but also with multiple risk factors impacting their likelihood of academic success. Many of AAU’s domestic students did not receive adequate academic preparation in high school and need to ramp up their study skills, time management, remedial writing, analytical thinking and math skills and/or foundational art and design skills.

AAU’s closest peer comparison schools are therefore other open-admissions universities and community colleges, which serve a similar student population.

Response to Feedback from the WASC Retention & Graduation Review Team

AAU recognizes the need to improve its graduation rate among undergraduate students, both overall and among URM students. AAU will leverage a substantially more robust and integrated approach to persistence to increase its retention and graduation rates over the next 7-10 years (AAU’s persistence plan is outlined at the end of this essay). Below is AAU’s response to the feedback from the WASC Retention and Graduation Review team (RGR), received in fall 2012. The WASC RGR Team’s feedback focused on AAU’s undergraduate completion rates (as does this essay); graduate completion rates were found to be acceptable: “Graduate graduation rates seem reasonable for MFA-MSFT (though no comparisons are provided).”

17 Online-only graduation rates are compared to peer schools with online programs.

18 As identified in national studies of barriers to student success.

19 International students may be entering with low English proficiency and while their academic and art and design skills are on track, these students need time to ramp up their English language skills in order to succeed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RGR FEEDBACK</th>
<th>AAU RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All at-risk sub-populations are lower than the overall AAU graduation average.</td>
<td>This is true nationally for URM student populations. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2010, Graduation Rates component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for closing achievement gaps within sub-populations need to be more explicit, particularly for African American and Latino students.</td>
<td>To increase graduation rates among URM students, AAU is planning to adopt additional, differentiated retention services targeted to specific demographic groups (e.g., Hispanic/Latino and African American students). See AAU’s Persistence Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of concern for next peer review:</td>
<td>See AAU’s Persistence Plan, featured at the end of this essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus must continue to improve graduation rates at the undergraduate level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus needs to increase attention to closing the achievement gaps for all sub-populations.</td>
<td>See AAU Persistence Plan, featured at the end of this essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus needs to locate comparative schools for graduation rates in its MFA programs.</td>
<td>No comparison data is readily available at this time for MFA degrees. At the moment, there is no guarantee that other MFA programs (either regionally or nationally) are compiling graduation data using a methodology that would allow for meaningful comparison to the required WASC Retention and Graduation data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AAU is interested in undertaking the challenge of locating comparative schools for graduation rates in the MFA programs. This should become easier over the next few years as WASC requires other schools in the region to report their retention and graduation results in more detail than required by IPEDS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campus also needs to improve graduation rates in the MFA-OSPT <Onsite, Part-Time> program.

By definition, many part-time MFA students are not taking enough credits to graduate in the time frame defined by the WASC data tables. At this time, the graduation rate for full-time students is the only meaningful indicator.

All graduate students, regardless of full- or part-time status, will benefit from AAU’s initiatives to improve retention and graduation rates.

**Current Persistence Efforts**

AAU’s current persistence-related initiatives appear to be having a positive impact, as AAU’s one-year retention rate is trending upward, showing a 6% increase from fall 2008 (59%) to fall 2010 (65%). The average one-year-retention rate among first-time, full-time freshmen is 62%.\(^20\) Given the simultaneous rise in AAU’s online freshman population, this trend supports AAU’s hypothesis that retention programs implemented to address the needs of new students are having a positive impact (these programs are discussed later in the narrative).\(^21\) This hypothesis is also supported by the rise in AAU’s retention rate among full-time freshmen over the last decade, which has occurred in spite of increasing cohort size.

84% of students who were exit-interviewed after dropping out of AAU stated that they were pleased with their experience and would recommend AAU to others.\(^22\)

At the time of this WASC self-study, AAU has two major strategies for persistence-based interventions: the extensive educational support services provided through the Academy Resource Center (discussed in Part II of this essay) and an ongoing partnership with InsideTrack (2007-present), an external vendor specializing in executive-style success coaching for college students. AAU also has a longer-term, integrated persistence plan, discussed in the next section of this essay. Based on research from Stanford and UC Berkeley, the InsideTrack model of student success coaching has been shown to improve retention results in over 30 controlled studies. On behalf of AAU, a team of 13 InsideTrack success coaches provide semester-long, one-on-one support to subpopulations of students that AAU has identified as being academically at risk. During regularly scheduled meetings, coach and student focus on identifying and removing

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\(^20\) Fall 2008-Fall 2010.

\(^21\) Online students, in line with national statistics, are harder to retain.

\(^22\) Since 2009, over 2,000 exit interviews have been conducted by InsideTrack, an outside vendor working in partnership with AAU on student persistence initiatives.
obstacles to success, with the coach referring the student to Academy resources as needed. Regular follow-up assures student accountability and provides a consistent source of support.

Student populations that have received InsideTrack coaching at AAU include: new online students, students referred for academic support by their instructors, students on academic probation and those who have recently come off academic probation, continuing students who were particularly responsive to coaching in the first semester, and new graduate students. In fall 2012, in addition to continuing to serve some of the groups listed above, InsideTrack began coaching the following student groups:

- New students who are Pell grant recipients
- Low English proficiency students from mainland China and Saudi Arabia

InsideTrack’s analytics team aggregates data from these coaching sessions to provide detailed weekly reports and end of semester summaries about obstacles to student success. Cumulatively over 5 years, these reports have provided AAU with extensive qualitative data on the experiences of various populations of at-risk students. In response, AAU has implemented improvements such as an intensive language program (for students entering with low English proficiency), earlier communication about mandatory class supplies and a visual progress indicator in all online courses (for online students).

As part of a pilot study of incoming freshman Pell Grant Recipients, InsideTrack began providing one-on-one success coaching to approximately half of this cohort (400 students) in fall 2012. A comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of this intervention (looking at results for both the coached cohort and the control group) will be conducted in the spring 2013 semester. Coaches helped these students acclimate to the university experience, connect with academic and administrative resources, engage with the school community, stay connected to their motivation and long-term goals and create detailed and actionable plans to support their success. InsideTrack continues to support the fall 2012 cohort in their preparation for the spring 2013 semester start.

Preliminary findings have identified several recurrent risk factors for the Pell Grant cohort:

- **Finances:** Students reported having difficulty finding money to pay for expensive, art-related supplies or simply for meeting day-to-day personal needs. At least 85 of the students coached reported that their primary challenge in school is being financially independent.

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23 Pilot study: cohort selection and study design described below.

24 See: Fall 2012 InsideTrack Pell Grant Student Coaching Summary and Fall 2012 InsideTrack Mainland Chinese Student Coaching Week 4 Update.

25 InsideTrack will coach all incoming URM freshmen who are also receiving Pell Grants in spring 2013.

26 AAU realizes that finances will remain issue for many of the students we serve. Most Pell grant students now receive approximately $850 the within the first seven days of school to help pay for books/art supplies. In addition, we are working toward having students’ living expense checks direct deposited into their checking account (instead of waiting for a paper check). We are also moving to a paperless system in 2013-2014 to reduce the paperwork burden on students.
Time Management: Many students are struggling to balance job and family responsibilities with the demands of their schoolwork. Several students were working multiple jobs or had jobs with odd working hours, which provided additional challenges to their academic success. At least 80 students reported working full time while taking classes as their primary challenge at school.

Communicating with Instructors: Students regularly told coaches they were hesitant to communicate or reach out to their instructors for additional support or guidance when they needed it. Students reported that they did not want to bother their instructors with personal or family challenges and did want to appear “weak” or “a burden.”

Not Using Academic Support Resources: Students mentioned a reluctance to use various AAU support services, such as academic department workshops, the Academy Resource Center (ARC) Training and Tutoring workshops or labs, and the school’s services for students with disabilities.

Not Understanding Online Class Participation Requirements:27 For those students taking courses online, many reported not knowing or understanding the requirement (length, details and frequency) or significance of class discussion posts.

Hurricane Sandy: At the semester midpoint, Hurricane Sandy devastated significant portions of the United States East Coast, impacting both the academic and personal lives of a number of AAU online students. InsideTrack coaches reached out to students consistently during this challenging time, connecting them with their instructors and school resources.

Qualitative feedback from the coached students has been positive so far:

“I really appreciate the effort of my Inside Track coach. He not only told me about the various resources available to me, he sent me links about how to access those resources. This is a great tool for new students to get the most out of their college. I earned my associates degree from an online college and they did not have anything like AAU’s coaching program. It’s definitely a much needed asset for online students in order to get the most out of their education.”

“It’s helpful and it gets you used to speaking up about anything troubling you and the sort.”

“I really appreciate that we get a coach to show us how to access the school’s resources because I would not have been able to find some things such as ARC without his help.”

AAU is also conducting a one-year, Low English Proficiency Coaching Study with InsideTrack, providing coaching to all low English proficiency students from Mainland China and Saudi Arabia. For the fall 2012 semester, InsideTrack added an Arabic-speaking coach and an additional Mandarin-speaking coach to the coaching team working with AAU applying for financial aid. Comparably, AAU’s tuition is lower than other art schools by 44% and overall cost of attendance is lower by 28%.

27Although the requirements for online participation are very clearly posted in online classes and covered in a mandatory orientation for online students, InsideTrack often hears feedback from freshman that the online environment (and being a college student) is new to them. Students are inundated with information and often don’t retain all of the information. Students report that they are unsure of what is significant and what they need to remember. InsideTrack coaches help reinforce the significance of participating in discussion posts and direct students to consult with their instructors about requirements.
students. These low English proficiency students are adjusting to a new culture, language, school system and city; many students do not have family or friends nearby. These students appreciate the one-on-one, weekly support of a coach who speaks their native language; they can more easily express their feelings and concerns and feel comfortable seeking the help they need to acclimate.

Based on InsideTrack feedback, AAU improved its programming for an increasing population of international students who are low English proficiency learners. In fall 2012, incoming international students testing at the lowest-English proficiency level were enrolled in a newly designed Intensive English Course (EAP A for Undergraduate and EAP 600 for graduate students). The course, worth nine credit hours, introduces artists to the English language with an emphasis on the acquisition and application of basic grammar structures and the development of foundational skills in listening, speaking, pronunciation, reading, and writing. Depending on their major & interests, students choose basic art or design workshops: sketching, design or video. The course also helps students acclimate to San Francisco.

Preliminary findings are encouraging:

- 87% (20 of 23) of the fall 2012 students reenrolled for the spring 2013 semester. Comparatively, in spring 2012, 0% (0 of 4) of students at an equivalent language proficiency level persisted to the subsequent summer or fall 2012 semester.
- The average GPA for the fall 2012 students was 2.60.
- 8.7% (2 of 23) of students were on Academic Probation status after the completion of this first term. This is lower than the average for both international undergraduate (27.7%) and graduate (12.6%) students at the lowest English language proficiency level and also lower than AAU’s overall undergraduate average (9.1%).

AAU believes the following factors have contributed to the academic success and anticipated high retention rate of these students to their second semester:

- Community-building activities and events at multiple levels – within the class section, within the EAP level and school-wide
- Expansion of the Intensive English Course from 15 to 30 hours per week
- The addition of art workshops to students' course schedules, allowing them to stay connected to their majors while studying English

An Integrated, Student-Centered Approach to Persistence

Over the past two years (2010-2012), AAU’s retention team—comprised of staff from key support areas of the university as well as academic departments—has drafted a plan to redesign AAU’s approach to persistence. The new plan, presented in draft form in this WASC self-study, was formulated with substantial input from the President and the Board of Directors. AAU’s target is to increase graduation rates by 6% over a 3-year period (2013-2016).28 To achieve this goal, the university will immediately implement:

28 This realistic target was determined by evaluating the comparative performance of peer schools. In 2016, AAU will review overall progress and set a new improvement target, with the longer-term goal of increasing rates as much as possible.
1. The new persistence plan (detailed below), focusing on pre-assessment of risk factors, continuous monitoring of student experiences among the wider student population, and proactive, integrated response to student needs, including creating a 360-degree student support model involving peers, staff, and faculty in various capacities.

2. A proposed retention management system from Campus Labs Beacon, with software allowing for wider access to data among academic directors and executive-level staff.

3. Technological improvements allowing for an integrated student record (so that relevant knowledge about the student experience can be shared by staff across different departments).

**Timeline**

2013-2015
Refine and implement AAU’s Integrated, Student-Centered Approach to Persistence.

2014-onward
Monitor and evaluate results; make necessary additions and improvements to the plan.

2013-2018
Close the achievement gap for at-risk subpopulations identified by institutional researchers.

By 2015
Meet the 6% retention and graduation rate increase in 3 years.

2015-2016
Evaluate results and set new retention and graduation rate targets.

The retention team’s recommendations resulted from a candid and robust analysis of:

- Existing approaches to supporting student success and persistence at AAU
- Tens of thousands of student outcomes from the past decade (qualitative analysis provided through InsideTrack coaching data and exit interviews; quantitative data provided by through the Office of Institutional Research)
- A taxonomy of academic, social, financial, and noncognitive risk factors routinely affecting the success of AAU students
- A set of recurrent situational scenarios (e.g., personal or family crises, financial difficulties, difficulty balancing school with other obligations such as work and family) that impact student persistence
- AAU’s administrative and educational support culture as experienced by our students

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29 At the time of writing this self-study, the system is pending final approval by the President.

30 InsideTrack has been coaching AAU students since 2007. As of fall 2012, InsideTrack had reported direct feedback from 16,877 students receiving coaching and more than 2,000 students who dropped out of AAU. AAU’s Office of Institutional Research had tracked a decade’s worth of outcomes for more than 19,000 undergraduates and nearly 6,000 graduate students.

31 Identified through InsideTrack Summary Reports.
Key recommendations to increase student success and persistence include providing students a clear point of contact and a circle of personalized support during their first year and beyond; connecting and coordinating administrative staff, academic support staff, faculty, and peer mentors who will share the common goal of supporting specific cohorts of at-risk students; leveraging technology to provide a comprehensive, shared record of student contact, communication and intervention (thereby allowing for holistic, 360 degree problem solving and guidance by AAU staff).\textsuperscript{32} Specific goals and measures of effectiveness will be developed for each programming component over the next year (2013-2014).

Planned enhancements to AAU’s technology infrastructure (implemented by AAU’s Information & Technology Department and CyberCampus) and a new retention management system will be essential to the success of these efforts.

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Integrated Student Record} & \textbf{Goal}: Unify all information about student records and interactions with the student across academic and administrative support teams. Achieve 80\% unification by summer 2014. \\
\textbf{Significance}: With a comprehensive, integrated set of information, AAU will be able to serve the student better, both proactively and in reaction to unanticipated circumstances. \\
\textbf{Accomplished through}: Data mapping, translation and exchange/synchronization across multiple systems platforms including PeopleSoft, LMS and Salesforce.com. Current activities involve the core data integration and expansion of the platforms across Student Services, Campus Life, Academy Resource Center (ARC), Athletics and other departments. \\
\hline
\textbf{Persistence dashboards for academic directors and administrators} & \textbf{Goal}: Create a federation of dashboard tools (reports, access, queries, metrics, services, etc.) available to academic department directors and administrators beginning in fall 2013. \\
\textbf{Significance}: Expanded access to student persistence data via the existing Learning Management System (LMS) Director Dashboards will allow academic departments to identify the attributes of at-risk students within their program and intervene where necessary. Key administrators will have access to Executive Dashboards. \\
\textbf{Accomplished through}: Upgrading features on existing LMS Dashboard to provide more functionality, including integration with Salesforce.com, AAU Intranet (2013) and access to integrated student records (see persistence plan below). \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{32} This approach will allow AAU staff to get to the actual root of student problems. For example, life issues such as needing to take on an additional job to make ends meet may manifest in poor academic performance, but does not necessarily indicate that the student’s problem is academic. In fact, academic interventions (such as tutoring) are not the most effective choice in such situations. The Campus Labs system will allow for better recording and sharing of key persistence-related information.
TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF STUDENT SUCCESS

**InsideTrack/AAU data integration**

**Goal:** Integrate InsideTrack coaching data (qualitative student feedback) with the Integrated Student Record (work is underway with various stages of completion targeted for summer 2013-fall 2014).

**Significance:** With better information from AAU, Inside Track can provide better support services. AAU will benefit from more effective success coaching results.

**Accomplished through:** Data mapping, translation and exchange/synchronization across the Salesforce.com platforms of AAU and InsideTrack.

**Social Media monitoring platform (Radian 6)**

**Goal:** Have four analytical areas identified and the tools implemented by summer 2013.

**Significance:** Through Radian 6, a social media monitoring platform, AAU now has access to millions of public websites and social media sites; this access can be used to understand conversations about AAU and issues of importance to the university and the art and design industries it serves. AAU is using this research and reporting capability to gather information on how to serve the students better and to identify industry needs and trends in order to evolve the curriculum.

**Accomplished through:** Purchasing an enterprise license for Radian 6 Social monitoring tools (done, fall 2012).

**Strategies for Persistence**

AAU needs to be able to identify and proactively support individual students and peer cohorts who are at risk (rather than waiting for problems to manifest), track intervention results in real time (rather than waiting years for IPEDS data to learn whether retention rates went up) and identify recurring student problems over time (rather than treating each student problem as a one-off situation). A major goal of AAU’s persistence plan is to implement a retention management system to house, aggregate and analyze a wide array of variables impacting student persistence. A dashboard feature on the new retention management system will allow staff to share information and respond collaboratively to individual student needs. Staff members will be placed into student support teams, working collaboratively on resolving individual student issues, with shared access to student profiles and progress.

In 2013-2014, AAU is planning to pilot an early alert persistence management system from Campus Labs Beacon (currently pending approval). During the application and matriculation process, AAU will collect the following information from incoming students:

- High school GPA
- Transfer GPA
- GED graduate or delayed entry to college
- Previous post-secondary education & how long since last enrollment
- First-generation college student
- Work status – not working, working part-time or full-time
• Parental status – does student have children at home?
• Intention to study part time
• Military Status – by type, e.g. veteran, active military, dependent
• Inquiries about AAU’s disability services
• Financially independent (no parental financial support)
• Ethnic origin
• Gender

Entering students will also complete the Campus Labs Students Strength Inventory (SSI), which is part of the retention management system. This survey data collects information on noncognitive factors affecting student success (such as self-efficacy, interest in and commitment to their major, parental & peer support). This data will be entered into an integrated data management system that can be accessed by the various administrative departments supporting or analyzing student persistence (e.g. Admissions, Student Services, Academy Resource Center and Institutional Research).

The Campus Labs system—with its focus on both noncognitive and traditional risk factors—will offer AAU a snapshot of students’ college readiness upon entry. The capacity for sharing a dashboard of persistence-related data for each student (and for specific subgroups of students) among university administrators will allow AAU to monitor students’ resilience and identify currently invisible attrition issues. The Campus Labs dashboard tool aggregates and analyzes data from various campus data locations and the SSI. The system will allow AAU to build predictive algorithms to identify typical, at-risk student profiles (e.g., a student whose roommate drops out of school is statistically more likely to drop out—and thus should be understood as at risk and given additional social support).

The integrated persistence plan includes targeted interventions to AAU’s highest-risk, under-performing student groups: Under-Represented Minority students, Pell Grant recipients, online students and students entering with low English proficiency. Differentiated support for student success will integrate existing efforts with new programming, as outlined in the chart below.

### Providing Differentiated Persistence Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNDERPERFORMING STUDENT POPULATIONS</th>
<th>AAU INTERVENTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pell Grant Students</td>
<td>In fall 2012, InsideTrack coached all incoming freshman Pell recipients during their first semester at AAU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic, Under-Represented Minority Students (URM)³³</td>
<td>Many of the Pell Grant recipients coached in fall 2012 were URM students. For spring 2013, InsideTrack will make shift from coaching all Pell to coaching URM students with an EFC (Estimated Family Contribution) of less than $10,000; this group includes some Pell recipients. A total of 432 students in this cohort will receive coaching. Coaching focus will include:</td>
</tr>
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</table>

³³ This demographic category includes Hispanic/Latino, African American and Native American students.
UNDERPERFORMING STUDENT POPULATIONS | AAU INTERVENTIONS
---|---
• Helping URM students internalize the value of a degree; engaging them in career development plans and exploration of academic and professional interests
• Supporting URM students in identifying and committing to educational goals at AAU
• Anticipating and addressing possible roadblocks to success

Campus Life Department will leverage the social networking potential of cultural clubs (Indian Student Association, African Student Union, Indonesian Student Association, Korean Club) and create new clubs to reach other student groups in the spring 2013 semester (Hispanic, Native American, Asian).

Campus Life Department will establish support networks and communities to strengthen connections with peers and campus resources during a student’s first two years at AAU. Key program elements will include:

• First-year, peer cohort groups by major (Pilot groups: Spring 2013)  
• Peer Mentorship through academic departments (Spring 2013 semester); increase student leadership training and URM peer leaders at AAU in efforts to increase persistence among URM (and all) student groups
• Activities (such as Yosemite trips) that use staff and faculty facilitators/mentors/chaperones relevant to specific needs of a targeted social network  
• Social network (online) marketing of clubs, social media groups and activities/meetings/events targeted to specific student groups
• Outdoor “ropes course” orientation experience at Ft. Miley and targeted orientation week networking events (Spring 2013)
• Semester social events within like cohorts
• Mentoring by trained, first-year faculty
• Increased opportunities for student engagement, volunteerism, and leadership development: Student Programming Board, Club Leadership Seminar,  

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34 Each cohort group in the pilot program will include seven first-year students and one upper-classman peer mentor. The School of Advertising and the School of Illustration will each pilot two undergraduate peer cohort groups in spring 2013.

35 Peer and faculty mentors will also help identify and assist at-risk students.

36 As a result, students will be connected to relevant AAU resources within the context of their social support networks.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>UNDERPERFORMING STUDENT POPULATIONS</th>
<th>AAU INTERVENTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Students</td>
<td>AAU offered targeted services to new students studying exclusively online from 2005-2012, including success coaching of all new online students by InsideTrack. AAU requires an interactive pre-start orientation. AAU will pilot a major-specific, first year seminar course to engage students with peers having similar academic interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low English Proficiency International Students</td>
<td>AAU has offered targeted language support service to English language learners for more than two decades. Recent interventions for low English proficiency Saudi and mainland Chinese students included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• InsideTrack success coaching (in students’ native language, where possible)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enrollment in Intensive English Course</td>
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</tbody>
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**Monitor Students’ Progress in Detail and Remove Roadblocks**

As a result of five years of in-depth, interview-based research, InsideTrack has identified a finite number of recurring roadblocks impacting attrition at AAU. Roadblocks are the kinds of issues that most students will face at one time or another during their time at AAU (or any university): health and family concerns, work and finance issues, conflicting commitments and demands on their time, changing life circumstances and motivational issues. (See composite case studies excerpted from a retention presentation to the AAU Board of Directors in March 2012.) Roadblocks can be academic, and often will manifest in classroom performance, but often, they originate from events happening outside school that affect the student’s motivation and performance.

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37 The Campus Life Department will identify 10 student leaders to join the Student Programming Board and will provide leadership training to these students. The student leaders will then develop and implement student activities and train additional student leaders.

38 Student Club presidents will attend a mandatory leadership training over a weekend in late February and will repeat the training at the beginning of each semester.

39 The Urban Knight Art Café will be restructured to increase traffic and engagement within this student community space. Student Clubs will be assigned designated programming nights throughout the week. The space will be redesigned for improved academic-social life balance.
Some students overcome these roadblocks on their own and persist in their studies; others need help to stay on track. For less resilient students, these types of roadblocks will cause them to stop and give up on their dream. If a student does not get help when it is needed, their problems tend to snowball, because one area of a student’s experience quickly impacts all the other areas. This phenomenon in particular affects the student’s motivation and ability to stay on track to their degree. Tracking students’ performance, engagement, motivation and resilience throughout their AAU life cycle will allow the university to identify and address barriers to persistence that are occurring beyond the first year (where AAU has traditionally focused most intervention efforts).

AAU will need to develop standard procedural responses to the most common roadblocks and identify and train staff to help students overcome these obstacles in a coherent, systematic manner that involves recording the results of interventions (2013-2015). The Campus Lab system will provide the technical functionality part of this equation. The retention team has recommended to President Stephens (fall 2012) that AAU conduct a search for a Vice President-level position responsible for implementing the overall persistence plan and in particular, staff training and peer- and cohort-based persistence programming (recommended hire date: spring-summer 2013).

The persistence plan also requires that AAU identify and reengage students who take time off from university intending to return (stop-outs) to support their reenrollment.

Analysis of student feedback has revealed ways in which AAU’s business practices and technology need to adapt and change to meet the needs of 21st century students. When Chief Information Officer (CIO) Erik Viens joined AAU in 2011, President Stephens asked him to analyze AAU’s student-facing business processes and advise her on how AAU could offer more convenient, student-centered experiences. President Stephens also asked the retention team leadership for feedback on how AAU could offer better customer service. Every semester, this team (comprised of staff from across the university) examines the reasons that students drop out of AAU.

Students who left AAU intending to transfer to another institution most commonly reported that they intended to improve their English before returning to AAU; were transferring to a community college or another onsite school closer to home; or were transferring to a less expensive school.

The resulting reports to President Stephens highlighted the ways in which, although AAU has grown and changed over the last decade, many of its student-facing administrative practices have not changed. Indeed, many of the ways AAU expected students to interact with the university (e.g., coming to campus and waiting in a line to register for classes with their advisor) were inconvenient and outdated, especially when compared to the level of customer experience students have come to expect through their daily interactions with companies like Amazon, Apple and Netflix. Twenty-first century students are used to being able to get help almost instantly and to get what they need quickly, resolve any problems smoothly, and have access to the information they need at any time. They are used to being treated as a market of one, with customer service experiences designed for their tastes and preferences.

The major persistence-related issues identified in these reports to President Stephens and AAU’s Board of Directors included the following:

1. While many fine support services are offered, AAU has no clear pathway for students to find basic help and information. The website is difficult to navigate. There is no clear “go-to” person where students can get help with typical problems.
2. Many processes AAU requires of students are inconvenient, time wasting, overly complicated, and not widely understood. Often, students can only get service from one person/area in a given place at a given time.

3. AAU’s approach to helping students, while energetic and well-intentioned, is also one-off and reactive. AAU does not monitor students’ ongoing experience; by the time a problem comes to a staff member’s attention, events have often escalated to an unnecessary crisis level.

4. Because administrative departments are siloed, knowledge about individual students is fractured. AAU’s databases do not interact sufficiently and many administrative and support areas keep no record of their interactions with students—so often crucial information is not shared.

5. AAU has no clear pathway for low-level customer service complaints and there is a lack of uniform customer service expectations and training in many administrative departments (and overall).

Based on an analysis of AAU’s outward-facing student feedback on sites like Yelp, it appears that many students will be helped simply by streamlining AAU’s administrative processes, developing clearer pathways to basic help and information and improving customer service training, refocusing staff on collaborative, student-centric problem solving. President Stephens has empowered the CIO and the retention team to present proposals that will achieve this goal.

Substantially improving student retention and graduation rates will require a multifaceted, proactive, collaborative and far more robust approach than has been attempted previously. In spite of multiple interventions put into place over the past decade (see Overview of Persistence Support Programs and Language Support Services), AAU’s graduation rate for first-time, full-time freshmen has remained relatively consistent within a 9-point range (27%-36%), with the most recent cohort near the top of that range. Analyzing the major factors impacting student success at AAU has helped AAU’s retention team define a more precise approach to interventions. These will focus on: improving the ease of student interactions with AAU, including seeking educational and personal support; collectively addressing the interplay of academic, social, financial and noncognitive risk factors that affect each student’s motivation to persist to graduation. The retention team believes that the Integrated Persistence Plan represents a breakthrough approach for AAU.

This chart summarizes persistence support programs not addressed elsewhere in this essay.
Ensuring Institutional Capacity & Effectiveness in the Future
& Planning for the Changing Environment for Higher Education
(CFR 3.1-3.11, 4.1-4.3, 4.6, 4.7)

As shown by its increasingly worldwide reach, AAU is achieving its mission to provide unparalleled access to a quality art and design education. This is in sync with the trend toward a more integrated global workforce and economy. AAU responds quickly to emerging industry trends and evolving technologies. The university has long been in the habit of bringing together faculty (who are themselves working professionals) and stakeholders from the creative industries in order to address the present and future needs of these industries. This enables a productive transfer of knowledge and skill as AAU graduates a body of aspiring professionals each year and industry professionals contribute their time and talent toward educating the next generation.

In this sense, AAU believes that its educational philosophy and core practices will remain sustainable, even though the following will certainly change over time:

• Industry needs and requirements (e.g., technical skills)
• Emerging and receding disciplines and areas of specialization within those disciplines
• Delivery methods (e.g., online education; possible unbundling of skills/credits in line with national trends)
• Teaching approaches (increased use of the online platform to simulate real-world projects with international work teams in different locations)
• Student populations (increase in online and international students)

AAU takes its responsibility to ensure students’ readiness for the 21st century economy extremely seriously. In line with its mission and founding principles, AAU sets the academic target of producing students who are able to execute market-quality work prior to graduating. Students’ portfolios and demo reels need to demonstrate their skill set to potential employers and prove their readiness to enter the workforce as immediately productive members of a team.

In each department, AAU’s curriculum focuses on:

• Current industry standards and technology
• Meeting real world challenges
• Engendering creative thinking and problem solving
• Ensuring technical fluency
• Communication of complex ideas (visually, orally, and in writing, as demanded by the discipline)
• Command of art and design principles
• Explaining and justifying their ideas
• Solving problems within modeled client parameters
• Communicating within a team (as required by the discipline)
• Iteratively improving projects as a key part of their artistic practice

Even general education courses are related, as much as possible, to an art and design context in order to help students integrate their knowledge. These skills will continue to remain relevant over the next decade, both within and outside of the art and design industry.

Students enter AAU under an inclusive admissions policy; their success is measured by what they accomplish during their time here. AAU is proud of its commitment to educate these students, which broadens social access to a quality education rather than limiting students’ creative and degree prospects by a one-time judgment of their high school performance—especially when many students have not had access to previous art and design training due to two decades of budget cuts in the arts (Standards 1 & 4). AAU has a long history of providing educational support programs to assist students who have the potential to succeed, but who enter with academic challenges to their success (whether due to gaps in their previous academic preparation, need for remedial art and design training, or low English proficiency). In this sense, AAU is well-positioned to meet the challenge of educating a broader section of the population so that they may find a productive and hopefully rewarding place in the workforce.

Historically, AAU students have been able to pay back their student loans at an acceptable rate, indicating that they have made a valuable investment in their education (see attached cohort default rate graph). AAU purposefully tried to keep tuition as affordable as possible; tuition and overall expenses at AAU are well below the level of comparable private art schools, with tuition 44% below the cost of other institutions and overall costs 28% lower (data from National Center for Education Statistics).

AAU’s last tuition increase (2.5%) is modest compared with other universities. Affordability is an area of strength for AAU since the rising cost of higher education and total student loan debt reaching one trillion dollars are much talked-about topics nationally. AAU could do a more effective job of communicating this, as the mythology is that AAU is very expensive, likely because AAU serves an economically vulnerable population of students who have no point of comparison and because it is expensive to purchase necessary art supplies. AAU tries to mitigate these costs by negotiating bulk purchase prices for our students and providing free or extremely low cost software where possible—e.g., providing Adobe Creative Suite to all students and faculty free of charge.

Sustaining Resources over the Next 7-10 Years (Standards 1 & 3)

AAU was founded in 1929. Historically increasing enrollment trends both domestically and internationally have sustained a strong financial position for the university. AAU has successfully adapted to changing financial outlooks nationally and internationally through an increased presence in online education and strong international recruiting and
word-of-mouth efforts. AAU has successfully educated international students in art and design for over two decades; many of these students return to tremendous success in their home countries and over time, AAU’s reputation has grown in particular areas of the world, e.g. Asia (Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and an increasing number of students from mainland China).

AAU’s financial stability is projected to continue over the next 10 years. Over the past decade, AAU has demonstrated a strong financial history and consistent allocation of academic resources to improve the student learning experience, including developing an extensive infrastructure for online education (CyberCampus), educational support (ARC and InsideTrack) and faculty development. AAU has consistently applied its resources to improving learning facilities, acquiring new ones and upgrading equipment, technology and software to keep pace with industry trends.

Financial resources are allocated subsequent to a rigorous budgetary review process, with each budget tied to the income statement and balance sheet. AAU consistently exceeds the financial ratio scores required by the US Department of Education. The three ratios are: Primary Reserve (measures a school’s viability and liquidity); Equity (measures capital resources and ability to borrow; net income (measures profitability).

President Stephens and the academic department directors continue to steer the university in innovative directions. AAU has been able to adapt to industry needs (which are constantly changing in many majors) and the academic goals of 21st century students while staying true to the founding philosophy. AAU is managed by a well-qualified and experienced leadership team, both academically and administratively, with both long-serving members and more recent recruits; this bodes well for growing the next generation of leadership.

The art and design faculty continues to grow onsite and online, and their effectiveness is supported by a team of faculty developers well-versed in the needs of AAU’s unique learning environment. The faculty model used by AAU has succeeded in ensuring the academic content and quality of the programs through a combination of long-serving members and more recent infusion of talent from the industry. Guidance and feedback are provided through assessment, program review and regular feedback on the curriculum and learning results from industry representatives (annually) and peer review teams from NASAD, NAAB, and CIDA (periodically).

Sustaining Educational Effectiveness over the Next 7-10 Years (Standards 2 & 4)

AAU has a robust network of systems and practices already in place to guide educational effectiveness over the next decade, including:

- Demonstrated commitment to assessing students’ development of high-level creative thinking, aesthetic and technical skills at the assignment and programmatic level; university-wide formative and summative assessment system at the graduate and undergraduate level (CFR 2.6)
- Highly effective Assessment Director and engaged faculty review committees
- Refined assessment plans and program learning outcomes lists for all departments
- Assessment results for all departments (including general education)\(^1\)
- Ability to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of assessment practices and typical, institutional-level results and make changes for improvement (CFRs 2.7, 4.4 and 4.5)

\(^1\) Clearly, new programs will not have assessment results until their students reach the formative review stage.
• Rigorous, learning-centered reviews of academic performance through the President’s Academic retreats (3-4 annually) and periodic program reviews (5-6 year cycle), innovatively managed by the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness
• Mandatory development of rubrics and sample critiques for all first-year classes (project will encompass all required classes within 3 years)
• Innovatively-designed online courses with extensive services in support of online students and faculty
• Support of key educational effectiveness activities (e.g., assessment, rubric development, analysis of key academic performance indicators such as grading trends and course evaluations) through an easy-to-use Department Director Dashboard designed by CyberCampus
• Support for development of working professional faculty as effective instructors and course developers (onsite and online)
• Sustained research on AAU’s unique teaching and learning environment through the Office of Faculty Development
• Extensive range of educational support services through Academy Resource Center (ARC), designed to help at-risk students reach their academic goals (CFRs 2.6, 2.12)
• Free one-on-one success coaching for targeted groups of at-risk students, provided through AAU’s partnership with InsideTrack
• Mandatory peer review of curriculum and student learning results by NASAD (most departments), CIDA (Interior Architecture & Design) and NAAB (Architecture)

These practices and related educational effectiveness initiatives (such as the establishment of CyberCampus and a longstanding commitment to rubrics, including the recent rubric-building tool developed by CyberCampus) are embedded in AAU’s culture at all levels and are used for both top-down and bottom-up improvement efforts.

Educational effectiveness is consistently prioritized in planning and decision-making activities such as the Strategic Action Items charts arising from the President’s Academic Retreats, program review, the Annual Strategic Focus Areas (and related semiannual progress reports to the Board of Directors) and AAU’s Long-Term Vision & Focus Areas. The President’s 2012 Focus Areas for AAU were:

1. Expand and strengthen the curriculum.
2. Implement systems that improve both technology and processes.

Particular focus areas are identified as annual “themes” from a larger strategic matrix jointly defined by the President and AAU’s Board of Directors. This matrix is designed to contain the full spectrum of AAU’s long-range needs and priorities. Each year, the President reports AAU’s progress on specific focus areas as well as advances under each area of the matrix. AAU’s strategic matrix aligns with the long term priorities outlined in the Conclusion of this report. AAU identified these priorities through evaluation and planning activities conducted over the past three years.
Adapting to Changes in Higher Education in the Next 7-10 Years

AAU is focused on the following trends and issues in higher education:

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<th>TRENDS</th>
<th>IMPACT ON AAU</th>
<th>AAU’S CURRENT THINKING</th>
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<td>The impetus toward using bright line indicators for graduation rates continues to be a hot topic in higher education.</td>
<td>Some states (California-Cal Grant program, Wisconsin) have either implemented or will implement new standards tied to graduation rates. The current proposal for schools licensed by the state of Wisconsin requires a graduation rate of not less than 60%. This will affect AAU because under Wisconsin law, universities using distance education to teach even a single student residing in that state are required to obtain a Wisconsin license for their online programs.</td>
<td>There has been talk in Washington, D.C. that in the future, Title IV federal financial aid may be tied to student outcomes (including graduation rates) when determining a school’s eligibility to participate. AAU will need to raise its graduation rates as much as possible as a matter of pressing importance.</td>
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It should be noted that AAU has consistently dedicated substantial resources and implemented multiple large-scale interventions to raise completion rates over the past decade. Due to the at-risk student population that AAU serves (and perhaps to a lack of holistic staff integration/communication and appropriate technological support capacity in these past efforts), graduation rates have remained relatively steady within a 10-point range. AAU is confident that its Integrated Persistence Plan, with a redesign of persistence efforts and associated technological support, will represent a breakthrough in this area.
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<tr>
<td>Publicity is increasing about the rising cost of higher education and the resulting debt loads that are being incurred by students and their parents. This leads directly to the DOE’s interest in asking schools to prove that their graduates will earn enough to be able to repay debt (particularly federal student loans) within a reasonable number of years.</td>
<td>The focus on students’ earning potential and debt load is directly tied to the concern over graduation rates; students have to start repaying debt when they are no longer in school (whether they have graduated or not).</td>
<td>This emphasis on income potential challenges the traditional value of an education undertaken primarily for the sake of increased knowledge or skills that are not immediately/literally transferable to the workplace.</td>
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<td>This situation is further complicated for students at AAU, since, by the nature of our academic departments, a large number of our graduates (and non-graduates who leave prior to earning a degree), will be working on a freelance basis or starting their own businesses…thereby making it harder to document “gainful employment” and income sufficient to repay student loans.</td>
<td></td>
<td>While some majors and academic specialties at AAU will lead directly to full-time employment within the industry (e.g., Graphic Design, Web Design &amp; New Media, Architecture, Fashion Merchandising, Animation &amp; Visual Effects), other degrees are likely to lead to freelance employment, as that is the nature of particular fields of art and design (Motion Pictures &amp; Television, Acting, Photography, Fine Art).</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is likely to be tighter monitoring of distance education programs in the future due to “bad actors” in the distance education sector. The DOE and Office of Inspector General have uncovered fraud and abuse with Federal funding in certain poorly run and unethical institutions offering distance learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>AAU will continue to keep tuition costs as low as possible in order to remain competitive with other private schools.</td>
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<td>This has little impact on AAU as the university has been commended for the quality of its online programs by WASC, NASAD and CIDA. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a focused program review on AAU’s distance learning in August of 2011. The DOE team was very impressed with the online delivery system at AAU and had no findings.</td>
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**TRENDS** | **IMPACT ON AAU** | **AAU’S CURRENT THINKING**
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Student demand for online education is increasing. | A significant sector of AAU’s student population will shift either to hybrid or online-only status. | This is an opportunity for AAU and also brings challenges with it, as online-only students are harder to retain and graduate. Relative to onsite-only or hybrid students, online-only students are often more difficult to engage; they are frequently studying part time with substantial family and work commitments outside of school. In 2013, AAU began rollout of a more engaging course content management system in conjunction with AAU’s proprietary LMS system. Continue to focus on identifying successful strategies to retain online students.

New online delivery models will continue to gain traction (i.e. massive open online courses). There are also trends toward competency-based certifications and modularization/unbundling of education. | Some competition for students should be expected from online institutions with alternative paths to learn art and design skills (e.g. the 18-month online program offered by Animation Mentor) and from companies such as Lynda.com with widely accessible technical skills training (though the latter lacks professional mentorship and portfolio project design). | AAU will continue to monitor these trends closely. AAU has the potential to offer a more unbundled approach to skills development in the future and could work with CAEL to offer credits for work experience were this to be recommended.
There is an increasing reliance on mobile apps and social networking to communicate with today’s students. AAU has begun to transform the way it communicates with students. AAU’s free student mobile app leverages our investment in the Salesforce.com enterprise license and allows students to download the app to their smart phones. The app has class schedule information, Campus News & Events, a Message Center, transit maps and a full function transit planner that helps them determine schedules for shuttle buses between campus facilities. Real-time bus locations, charted on city maps, are featured so our students never need to miss a class.

Future enhancements will include grade checking, real-time messaging with advisors, faculty and other students, coordination with Campus Life and Athletics and rich communication networks using AAU Chatter.

**Maintaining Momentum over the Next Decade**

AAU anticipates that it will continue to evolve as it adjusts both curriculum and administrative practices over the next 7-10 years. This will allow AAU to meet the needs of 21st century students more effectively. Over the past decade, AAU has proved its capacity to evolve successfully as an institution:

- Adding new degree programs and areas of specialization
- Developing a robust and creative approach to online education, which has extended AAU’s ability to teach students beyond San Francisco and offer onsite students more convenient, hybrid options to pursue their education
- Developing more nuanced and systematic access to data in support of evidence-based decision making (Director Dashboards, assessment results, program review, performance data required by the President’s Academic Retreats, increased institutional research capacity, access to considerable qualitative data on the student experience through a 5+ year partnership with InsideTrack)

If the past decade is any predictor of the future, AAU can look forward to rapid and rewarding development. Ask anyone who works at AAU: the university never feels static.
Integrative Conclusion

This section of the report evaluates AAU’s current development in light of the WASC Core Commitments. It also reviews progress on key areas identified by the WASC Commission Action Letter of July 2007 and summarizes AAU’s plans for improvement over the next 7-10 years.

As a direct result of initial accreditation by WASC in 2007, AAU has expanded its capacity significantly in key areas such as assessment, program review and institutional research. The 2007 WASC Commission Action Letter for Academy of Art University identified two areas for institutional attention:

1. **Enhanced Program Review:** The commitment that faculty and staff have made in classroom evaluation is creative and ongoing. The practice of collective faculty reflection on the results of such assessment, in the form of systematic program review at the program, school, and institutional levels, is a more recent development. AAU has created an impressive program review template to guide its many units as they move more fully into this institutional practice. It is critical that AAU sustain its present high level of commitment to improvements in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment strategies by not relaxing its efforts to implement fully its program review strategies in all units, including in the online and co-curricular programs (CFR 2.6, 2.7, 2.13).

2. **Understanding the Academy’s Diverse Community:** AAU has opened its doors wide to students from many different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and has made significant commitments to help each student succeed (CFR 1.5). The degree to which the multiple categories of students are in fact being served and how they succeed is a more recent focus of analysis. In keeping with CFR 2.6, 4.3, and 4.7, the Commission affirmed AAU’s efforts to obtain more precise quantitative and qualitative measures of its effectiveness in supporting diverse student populations, and to use such data to inform policy and practice. AAU will need to reflect on this information, disaggregated by various student characteristics, and, where appropriate, set targets or benchmarks for improvement. In addition, AAU should focus institutional attention on the continuing need for AAU’s faculty and staff to more closely reflect the demographics of its student population.

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1 An analysis of AAU’s progress on program review since 2010 is featured in Essay 1 of this self-study. AAU’s Retention and Graduation Narrative (September 2012) and Essay 3 report AAU’s progress on Understanding the Experience of Diverse Students.
The WASC Commission requested an Interim Report from AAU, submitted in February 2010. The attached chart shows AAU’s Progress on Interim Report Items since 2007. The chart also features verbatim text from the WASC Interim Report Committee Letter (June 22, 2010), which acknowledged AAU’s substantial progress in the areas of program review, assessment and institutional research at the time of the Interim Report review.  

Next Steps in Program Review and Institutional Research: 2013-2018

- Fine tune assessment and program review systems (e.g., norming formative assessment expectations, developing rubrics in first year courses, piloting an international external review component for program review)
- Raise student achievement levels as a result of access to more refined information on student performance, which allows for a more refined curricular, pedagogical and educational support response for improvement
- Achieve access to more granular and ongoing information about each student’s experience of AAU so that we can remove obstacles to persistence—both academic and nonacademic—in order to help more students to graduate and thus meet their academic and professional goals.

Integrative Self-Evaluation

AAU offers this reaccreditation report, the DQP Exhibit and associated evidence exhibits of proof of its sustained engagement with the WASC Core Commitments:

- Student Learning and Success
- Quality and Improvement
- Integrity and Accountability

The body of the report and the DQP Exhibit demonstrate AAU’s ability to engender high-level learning outcomes among its students (Standards 1 & 3). AAU has proven that it is able to put in place systematic processes of assessment across the university and to use the results to improve student achievement (Standard 2). This demonstrates AAU’s ability to learn and improve as an organization, as does its commitment to meeting the needs of its students through innovative approaches to online learning and educational support (Standards 1 & 4). AAU remains responsive both to its accreditors’ standards of quality and to the industries it serves (Standard 4). The university is well-resourced financially in terms of facilities, technology and personnel, with the ability to sustain its capacity and effectiveness over the next decade (Standard 3).

AAU offers the essays contained in his report, 2013-2023 strategic priorities chart (see below) and the following self-evaluative tools as nuanced evaluations of AAU’s current performance in relation to the WASC Core Commitments:

- Self-Review under the Standards
- Compliance Audit
- Educational Effectiveness Framework
- WASC Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Academic Program Learning Outcomes
- WASC Rubrics for Assessing the Use of Portfolios and Capstones (2 rubrics)

² Text appears verbatim in the chart; WASC will supply the team with the full WASC Interim Report Committee Letter.
• WASC Rubric for Evaluating General Education Assessment Process
• WASC Rubric for Assessing the Integration of Student Learning Assessment into Program Reviews

The attached chart summarizes AAU’s strategic focus areas 2013-2023 (the reasoning behind these priorities is detailed in the body of this report). The action items and timelines in this reaccreditation report, along with feedback from the visiting team and the WASC Commission, will serve as a roadmap for AAU’s continuing improvement over the next decade.

Since joining the WASC community, AAU has appreciated the opportunity to participate in the lively dialogue within the region about contemporary challenges and best practices. WASC has offered AAU many valuable opportunities to learn from our peers and improve our ongoing performance: site visits and team reports, the Interim Report and Substantive Change Processes, invitations to serve on teams visiting other WASC schools, WASC retreats and the annual Academic Resource Conference. We are excited about continuing to learn.
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