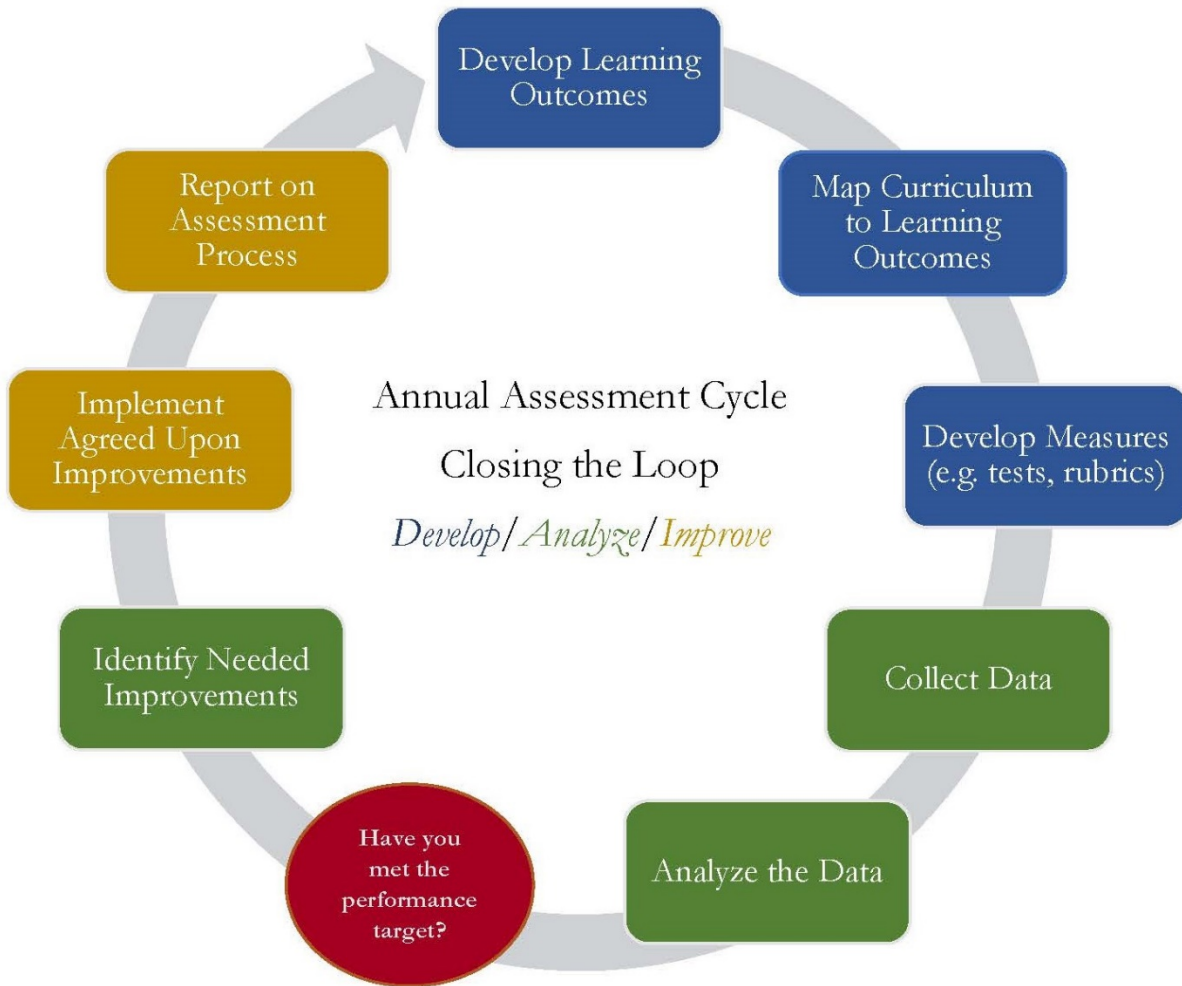## EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

Eastern Connecticut State University engages students from diverse backgrounds in a transformative, liberal arts learning experience that provides knowledge and skills to lead enriching, purposeful lives.

Develop Learning Outcomes

Report on Assessment Process

Map Curriculum to Learning Outcomes

Implement Agreed Upon Improvements

Annual Assessment Cycle

Closing the Loop

Develop / Analyze / Improve

Develop Measures (e.g. tests, rubrics)

Identify Needed Improvements

Collect Data

Have you met the performance target?

Analyze the Data

LIBERAL ARTS ASSESSMENT PLAN

Spring 2021

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Eastern Connecticut State University LAC Assessment Plan

Assessment is defined and approached in a variety of ways across institutions of higher education. Ultimately, definitions of assessment share several common components. Assessment should be:

- Participatory- it should engage students, faculty, and staff,
- Iterative- it should not be done in isolation but revisited and improved upon,
- Context-driven- it should account for the culture and mission of the institution,
- Focused- it should be focused on learning outcomes that are defined and agreed upon by the community,
- Reflective- it should include time for reflection on results and provide opportunities to articulate a plan based on the data, and
- Actionable- it should include a plan for improvement that is reasonable and actionable.

Ultimately, assessment should provide an institution with information necessary to improve students' learning and direct resources for faculty and institutional development and improvement.[1] This plan details the assessment approach and methodologies that will be utilized to assess Eastern's Liberal Arts Core.

Assessment at Eastern

Eastern Connecticut State University's academic assessment plan reflects its mission as Connecticut's public liberal arts institution. The plan focuses on building and assessing curriculum that allows students to be prepared for work and life in the 21st century. Eastern's learning outcomes focus on skills that the university and external community value. As such, assessment of these learning outcomes in the liberal arts curriculum (LAC) serves several purposes:

1. *Improving learning inside the classroom*
2. *Ensuring the quality and integrity of an Eastern degree*
3. *Demonstrating accountability to our stakeholders*

Improving learning inside the classroom

Assessment at Eastern ensures that students are meeting expected learning outcomes. By establishing clear goals and evaluating achievement with a systematic process, university-wide and academic programs can build upon successes and improve areas in need of additional support. This plan provides for the dissemination of assessment information to the LAC program coordinator, the Liberal Arts Program Committee (LAPC), the First Year Program Committee (FYPC), the Faculty Development Committee (FDC), and other relevant senate committees to ensure that assessment results can be used in future program management and faculty development that is focused on improving learning in the classroom. It additionally provides the roles and responsibilities of assessment at Eastern and information about resources that will are available to academic programs to conduct assessment that results in improving learning inside the classroom.

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[1] For examples of definitions and approaches to assessment, see the Higher Learning Commission's website https://www.hlcommission.org/ and National Institution of Learning Outcomes Assessment's (NILOA) website https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/ .

The quality and integrity of an Eastern degree is critically important not only to our students, but their parents, and the public. Assessment provides Eastern with a tool to improve curriculum, invest wisely in faculty development, and manage university programs and academic majors. The use of assessment data to actively manage programs and promote continued improvement will increase the quality and integrity of an Eastern degree by helping faculty determine the extent to which the Eastern curriculum is preparing students for employment, graduate school, and life after Eastern. Assessment data can be used to identify areas of strength and areas that need attention so that faculty development programs can be created to improve student learning. In addition, changes in assessment outcomes over time will allow us to establish the efficacy of faculty development and other interventional programs.

Demonstrating accountability to our stakeholders
In an increasingly data-driven world, assessment offers an opportunity to demonstrate accountability to our stakeholders. First and foremost, Eastern should demonstrate to students and parents that students are developing important skillsets that will aid them in life and work beyond graduation. Second, state legislators and taxpayers also need to know that the funds earmarked for public education are being used wisely. Third, funding agencies and foundations want to be sure that their funds are being used effectively and efficiently. Assessment results can be used to demonstrate accountability to these funders and can be utilized to obtain additional grants that can enhance the educational opportunities that Eastern's university-wide and academic programs provide. Fourth, assessment processes and results are growing in significance in the accreditation process based on federal demands for increased transparency and accountability. Effective assessment yields the evidence that allows Eastern to demonstrate confidently to students, parents, state legislators, taxpayers, funding agencies, and foundations that our students are developing valuable skillsets that are necessary for life after Eastern.

Assessment of the Liberal Arts Core

The Liberal Arts Core (LAC) at Eastern is guided by the five following learning outcomes: Communication, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Ethical Reasoning, and Quantitative Reasoning. These learning outcomes will be assessed on a three-year cycle. Critical Thinking and Communication will be assessed in the first year of each cycle, beginning in Academic Year 2021-2022. Quantitative Reasoning and Ethical Reasoning will be assessed in the second year of each cycle. Creativity will be assessed in the third year of each cycle.

The LAC and Assessment
While the Committee on the Liberal Arts Core continues to work on a revision of the LAC, assessment has begun on the existing structure. The LAC currently has a tier structure that begins with in the First Year Program and has three additional tiers of LAC courses across different categories (i.e. Natural Sciences, Cultural Perspectives, etc). The expectation is student progression up the tier structure over their time at Eastern. Students can count 6 credits or 2 courses toward both LAC requirements and major requirements. For example, students majoring in Business Administration can take ECO 200 (LAC T1 SS) and BUS 205 (LAC T2IT) to fulfill both LAC and business core requirements. After a student has taken major courses that count as LAC requirements, the student can continue to take LAC courses in the major and count them toward major requirements but cannot count them towards both LAC and major requirements simultaneously. The Tier III LAC courses additionally count toward students' academic majors and are required to include an assignment that examines the role of a liberal arts education in

preparing students for work and life after graduation. This interwoven structure has affected both the way that LAC courses are conceptualized by faculty and how Eastern has approached assessment of the LAC.

Assessment of the LAC is summative in nature and is intended to inform the Eastern community of student achievement at specific points in the LAC program at the end of the academic semester. Assessment efforts to date have focused primarily on Written Communication, Ethical Reasoning, and Critical Thinking within the LAC. In AY 2018-2019, three separate assessment processes were conducted to understand student achievement on these learning goals. These assessment processes revealed flaws in curricular and assessment design that this plan aims to address.

In particular, the LAC curriculum currently operates as a distribution model that approaches courses as a part of the faculty member's discipline rather than a set of courses in the liberal arts tradition. Courses are primarily designed to cover content and not necessarily to focus on a common set of skills. When skills are focused on, definitions of the skills are often driven by disciplinary assumptions. For instance, in the 2019 Critical Thinking Assessment, a large majority of faculty members indicated that they were unsure which assignments would be appropriate for an assessment of critical thinking or if their assignments were adequately gauging critical thinking as defined by the Eastern-modified AAC&U VALUE rubric. One faculty member even commented that the assessment process may be using a "fundamentally different and arguably incorrect" definition of critical thinking.

Prior to Spring 2020, the LAC contained over 100 distinct learning outcomes, making it difficult to identify what to assess and in what courses to assess it. As a result, the assessment processes that have been undertaken have not examined student learning across the curriculum and have focused very narrowly on single learning outcomes in a subset of classes (i.e. assessment of the first-year program, assessment of first year writing courses, etc).

To address these issues (unwieldy number of learning outcomes, lack of common definitions, disciplinary focus of the LAC), the University convened a committee to meet regularly over the 2019-2020 academic year. This committee was charged with revising the learning outcomes for the LAC. The Committee conducted research, incorporated faculty feedback, and generated a list of five learning outcomes, definitions of those outcomes, and rubrics to assess those outcomes. In Spring 2020, the University Senate approved a bill that reduced the number of learning outcomes in the LAC to five and adopted a rubric for the assessment of each learning outcome for courses taught in the LAC. The next several years will be focused on implementing these learning outcomes and beginning routine assessment.

Student Learning Outcomes

The five learning outcomes to be assessed are defined below. This language is taken directly from the SB19-20_07

Critical thinking

Critical Thinking is the analysis and evaluation of complex ideas, artifacts, information, and arguments as a basis for formulating a well-reasoned belief, judgment, or conclusion.

Learning Outcome: Upon completion of the LAC Curriculum, Eastern students will be able to demonstrate critical thinking by: identifying and stating a problem or issue to be addressed; analyzing and evaluating complex ideas, artifacts, information, and arguments that can address the problem or issue; and formulating well-reasoned beliefs, judgments, or conclusions.

Ethical Reasoning

Ethical Reasoning requires students to recognize ethical issues, identify their own ethical positions, and analyze other ethical perspectives in real-world situations in order to consider the impact of decisions and actions on other individuals, society, and the environment.

Learning Outcome: Upon completion of the LAC Curriculum, Eastern students will be able to demonstrate ethical reasoning by: recognizing ethical issues; identifying their own ethical positions; analyzing other ethical positions; and considering the impact of decisions and actions on other individuals, society, and the environment.

Communication

Communication requires students to recognize and utilize the most appropriate means to address specific audiences in relevant contexts or genres in order to effectively inform or persuade.

Learning Outcome: Upon completion of the LAC Curriculum, Eastern students will exhibit communication skills by: Recognizing and utilizing the most appropriate means to address specific audiences; and employing communication methods relevant to specific contexts or genres to effectively inform or persuade.

Creativity

Creativity is the ability to utilize skills and strategies to synthesize ideas, perspectives, information, or materials in original and self-aware ways, and to use that synthesis to generate imaginative acts or products.

Learning Outcome: Upon completion of the LAC Curriculum, Eastern students will be able to demonstrate Creativity by: utilizing newly acquired strategies and skills within a creative domain; synthesizing ideas, perspectives, information, or materials in original ways; creating an imaginative act or product with new ideas, perspectives, information, and materials; and evaluating the role of their own values, interests, and ideas in the creative process and act or product.

Quantitative literacy

Quantitative literacy is competency in working with numerical data to reason or solve problems, the ability to make judgements and draw conclusions supported by quantitative evidence, and the ability to communicate those arguments utilizing quantitative tools.

Learning Outcome: Upon completion of the LAC Curriculum, Eastern students will be able to demonstrate quantitative literacy by: interpreting and explaining information presented in quantitative forms (e.g. equations, graphs, diagrams, tables); converting information into quantitative forms when required; creating arguments and arriving at judgments based on quantitative analysis of data; and expressing quantitative evidence in support of arguments.

Assessment Calendar and Timeline

The five LAC learning outcomes will be assessed on a three-year schedule. In year one of each assessment process, Eastern will assess critical thinking and communication. In year two, Eastern will assess ethical reasoning and quantitative literacy. In year three, Eastern will assess creativity. Table 1 displays the schedule for learning outcomes assessment over the next six academic years.

Table 1: Learning Outcome Assessment Schedule

Learning outcome	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Communication	X			X		
Creativity			X			X
Critical Thinking	X			X		
Ethical Reasoning		X			X	
Quantitative Literacy		X			X	

Assessment Measures

Each assessment process will include direct assessment of student learning. The Assessment Task Force will conduct assessment of student artifacts from courses in the LAC. For at least the next six years, there will be ongoing faculty development in the summer months to train faculty in teaching the learning outcomes. Initially, Eastern planned to implement this training program in Summer 2020. Due to the pandemic, obstacles to implementation required Eastern to delay implementation to Summer 2021.[2] Eastern will implement an early adopters program for faculty teaching in the LAC who want to focus on critical thinking and communication. This program incentivizes faculty development and requires faculty to embed the learning outcomes into LAC courses, develop signature assignments, and submit artifacts for assessment on the learning outcome of focus. In Summer 2022, the University will implement an early adopters program for faculty whose courses focus on creativity, ethical reasoning, and quantitative literacy. The early adopters program will function as a "train the trainers" event as well. In the summer following each early adopter program, some early adopter faculty members will be asked to run workshops to further disseminate knowledge and refine skills to embed these learning outcomes into LAC coursework.

Assessment of the LAC during this period of transition will be conducted using a purposive sample. Since Eastern wants to understand the effects of the new faculty development programs, a truly random assessment process would not yield useful results. Faculty from the early adopter and subsequent training programs will be required as part of their participation in the program to submit artifacts. A comparison group of untrained faculty members will also be asked to submit artifacts.[3] This will allow our assessment process to provide important information both about Eastern's training approach and about student learning in the LAC more broadly.

Data Collection and Analysis

Figure 1 details the general timeline of the assessment cycle. The assessment cycle begins each summer with faculty development to implement learning outcomes. Faculty will participate in 1.5-day development workshops focused on pedagogical approaches to embedding the learning outcome in their course curriculum and effective assignment design. Faculty will utilize this training in their courses in the fall semester. In December of each year, the University Assessment Coordinator will collect all artifacts

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[2] Travel restrictions made it difficult to secure an expert to lead curriculum workshops and faculty were facing increased workloads and attending numerous training sessions related to teaching during the pandemic.
[3] Once the LAC curriculum is revised and faculty are widely trained to emphasize the learning outcomes in their LAC courses, the methodological approach to assessment will likely change with the ultimate goal to be assessment of LAC courses with random sampling.

from the fall (in year one there will only be artifacts from fall, but in subsequent years there will be artifacts from the previous spring as well). Once collected, the University Assessment Coordinator, with the help of the project coordinator for the Davis Educational Foundation Grant, will prepare the artifacts (stripped of identifying information, formatted appropriately, and uploaded into assessment software) for assessment by the Assessment Task Force (ATF).[4] There are 12 assessors on the ATF. In year one of the assessment cycle, assessment of critical thinking and communication will each be reviewed by one group of six assessors. Two assessors, paired based upon a pre-assessment norming exercise, will score each artifact. The total number of artifacts scored by each pair is based upon page numbers as artifacts greatly vary in length. The assessment report will detail the number of artifacts and selection process. The ATF will assess artifacts each year during the winter break. In the spring semester, the University Assessment Coordinator will compile results (such as median scores, standard deviations, percentages of students by performance categories, intercoder reliability scores) and write a report to be presented to the university community.
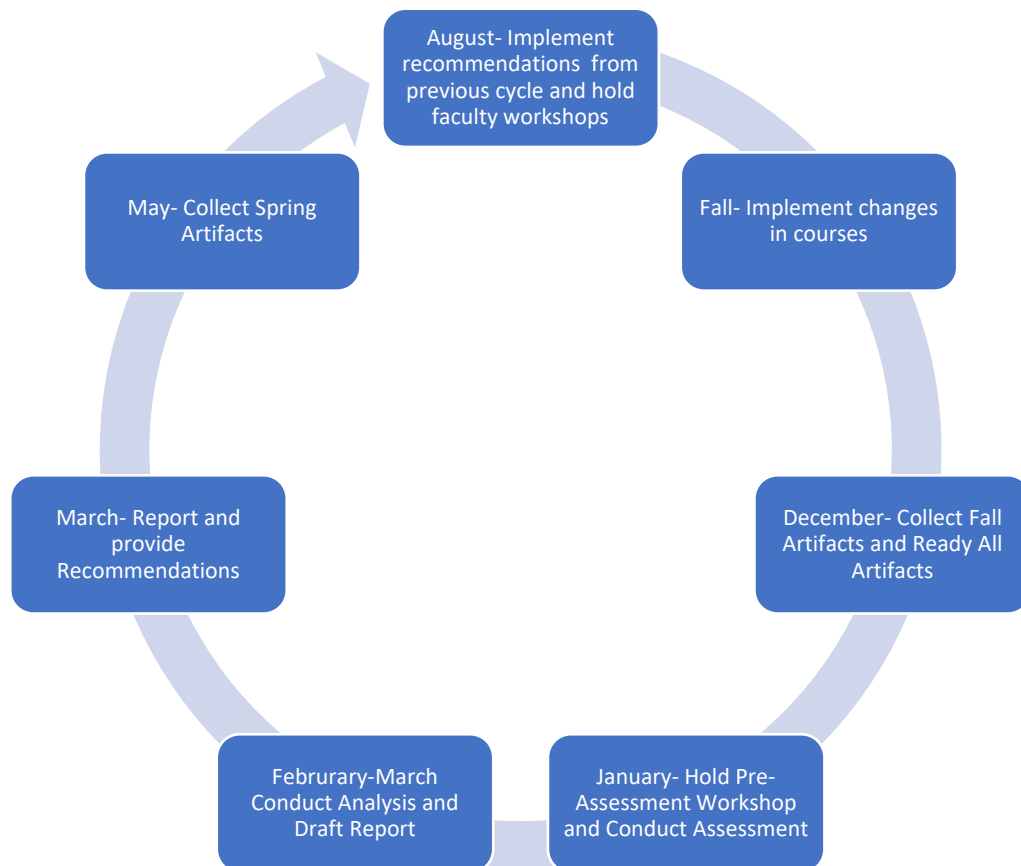

Figure 1: Regular Assessment Cycle during the Early Adopter Program

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[4] ATF assessors are faculty members from across the two schools at Eastern and from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Assessors underwent training at the AAHLE 2020 virtual meeting and the Assessment Institute 2020 virtual meeting.

Curriculum Improvements and Reporting: Closing the Loop

The results will first be presented to the ATF and Assessment Committee and the University Assessment Coordinator will draft report based upon this discussion. The ATF will identify major areas of strengths and areas ripe for improvement and make initial curricular recommendations. The report will be shared in meetings with the LAPC, FYPC, the Faculty Development Committee, and the University Senate Executive Committee to help contextualize the results, refine recommendations, and begin the process of setting a timeline for the implementation of curricular changes and faculty development. Once their feedback is incorporated, the University Assessment Coordinator will use the results to update the next assessment process. A final draft of the report will be circulated to ATF members, the Assessment Committee, the LAPC, the FYP, Senate Executive Committee, and the Faculty Development Committee for final comments. Each respective committee can discuss the results and identify areas of curricular improvement and interventions that are related to the committee's respective role in curriculum management. The University Assessment Coordinator will present the final report to department chairs during Dean's Meetings and the report will be made available to all faculty and staff on the University Senate's Assessment page in SharePoint (please see appendix B to see full dissemination flowchart). In the summer months, the University Assessment Coordinator will work to implement the recommendations and prepare training workshops for faculty in late summer. The effectiveness of these workshops will be measured both directly, in the next round of assessment, and indirectly through a survey of faculty program participants. At the end of the three- year cycle, the University Assessment Coordinator will prepare a summary report that details the process and results of assessment over the entire assessment cycle.

Appendix A: Summary of Practices in the Collection and Treatment of Artifacts

Selection of Artifacts- Artifacts in the next several years will be randomly selected from a purposive selection of courses. As Eastern works to implement the new learning outcomes and provides faculty development, artifacts will be selected from sections where there was a training intervention and a comparison group of courses. After the learning outcomes are fully implemented, artifacts will be randomly selected from all courses in the LAC to create a representative sample from across the curriculum.

Submission of Artifacts- Artifacts should be submitted to the University Assessment Coordinator with identifying information by the end of the semester requested. If possible, the faculty member should submit electronic copies of the artifacts either in word document or pdf format. If a faculty member cannot submit the artifacts electronically, the faculty member can make alternative arrangements with the University Assessment Coordinator in advance.

Confidentiality- Artifacts submitted to the University Assessment Coordinator will be collected and accessed on a university-issued computer. They will be stripped of all identifying information (i.e. Student Name, Student Identification Number, Faculty Name, Course Number, Course Name) prior to being saved. The Coordinator will maintain a file of identifying information that can match artifacts to students and courses. This information will be maintained in a password-protected encrypted file, on a secured server, and will be maintained only for the purposes of examining student learning over time. Additionally, the identifiable information pertaining to faculty members will be useful if the faculty requests the results from artifacts for their specific course. The Assessment Coordinator will work with University IT to ensure the security of identifiable information. The University Assessment Coordinator will not release identifying information and will only report results in the aggregate.

Reporting of Results- Results from assessment will be reported only in the aggregate within course categories (for example, FYI 100, Tier I, Tier II, Tier III). The report will include a basic description of the artifacts in terms of number of artifacts, length, and category of LAC course. The purpose of reporting results is primarily for LAC program management and will, therefore, identify areas of strength and areas in need of development. The reporting of assessment results will never identify a faculty member or student. Faculty information will be used if the faculty member requests specific assessment results for the artifacts he/she/they contributed to the assessment process.

Appendix B: Dissemination Plan

University Assessment Committee

Revise Report

University Assessment Coordinator

Draft Report
Finalize Report
Posts to Senate SharePoint

Revise Report

Assessment Task Force

Feedback Process

Present results and gather feedback

Faculty Development Committee and Coordinator

Present results and gather feedback

Present results

Present results

Present results and gather feedback

Present results and gather feedback

Senate Executive Committee

First Year Program Committee and Coordinator

Dean and Department Chairs at Dean's Meeting

(Arts and Sciences)

Dean and Department Chairs at Dean's Meeting

(Professional Studies)

Liberal Arts Program Committee and Coordinator

Chairs bring information to department

Chairs bring information to department

All Faculty