

Working Group Report #3

Synthesis/Analysis Standard IV

Standard IV-1a ... *accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds*

Potential evidence:

- 2019-2020 Student Handbook
- 2019 Orientation Schedule
- 2019-2020 Family Guide
- Student Consumer Information

Summary of evidence:

Mercyhurst University provides accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds. Mercyhurst uses a variety of mechanisms to communicate all aspects of financial literacy with regard to University funding. The working group recognizes that timely notifications from the Student Financial Services office is crucial to the financial health of its students, families, etc. Print materials, in addition to online resources provide university members and prospective students and families a clear understanding of expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds.

For example, print materials include annual updates to the Student Handbook, which is organized by the residence life & student conduct team and is widely distributed across campus for current student use. Additionally, the Family Guide is organized by the campus involvement center and updated, printed and distributed via print form and electronically to all incoming students and families. The section in the Family Guide is titled payment options and begins on page 30 of the 2020-2021 edition. This section includes subsections on student financial services, student rights and responsibilities, student billing, Nelnet campus commerce payment plan, financial aid on the bill, the tuition refund policy, financial aid and awarding, eBill instructions and access to student financial records. These two printed documents provide our constituents with a clear understanding of what costs they will incur and ways to supplement the cost of education with outside resources.

In addition to print materials, the orientation schedule is produced annually for the use at new student summer orientation. The schedule is available online prior to orientation and is distributed to each student and family on orientation day. On the orientation schedule there is a session titled *University Partnerships Working for You*, this session includes a presenter from student financial services who reviews all information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment and refunds. In 2020, the in-person orientation was transitioned into a virtual model. In this model, the student financial services team created a series of resources for students and families. These resources included information sheets regarding advice, a checklist, payment options and terminology. Additionally, the student financial services team conducted one on one appointments with any student or family who wished to discuss their individual concerns with an advisor via virtual appointments.

Furthermore, the student consumer information page provides a comprehensive overview regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds and is located on the Mercyhurst webpage. The Consumer Information page (found here: <https://www.mercyhurst.edu/student-consumer-information>) outlines the cost of attendance, code of conduct for educational loans, our banking services agreement, federal refund policy, financial aid forms and information, Institutional refund policy, and late fee information. This information is in a public place and can be found very easily.

Summary of compliance:

As evidenced by the myriad of resources available to individual students, families, and outside constituents, Mercyhurst University provides accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds.

The Working Group found robust materials provided by the Student Financial Services office and additional areas across campus that promote these materials.

Standard IV-1b ... *a process by which students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted are identified, placed, and supported in attaining appropriate educational goals*

Potential evidence:

- Admissions Application
- TEAS Testing
- TOEFL Exam
- Academic Probation Policies & Procedures

Summary of evidence:

The Office of Admission is responsible for reviewing applications for every prospective student to ensure they are ready to study at the level they are applying for. In the admissions application, it is required that all students submit their academic transcripts, a writing sample, and letters of recommendation. Submission of the SAT and ACT scores is optional. Moreover, additional tests are given. For example, all of our nursing students must complete the TEAS test, the Test of Essential Academic Skills, which is a standardized, multiple choice test and is used to determine the ability to adjust to a nursing program. The test is created and administered by Assessment Technologies Institute. Meanwhile, our international applicants must pass the TOEFL exam, or the Test of English as a Foreign Language. It is a standardized test used to measure the English language ability of non-native speakers wishing to enroll. The test is accepted by many English-speaking academic and professional institutions.

All confirmed incoming freshmen must complete the ALEKS math placement exam, administered by our office of Academic Support. The ALEKS exam gives a clear assessment of the students' readiness for particular math courses. ALEKS does not use multiple-choice questions like most other standardized tests. Instead, it utilizes an adaptable and easy-to-use method that mimics paper and pencil techniques.

We offer a myriad of services that support students who may be underprepared for college or who struggle with academics once they are here. Our Academic Support and Learning Differenced team work closely with students who initially self-identify a need for additional support. We offer a fee-based program, the Academic Advantage Program, that families opt

into before the academic year begins. These students meet twice weekly with an Academic Support counselor to review current class progress, assess deficiencies, and plan for future academic goals. As a supplement to this program, Academic Support offers a three-week residential summer program for interested incoming freshmen. This program introduces the students to our academic expectations and our campus culture. Students take an introductory REACH course taught by a tenured faculty member and receive study skills support by the Academic Support team.

Academic progress is monitored after each semester for all students. Any undergraduate student who does not achieve at least a 2.0 cumulative grade point average (G.P.A) is placed on academic probation. We recognize the fall semester of the freshman year can have extra challenges, so we have established an academic warning status for freshman who earn between a 1.75 and a 2.0 g.p.a. in the fall semester. These students often return to good academic standing within one semester.

Once a student is placed on probation for failure to achieve or maintain a 2.0 g.p.a., they are expected to meet with their Academic Support counselor to do a probation plan of action before the semester begins. This meeting establishes strategies for success in the upcoming semester. The student is also required to meet with their counselor at least three times throughout the semester, register and remain enrolled in at least 12 credits, demonstrate tangible progress toward graduation, and refrain from withdrawing from any courses without review by a faculty advisor or an Academic Support counselor.

Any student who was placed on probation but failed to earn the 2.0 g.p.a. will proceed to final probation. This status puts students on notice that they may be suspended for failure to maintain academic progress. At the end of two full semesters on probation, a student who fails to achieve or maintain a 2.0 g.p.a will be suspended. Appeals for academic suspension are reviewed by the Office of the Provost.

After each semester has ended and grades are certified, students are notified of their probationary status via a letter sent to their home address and by email to their campus account.

Summary of compliance:

As is evidenced above, Mercyhurst University maintains, from admission to graduation, checks and balances to ensure the success of our students.

Standard IV-1c ... orientation, advisement, and counseling programs to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience

Potential evidence:

- 2019 Orientation Schedule
- ADA Accommodations Process
- HUB Site Academic Support
- HUB Site Student Financial Services
- 2019-2020_FamilyGuide
- iMU course

Summary of evidence:

From the day a new student arrives on campus, to the day they graduate, the departments of student life, student financial services, athletics, and academic support, have developed and maintained, and continue to create and institute, programs, events and resources to enhance the overall student experience resulting in increased retention. Mercyhurst's boasts a five-year average retention rate of 80.2% which is more than 8% above the national average. This data comes from the last five years available on IPEDs. The level in which we engage our students is credited in part for our retention rate.

During the orientation process, which was only for all incoming freshmen but is now offered to all transfer and adult students, we offer sessions on financial aid, information technology, the help desk, Title IX, the health center, the counseling center, residence life, athletics, campus ministry opportunities and campus involvement opportunities to name a few. We also send our students and their families a Family Guide which covers academics, academic support, campus life resources and activities as well as financial aid, IT resources and support with technology recommendations.

All new traditional aged students are enrolled in iMU, a two-part college transition course designed to acclimate students to our campus resources, establish an early mentoring connection with a facilitator and Laker Leader, and to share our rich history of the Sisters of Mercy. The course is offered in the first eight weeks of both the fall and spring semesters. This course provides students with information they need to be successful in their first year of college. This course is taught by a wide variety of administrators and faculty.

After a thorough review of the HUB (internal portal) sites for Academic Support and Student Financial Services, we found a wide range of resources available to the Mercyhurst University community. The Student Financial Services (SFS) HUB page covers information such as billing, payments, scholarships, applying for Financial aid, and contact information for SFS counselors. The Academic Support HUB site includes information pertaining to learning differences and accommodations, exploratory studies, testing center, tutoring and writing assistance, along with a list of staff to support and assist students in achieving academic success.

Summary of compliance:

At this time, it is our belief that we thoroughly utilize, distribute and, implement all of the evidence and resources listed above. Our working group has proven that this standard is well met. The orientation, advisement, and counseling programs certainly enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience.

Standard IV-1d ... processes designed to enhance the students' achievement of students' educational goals including certificate and degree completion, transfer to other institutions, and post-completion placement

Potential evidence:

Self-Service – Progress link

Office of Career Development – Internships

Transcript Request Form

Summary of evidence:

Students are guided throughout their academic experience at Mercyhurst via advising from Faculty and Academic Success Counselors. Students are encouraged to work with advisors to ensure that requirements for degree completion are met. In order to support the success of the student, Mercyhurst employs technology through the Student Information System, Ellucian. One of the products, the Self-Service tool is available to students and advisors. This tool gives access to the unofficial transcript, enables students to Plan and Register for their coursework, and confirm that Progress is made toward meeting degree requirements.

For those students planning to transfer to other institutions, Academic Success Counselors meet with them to conduct an exit interview. In that process, after the initial conversation with the counselor, the student meets with a Student Financial Services representative for exit counseling where information regarding student loans is reviewed. Students are made aware of repayment requirements including deferment of loans if they transfer to another school and how it will affect the loan grace period. Additionally, the student is directed by the Academic Success Counselor to the website www.mercyhurst.edu/transcripts where they can request an official transcript be sent to the new institution.

Several programs within the University either recommend or require students to participate in an Internship within their discipline. These opportunities provide students with connections within the real-world workplace, often resulting in job placement after graduation. The Office of Career Development is instrumental in overseeing internships. Other services that are provided include a Career Exploration Link, Job Search Links, and Career events including Job Fairs and workshops for resume writing and interviewing techniques. A list of all Career Development opportunities and resources can be found on the HUB at https://lakersmercyhurst.sharepoint.com/sites/SPO_STU_CareerDevelopment.

Summary of compliance:

As evidenced by the services available to students and faculty, Mercyhurst University offers ample resources to enhance the students' achievement of educational goals. The university uses current technology to support degree planning, and career search and staffing addresses the needs of the students.

The current challenge created by the Covid-19 pandemic Covid-19 has impacted processes. In person events and assistance are rarely possible. While staff are handling the situation with creativity and resilience, virtual encounters as a new mode of interacting is still to be perfected.

Standard IV-2 ... policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits, and credits awarded through experiential learning, prior non-academic learning, competency-based assessment and other alternative learning approaches

Potential evidence:

2019-2020 Graduate Catalog

2019-2020 Undergraduate Catalog

Credit for Life Experience from the Catalog
Transfer Student Admissions

Summary of evidence:

Policies for evaluation and acceptance of credits either through transfer, experiential learning, prior non-academic learning and competency-based assessments are outlined in each of the University catalogs found digitally on the University website: <https://www.course-catalog.com/mercyhurst/C/2020-2021>.

The University keeps in its Student Information System, a bank of institutional data that reflects coursework equivalency that has been approved by department chairs. This information is reviewed on a rotating basis by the Records Manager in the Office of the Registrar to ensure the information is current. The information is made available to Transfer Admissions Counselors who are tasked with reviewing official transcripts from the transfer institution and outlining transfer equivalencies on a Transfer Evaluation Form for the student. This form is kept in the student file for referral should a review of courses accepted become necessary. For the transfer student interested in attending Mercyhurst, the admissions web page <https://www.mercyhurst.edu/admissions-aid/transfer> offers resources to assist the potential student determine if and how coursework from prior institutions will be applied to Mercyhurst's degree programs.

Students are awarded credit for competency-based assessment such as the International Baccalaureate program, Advanced Placement Exams and the College Level Examination Program. Through the Office of Admissions, students are advised to submit transcripts/official placement scores as part of their admissions package. Information for the awarding of credit from placement exams can be found at <https://www.mercyhurst.edu/admissions-aid/school-counselors>. Upon receipt of these scores, the Office of the Registrar awards credit for successfully completed exams. Students are required to earn a score of 4 or better for Advanced Placement Exams and a score of 4 or more for High Level IB exams and 5 or more for Standard Level IB exams.

Students interested in attempting the College Level Examination Program to fulfill REACH curriculum requirements may schedule an exam through any testing agency. Students who complete the exam with a minimum recommended score may elect to pay the placement exam fee for credit to be posted to their transcript. Mercyhurst is authorized to administer the examination, however, due to Covid-19 restrictions, exam dates have been suspended.

A path for awarding credit for non-traditional learning is available to students who have had life/work experiences. Normally it is the non-traditional student who pursues this option. Documentation, which can include a portfolio of work experience, is reviewed by the department to determine what learning objectives have been met through the experience. Students register for the life-experience course and can earn up to 3 credits for the experience course.

Summary of compliance:

We believe that the evidence stated supports students with a variety of options to successfully complete degree requirements in an efficient and effective manner. The challenges of the pandemic have impacted the ability of students to take the CLEP examinations here at the University, however, this is a broader issue in the area of higher education as a whole.

Standard IV-3 ... *policies and procedures for the safe and secure maintenance and appropriate release of student information and records*

Potential evidence:

- Confidentiality Form
- FERPA Guidelines
- FERPA-Authorization_Form_rev2020
- FORM -Community Restitution Timesheet
- FORM – Important Information about your sanctions
- FORMS_Release of Information Form 5.20.docx
- Terms and Conditions of Occupancy

Summary of evidence:

Student privacy is of the highest priority for our university. Beginning with the very first course taken at the institution, students fall under the protection of the Federal Educational Rights to Privacy Act. Information, including FAQs about FERPA, annual notice (which includes FERPA guidelines), and quick facts to assist all constituents in dealing with the privacy of our students can be found at <https://www.mercyhurst.edu/ferpa>.

Links to forms that can be downloaded and completed by students on this site include: Letter of Recommendation Waiver, Work Study Non-Disclosure Agreement, Request to Prevent Disclosure (Directory Information) and External Employee/Contractor Non-Disclosure Agreement. The Registrar's site within the Hub, https://lakersmercyhurst.sharepoint.com/sites/SPO_STU_Registrar/SitePages/Student-Forms.aspx, has the link to the Authorization of Access to Student Educational Records form. Students must complete this form identifying entities that may have access to their records. Once the form is completed and returned to the Office of the Registrar, a notation in the SIS is made on the student's record. This note is visible to student advisors through Self-Service, providing guidance for interaction with parents/guardians.

Student Community Service timesheets are issued as a restitution for student conduct violations. The forms state the students name and number of community service hours that must be completed. The student can then take that form with them each time they complete community service hours to get it signed by the person who supervised their shift. The times sheets are then turned in to the Residence Life office and then stored in a filing cabinet which remains locked when not in use for up to 7 years.

Sanction notices are related electronically through the Adirondak Student Conduct software. Student conduct notices are stored in electronic files and only accessed by authorized Residence Life personnel who must have a university approved username and password to gain

access to student files. Student conduct decisions are shared with students through their university e-mail which only they can access using their university username and password.

The terms of condition of occupancy are shared in the Student Handbook. This can be found at <https://www.mercyhurst.edu/handbook>.

Summary of compliance:

Our working group believes that Mercyhurst adheres to local, state and university guidelines and best practices with regard to release of information and confidentiality. We comply with these standards and will not release information unless the students complete all necessary forms and documents.

Standard IV-4 ... if offered, athletic, student life, and other extracurricular activities that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that govern all other programs

Potential evidence:

- Budget Process Review
- Student Athlete Handbook
- Student Handbook
- Student Consumer Information

Summary of evidence:

Administrative principles and procedures that govern all programs including athletics, student life and all extracurricular activities are consistent and are regulated in the same way. All areas are required to complete the same Budget Process Review. The Budget Process review document is housed in the Finance Office and on the HUB at https://lakersmercyhurst.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/MSCHESelfStudyProcess/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7BFBD991EB-04E1-4E0F-8354-FB8F3FA48124%7D&file=Budget%20Process%20Review_2018.docx&action=default&mobileiredirect=true . It looks to be complete but was last updated in the Fall of 2018. The process is tied to the Strategic initiatives and outlines the process, outcomes, and recommendations in the budget review process. The document also outlines who is responsible for overseeing the process. The Budget Process review does include the two parts of the budget; budget system and reporting tools and management and oversight. The budget software, as referred to in this document is what we use to universally throughout all areas and campuses. In addition to the Budget Process Review, there is also a Budget Planning Process chart (found on the HUB at <https://lakersmercyhurst.sharepoint.com/sites/MSCHESelfStudyProcess/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?csf=1&e=GOwzOm&cid=6bfb47bd%2D9698%2D41a8%2D8eaf%2D0e16e2b31729&FolderCTID=0x01200005FF2D561E7CBC4D867D123005A02C93&id=%2Fsites%2FMSCHESelfStudyProcess%2FShared%20Documents%2FMSCHE%20Evidence%2FEvidence%20for%20Interim%20Report%20%232%2FBudget%20Planning%20Process%20Chart%20rev3%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FMSCHESelfStudyProcess%2FShared%20Documents%2FMSCHE%20Evidence%2FEvidence%20for%20Interim%20Report%20%232%2FBudget%20Planning%20Process%20Chart%20rev3%2Epdf>

[2FEvidence%20for%20Interim%20Report%20%232](#)), also updated in Fall of 2018. This flowchart outlines the order in which budgets must be approved.

The Student Athlete Handbook and the Student Consumer Information go hand in hand. These two documents help us regulate everything from Equity in Athletics to policies and procedures consistent with Mercyhurst University student's campus wide.

The Student Athlete Handbook is used to familiarize student athletes with policies and procedures within the Department of Athletics; the handbook is referenced during preseason meetings with every student athlete. Student Athletes and staff use the handbook to review established policies and procedures. The policies and procedures in the Student Athlete Handbook are pulled from the university-wide Student Handbook, ensuring consistent rules and regulations for all students. The Student-Athlete Handbook states the mission of the University and of the department on page 2 which echo's Mercyhurst University's mission located on page 2 of the Student Handbook. The Student Athlete Handbook notes the various academic services available to student-athletes on page 12, the same services are noted on page 20 of the Mercyhurst Student Handbook.

Summary of compliance:

Mercyhurst is consistent in regulating all athletic, student life, and other extracurricular activities by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that govern all other programs. This is clearly articulate in the Budget review process and in all handbooks.

Standard IV-5 ... *if applicable, adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval of student support services designed, delivered, or assessed by third -party providers*

Potential evidence:

No evidence due to Mercyhurst not using third party providers.

Summary of evidence:

This does not apply to our institution.

Summary of compliance:

This does not apply to our institution.

Standard IV-6 ... *periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience*

Potential evidence:

NSSE 2019 Survey Results
Student Athlete Post Season Survey
Assessment Handbook

Summary of evidence:

The National Survey of Student Engagement or NSSE, for short is completed every 3 years, capturing data from Freshmen or 1st year students and from our senior or 4th year students. The 2019 NSSE survey results are available through the assessment office. The survey is not distributed annually, therefore, these results are most pertinent to the ongoing effort of assessment which supports this criterion. The NSSE survey results are a tool in supporting the periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience. Engagement Indicators (EIs) provide a useful summary of the detailed information contained in our students' NSSE responses. By combining responses to related NSSE questions, each EI offers valuable information about a distinct aspect of student engagement. We know that students benefit and are more satisfied in supportive settings that cultivate positive relationships among students, faculty, and staff. The two EIs that speak to the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience are found under Campus Environment and speak to the Quality of Interactions and the Supportive Environment. In comparing our results with other institutions, we rank similar to the Carnegie and Master Public Private institutions. Results of this survey are shared strategically with key stakeholders to make positive changes at the University. For example, the Marketing department uses information gathered from the NSSE survey to streamline and cater advertising efforts to prospective students.

The Student Athlete Post Season Survey is conducted yearly with every varsity student-athlete; it is delivered electronically with the sport supervisor overseeing the process. The survey is reviewed annually by the Athletic Administration and is updated at that time. The Student Athlete Post Season Survey is used by Athletic Administration to garner information about the student-athlete experience and student athlete perspective. The survey results are discussed in end of season/end of year meetings between Athletic Administration and Head Coaches. The information is also used to gain information on perspective regarding athletic facilities, gender equity, feedback on head and assistant coaches, athletic training services, sports marketing and promotions, strength and conditioning programs and team travel. This information is discussed and utilized in athletic administration regarding policy and procedure changes. The Student Athlete Post Season Survey provides direct information from the student athletes to athletic administration to be used as a direct tool for policies and procedures, gender equity discussions and facility upgrades. As a direct result of the survey, there was a reassessment of the playing facilities for the softball team and upgrades were made to that facility, including new dugouts, a press box, new fencing and a new scoreboard, as well as the addition of locker room for the men's and women's rowing programs.

The Assessment Handbook is created and maintained by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and was last updated in Fall 2019. This handbook outlines Mercyhurst's philosophy on assessment and contains information on assessment planning, assessment reporting, timelines and schedules to be used by all departments/areas across campus. This document is used as departments/areas adhere to the components outlined for self-studies, action plans, assessment plans and student learning outcomes. The university wide assessment processes, outlined in the Assessment Handbook, provide a variety of mechanisms through which university initiatives and resources are assessed for both academic and non-academic units at all levels. In particular, the unit-level Self Study process carried out by each unit and reviewed by the area Vice President specifically designates a five-year planning process that

includes a discussion of resources. The Assessment Handbook speaks directly to periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience.

Summary of compliance:

While the university has a number of mechanisms in place to assess the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience, the information is not always widely used or disseminated to the areas that could implement changes based on the findings. We found this to be particularly true with the NSSE survey results in contrast to the Assessment Handbook and procedures that are used by offices and departments.

RoA – 9... *The institution’s student learning programs and opportunities are characterized by rigor, coherence, and appropriate assessment of student achievement throughout the educational offerings, regardless of certificate or degree level or delivery and instructional modality.*

Potential evidence:

Syllabus Repository

Summary of evidence:

The university maintains a syllabus repository that is accessible to students, faculty, staff, and administrators through the Mercyhurst Portal. The online repository (https://lakersmercyhurst.sharepoint.com/sites/SPO_EMP_SyllabusRepository) organizes syllabi by the semester a course was taught, location the course was taught (Erie, Northeast, Corry, Booker T. Washington Center), College, and department. The online repository provides access to every graduate and undergraduate course taught at the university since the 2014-15 academic year. Syllabi for courses taught prior to the 2014-15 academic year are available upon request from the Dianne Speice, the Syllabus Repository Coordinator.

The syllabi archived in the repository contain information about student learning objectives, methods of instruction, assessments, and policies for each class taught at the university. In addition to providing students access to recent syllabi prior to their registering for classes, the repository provides department chairpersons, deans, and associate deans a resource for mentoring and evaluating faculty. Department chairpersons regularly utilize the repository for sample syllabi as they assist adjunct faculty members preparing to teach a class for the first time, and during the Academic Evaluation process as they evaluate the effectiveness of faculty members’ classroom instruction, rigor of the courses they teach, and appropriateness of their methods of assessment. Deans and associate deans and the Office of Academic Affairs also make use of the repository as they evaluate faculty members’ teaching effectiveness during the Pre-Tenure Review and tenure/promotion process.

Summary of compliance:

Our working group believes that the syllabus repository fulfills the following Requirement of Affiliation: The institution’s student learning programs and opportunities are characterized by rigor, coherence, and appropriate assessment of student achievement throughout the educational offerings, regardless of certificate or degree level or delivery and instructional modality. All syllabi are collected and posted per the Faculty Handbook and in

accordance with the regulations per the Office of Academic Affairs and the Provost. Mercyhurst values our syllabus repository and dedicates a staff member to the task of organizing and posting syllabi in a timely manner.