This essay expands upon the discussion of the meaning, quality, and integrity of the degree from Essay 3. It examines standards of performance for undergraduate and graduate programs at CSU Bakersfield, student learning achievement at both levels, and the role of assessment and program review in ensuring quality educational programs. At the undergraduate level, evidence of student achievement in the majors is considered for each of the four schools (Arts and Humanities; Business and Public Administration; Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Engineering; and Social Sciences and Education), and with respect to the five WSCUC Core Competencies (oral communication; written communication; critical thinking; quantitative reasoning; and information literacy). At the graduate level, evidence of student achievement of the University Learning Outcomes for Graduate Programs (ULOGP) is considered, following the university’s framework for knowledge and skills acquisition at the graduate level. For all degree levels, detail is provided on how faculty members utilize assessment findings to improve teaching effectiveness and program quality. This essay concludes with a review of insights on student learning at CSU Bakersfield and future plans for continued improvement.

4.1 UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

4.1.1 STUDENT LEARNING IN THE MAJORS (CFRs 2.2-a-b, 2.4, 2.6, and 2.6)

Student learning standards of performance for each of CSU Bakersfield’s academic programs are developed by faculty and articulated in each major’s program learning outcomes (PLOs). Student learning outcomes (SLOs) for each course are aligned with the major’s PLOs and are shared with students on course syllabi. PLOs for each major are aligned with CSU Bakersfield’s University Learning Outcomes (ULOIs), and are widely shared among faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders in the online university catalog [link: 2016-18 Catalog] and a dedicated institutional webpage [link: CSU Bakersfield Assessment Webpage]. Student achievement of PLOs are assessed at the rate of at least one per year, with the goal of assessing all PLOs within a five-year period. Assessment plans, findings, action plans, and status updates for each program are annually reported in TaskStream, CSU Bakersfield’s Assessment Management System (AMS) [link: Department Assessment Webpage]. Annual assessment results and subsequent plans for improvements to student learning are comprehensively considered during the program review process (see Essays 3 and 6 for further details on the program review process).
Assessment of student learning in the majors is conducted by faculty in the various programs and departments at CSU Bakersfield. Course-level assessment is coordinated at the program level by department chairs or program directors. The resulting data is shared and integrated at the school level by each school’s assessment coordinator. Schools, and programs within schools, use this information to identify gaps in student learning, and to make changes consistent with each program’s mission, instructional goals, and learning objectives. The assessment data, and associated plans to improve student learning, are included in annual reports, periodic program review reports, and, where appropriate, accreditation reports. The University Program Review Committee (UPRC) functions as a campus-level internal accreditation body to ensure that programs perform assessment and that programs make appropriate changes based on assessment data. This information then flows to the Provost [Assessment Flowchart doc. 2.6:01].

In the fall term of 2016, CSU Bakersfield shifted from a quarter to a semester system. In the two years preceding the quarter-to-semester (Q2S) conversion, academic programs reviewed their curriculum, including their PLOs and, when needed, revised the curriculum in response to results from previous assessment cycles. While some programs simply converted their existing curriculum from quarter to semester units, nearly 90% of all programs made significant, transformational changes to their curricula [Q2S Curriculum Revision Process doc. 2.2:16]. These curricular changes were reviewed by school curriculum committees prior to final approval by the school deans.

Each undergraduate program has specific learning outcomes that are regularly measured and assessed to improve teaching effectiveness and program quality. Faculty also make adjustments to the assessment process itself when necessary, to improve the quality of data collected. In an effort to publicize the various ways in which CSU Bakersfield faculty engage in the assessment process and use assessment data to improve pedagogy, programs, and services, as well as to share ideas, tips, and best practices in the field, CSU Bakersfield now publishes an assessment newsletter, *Context & Meaning* [doc. 2.6:02 and 2.6:03]. The newsletter features examples of how individual programs use assessment data to improve student learning by, for example, making changes within an individual course in a program, adjusting skill development interventions across courses within the same program, and adding additional coursework to program requirements.

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1 The first issue of Context & Meaning was published in Fall 2016 by the Office for Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment. Most of the articles are written by the School Assessment Coordinators and the General Education Assessment Coordinator. Articles have also been contributed by the Provost; the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research Planning and Assessment; the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs; a research associate for Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment; and, the Dean of Business and Public Administration.
An example of how faculty have made changes to an individual course in response to assessment results comes from the School of Arts and Humanities (AH). Faculty in the Department of Art and Art History focused their 2014-15 assessment efforts on PLO 3.1, (Graduate is able to write about his/her own work within the contexts of art criticism, art history, and art theory):

In a previous assessment of PLO 3.1, senior theses from the program’s capstone course were collected, and following the evaluation of those artifacts, faculty determined that student writing needed improvement. The faculty subsequently implemented three changes to the curriculum: (1) in keeping with the standard for working artists, students were required to reduce their 3-5 page thesis into a 1-page artist statement, (2) multiple faculty members served as guest artists to critique student work, adding to the feedback received from the course instructor, and (3) a faculty member with a background in writing was added as a co-instructor to the senior capstone course. Results of the assessment were positive, with only 1 student failing to meet the benchmark designated by the faculty, and nearly half of graduating seniors exceeding the benchmark.

An example of how faculty have adjusted skill development interventions across courses within a program in response to assessment results comes from the School of Business and Public Administration (BPA).

Assessment of the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) is conducted by a committee which is also tasked with meeting accreditation standards set by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), both internationally recognized organizations. One of the initial tasks that the committee embarked upon, based upon feedback from the AACSB assessment team, was to refine and decrease the set of learning goals and objectives. Additionally, assessment findings indicated that MyWritingLab Plus (MWL Plus) was being used at random throughout BPA and students were beginning to experience MWL Plus fatigue. Based on these findings, MWL Plus and writing assignments have been strategically placed in core courses to facilitate improvements in student writing and increase student motivation in using the MWL Plus program. Using paired t-tests, students’ MWL Plus Mastery scores increased between their sophomore and senior years.

An example of how faculty have added additional coursework to a program’s requirements in response to assessment results comes from the School of Natural Science, Mathematics, and Engineering (NSME).
The Natural Sciences program consists of a core of lower division coursework from the departments of Biology, Chemistry, Geological Sciences, Mathematics, and Physics and Engineering with a concentration selected from one of the science disciplines. The main goal of this program is to produce High School science teachers. The State of California requires potential science teachers to pass the California Subject Exams for Teachers (CSET) in science in order to demonstrate subject matter competency in science. Until recently, the CSET consisted of two general science exams and one depth exam in a discipline chosen by the student; as of August 2017, there is a single general science exam, while the depth option has not changed. Because of the importance of the CSET to students’ career goals, these exams serve as the primary assessment instrument for the program.

The passage rate of Natural Science students for the general science and disciplinary exams was generally above or comparable to that of other CSU Bakersfield STEM majors and the statewide average. However, the passage rate for the disciplinary exams was lower than that for the general science exams and less likely to exceed the comparison groups’ passage rates. In an effort to improve the passage rate for the disciplinary exams, the program faculty used the semester conversion as an opportunity to implement several changes to the Natural Sciences program. Collectively, these changes allowed the addition of required coursework to each of the disciplinary concentrations. The faculty plans to make a pre-post comparison in 4-6 years to assess the effectiveness of these changes.

Finally, an example of how faculty have made changes to the assessment process itself comes from the School of Education and Social Sciences (SSE).

Assessment efforts for the Teacher Education programs are vital to the State and Federal accreditation process. In the previous decade, education archival assessment data filled an entire room in the Education Building. Most education departments are required to assess all of their department’s goals and outcomes either annually or biannually. Several departments have between 20 to 30 goals and outcomes that need to be assessed, with items including dispositional data on students, unit operation surveys for the faculty, signature assignments, rubrics, 5-year trends for signature assignments, exit surveys, and alumni surveys.

Through a series of meetings of the education faculty and staff, a new institutional data collection structure was developed to streamline the process of collecting the data, generating reports, and evaluating whether
or not students meet the expectations of the outside agencies. Faculty now use LiveText for their credentialing accreditation reporting and TaskStream for WSCUC-related assessment reporting. In addition, faculty now gather for an annual summer retreat to evaluate the collected data and to discuss future improvements to existing programs. These changes to the assessment process led to an "Outstanding" report from the Accreditation agency in 2016, an official designation that is rare in the CSU.

Overall, the most recent years of data indicate that faculty find most students to be proficient in the skills and knowledge expected of them. For the 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 assessment cycles, faculty report that students met or exceeded expectations at rates of 68%, 59%, and 79%, respectively [Target Achievement Reports 2.6:41-43]. Similarly, students report that they have gained the skills and knowledge expected. In the AY 2014-15 and 2015-16 Graduating Student Survey, more than half of all students indicated that they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their experience at CSU Bakersfield, and in AY 2016-17, more than three-fourths of all students indicated that they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their experience at CSU Bakersfield [Graduating Student Surveys 2.6:38-40]. For all three years of data, students reported the highest level of proficiency for knowledge of major and ability to work independently. Although the average responses did not drop below the proficient mark, student responses indicate that the areas most in need of improvement concern numerical/quantitative literacy and social/civic/political awareness. In response, many programs seized on the quarter to semester conversion process as an opportunity to incorporate service and experiential learning into their curriculum, and the general education program was revised to include the intentional reinforcement of quantitative reasoning skills at the upper-division level and demonstration of quantitative reasoning proficiency at the time of graduation. The next section offers details on the new general education program, particularly with respect to the areas of strength and weakness relevant to the WSCUC Core Competencies.

4.1.2 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE WSCUC CORE COMPETENCIES (CFRs 2.2a-b, 2.4, 2.6 and 4.3)

The WSCUC Core Competencies of oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy have played an important role in the campus undergraduate curriculum since our last accreditation review. CSU Bakersfield’s University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) reference all five of the WSCUC Core Competencies. The six learning objectives associated with ULO Goal I are focused on critical thinking, and also address written communication and oral communication; the four learning objectives associated with ULO Goal II address written
communication, oral communication, and information literacy; and, the three learning objectives associated with Goal IV focus on quantitative reasoning [2.2a: 08]. These ULOs are widely shared among faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders in the university catalog [link: 2016-18 Catalog] and online [link: CSU Bakersfield Assessment Webpage].

Prior to Fall 2016, the General Education program was primarily responsible for the teaching of the Core Competencies, with additional reinforcement of writing skills mandated for each of the three upper-division area breadth courses covering the natural sciences and technology, arts and humanities, and social and behavioral science (Theme 1, Theme 2, and Theme 3, respectively). For courses in each of these three areas, students were required to write at least one substantial research paper (or other relevant discipline-specific, in-depth paper). The purpose was to ensure some upper-division practice of the writing skills learned at the lower-division level, along with some training in information literacy. In addition, it was expected that critical thinking was reinforced, especially if the students had to provide support for a thesis in the substantial research paper.

Aside from this reinforcement of the Core Competencies, it was expected that the major courses would also provide practice in writing, research, and critical thinking. Quantitative reasoning reinforcement occurred unevenly. Perhaps some quantitative reasoning reinforcement would take place in those same GE areas of natural sciences and technology (Theme 1) and social and behavioral science (Theme 3), but students majoring in these areas would, in their major courses, typically benefit much more from reinforcement of their quantitative reasoning skills (and advanced instruction) than students majoring in arts and humanities disciplines.

On the former GE program, then, reinforcement of the Core Competencies was somewhat uneven, not only with respect to quantitative reasoning skills, but also with respect to the other Core Competencies. The Community Stakeholders Report, which aggregated responses to the survey and summaries of focus group discussions in 2008, showed that community stakeholders generally had a very positive view of CSU Bakersfield students, but only 63% to 79% rated student preparation for critical reasoning, problem solving, and written and oral communication satisfactory or better. These findings influenced the development of a new General Education curriculum.

Now, with the fall 2016 implementation of the new GE program, called Achieving Integration & Mastering Skills (AIMS), CSU Bakersfield demonstrates a stronger commitment to the teaching and reinforcement of the Core Competencies. The GE Program Learning Outcomes (GE PLOs) prominently feature the WSCUC Core Competencies: the five learning outcomes associated with Goal 1 reference oral
communication, written communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy [2.2a:03].

Moreover, the AIMS program embodies a campus commitment to a much more robust, structured approach not only to core competency instruction, but also to the intentional reinforcement of those vital skills in both lower- and upper-division GE courses. First, students must meet the Area A requirements of the AIMS program. This includes instruction in oral communication (A1), written communication (A2), critical thinking (A3), and quantitative reasoning (A4). Second, thematic lower-division courses must reinforce at least one of the Core Competencies, using reinforcement techniques such as scaffolded assignments combined with substantive, developmental feedback given to each student. Third, each of the Area upper-division courses must intentionally reinforce two of the Core Competency skills—UD B (Natural Sciences) must reinforce quantitative reasoning and one other skill; UD C (Arts and Humanities) and UD D (Behavioral and Social Sciences) must reinforce critical thinking and one other skill. Fourth, other GE courses also require intentional reinforcement of particular skills. Junior-Year Diversity and Reflection (JYDR) and American Institutions-History (AI-H) reinforce written communication; American Institutions-Government (AI-G) reinforces critical thinking; and, the senior Capstone course reinforces oral communication.

Instruction in the new GE AIMS program is now both more consistent and more broadly standardized. Consistency is heightened among courses offered by different departments and different instructors which meet the same course-level learning outcomes because each course approved for GE has gone through a course application and review process. In this process, a Master Course Syllabus or Master Course Outline is created to guide the teaching by individual instructors. Prior to approval by the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECCo), courses must demonstrate exactly how they would meet the course-level learning outcomes and course requirements for a particular GE area. Only those that do so in a substantive way are approved for the program. In this way, course instruction across the campus is now significantly more consistent. The teaching of the Core Competencies in the AIMS program is also now standardized, since the instructors are now required to meet in Learning Communities in which “best practices” and other innovations are shared among colleagues teaching the same skill. With our new GE program, students are much more likely to have a similar learning experience in one of the Core Competency courses, regardless of the department that offers the approved course, and regardless of the instructor.

To prepare for the launching of the AIMS program, a GE Faculty Assessment Coordinator (GE FAC) position was created and filled in 2014. The GE FAC attended the WASC Assessment Leadership Academy in 2014 and focused her work on the
development of a comprehensive assessment plan for the AIMS program [GE Assessment Report doc. 2.6:19]. During the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years, four critical tasks were accomplished. First, five teams of faculty attended WASC Core Competency educational programs [doc. 2.6:18 and ppt. 2.6:17]. Each team was composed of at least three individuals, such as the GE Faculty Director, the GE Faculty Assessment Coordinator (GE FAC), the GE Learning Community Facilitators (GE LCFs), members of the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECCo), an instructional librarian, and the campus Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Second, GE Program Learning Outcomes (GE PLOs) were developed and approved by GECCo [doc. 2.6:18]. These GE PLOs were mapped to the ULOs and a curriculum map of all approved GE courses were mapped to the GE PLOs [ppt. 2.6:15]. Third, an assessment of four of the Core Competencies—oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning—was completed to set a baseline against which the AIMS program could be measured [doc. 2.6:18]. These assessments took place in upper-division courses “at or near the time of graduation.” The oral communication SLOs were assessed in senior seminar courses; written communication was assessed through the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) exam; critical thinking was assessed in upper-division Theme 2 and Theme 3 courses and in the GWAR exam; and quantitative reasoning was assessed in Theme 1 courses [doc. 2.4:08]. Fourth, a five-year assessment plan was developed to measure at least two GE PLOs per year [ppt. 2.6:17]. Oral communication will again be assessed in 2020-21 in the GE Capstone courses; written communication will be assessed in 2018-19 through the GWAR exam and in JYDR courses; critical thinking will be assessed in 2018-19 through the GWAR exam and in 2019-20 in UD C and UD D courses; and quantitative reasoning will next be assessed in 2019-20 in the UD B courses.

The results of the baseline assessment study completed in AY 2015-16 indicate that CSU Bakersfield students are most successful at meeting the performance standards associated with written communication: 70% met or exceeded expectations for developing ideas using effective examples and/or evidence; and 79% met or exceeded expectations for coherently organizing ideas [link: GE Assessment AY 2015-16]. This relatively high level of achievement of written communication skills is particularly remarkable, given the low level of preparation for college among our predominantly low-income student population that includes many English Language Learners. On the other hand, these results demonstrate the effectiveness of the composition program at CSU Bakersfield, which includes a Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum workshop offered to faculty on an annual basis, as well as the use of MyWritingLab Plus in various courses throughout the curriculum.
Student achievement of the performance standards associated with oral communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning was more troubling. With regard to oral communication, 55% of artifacts in the sample met or exceeded expectations for organization, 54% met or exceeded expectations for use of supporting material, 39% met or exceeded expectations for delivery, and 57% met or exceeded expectations for language choice [link: GE Assessment AY 2015-16]. With respect to critical thinking, 60% of artifacts in the sample met or exceeded expectations for argument construction, while results for argument analysis widely varied depending on the prompt—from 15% meeting or exceeding expectations to 75% meeting or exceeding expectations—and results for argument evaluation varying from 20% to 38% meeting or exceeding expectations. With respect to quantitative reasoning, results also varied depending on the prompt: 75% to 88% met expectations for calculation/estimation; 25% to 91% met expectations for quantitative reasoning; and 19% to 88% met expectations for application of quantitative reasoning skills. Baseline data for information literacy was collected in 2017-18 in the First-Year Seminar and senior Capstone courses and has not yet been analyzed. We hope that our newly focused attention on the intentional cultivation of the Core Competencies throughout the AIMS program will improve student achievement of our expectations.

Because our new GE program has only been in place for a short time, we do evidence of the extent to which the AIMS program has improved student achievement of the WSCUC Core Competencies. However, assessment planning began even before the actual courses were approved for the program. For example, each area of GE has course-level student learning outcomes and course requirements put into place only after extensive consultation with faculty who were teaching in those areas prior to the introduction of the new program. So, to give one instance, all faculty who taught pre-fall 2016 critical thinking courses were invited in the spring of 2014 to gather with campus colleagues who were teaching courses meeting same GE requirement. It was usually the case that these meetings began with discussions around what we expected students to be able to do when they successfully completed any course in a particular GE area. Notes from the discussion were typed and distributed to the instructors in that area, and a second meeting occurred in which amendments and changes were brought forward and discussed. As a result, each area had its SLOs and requirements in place before the call for courses in those areas went out to the faculty and departments. These SLOs and requirements provided the primary criteria for determining whether a particular course was approved for the new GE program. Moreover, a General Education Summer Institute was held August 17-20, 2015, to orient faculty to the new expectations regarding the reinforcement of the Core Competencies throughout the AIMS curriculum. Approximately 120 faculty members participated in at least one of the eight sessions offered during the four-day event [GE Assessment Cycle doc.2.6:16].
In the meantime, we have implemented a structure for responding to the results of annual assessment findings through a number of initiatives. For example, professional development opportunities are regularly offered to assist faculty in improving instruction, including Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum workshops and Faculty Learning Community workshops focused on teaching the Core Competencies. We are also piloting several interventions to improve student learning outcomes, such as Supplemental Instruction for critical thinking and Supplemental Instruction for quantitative reasoning. Finally, several GE faculty members are piloting the use of ePortfolios, which serve to both collect artifacts of student work and give students the opportunity to reflect on their learning achievement in the AIMS program.

**4.1.3 UNDERGRADUATE LEARNING (CFRs 2.2a-b, 2.4 and 4.3)**

In the preceding sections, we have discussed evidence of student achievement in majors for each of the four schools—Arts and Humanities; Business and Public Administration; Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Engineering; and Social Sciences and Education—as well as student achievement with respect to the WSCUC Core Competencies of oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy through the general education program. Our strengths include efforts to build a culture of assessment throughout all undergraduate academic programs and a new emphasis on the concerted cultivation of the WSCUC Core Competencies through the AIMS program. Every degree program has developed and made public their program learning outcomes, mapped their PLOs to the university learning outcomes, and mapped their course offerings to their PLOs. The majority of degree programs are engaged in annual assessment efforts to both ascertain student achievement of learning outcomes and to make improvements to their programs based upon that data. Further, the structure of the new general education program, AIMS, offers cross-campus collaboration among faculty to improve student learning of the Core Competencies both within the general education program and in the various majors.

Moving forward, we must not only maintain a campus-wide culture of assessment in which all academic programs complete assessment on an annual basis and successful teaching innovations are widely shared and adopted across units, we must also publicize the success stories about how assessment results have positively impacted student learning and programmatic development. In addition, we must carefully examine the results of upcoming assessments of the Core Competencies through the GE program to ensure that student learning is meeting our expectations and continue to
make improvements particularly with regard to oral communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy.

### 4.2 GRADUATE STUDENT LEARNING (CFRs 2.2a-b, 2.4 and 4.3)

In Essay 3, we outlined how students graduating from CSU Bakersfield with a masters or EdD degree will possess the knowledge and skills identified in the four University Learning Outcomes for Graduate Programs [ULOGP doc. 2.3:16]. The four learning outcomes define, in broad terms, minimum expectations for all graduate students but every program establishes the desired level of competency for each goal depending on its location in the program’s learning objectives. It is anticipated that students will acquire these proficiencies through diverse curricular and co-curricular strategies developed by each program. Program learning outcomes will be developed to align with the ULOGP, the university’s framework for knowledge and skills acquisition at the graduate level. In this section we provide evidence of graduate student learning by drawing from assessment results for select graduate programs. However, it should be noted that every graduate program at CSU Bakersfield has program-specific learning outcomes that are regularly measured and assessed to improve teaching effectiveness and program quality.

The Degree Qualifications Profile advocates infusing integrative knowledge at all levels of a student’s learning experience and not merely relegating it to the first two years of the undergraduate collegiate curriculum [DQP doc. 2.6:30]. Consistent with this line of thinking, the first university wide goal for all graduate students at CSU Bakersfield is to demonstrate how their field of study has developed with regards to other disciplines. Students should also be able to articulate the ‘significance and implications’ of their specialized work within a social and global context. Several graduate programs at CSU Bakersfield have incorporated this goal into learning objectives for all students in their disciplines. For example, the MA program in Curriculum and Instruction aspires to create a teacher leader who, “shares information with colleagues within and/or beyond the district regarding how local, state and national trends and policies can impact classroom practices and expectation for student learning” [2.2b:04]. Similarly, one of the learning objectives for MS Nursing students is to “expand knowledge and evaluate nursing theories and theories from related disciplines as a basis for advanced roles and nursing practice” [2.2b:03]. Student learning related to this learning outcome is regularly assessed through direct and indirect measures in several of CSU Bakersfield’s graduate programs.

All CSU Bakersfield graduate students are also expected to develop specialized knowledge in their area of study. As an illustration, the graduate program in English has
developed learning outcomes for its students in three subject specific areas of specializations: linguistics; composition; and literature. In 2014-15, the department assessed students’ ability to apply critical theory in the analysis of a literary text, one of their literature learning outcomes. The results indicated that significant value was added to the students’ learning experience by taking the core course in Criticism. The faculty’s reflection at the end of the assessment cycle underscore their abiding commitment to student learning: “My goal in this course is arrive at a set of theoretical readings that is simultaneously challenging, up-to-date, and suited to most students’ tastes. The last consideration has been the most difficult to gauge (taste), but this fall 2014’s readings were the most enthusiastically received by far … Either way, continuing to change the reading set along the lines of the last adjustments will undoubtedly further enhance student success and engagement in the class” [link: Department Assessment]. It should be noted that this pattern is repeated in several assessment cycles in the department of English for other learning goals highlighting how one graduate program at CSU Bakersfield cultivates student success through active student engagement.

Graduate programs at CSU Bakersfield have developed program level learning outcomes that require students to demonstrate intellectual skills such as analytic inquiry, use of information resources, engaging diverse perspectives, and quantitative and communication fluency that are more advanced than undergraduate learning experiences. The graduate program in Administration, for example, measures several of these intellectual skills using students’ competency portfolios. Assessment results indicated that seventy-five percent of students met the target level of competency while the remaining twenty-five percent exceeded the target. This is a result of faculty providing intentional support to help students achieve learning outcomes. They provided students guidance on how to: “(1) select a project topic of interest; (2) write a one-page synopsis to explain their interest in the topic; (3) write a three-page project proposal to present some preliminary findings and elaborate on expected project outcomes, and cite several resources; (4) submit a draft to first and second readers for comments and suggestions for improvement; (5) revise the draft accordingly to prepare the final copy of the project; and (6) develop a PowerPoint slide presentation of project highlights and post it on Discussion Board for all other students to read and comment. The project grade was distributed in such a way that students received credit for completion of each component” [link: Department Assessment]. As an additional example, the Educational Counseling program assessed their students’ capacity to utilize technology in counseling. The faculty administered to students who were in the middle of their program of study a Technical Competencies Electronic Portfolio that was developed by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision in 2016. All students, one hundred percent, scored within the target or acceptable range [link: Department Assessment].
The fourth broadly defined university learning outcome for all graduate programs, conducting applied research, is typified in the History department’s program specific goal of having their students present research at professional conferences. Assessment results in 2016 indicated that 21 History graduate students had presented at professional conferences during the previous six years. This outcome exceeded the department faculty’s expectation who were, in turn, motivated by these findings to have more of their students present a project requiring application of advanced knowledge in an out-of-class setting [link: Department Assessment]. Similarly, Biology graduate students are expected to demonstrate, “advanced ability to develop an original and independent research idea and design in the form of a written proposal.” The department assessed this goal in 2015-16 and found that all of their graduate students were able to write and present scientific proposals with a mean score exceeding ninety percent. Buoyed by these results the faculty noted: “As part of this activity, we developed a program-approved instruction document on proposal writing. We are going to continue to use this document to assist students in developing scientifically themed proposals” [link: Department Assessment]. As a final example of conducting applied research, Social Work graduate students are assessed on their ability to advance human rights and social and economic justice as well engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research. The program used 35 advanced practice behaviors to evaluate students’ performance in the ‘field.’ Their assessment results indicated that slightly more than eight-five percent (85%) of all students demonstrated competency in this area [link: Department Assessment].

The preceding section demonstrates that CSU Bakersfield graduate programs have established standards of performance that are more sophisticated and challenging than those at prior degree levels. Each program establishes its own set of learning outcomes that align with University-wide educational objectives for all graduate students which are to promote specialized and integrative learning; provide opportunities for practicing intellectual skills; and conduct applied learning. Graduate programs use ongoing assessment to ascertain that student learning is being accomplished at the desired standard of expectation and use assessment results to improve student learning, where necessary.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

This essay describes how CSU Bakersfield documents students’ development and attainment of knowledge and skills consistent with the goals of their respective degrees. At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the data show that the vast majority of CSU Bakersfield’s programs are consistently achieving faculty-set learning outcomes.
Equally, the data show that CSU Bakersfield recognizes important areas in which to improve the achievement of student learning. Importantly, CSU Bakersfield harnesses the WSCUC Core Competencies to build effective learning experiences. CSU Bakersfield’s University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) are built around all five of the WSCUC Core Competencies: oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy, and, the campus’ new GE Program Learning Outcomes (GE PLOs) prominently feature the WSCUC Core Competencies. Finally, this essay explains how the Degree Qualifications Profile infuses integrative knowledge throughout the graduate learning experience. It also demonstrates how the Degree Qualifications Profile was used to develop University Learning Outcomes for Graduate Programs (ULOGP). In Essay 5, the relation between these measures of performance and student success will be shown in detail.