



HOUGHTON
UNIVERSITY



Middle States Commission on Higher Education
Reaccreditation Self-Study
April 2024

[THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK]

Contents

Introduction/Executive Summary	5
CHAPTER 1—STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND GOALS	8
Overview	8
Description of lines of inquiry	8
Assessment and analysis of evidence	8
Areas of strength.....	21
Opportunities for improvement	22
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	22
CHAPTER 2—STANDARD TWO: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY	23
Overview	23
Description of lines of inquiry	23
Assessment and analysis of evidence	23
Areas of strength.....	32
Opportunities for improvement	33
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	33
CHAPTER 3—STANDARD THREE: DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE	34
Overview	34
Description of lines of inquiry	34
Assessment and analysis of evidence	34
Areas of strength	49
Opportunities for improvement	50
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	50
CHAPTER 4—STANDARD FOUR: SUPPORT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE	51
Overview	51
Description of lines of inquiry	51
Assessment and analysis of evidence	51
Areas of strength.....	72
Opportunities for improvement	72
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	73
CHAPTER 5—STANDARD FIVE: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT	74
Overview	74
Description of lines of inquiry	74
Assessment analysis of evidence	74

Areas of strength.....	86
Opportunities for improvement	86
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	87
CHAPTER 6—STANDARD SIX: PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT	88
Overview	88
Description of lines of inquiry.....	88
Assessment and analysis of evidence	88
Areas of strength.....	102
Opportunities for improvement	102
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	102
CHAPTER 7—STANDARD SEVEN: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND ADMINISTRATION	103
Overview	103
Description of lines of inquiry.....	103
Assessment and analysis of evidence	103
Areas of strength.....	110
Opportunities for improvement	110
Initial strategies for continuous quality improvement	111
Conclusion.....	112

INTRODUCTION/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNIVERSITY HISTORY

Houghton University, an educational institution of The Wesleyan Church, seeks to prepare “scholar servants” for effective engagement with the rapidly changing world of the 21st century. As “scholars,” students are trained not only in the theoretical knowledge of their fields but also in how to apply that knowledge to practical circumstances in this country and around the world. As “servants,” students are inspired to steward their gifts humbly and graciously in the name of Jesus Christ in whatever circumstances God calls them to serve. To be prepared to serve effectively, a Houghton graduate must develop skills in listening, reading, written and spoken communication, computation, problem-solving, logical reasoning, and value discrimination.

All Houghton University community members, including students, commit to Houghton’s Vision of Our Common Life. This commitment signals that all community members desire to live together in Christian community and fellowship. The Student Guide gives a more complete statement of expectations for community life that includes student behavior and lifestyle. As part of the University’s commitment to community life, the Houghton University community gathers for chapel several times a week.

Houghton University was established in 1883 as a seminary (high school) under the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. Coeducational from its founding, Houghton operated as a secondary school for its first 15 years. The Institution has been committed from its conception to making a high-quality, deeply Christian education available to those would not otherwise have this kind of opportunity. Thus, affordability, accessibility, and global engagement—as well as high quality education and deeply Christian faith—have been consistent trademarks of a Houghton education throughout its history. Beginning in 1899, a few college classes were offered—sufficient to allow the college department’s first diploma to be awarded in 1901. Early principals of the school were Wesleyan Methodist pastors willing to accept the job, but, in 1908, Houghton acquired its first academically trained president, James S. Luckey, who served until his death in 1937.

Thanks in large part to President Luckey’s persistent efforts, Houghton College (now University) received its provisional charter from New York State in 1923 and awarded its first 19 bachelor degrees two years later. A permanent charter was granted in 1927 followed by full accreditation by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges in 1935.

Throughout its history, Houghton has affirmed that an education grounded in a deep sense of believers’ identity as God’s children and a commitment to excellence in critical thinking, communication, and community formation is the best preparation for a lifetime of effectiveness and impact in the ever-changing circumstances of the 21st-century world.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Houghton University serves four primary student populations: early college high school students, recent high school graduates (traditional 18-22 year olds), post-traditional “adult” learners (ages 23+), and graduate students. The students are served through the Houghton, NY, residential campus; the Buffalo, NY, location; and online.

Fall 2023 enrollment data reports indicate that total enrollment across all programs and locations was 910 students. Of that total, 705 were traditional main-campus undergraduate students, 58 were online adult undergraduate students, 96 were early college online high school students, 14 were taking some coursework in Buffalo, and 37 were spread across three graduate programs. The institutional return rate from spring 2023 to fall 2023 for all residential students was 90%.

A majority (76%) of students come to Houghton from the Northeast portion of the United States. Nearly 80% identify as White, 8.3% identify as Other, 4.6% identify as Two or More Races, 4.2% identify as Black, 1.7% identify as Asian, 1% identify as Hispanic, and less than 1% identify as Native American. International and Canadian students make up about 8% of the student population. Although the University is religiously affiliated with The Wesleyan Church, only about 9% of students identify as Wesleyan. The remaining 91% of students identify with other faith backgrounds, traditions, and denominations.

Of the 58 teaching faculty, 53 are full time and 5 are part time; 50/58 (86%) hold terminal degrees. Of the 11 non-teaching faculty, 7/11 (64%) hold terminal degrees. Racially, 50 (94%) of the full-time teaching faculty and 4 (80%) of the part-time faculty identify as White. Of the non-teaching faculty, 10 (91%) identify as White. In terms of gender, 21/58 (36%) of the teaching faculty are female and 4/11 (36%) of non-teaching faculty are female. Of the 109 staff, 57 (52%) are female and 52 (48%) are male; 89% are full time. Racially, 96% of staff identify as White and 4% identify as Black or African American.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

The Steering Committee began the process by attending the self-study institute in fall 2021. The committee then selected a wide cross section of the campus community—including faculty, staff, students, Board of Trustees, and administrative representation—to serve as primary participants in the review process.

In January 2022, at the launch of the University-wide self-study process, and by March of 2022, the following institutional priorities were identified:

1. Enrollment growth across all programs
 - Including increased racial/ethnic and geographic diversity of students
2. Strengthened financial position of the University through:
 - Increasing student admission (FY, transfer, and graduate) and retention
 - Continuing endowment growth through strategic investments
 - Expanding the University's base of major donors
3. Improve employee recruitment and retention through:
 - Increasing salaries and enhancing benefits
 - Providing enhanced opportunities for employee development, growth, and advancement

Next, the intended outcomes of the Houghton University self-study were agreed upon by the Executive Leadership Cabinet, and all University employees.

1. Demonstrate how the Institution currently meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation (MSCHE required)
2. Focus on continuous improvement in the attainment of the Institution's mission and its institutional priorities (MSCHE required)

3. Engage the institutional community in an inclusive and transparent self-appraisal process that actively and deliberately seeks to involve members from all areas of the institutional community (MSCHE required)
4. Use the self-study process to inform the development of the next strategic plan (Houghton University identified)

Houghton University administration and the Steering Committee chose to use a standards-based approach to organize the self-study process. It is believed that the standards-based approach allows for wider campus inclusion of all faculty and staff who have differentiated levels of knowledge, skills, and experiences in institutional accreditation, including self-study processes and outcomes.

Each standards sub-committee (working group) was co-chaired by both a faculty member and a staff member from across campus who had been charged with ensuring that the working group accomplishes the tasks required. This approach was strategic to ensure that a broad representation existed on each standard team. It is understood that the experience of a faculty member may be different from a staff member, and their individual perspectives will add value and contribute to the self-study documents and process. Consequently, all members of the University community have been afforded the opportunity to be part of the process. The self-study co-chairs, Ann Monroe-Baillargeon and Bill Burcher, met regularly to review and discuss progress across all teams.

Upon completion, the University believes that the intended outcomes of this self-study process have been fully achieved as evidenced in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 1

STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND GOALS

OVERVIEW

Houghton’s historic mission—to provide a pathway for individuals to radically alter the social and economic trajectory of their lives through a high-quality, Christ-centered education—began in 1883 with the residents of Allegany County and has grown to include students from 37 states and 17 countries. Houghton’s mission has evolved to its current mission statement and yet has remained unchanged at its core throughout our history. The Wesleyan Church has had an emphasis on higher education from its beginning. As the oldest established higher education institution of The Wesleyan Church, Houghton provides a biblically centered framework with excellence in academics, which then enables society and the church to be stronger because Houghton’s affiliates are thinking deeper about the issues America’s culture is facing. Throughout Houghton’s history—whether Houghton Seminary at our founding by The Wesleyan Church (then Wesleyan Methodist Connection), Houghton College, or since 2022 Houghton University—its focus and mission have never wavered.

A clear mission and accompanying goals are central at Houghton. The University’s recent strategic plan and priorities illustrate our mission-aligned goals relevant to its current context. This chapter demonstrates how the University’s mission and goals have advanced at Houghton since the previous 2015 self-study.

The Houghton University community engaged in an in-depth review and analysis of its mission and goals to examine if the mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, equips the students it serves, and does what it intends to accomplish. Upon this exploration, the University community determined its stated goals are linked directly to its mission, and these goals specify how this mission is fulfilled. We have determined that Houghton University has sufficiently achieved all criteria included in this standard, as well as Requirements of Affiliation 7 and 10.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

Three lines of inquiry have guided the University’s consideration of the effectiveness of Houghton University’s mission and goals in defining its purpose, serving its students, and fulfilling its mission. The lines of inquiry are:

1. How do the mission and goals inform academic work and student life?
2. How well is Houghton University fulfilling its mission by determining to what degree the mission is understood, valued, and enacted across the institution?
3. How does Houghton serve students through its mission by evaluating the outcome evidence that exists to demonstrate that Houghton is accomplishing its mission and goals in the lives of its students and graduates?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Criterion 1a. *An accredited institution has a clearly defined mission and goals that are developed through appropriate collaborative participation by all who facilitate or are otherwise responsible for institutional development and improvement.*

Houghton University's mission statement was first adopted February 24, 1995 (1.4.1 College Catalog) and has roots in the vision that was set by the founding leaders who wanted to provide a Christian education to the poor boys and girls of Allegany County. The current mission statement reads, "Houghton University provides an academically challenging, Christ-centered education in the liberal arts and sciences to students from diverse traditions and economic backgrounds and equips them to lead and labor as scholar-servants in a changing world." From the early beginnings until now, the University has engaged in collaborative efforts to communicate its mission to internal and external stakeholders and to ensure that the institution is living out its mission and goals in effective, honest and authentic fashion.

Throughout collaborative strategic planning since the 2015 self-study, the University's mission has provided a clear foundation and guidance for goal setting and planning. In each iteration, members of University leadership groups (e.g., Board of Trustees, President's Advisory Board), administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni had a voice in guiding their development and implementation. Elements from the mission have remained as pillars in the University's planning and goal setting. Key words from the mission statement—academically challenging, Christ-centered education, the liberal arts and sciences, students from diverse traditions, students with diverse economic backgrounds, equipping students to lead and labor as scholar-servants, within a changing world—have guided the University's goal setting and remained central throughout each of its plans. Illustratively, in 2015, elements from the mission statement were mapped out for alignment with Ologie (Marketing Consultant), Pillars the Institution's values, the results of a task force on the University's niche market, and the University's educational learning outcomes—each had to be aligned with one of six components from the mission statement (1.1.a.13 2015 Mapping Mission Pillars).

In 2017, a campus-wide collaborative Campus Strategic Planning Task Force was formed to partner with the administration on strategic planning (1.1.a.12 Strategic Plan Minutes 12-6-22). It was comprised of (a) administration, including the Provost (chair), Vice President for Finance, Executive Director of Institutional Research, and the President (ex officio); (b) faculty, including the Faculty Moderator and three members of the faculty designated by the Faculty Concerns Committee; (c) staff, including the President of the Staff Cabinet and one other member of staff designated by Staff Cabinet; and (d) students, including the Student Body President or designated representative of that office. The task force was charged with monitoring the action plan, analyzing factors, preparing updates for the Board of Trustees, ensuring two-way communication with the campus community, advising on appropriate refining, and updating the plan (1.1.a.14 2017 Strategic Advisory Group).

In 2019, in preparation for the development of the 2020-2023 strategic plan, Preparing Our Future, the Board of Trustees and the President's staff reviewed the Institution's external context, conducted a full STEEPLE (social, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal, and ethical) analysis, and identified the three most important issues driving strategic change: (a) demographic changes, (b) technological changes, and (c) the regulatory environment of higher education (1.1.a.15 2019-12-10 Silent Phase of Strategic Plan 2020-23).

It is important to note that this mission and associated goals have been developed and affirmed across the Institution. The Board of Trustees (BOT) regularly considers both the mission and the resultant decisions that impact the University. For example, in March 2019, the BOT requested community feedback as they were thinking about and discussing future planning. The Executive Leadership Cabinet (group was formerly titled "President's Staff") regularly engages in discussions on strategic plans and

goals (1.1.g.2 Cabinet Excerpts). Faculty meeting minutes (1.1.a.5 Faculty Herald) demonstrate faculty involvement in questions of strategic planning, Community Covenant revision, and engagement in defining the mission and goals of the Institution. Institutional staff actively engage with policy and process, providing insight, direction, and feedback regarding institutional resources, procedures, governance, working conditions, and professional development (1.1.a.3 Staff Council, 1.1.a.6 Staff Survey). Students are regularly included in decision making that impacts their experience across campus as evidenced by student participation in each of the major University councils. The Student Council appoints representatives to various committees as seen in the Campus Assessment that considered physical space and facilities utilization (1.1.a.2 Campus Assessment). Both first-year and senior students regularly report higher than mean scores from comparable institutions on “I feel valued by this institution” and “I feel like part of the community at this institution” in their responses on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (1.1.a.16 NSSE 2020).

During the 2022-2023 academic year, the University engaged in a deliberate and detailed process of developing its 2023-2028 Strategic Plan—Pursuing Christ-Centered Excellence. This process included discussions with the Board of Trustees, Executive Leadership Cabinet, faculty, staff, and students (1.1.a.10 Strategic Plan Timetable). This year-long process sought to engage individuals from across the entire University, resulting in a final strategic plan that will guide the University through the next five years (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan-2023).

Criterion 1b. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates a clearly defined mission and goals that address external as well as internal contexts and constituencies.*

Houghton has several documents that demonstrate its mission and goals to both internal and external constituencies. Taken together, these describe more fully Houghton’s mission to these stakeholders.

- Mission Statement
- Doctrinal Statement
- A Vision of Our Common Life
- Core Belief and Values from Houghton’s sponsoring denomination, The Wesleyan Church

Houghton University ensures that it remains mission driven by cultivating understanding and support for this identity and mission among external and internal stakeholders. The mission statement appears in multiple locations on the University’s website; in the academic catalogs; in faculty and staff handbooks; and in various promotional materials and policy statements. Candidates for employment are prompted to review the following three documents, which articulate some of the key positions of Houghton University and The Wesleyan Church. Employees are asked to subscribe to these statements: (a) Mission Statement, (b) Doctrinal Statement, (c) A Vision of Our Common Life, and (d) Core Beliefs and values (1.1.a.17 Doctrinal Statement; 1.1.a.8 Common Life; Wesleyan.org). Orientations for new employees and new trustees and ongoing professional development programs expound on these essential commitments. The mission statement is prominently displayed in the Dieter Board Room and, in 2022, was added to the administration building outside the President’s suite.

Also in 2022, Houghton University celebrated the transition from College to a University. The messaging remained consistent to both internal and external stakeholders, reaffirming the University’s commitment to the unchanged mission. President Wayne D. Lewis, Jr., stated, “As we celebrate, I want to assure you that even as our name has now changed, our mission remains the same. We remain steadfast and unapologetic in our commitment to providing a Christ-centered, academically challenging

education, equipping them [students] to lead and labor as scholar-servants...” (1.1.b.3 Houghton Magazine 2023).

The context in which the University is operating is continually changing. Throughout the 2019 silent phase of the development of the 2020-2023 strategic plan, *Preparing Our Future*, the leadership boards and administration reviewed both the external and internal context and recognized the basic similarities in external and internal realities, though perhaps evidencing even greater intensity and urgency—and therefore similarity in priorities. Following the April 2019 Board meeting, it became clear from preliminary admissions data that the polarization in Houghton’s sponsoring denomination, as well as across the applicant pool and across the University’s culture, were key additional elements that had to be included among the key external factors that will be driving strategic change.

Externally, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University relied heavily on its guiding documents as it created principles for decision making. A few brief highlights of some of the ways in which Houghton has acted within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that demonstrate the Middle States Standards for Accreditation are as follows:

- In planning for the re-opening of campus for fall 2020, the administration hosted Student Listening Groups in June 2020, asking students to identify the two things they were most concerned about in re-opening.
- Various teams were created: the PREP Team (President, Provost, CFO, VP of Student Life, and Chief of Staff) and a COVID Task Force and Student Care Team (VP of Student Life, Director of Residence Life, Metz Food Service Manager, and Director of the Health Center).
- At the onset, with an original extension of spring break, the administration held a COVID-19—question and answer session with faculty and staff on Friday March 13, 2020 in CFA recital hall.
- The development of a re-opening plan included Houghton-specific principles—based on the mission, the campus ethos, and the sponsoring denomination—that guided the decision making moving forward through the context of the global pandemic:
 - Thoroughly evaluate and minimize risks based on available information.
 - Limit capacity for care: the goal was to minimize spread on campus and prevent outbreaks.
 - Reduce unnecessary risk by stewarding resources well.
 - Proactively communicate risk for vulnerable populations on and off campus
 - Limit impact on students’ academic progress.
 - Prioritize collective safety while creating reasonable avenues for personal conscience to evaluate individual risks (1.1.b.5 Restarting On-Campus).

One of the realities of a university is that it must balance its efforts to continually look both inward and outward as decisions are made, priorities are established, and outcomes are measured. Houghton has done an excellent job of leveraging both of these perspectives as it seeks to be true to mission. As the process of self-study began, a survey was sent to internal constituents seeking feedback (1.1.b.1 Outcome Survey). Likewise, the recent strategic plan development process demonstrated the same practice of engaging feedback across all levels of the Institution from the Board of Trustees to students.

The Houghton Magazine (1.1.b.3 Houghton Magazine) has a distribution list of over 17,000 recipients. This is one of the major tools used to inform alumni, family, and friends about the Institution. It highlights what is happening on campus and what alumni are doing around the world after graduation. As a result of this distribution, the Alumni Office and Advancement Office regularly receive comments,

feedback, and questions from constituents regarding content (1.1.b.4 Magazine Feedback). This feedback is considered during bi-weekly Advancement Office strategic planning meetings, which regularly include the President and the Editorial Board. It is through publications like this that the institution can demonstrate continued mission focus on diversity of its alumni, their service to the world, and their support for the mission of the Institution.

Criterion 1c. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates a clearly defined mission and goals that are approved and supported by the governing body.*

Houghton University is an education corporation chartered by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York under Section 216 of the Education Law of the State of New York and is a charitable corporation under the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York. Pursuant to Section 601(a) of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law, the University shall have no members. The Board of Regents granted a provisional charter April 7, 1923, made absolute June 20, 1927 and updated occasionally with the most recent update on July 11, 2022, establishing the change to University status (1.1.c.4 Institutional Charter).

A unique context for Houghton is its strong relationship with its sponsoring denomination, The Wesleyan Church. Although there are multiple structures for Christian higher education institutions, Houghton's context is that the sponsoring denomination, through its General Board, grants final approval for new appointments and renewal terms for members of the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is the governing body of the University under the Standards of the Church (1.1.c.3.a BOT Bylaws). Its single employee is the President of the University who serves as Chief Executive and provides administrative leadership for the University. The Board of Trustee membership must, as required by the General Board Standards for Educational Institutions and the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, be comprised of at least two-thirds of individuals who are members of The Wesleyan Church. This provision is in place to ensure that the governing body of the Institution remains in alignment with the doctrine and beliefs of the Church.

The Wesleyan Church is Houghton's founding and sponsoring denomination. According to the Standards of The Wesleyan Church for Educational Institutions (1.1.c.3.b Wesleyan Standards), the General Board of The Wesleyan Church sets the Standards as broad guidelines for the operation of each its educational institutions (GBP-2110) and establishes the structure of the control of Wesleyan educational institutions to be such as to perpetuate these institutions as a responsible arm of the total ministry of The Wesleyan Church (GBP-2114). By the Discipline of The Wesleyan Church, Houghton's President serves as a member of the University's Board of Trustees, a non-voting member of the General Board of The Wesleyan Church, and a voting delegate to the Church's quadrennial General Conference.

Outlined in Standard GBP-2130, The Wesleyan Church views its educational mission comprehensively and does not believe that education should be isolated from the mainstream of church life. The General Conference of the denomination systematizes the financial contributions in support of the educational institutions and defines certain broad patterns of governance. The General Board of the denomination determines the Standards of The Wesleyan Church for Educational Institutions and elects members of the Board of Trustees to govern each institution. Each board is so constituted, and its powers so defined, as to provide for the integration of the school and the denomination (1.1.c.3.b Wesleyan Standards).

The BOT reviews, changes/affirms, and approves Houghton's institutional mission statement, strategic plans, guiding policies, and practices of the University as outlined in governance documents. Houghton

is responsible to and governed by the commitments of Wesleyan doctrines and discipline. Similarly, the Church has affirmed Houghton's mission and goals.

The Houghton University Board of Trustees bylaws constitute the provisions for the governance of the University by its Board of Trustees under the Standards of The Wesleyan Church. The Board of Trustees is responsible for observance of the Standards (The Wesleyan Church) as from time to time adopted or revised and declared by the General Board of The Wesleyan Church. Title to the property of the University shall be held by the Board of Trustees of the University in trust for the use and benefit of The Wesleyan Church, subject to the requirement that the University Board of Trustees may not at any time sell, lease, exchange, mortgage, pledge, transfer, or otherwise dispose of all or substantially all of its assets without the express approval of the General Board of The Wesleyan Church.

Criterion 1d. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates a clearly defined mission and goals that guide faculty, administration, staff, and governing structures in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program and curricular development, and the definition of institutional and educational outcomes.*

As part of a commitment to shared governance, the faculty of Houghton has input into the mission and goals of the University. As stated in the Faculty Handbook (section 2.5, page 2-6): "The faculty has biweekly faculty meetings, as scheduled by the academic dean (provost), where pertinent campus issues are discussed and appropriate faculty recommendations considered.... Most issues are presented to the faculty, by faculty committees, although individual faculty members may bring issues to the floor. It is expected that all policy changes and all substantive matters for consideration by the faculty will be published in the Faculty Herald and distributed to the faculty prior to consideration at a faculty meeting." An example of shared governance in action can be seen during the 2020 strategic plan development where former President Shirley Mullen requested feedback from faculty (1.1.c.2.a Faculty Feedback, 1.1.c.2.b Governance Response) that helped to shape the administration's completion of this important transition plan.

A strong and clearly articulated mission consistently guides decisions that are made across the University. In September of 2020, then-President Shirley Mullen announced an historic tuition reset decision. She stated in an email to the faculty and staff of Houghton, "...in keeping with our historic Mission, we want to take a Houghton education to today's learners who would not otherwise have a high-quality Christian education, and for whom that education can make all the difference in the trajectory of their lives" (1.1.d.7.b Tuition Reset President Email). This decision, which emphasized choice and pricing transparency, was made with students in mind, ensuring that all students had access to an education that fit their needs and situation. As noted in a press release published at the same time, "This milestone is a major move for the Christian institution and represents the latest embodiment of Houghton College's longstanding mission to provide a high-quality Christian education to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and life circumstances..." (1.1.d.7.c Tuition Reset Press Release).

Several additional task force initiatives, related to several mission-focused goals, were established to solicit engagement from across the Institution. For example, the minutes from the September 2021 Online Task Force summarizes a discussion related to membership, and the role and function of this task force focused on serving online students and programs (1.1. d.3 Online Task Force Minutes). Another example is the Canadian Recruitment BOT Task Force that worked to "develop a long-term strategy for recruitment of [students], marketing, visits, relationships with high schools, churches and multiple audiences (residential, online, graduate)" (1.1.d.8 Canadian Task Force).

As the mission statement articulates, Houghton provides a “Christ-centered education” that is rooted in the Wesleyan tradition. One significant representation of this commitment is the requirement that all students receiving a bachelor-level degree must successfully complete nine academic credits of biblical literature, introduction to Christianity, and one elective course in Bible or theology (1.1.d.5.a Bible-Theo Requirements). The Office of Spiritual Life at Houghton is “built on the idea of developing a rhythm of worship, where we consistently join together to praise God, hear His word and lift our shared prayers to him” (1.1.d.10 Spiritual Life). The Emmanuel Scholars program was developed in 2018 to provide a year-long spiritual formation opportunity for sophomore students to interact around reading and discussing books, one-on-one discipleship and spiritual direction, and group interaction with the intention of further shaping the Christian educational experience of students (1.1.d.4 Emmanuel Scholars).

Beyond the Christian curricular and programmatic elements of Houghton, there are discipline-specific academic programs that guide students to realize the institutional mission to be “academically challenging” “in the liberal arts and sciences” to “lead and labor as scholar-servants in a changing world.” The list of affiliated study abroad opportunities (1.1.d.1 List of Affiliated Programs) provides a broad array of experiences available to students. As students can choose to travel and study in places such as London, East Africa, Nashville (TN), Spain, and Italy, just to name a few, they can deepen their knowledge and understanding of the world beyond their historical reach, reinforcing what it means to be a Houghton graduate.

Criterion 1e. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates a clearly defined mission and goals that include support of scholarly inquiry and creative activity, at levels and of the type appropriate to the institution.*

Three distinct groups will be highlighted in this section related to scholarly inquiry and creative activity: faculty, students, and community. Houghton has an extensive representation of evidence related to each of these three groups that is guided by the mission of the University to provide an academically challenging education for students.

Although Houghton is a teaching university and not a “research institution,” the University’s faculty engage in regular scholarship as demonstrated by publication in refereed journals, conference presentations, recitals, art shows, published books, and lectures. Each year, approximately ten faculty participate in the Faculty Lecture Series (1.1.e.1 Faculty Lecture Series), where they publicly present an aspect of their scholarship to the college community. Students, faculty, and community members can learn from faculty member they may not engage with regularly, and ask questions to deepen and broaden their understanding of the world. Faculty in both art and music regularly perform recitals and prepare art exhibits in the Ortlip Art Gallery or other national galleries (1.1.e.7 Gallery Info), which give the community an opportunity to appreciate that specific aspect of the faculty member’s professional work.

To institutionally support faculty scholarship, the Faculty Development Committee facilitates a grant program where faculty can apply for funds to support a specific research project, conference presentation, attendance, or scholarship activity (1.1.e.12.b Application for FDC funding). During the 2019-2020 academic year, 15 faculty (or 22%) received grants (1.1.e.12 FDC recipients). Following completion of their project, faculty are required to submit a report that summarizes the results of the project and how it enhanced the “mission of the department and the goals of the academic master plan or mission of the college” (1.1.e.12.c Report for FDC Funding).

Students also have a variety of opportunities to engage in research and creative activity. One example of this is the Summer Research Program, where students can be on campus over the summer and participate in research programs with faculty in the STEM fields. During summer 2022, seven faculty in the math and science areas collaborated with 17 students conducting significant research, resulting in conference presentations, journal publications, and enhancements to their résumés and graduate school applications (1.1.e.3 Summer Research).

In the business and economics programs, several opportunities are available for students to demonstrate and enhance scholarship. Students in the accounting program have been able to become IRS-certified and provide free tax preparation services to qualifying individuals and families. Offered as part of the IRS-sponsored Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, this student program perfectly aligns with the University's mission to serve those from diverse economic backgrounds as volunteer students lead this free service to Western New York residents. This service can be especially valuable to low-income tax filers by helping them apply for earned income tax credits, which the IRS estimates can mean as much as \$5,028 for a family with two children. Over the past three years, the program has had an average of eight IRS-certified students assisting with 10 tax returns the first year and 50 the third year. These "real world" practical opportunities enhance and enrich the academic experience of the students.

All students in music and art programs must perform musical recitals or participate in art shows where they can highlight and demonstrate their scholarship in their respective areas. These experiences are typically well attended by students, faculty, and community members invested in the students' work. Students can also elect to participate in academic internships (1.1.e.6 Internships) and student clubs, such as Journey's End Tutoring (1.1.e.4 List of Clubs and Organizations), which reinforce the mission of the University in support of scholarly inquiry and creative activity.

Each year, the science and math program areas offer the STEM Colloquium presentations. During the 2022-2023 academic year, 16 such presentations occurred (1.1.e.8 STEM Colloquium). These lectures are a mix of students presenting their research, faculty sharing some aspect of their research, or experts in the field sharing on campus with the STEM students about issues relevant to the field.

Since 1995, the Chamberlain Mission Lectureship (created by Ray and Mary Ann Chamberlain, parents of former President Daniel Chamberlain) has brought experts in the field of Christian missions to lecture to the whole community (1.1.e.10.b Chamberlain Lecture). Beginning in 2011, the annual Kindschi Faith and Justice Symposium provides a rich setting in which the University is able to "create awareness and dialogue around key issues, opportunities and challenges, facilitating ongoing conversations and building partnerships to enhance programs" (1.1.e.9 Faith-Justice Symposium). BEST Talks were created in 2018 to highlight alumni who are working within their respective professional spheres (1.1.e.10.a Best Talks). Alumni return to campus and offer a lecture related to their field of ministry or vocation and then engage with students in conversation and advisement.

Criterion 1f. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates a clearly defined mission and goals that are publicized and widely known by the institution's internal stakeholders.*

The mission and goals of Houghton University are evident across both internal and external platforms, providing clear and consistent reminders of what Houghton is and what guides the University's work. From the University's website (1.1.f.1.d Web Page Mission), the reader can clearly see the mission

stated, as well as the Doctrinal Statement employees are expected to support, the statement of what it means to be a part of this community (A Vision of Our Common Life), and the sponsoring denomination's Core Beliefs & Values. Similarly, the University's Facebook page (1.1.f.2 social media) has the mission clearly visible on the sidebar of the main page. These pages are accessible to anyone who wants to know more about the Institution.

The mission statement is displayed publicly in various locations, including the Dieter Board Room, administration building, athletic facilities, Admissions Office, and individual offices of some faculty and staff (1.1.f.1.c Location of Mission). When prospective students and their families visit Houghton, their campus tour begins with a reading of the mission statement and a discussion of how this mission is lived out across campus (1.1.f.4 Tour Script).

The Academic Catalog (1.1.f.1.a Academic Catalog), Faculty Handbook (1.1.f.1.b Faculty Handbook) and University internal Intranet (1.1.f.3 Intranet) all clearly state the Institution's mission. From the Board of Trustees to the faculty, staff, students, and visitors to campus, the mission is widely publicized and accessible, reminding everyone that Houghton is an "academically challenging, Christ-centered institution in the liberal arts and sciences to students from diverse traditions and economic backgrounds and equips them to lead and labor as scholar servants in a changing world."

Again, during the 2022-2023 academic year, the University developed a new five-year strategic plan. This plan has been clearly communicated to various stakeholders (1.1.a.10 Strategic Plan Timetable) and is also available on the University's website (1.1.f.5 Strategic Plan Web). In addition, the Houghton Magazine, Summer 2023 edition, included a printed copy of the strategic plan.

The University's statement of what it means to be a part of this community—A Vision of Our Common Life—was written to be read responsively (1.1.a.8 Common Life). At various times, campus groups (new students, student leaders, and the whole campus community) participate in a responsive reading of the document as an exercise of committing to live together in this academic community.

Criterion 1g. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates a clearly defined mission and goals that are periodically evaluated.*

Houghton regularly reviews its mission and goals, as evidenced by the strategic planning process. In 2015, a five-year strategic action plan was developed and implemented (1.1.g.3 2016 Action Plan). This plan shaped and guided the institution during that time. In 2020, a new three-year plan was presented in preparation for the presidential transition (1.1.g.1.b 2020-2023 Final Strategic Plan). In 2023, the next five-year plan was developed and introduced (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023). During each of these plan developments, the mission and goals of the institution were reviewed and evaluated (1.1.g.2 Cabinet Excerpts). In addition, another piece of evidence of the periodic review of strategic plan review can be found in the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) progress documents, noting which cabinet member was responsible, the goal completion date, and the actual completion of the objective (1.1.g.1.a Strategic Plan KPI).

Criterion 2. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates institutional goals that are realistic, appropriate to higher education, and consistent with mission.*

The 2020-2023 strategic plan, Preparing Our Future, included three goals directly tied to the University mission statement: (1) Distinctive Christian Identity—Houghton must offer to the Church and society a

deeply Christian vision shaped by the priorities of the Gospel rather than those of the wider culture, reflecting the breadth of wisdom from many Christian traditions so that the University's thinking may be captive only to Christ; (2) Flexible, Relationally-Connected Curricular Brand across All Modalities—Houghton must clearly identify what will provide a mission-consistent market edge in the current environment by focusing on transformational learning opportunities that will enrich the educational experiences of diverse, distributed audiences; and (3) All-Encompassing, Distributed Community—Houghton must make education accessible and compelling to a diverse and distributed community of global, lifelong learners. The Preparing Our Future strategic plan included measurable projects and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tied to current trends in higher education related to instructional delivery and technology, diversity and inclusion, cross-disciplinary opportunities, and student-focused learning with world impact (1.1.g.1.a-b KPI Updates). The Institution "completed" most of the goals/projects listed in the strategic plan, indicating the goals are "realistic" and attainable (1.1.c.1 Strategic Plan).

Senior student exit surveys report that 65% of Houghton's graduates go on to full-time employment. The remaining 35% enter graduate school within a year of graduation. Approximately 16% of graduates go into full-time Christian service (1.2.1 Exit Surveys). These statistics indicate Houghton graduates are competitive in the marketplace and graduate school settings. The strong percentage of students entering full-time Christian service supports the mission of the Institution as a Christ-centered University educating scholar-servants serving people around the globe.

Student, faculty, and alumni testimonials on the University website confirm that the institutional mission and goals are appropriate and consistent with mission. The Marketing and Communications Office (Marcom) has been active in gathering and posting testimonials from current students, alumni, and the President about the impact of the Houghton experience and how the University is making efforts to reach stated goals (1.2.3 Testimonials).

Criterion 3. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates goals that focus on student learning and related outcomes and on institutional improvement; are supported by administrative, educational, and student support programs and services, and are consistent with institutional mission.*

Houghton University's Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) articulate and identify the institutional-level student learning outcomes. These student learning outcomes must be included in each course syllabus; instructors identify on their course syllabi which institutional ELOs are specifically met by each course. Most of the University's programs have connected program-level ELOs with institutional-level ELOs (1.3.4 Learning Outcomes). The seven ELOs speak directly to elements of the University's mission. For example, "Express the foundations of the Christian faith..." connects to the goal of Christ-centered education. "Demonstrate depth of knowledge..." connects to the academic rigor that the Institution strives to achieve. Additionally, "...knowledge of human cultures... ability to engage a changing and culturally diverse world..." connects to preparing students to be scholar-servants in a changing world.

At the conclusion of each academic year, each academic unit maps assessments to Houghton University Essential Learning Outcomes, academic unit student learning outcomes, and individual course outcomes through Nuventive Improve software. This platform is used to drive planning and progress for strategic, assessment, and improvement initiatives. This is accomplished by the faculty in each academic unit meeting together and discussing ELOs, goals, and outcomes, and assessing (1) whether the goals and outcomes are still accurate and pertinent, and (2) whether the goals and outcomes had been accomplished. If goals and outcomes had not been accomplished, plans are developed to ensure that they are met in the future (1.3.1 Assessment Day). For a more detailed

assessment of how Houghton uses assessment to shape goals that focus on student learning, see the section in this reports that reviews Standard V, Educational Effectiveness Assessment.

Another element of the mission articulates that the Institution seeks to educate students from diverse traditions and economic backgrounds. Confirmed by the Student Financial Services compiled report on current students' Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) (as of September 9, 2022), Houghton is serving a diverse economic landscape (1.3.2 Diverse Economic Backgrounds). As indicated in this report, students are spread across the six AGI groupings with 47% of Houghton students coming from households with an AGI less than \$75,000 (the bottom three groupings) and 53% from the top three groupings.

General Education Audit Sheets further demonstrate Houghton's commitment to mission (education in the liberal arts and sciences) and student outcomes (1.3.3 Audit Sheets). Each student who graduates from Houghton is expected to demonstrate, beyond their expressed major field of study, the completion of coursework in what is called general education curriculum. This curriculum includes biblical and theological studies, mathematics, science, writing, humanities, wellness, changing world, and social sciences. Each of these areas aligns with expectations stated in the mission.

Criterion 4. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates periodic assessment of mission and goals to ensure they are relevant and achievable.*

As noted in Criterion 1g of this chapter, Houghton regularly assesses and evaluates the relevancy of its missions and goals. Each year, multiple documents are revised, such as the College Catalog. A quick review of the past editions of the catalog reveals that the mission has remained consistent and guides the delivery of student learning and experience (1.4.1 College Catalogs). In addition, institutional Strategic Plans and Key Performance Indicators further demonstrate that institutional priorities and outcomes are reviewed and assessed (1.1.b.1 Outcomes Survey).

At the outset of this chapter, the three lines of inquiry were presented. These questions guided the process of discovery and reporting that has been presented here. Below are specific demonstrations of how Houghton has faithfully and sufficiently met the expectations of the expressed mission and goals of the University.

Line of Inquiry 1

The first part of this line of inquiry concerns whether the Institution can show that the mission and goals are informing the University's work in academics, athletics, student life, and other co-curriculars. The Campus Assessment (1.1.a.2 Campus Assessment) document illustrates that the Institution reflects on the physical spaces and their usage to promote the mission and goals of Houghton. The Highlander Happenings Employee Newsletter highlights activities and events that, taken together, show support of the institutional mission and goals (1.1.b.2 Employee Newsletter). The evidence described above under Criterion 1d shows how the mission and goals pervade the Institution's work. When it comes to faculty scholarship and travel grants (1.1.e.12 FDC Applications), for instance, all proposals come before the Faculty Development Committee to ensure the worthiness of the request and the alignment with mission. In the same way, grant proposals for funding outside the Institution (1.1.d.9a-c Grant Applications; 1.1.d.9d Gift Policies) are submitted for vetting to the Advancement Office to check for viability and also to consider whether the proposed monies would further the mission and goals of the Institution.

The processes in place for the development of the new programs are functioning well to keep Houghton's offerings consistent with its mission and goals. Proposed programs (or proposed changes to existing programs) are vetted first by the Academic Council, then the full faculty, the administration, the Board of Trustees, and finally New York State, where appropriate, to ensure mission fit. This means that the offerings on the residential campus, in Buffalo, and in various off-campus programs (1.1.d.1 List of Affiliated Programs) through the years, as well as in the online programs (1.1.d.3 Online Taskforce), show Houghton's commitment to serving students of diverse backgrounds and in diverse ways. In addition, the chapel program and spiritual life activities (1.1.d.10 Spiritual Life), the nine-hour Bible and theology general education requirement (1.1.d.5a-b Bible-Theology Requirements), and the development of the Emmanuel Scholars program (1.1.d.4 Emmanuel Scholars) to promote a thoughtful, purposeful engagement in the Christian life, all point to the commitment across campus to provide a Christ-centered educational experience for all students.

Also, Criterion 1d evidence shows the commitment of the Institution to make its education accessible to a broad range of students through the tuition reset (1.1.d.7a-c Tuition Reset) and through the efforts of the ongoing Canadian taskforce (1.1.d.8 Canadian Taskforce) to help students move seamlessly from the Canadian educational system to Houghton.

The evidence listed in Criterion 1e suggests that Houghton does support scholarship and creativity, living up to its goal of offering a high-quality educational experience. A range of cultural opportunities enrich the community. Houghton has a strong history of promoting the visual arts, both through shows highlighting faculty, staff, students, and other community members and through the work of visiting artists (1.1.e.7 Gallery Info). In addition, the Institution holds several lectureships in business (1.1.e.10a Best Talks) and STEM (1.1.e.8 STEM Colloquium), as well as the annual Chamberlain Lectures in Missions (1.1.e.10b Chamberlain Lectures). Houghton hosts an annual Faith and Justice Symposium (1.1.e.9 Faith-Justice Symposium) that deals with issues such as climate change, war and peace-making, and hunger, offering students, as well as the rest of the community, an opportunity to engage with larger issues facing the world.

Regarding the faculty specifically, the reports that recipients of faculty development grants (1.1.e.12 FDC Applications) submit show some of the breadth and depth of scholarship being done by faculty members. In addition, the items in the Faculty Good News section (1.1.a.5 Faculty Herald) of the bi-weekly Faculty Herald demonstrate the ongoing projects, presentations, and publications in which faculty members are engaged. Finally, the Faculty Lecture Series (1.1.e.1 Faculty Lecture Series), in all its diverse offerings, shows the creativity and scholarship of faculty from all areas of the Institution.

On the student side, the data demonstrates institutional support for scholarship and creativity. For instance, the Summer Research Institute (1.1.e.3 Summer Research) fosters collaborative research between faculty and students in STEM fields. In the business area of the University, the Student Investment Group (1.1.e.2a-b Student Investment Group) allows students to put into practice what they are learning in business classes. Accounting students have also engaged in a tax preparation program for community members (1.1.e.5 Student Tax Service). Students from across campus participate in tutoring English for refugee families (1.1.e.4, pg.1 JET Information). Students from many majors serve in internships (1.1.e.6 Student Internships).

The second part of the first line of inquiry concerns the metrics that exist to demonstrate the degree to which Houghton's goals and initiatives align with the mission statement. As mentioned, the processes for adding or modifying academic programs are clear. The processes for proposing funding for research

projects or for programmatic improvements, outlined above, also point to measurable ways the Institution evaluates whether proposed initiatives and articulated goals align with the mission.

Line of Inquiry 2

This line of inquiry concerns the degree to which the mission is understood, valued, and enacted across the Institution and evaluates whether there is evidence of collaborative participation in the development of mission-centric goals. In terms of awareness of the mission, the evidence for Criterion 1f demonstrates that the mission statement is well publicized and widely known to students, faculty, and staff. Specifically, it is publicized internally on the intranet for employees (1.1.f.3 Intranet) and is available in print in the Academic Catalog, the Student Handbook, the Faculty Handbook, and the Staff Handbook. It is visibly publicized on the walls of Dieter Board Room for Board of Trustee meetings and in Fancher Hall for all visitors (1.1.f.1a-b Publicized Mission Locations). Student tour guides communicate the mission to all visiting students during the campus tour (1.1.f.4 Tour Script). It is also publicized externally on the website for all audiences (1.1.f.1 Publicized Mission Locations), as well as on the University Facebook page for external and internal audiences (1.1.f.2 Social Media).

Regarding the input of various constituencies of the University in the formulation of its mission and goals, the evidence in Criterion 1a shows that all employees and the Board of Trustees have been, and continue to be, involved. Through faculty meetings (1.1.a.5 Faculty Herald) and faculty feedback for comment and approval (1.1.c.2a-b Faculty Feedback), staff council (1.1.a.3 Staff Council), and BOT meetings (1.1.a.1 BOT Discussion), these various bodies review and discuss the mission and goals of the Institution. The evidence in Criterion 1c highlights how faculty and staff feedback (1.1.a.6 Staff Survey) (1.1.c.2a-b Faculty Feedback) is sought on institutional strategic goals and how the governing documents, institutional charter (1.1.c.4 Institutional Charter), and by-laws of the Board of Trustees support them as well (1.1.c.3a-b Governing Documents). The Institutional Priorities and Outcomes Survey showed “strong support for the mission of Houghton among all constituencies” (1.1.b.1 Outcomes Survey).

Periodic assessment of mission and goals ensures they are relevant and achievable. However, the mission statement has not been changed since the previous Middle States self-study because each of its components remains relevant to the goals and work of the University (1.4.1 College Catalogs). Key Performance Indicators are periodically evaluated by the President and the Executive Leadership (1.1.g.1a-b KPI Updates). In addition, several indicators show that the mission and goals are periodically evaluated, including: the KPI Updates for Strategic Plan (1.1.g.1a-b KPI Updates), the President’s Staff Meeting Minutes (1.1.g.2 Cabinet Excerpts), and previous Houghton catalogs with evidence of programmatic changes in line with its mission (1.4.1 College Catalogs).

Finally, the materials generated in revising the Charter (1.1.a.7 Staff Charter) and the Vision of a Common Life (formerly called Community Covenant) (1.1.a.8a-8d Common Life) demonstrate involvement of various internal groups in articulating the Institution’s mission and goals.

Line of Inquiry 3

This line of inquiry concerns what outcome evidence exists to demonstrate that Houghton is accomplishing its transformative mission and goals in the lives of its students and graduates.

The evidence found in Criterion 2 suggests that Houghton is succeeding at its mission. For instance, Student Exit Surveys tend to confirm this, and the Placement Rate Data demonstrates that, on average, 65% of students are employed full time following graduation, while the other 35% go on to pursue graduate school within one year of graduation. Approximately 16% of graduates go on into full-time Christian service (1.2.1 Exit Surveys). The Marketing and Communications Office (Marcom) has been active in gathering and posting testimonials from current students, alumni, and the President about the impact of the Houghton experience and how the University is making efforts to reach stated goals (1.2.3 Testimonials).

The most recent Strategic Plan includes goals that are tied directly to the University mission statement and is reflective of its Christian heritage, its commitment to the liberal arts and sciences, and its focus on diversity and world impact. The goals of the strategic plan include measurable projects and KPIs tied to current trends in higher education related to instructional delivery and technology, diversity and inclusion, cross-disciplinary opportunities, and student-focused learning with world impact. The institution has “completed” most of the goals/projects listed in the strategic plan, which confirms that the goals are “realistic” and attainable (1.1.c.1 Strategic Plan).

In addition, the evidence gathered (under Criterion 3) shows that institutional goals focus on student learning and related outcomes, and institutional improvement. The Houghton University Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) are institutional-level outcomes that express the intention that every student be formed in fundamental ways in line with the mission statement (1.3.4 Learning Outcomes). These ELOs must be included in course syllabi. Most of the academic programs have connected program-level ELOs with institutional-level ELOs. The general education requirements also show concern that all students receive formation consistent with the University’s mission statement (1.3.3a-c Audit Sheets). The annual Assessment Day measures how well each academic program delivers on its ELOs (1.3.1 Assessment Day).

Finally, the stated purpose of Houghton Magazine (formerly called the Houghton Milieu) is to communicate the value and vision of the University, connect and engage alumni with the University and one another, and encourage and inspire readers in their faith, vocation, work, and service (1.1.b.3a-c Houghton Magazine). The evidence shows samples of published magazines from 2014, 2017, and 2023 to demonstrate Houghton’s continued communication with external constituencies.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Two notable areas of strength related to Houghton University’s mission and goals include Houghton’s emphasis on a Christ-centered education through opportunities such as chapel services, morning prayer, afternoon communion, required religion and theology courses in the general education curriculum, and student-led Bible studies and worship services. Second, Houghton’s continued commitment to serving students from diverse backgrounds with the implementation of programs and services in support of multiculturally diverse students and recent tuition reset ensures that Houghton is an affordable option, creating access for students from all socio-economic backgrounds.
- Houghton University’s mission and goals are well known by its community members, and the Houghton community offers substantial support. The recent staff survey results show that “the mission of Houghton University resonated deeply with Houghton employees, and it is the primary reason for employment and long-term retention. It is the top reason named in open forums when employees were asked why they work at Houghton.” The community recognition

and understanding of the mission and goals is also emphasized at hiring when employees are asked to sign the Vision for a Common Life and annually at contract renewal when community members are asked to reaffirm their commitment to Houghton's mission and values.

- Houghton University lives out its structure of shared governance in relation to the review of the mission and strategic goals. There is a collaborative review of the goals related to the mission statement through general faculty and staff meetings and an intentional increase in faculty and staff collaboration and interaction via the annual all-employee retreat and all-employee town hall meetings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has established a strong and clear identity rooted in the mission and vision of the Institution. It will benefit from a continued commitment to review and assess programmatic alignment with its mission and goals. Additionally, a continued emphasis on the growth and development of employees who understand and align with the mission will be important as the Institution continues to grow and advance.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified, through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities, the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. Provide resources and a program of professional development to equip new and continuing employees to integrate their Christian faith and their work effectively and meaningfully (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 1.2).
2. Develop additional resources to support the integration of faith and learning for faculty and students (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 2.2).
3. Continue to place emphasis on the commitment to access and affordability for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 5.2).
4. Expand curricular and co-curricular opportunities for high school students to engage with the University (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 5.5).
5. Expand opportunities and resources to support employees' professional development (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 6.5).

CHAPTER 2

STANDARD TWO: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

OVERVIEW

The Houghton University community has engaged in an in-depth review and has determined that ethics and integrity are central and indispensable, a hallmark of the University. In all activities, internal and external, Houghton University is faithful to its mission, honors its contract and commitments, adheres to its policies, and represents itself truthfully. We have determined that Houghton University has sufficiently achieved all criteria included in this standard.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

1. To what degree does Houghton fulfill its commitment to provide affordable, quality Christian education to students from diverse backgrounds?
2. To what degree does Houghton justly fulfill its diverse responsibilities to its employees?
3. How is the University's commitment to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, and respect for intellectual property rights demonstrated?
4. To what degree does the University foster a climate that respects students, faculty, staff, and administration from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Criterion 1. *A commitment to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, and respect for intellectual property rights.*

An essential element of higher education is the ability of faculty to freely teach, conduct research, and facilitate discussions around a broad array of topics. Houghton University has developed and implemented a clear and definitive approach to academic freedom that guides this work.

Houghton University is one of five higher education institutions founded and sponsored by The Wesleyan Church. As Wesleyan institutions, governance documents include The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church and the denomination's General Board (GB) Standards of the Wesleyan Church for Educational Institutions (standards that were last revised November 2019 and are currently under revision). Section iv Academic Freedom (GB-2154 through GB 2158) of the Standards speaks to the issue of academic freedom (1.1.c.3.b Wesleyan Standards). It importantly recognizes "tension exists between the statements to which it is committed and the academic freedom which is necessary to carry out God's mandate to pursue truth" (GB 2154). Additionally, the Standards state that "academic freedom is always to be exercised responsibly within the context of the institution's relation to the Church" (GB 2158). It is within this context that Houghton seeks to freely ask questions, pursue deeper understanding, and express ideas that help shape the collective understanding of what it means to be followers of Christ.

In 1979, the Faculty Handbook was amended to include a statement on academic freedom. It was most recently updated in 2022 in support of the role and responsibility that faculty possess to seek truth, ask challenging questions, and "push the boundaries of their study" while respecting the positions of the

Church (Section 1.7 Faculty Handbook). The handbook specifically and clearly states: “All members of the faculty, whether tenured or not, are entitled to academic freedom. This freedom pertains to the privileges and responsibilities of the teacher in the classroom and laboratory, in professional publications, and as a member of an academic community.”

The statement goes on to delineate between three distinct roles that a college professor plays: “a citizen, a member of a learned profession, and an officer of an educational institution.” It seeks to defend the faculty person’s right to speak as a citizen without censorship or discipline from the Institution while also recognizing that there are special obligations with this position and that the world may draw conclusions about the academic guild or Houghton University based on what a professor says in or out of the classroom. Hence, faculty are instructed to practice restraint, have respect for others’ opinions, and make clear that their individual speech does not represent the views of the Institution. The statement also limits academic freedom to the professor’s area of expertise and the subject being taught and extends that freedom into research and publication.

An institutionally commissioned white paper (2.1.1 Life Together Reflections) led to a 2022 revision to this statement (2.1.2 Handbook). The revision makes explicit the University’s responsibility to the church: “The faculty owe to the church the commitment to high standards of teaching and research, to pushing the boundaries of their study, and to staying engaged in the important conversations taking place around them.... The faculty owe The Wesleyan Church in particular a wholehearted pursuit of knowledge and truth, and the courage to offer both support and challenge for the refinement of the Church’s theological positions, based on what we learn together.”

This revision also clarifies the faculty member’s responsibility to The Wesleyan Church: “All faculty members shall demonstrate respect for and shall refrain from endorsing views contrary to the Wesleyan Beliefs and Core Values. Faculty members shall exercise their academic freedom within their respective disciplinary standards for good scholarship, teaching and service to the profession.” This was again reaffirmed in a September 29, 2022 faculty meeting discussion where the Provost re-asserted the position that “any work you are doing in your role as a professor is under academic freedom,” reminding faculty, for example, to avoid using University platforms for political purposes outside of their role and responsibility as a professor (2.1.4 Faculty Herald 10-3-22, p. 3).

From the point of first employment, all employees are expected to indicate respect for The Wesleyan Church doctrine and live in harmony with the principles that guide us as a Christian institution in the Wesleyan tradition (2.1.3 Contract Template). This responsibility and commitment are re-affirmed each year when faculty sign their contract renewal.

In 2015, an Intellectual Property Policy was developed (2.1.5 Intellectual Rights Policy). This policy was reviewed and approved by the President’s staff in August 2015. It was again reviewed and approved by the Executive Leadership Cabinet in 2022. A proposed partnership with an educational technology firm has led to questions of who owns the course structure and materials used in online teaching, particularly when a course has been constructed by one faculty member and then is taught by either another faculty member or a course facilitator who uses the course’s original materials. As this was discussed in a 2021-2022 academic year faculty meeting, the faculty was glad to receive reassurance that they would retain ownership of course materials that they created. As technology continues to advance, instructional resources develop, and alternative delivery methodologies emerge, it will be important for the University to continue to review and clarify this policy.

Criterion 2. *A climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives.*

Clearly expressed in the mission statement, Houghton University provides “... an academically challenging Christ-centered education... to students from diverse traditions and economic backgrounds.” While Houghton University is a Christian institution and intricately connected with The Wesleyan Church, Houghton University does not require that students be Wesleyan or even Christian (although most report to align with the Christian principles that guide the University). Some students have never been connected to any faith tradition but come to Houghton because of a particular academic program, Houghton’s location, or a particular co-curricular component, like a sport they would like to play. Others have grown up Christian and may have parents who want them to attend a Christian college, but they personally are struggling with their own religious identification. Still other non-Christian students may attend Houghton because they believe that in a Christian context, social life will be healthier and academic life more serious.

According to the 2020 National Survey of Student Engagement (a national survey of first-year college students and seniors), students report a lower rate of “discussions with people with different religious beliefs” than other private, small colleges. Even fewer students were engaging in these sorts of discussions than at other Christian colleges. At Houghton, 43% of first-year students and 37% of Houghton seniors report having these sorts of discussions; at other Christian colleges, the rate is 60% and 58%, respectively. It is important to note that due to the geographic location of Houghton, there are fewer opportunities off campus for students to engage with individuals who possess a more diverse worldview. The realities of COVID-19 temporarily discontinued opportunities for students to engage either in Buffalo or internationally through study-abroad programs with individuals who may have diverse perspectives including religious beliefs.

While students reported fewer such conversations, first-year students did believe that Houghton encourages “contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.),” rating this a 3.2 out of 4 compared to 2.9 at other Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) schools and 2.8 at other private Northeastern U.S. schools and small colleges (2.2.1 Student Summary, p. 6). This data supports that, although diversity rates may be small at Houghton, the students and employees foster an environment of respect and engagement across cultural lines.

In 2017, the President commissioned a Diversity Task Force that was comprised of students, faculty, staff, and administration. The charge of this group included five elements: (1) A plan for ensuring that Houghton’s commitment to cultivating the cultural diversity of God’s Kingdom is transparently evident to all who explore its community online and all who enter the community. (2) A plan for creating a website that showcases Houghton’s commitment to intercultural engagement both inside and outside the classroom. (3) A proposed protocol for hiring that increases the opportunity for a diverse hiring pool in both faculty and staff searches, and the opportunity for candidates of color to be appropriately considered in the hiring process. (4) A proposed protocol for grievances related to cultural bias. (5) A plan for the creation of an intercultural center on campus (1.1.d.2.c President’s Diversity Task Force).

A result of this task force was the development of the Mosaic Center in spring 2018. The Mosaic Center’s vision was, “The Mosaic Center invests in the development of student leaders to encourage the development of an equitable and inclusive campus climate through healthy peer accountability and influence” (2.2.3 Mosaic Center). As reported in the 2020 year-end report for the Mosaic Center, social media followers increased by 50%, a webpage was developed that highlighted the mission and vision of

the Center, student ambassadors conducted campus-wide programming related to issues of diversity, and processes were created to facilitate an easier and clearer reporting of bias incidents (1.1.d.2.a Mosaic Center 2020 year-end report).

As the campus context changes and initial programs evolve, in the spring of 2023, after discussion with stakeholders including students, staff, and the Diversity Committee, the decision was made to close the Mosaic Center space, reporting that it had become viewed as “exclusive and unwelcoming, leading to the effect of few students engaging in the learning experiences the space was intended to foster” (2.2.4 Mosaic Email). Honoring the original commitment to cultivating the cultural diversity of God’s Kingdom, the decision was made to close the space but retain the ambassador program, with student leaders helping to provide intentional and impactful programming on campus that fosters “intercultural connections and learning for all Houghton students” (2.4.4 Kingdom Initiative).

This co-curricular component is echoed in the curriculum, as one component of the Institution’s 2020-2023 strategic plan, *Preparing Our Future*, was the goal: “Identify clear curricular and co-curricular, cross-disciplinary opportunities to connect with real world problems giving purposeful attention to diverse voices and perspectives” (2.2.5 2020-2023 Strategic Plan). Two Key Performance Indicators in the plan are that in the 2022-23 Academic Year, 100% of faculty would have participated in culturally responsive professional development, and 100% of course syllabi would “reflect culturally responsive pedagogies and integrate diverse voices and perspectives into their courses.” This was not solely related to racial and ethnic diversity but was a key component of this KPI (1.1.g.1.a Strategic Plan KPI).

In summer 2023, Houghton announced the launch of the Kingdom Initiative aimed at learning about, engaging with and celebrating the rich cultural diversity of Houghton University and the Kingdom of God. A central part of the Kingdom Initiative—the Student Kingdom Ambassadors program—trains and supports a team of students who promote conversations about diversity and pluralism both inside and outside the classroom. This program is overseen by a faculty member who serves as the Dean of Religion, Humanities, and Global Studies; Professor of Political Science; and Director of the Kingdom Initiative. As part of the Initiative’s launch, Dean Meilaender and President Lewis will host three public Kingdom Conversation events on campus during the fall 2023 semester, revisiting a classic educational debate between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois.

The Spiritual Life Office of the University is committed to diversity, focusing consistently on inviting a diverse group of speakers to campus. This was a particular focus during fall 2020, which had a theme of engaging Black scholars and pastors to share about their work and ministry. Following most chapel services, particularly when guest speakers are on campus, the speaker and any interested students and employees convene in the Alumni Dining Room for lunch and an extension of the chapel talk. These post-chapel discussions are consistently attended by students and community members as a demonstration of the institutional commitment to fostering respect around a diversity of thoughts and ideas.

An intentional approach to issues of diversity in chapel and in the Kingdom Ambassadors’ programming demonstrates continued institutional commitment to foster respect among students, faculty, and staff, representing a range of diverse backgrounds during a cultural context of increasing polarization. Further commitment to deepening the University’s understanding of diversity in relation to higher education, and Houghton in particular, is represented in the participation of several executive-level administrators in programming and employee development opportunities, such as the CCCU Diversity conference held in October 2023.

Each year, faculty members are selected to offer broader community lectures as part of an annual Faculty Lecture Series (1.1.e.1 Faculty Lecture Series). Reviewing the list of lecture titles for the 2018-2019 academic year, the reader can see lectures from a diverse group of faculty members (gender, academic discipline) who lectured on topics such as women in philosophy, the value of learning a foreign language, #existing while black, spiritual stimulation, and the Indigenous Senecas of Caneadea, among many other topics. These lectures are consistently well attended by students, faculty, and community members. Each lecture is followed up with a time for questions and discussion that often extends beyond the time allotted.

Criterion 3. *A grievance policy that is documented and disseminated to address complaints or grievances raised by students, faculty, or staff. The institution's policies are fair and impartial and assure that grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably.*

To deal with potential grievances and complaints, Houghton University has appropriate systems in place that are freely and publicly available among the various groups on campus. Openly available on the Institution's webpage are the Sexual Harassment Policy, Whistleblower Policy, and Title IX and Related Compliance: Safety and Equity at Houghton University policies. The Staff Handbook, available to all employees on the University intranet, delineates the Staff Grievance policy (Staff Handbook, 2.21). Likewise, the Faculty Handbook delineates the Faculty Grievance Policy in the "Policies and Procedures" section of the Appendix. This is freely available to faculty on the Academic Dean's SharePoint. Houghton's Whistleblower Policy, Sexual Harassment Policy, and Bias Incident Form are freely available to faculty and staff on the employee intranet (2.3.2 Whistleblower Policy, 2.3.3 Bias Incident Report).

The Institution's website and the Student Guide provide guidance on how to pursue a Title IX complaint, as well as how to proceed with a disability grievance, grade grievance, or report of a violation of the Sexual Harassment Policy (2.3.1 Student Guide). The Student Guide further instructs students who "wish to file a complaint or grievance, but are unable to determine what procedure to follow should contact the Dean of Students ..." (2.3.1 Student Guide). This approach ensures that students' various needs are cared for appropriately.

Each of these policies is reviewed regularly as the handbooks and guides are updated. For example, the Student Guide is updated every summer prior to the beginning of each academic year. The Provost, appointed in 2022, has been working through revisions of the Faculty Handbook, updating policy and procedures as appropriate. This review considers both feedback from constituents and internal assessments of best practices.

Criterion 4. *The avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all activities and among all constituents.*

The Accounting Office sends an annual notice to all who can expend University funds and requires them to confirm that they will avoid and report potential conflicts of interest (2.4.1 Accounting Email, 2.4.1.b Conflict of Interest Form). The governing board, the Board of Trustees, is required to annually acknowledge conflict of interest and is reminded at each meeting to disclose any such conflicts during decision making, and as appropriate, recuse themselves of deliberation and decision making when conflicts of interest are present.

The University has the following policy for gift acceptance.

The giving program will be guided by principles of Christian stewardship. The interest of Houghton University will not take precedence over the interest of the donor. Programs or commitments that would benefit Houghton University at the expense of the donor's interests and welfare will not be proposed to prospective donors. Conversely, the Gift Acceptance Committee reserves the right to decline a potential gift that does not align with institutional priorities.

Houghton University affirms the values of the Donor Bill of Rights developed by national fundraising organizations, adapted for Houghton University institutional use.

Employees of Houghton University Office of Advancement (except a relative of the donor) will not serve in an individual capacity as a fiduciary or personal representative for a donor pursuant to a will, trust agreement, or other legal instrument (2.4.2 Gift Acceptance).

Criterion 5. *Fair and impartial practices in the hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline, and separation of employees.*

The Staff Handbook and Faculty Handbook delineate practices designed to promote fairness and impartiality throughout an employee's time at the University. The process regarding the hiring of faculty is thoroughly explained in explicit detail.

The Faculty Handbook (Section 4.1) gives definitions for several types of faculty employment (full-time, part-time, tenure-track, non-tenure-track and various categories of renewable contracts). Section 4.2 gives guidance on the hiring process, stipulating that tenure-track hires should be conducted through a national search, guiding the formation of a search committee and timing of gathering materials on the various candidates and explaining the role of the Dean and the search committee. Section 4.4 explains the tenure and promotion process, including the data that the Rank and Tenure Committee must review when evaluating applications for tenure and promotion.

Clear instructions are given for annual review and promotion and clear definition of expectations regarding teaching, scholarship, and community engagement. Clear, thorough guidance is given in section 4.7 for faculty discipline and termination.

The Staff Handbook covers recruiting and hiring in Section 2.8. Clear guidance is given for posting and hiring for positions. Section 2.11 covers performance evaluations and feedback, encouraging supervisors and employees to "jointly establish annual goals" even as the supervisors themselves must "communicate performance standards to employees." Sections 2.16-2.19 cover the process of disciplinary action, potentially leading to termination.

In 2019, the Institution initiated the process of developing Position Impact Statements for every employment position (2.5.1.a Position Impact Template) that help to align the University's mission to each position across campus, including both faculty and staff. As can be seen in the example (2.5.1.b Position Impact Statement), the mission of the University is clearly stated, as well as the way in which this position aligns with the mission. This, along with the clearly defined position responsibilities, offers the prospective employee, as well as existing employees, a clear understanding of what is expected.

In 2023, a newly revised Performance Appraisal was introduced that further delineates individual employees' alignment with the Position Impact Statements and the mission of the University with their performance within their duties (2.5.2 Performance Appraisal 2023). Both the Position Impact Statements and a clear Performance Appraisal document are essential in the evaluation of employees and necessary when consideration of termination is on the line. These newly developed documents help to ensure that the process is fair and impartial and that expectations are clearly articulated early and often.

Each year, approximately 600 students are employed as student workers while attending Houghton University. They serve in virtually every office and department at the University and perform a myriad of duties vital to the University's success. The institution annually revises a handbook for supervisors of student workers that clearly articulates the process of hiring and management of students (2.5.3 Guide for Supervisors of Student Employees).

Criterion 6. *Honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, recruiting and admissions materials and practices, and internal communications.*

Houghton University Admissions subscribes to the Principles of Good Practice established by NACCAP (North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals). Houghton's membership since 1973 (2.6.1.b NACCAP Membership) is a demonstration of the University's longstanding commitment to excellence. The Principles of Good Practice statement seeks to uphold values of integrity, honesty and fairness in the admissions process by pledging to share "accurate, complete and current information" with prospective students and also giving ethical guidance to students to ensure an even playing field for member institutions (for example, advising students that it is unethical to have enrollment deposits at multiple institutions or multiple pending Early Decision applications). The statement also prescribes shared dates and deadlines for member schools. NACCAP's principles also extend to clear communication about financial aid and actual costs of attending Houghton University (2.6.1.a Good Practice). Evidence of this compliance can be found on the University website, which clearly states the University tuition, fees, and procedures for calculating the cost of a Houghton education (2.6.1.c Tuition Web Page).

Internally, Houghton University works to ensure transparent bilateral communication between administration and employees. Weekly emails from the Dean of the Chapel to the faculty and staff focus the community on their shared Christian responsibility to students (2.6.2 The Bridge). The Provost emails faculty weekly with faculty-specific news and opportunities (2.6.3 Monday Memo). Highlander Happenings is a monthly newsletter from the Associate Director of Employee Engagement, keeping people posted on events of importance and helping campus build a greater appreciation of what others do (2.6.4 Highlander Happenings). Following each meeting of the Board of Trustees, the president also holds a town hall meeting, open to all faculty and staff, which has a Q&A component each time.

The Marketing and Communications Office has developed the Social Media Policy and the Crisis Communication Plan, which both address Houghton's commitment to honesty and truthfulness in public relations (2.6.5 Crisis Communication Plan, 2.6.6 Social Media Policy). The intentional and strategic considerations of how the Institution communicates information are a demonstration of this alignment. In February 2023, the Director of Marketing Communication asked the University to identify a public relations firm as a consultant in a crisis, noting that current staffing was not adequate to address this need. As a result, Pesch Digital was identified through consultation with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) as such a provider. A contract with Pesch was signed on April 12, 2023, and on

April 21, 2023, they were consulted to assist in ethically guiding the institution through a public relations incident (2.6.7 Pesch PR decision).

Following a recent prospective student day (10-9-23) a student commented about how it was his first visit to campus and he particularly noted that the information and impression that he saw on the website and other marketing materials accurately matched what he experienced in person during his visit. Although an antidotal report this offers evidence of Houghton's honesty and truthfulness in advertising, recruiting and admission materials and practices.

Criterion 7. *As appropriate to its mission, services, or programs in place: to promote affordability and accessibility; and to enable students to understand funding sources and options, value received for cost, and methods to make informed decisions about incurring debt.*

The mission of Houghton University states in part that it "...provides an academically challenging, Christ-centered education...to students from diverse traditions and economic backgrounds." This commitment to serving the needs of students from low-income environments is important and central to who we are. In support of this mission, in fall 2020, Houghton announced a landmark tuition reset, reducing the tuition by 53%, making it one of the lowest tuition rates of any college in Western New York. The tuition was reset at \$15,900 for the year (2.7.2 Tuition Reset).

In the summer 2022 semester, Houghton University announced the new Founder's Promise Scholarship program. Its first recipients enrolled at Houghton during the fall 2023 semester. Referencing the initial vision of the University's founder, Willard Houghton, to establish a school that served "the poor boys and girls of Allegany County," this program covers the cost of tuition for up to eight semesters for any Pell-eligible student who lives in University housing during their time at Houghton (2.7.1 Founders Promise). Students who live with their families within the approved commuting range of the University are also eligible to receive the scholarship and are not required to live in University housing. This represents a new level of engagement with Houghton's longstanding commitment to affordability.

Understanding that finances may still be stressful for many families, the Student Financial Services (SFS) Office works hard to connect students with financial aid options, including detailed descriptions of many different loan opportunities. The University further partners with Edamerica to provide families with independent college financial advice and strategic thinking about incurring and repaying debt. Admissions works closely with SFS to help families understand the value of Houghton and make wise decisions about what is best for them.

The SFS Office has a detailed website that assists students and their families in understanding and paying for their education (2.7.3 Paying Your Bill). All graduating students who have used loans to pay for their education must attend an exit counseling session (2.7.4 Exit Counseling).

For a student to receive Veteran Benefits at Houghton University, they must provide the SFS Office with their Certificate of Eligibility. The SFS Office will then send the student an award offer that includes any institutional academic funding a student is eligible for and their estimated VA award. SFS will certify enrollment to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) each semester, using a two-step certification process. The initial certification is submitted with tuition, fees, and aid, so the VA then begins authorizing student payments. After the drop/add period, SFS confirms student enrollment and completes the certification for a second time with updated tuition, fees, and any institutional aid.

Should an adjustment need to be made after the final certification is submitted, it is the student's responsibility to contact the VA Certifying Officer as soon as possible to update their certification request. Students must pay their expected portion of the bill by the billing deadline each semester. If there is a discrepancy between the estimated VA benefit and the actual benefit, it will be addressed once the institution receives payment from the VA. Students are responsible for covering any difference between VA coverage and overall University charges.

Criterion 8. *Compliance with all applicable federal, state, and commission reporting policies, regulations, and requirements to include reporting regarding the full disclosure of information on institution-wide assessments, graduation, retention, certification, and licensure or licensing board pass rates; the institution's compliance with the Commission's requirements of affiliation; substantive changes affecting institutional mission, goals, programs, operations, sites, and other material, which must be disclosed in a timely and accurate fashion; and the institution's compliance with the Commission's policies.*

The University is transparent regarding its identity and activity, and so it has consumer information disclosed openly on its website, compiled through the Registrar's Office (2.8.1 Consumer Information). Here there is information about graduation rates, academic progress, services for students with disabilities, and an overview about what accreditation means so that the University's constituencies can understand the process and purpose better. The Registrar reports that the University fully complies with the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, New York State Education Department, and Consumer Information Disclosure reporting systems. Further, the University provides all annual reports to MSCHE in a timely fashion and updates the institutional academic catalog annually to reflect what courses and programs are offered.

As a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association—Division III (NCAA D-III), Houghton must ensure that all programs and athletes comply with all regulations and policies. The Associate Director of Athletics for Compliance and Communication for the athletic department works directly with student athletes, as well as with athletic training staff, to ensure that the University maintains the highest standards related to participation and play (2.8.3 Athletic Compliance). An institution's ability to make decisions is a fundamental principle that supports the educational mission of a college or university and assumes presidential involvement and oversight. The Associate Director of Athletics for Compliance and Communication at Houghton is charged with overseeing the University's athletics compliance system, which includes rules education, monitoring of rules compliance, facilitating yearly data reporting, and reporting violations of NCAA rules. The NCAA bylaws provide guidance on various issues related to compliance oversight, but athlete eligibility, financial aid disbursement, and student-athlete recruitment are key areas that are monitored regularly. Adherence to compliance requirements for the NCAA conference (Empire 8) and membership in the National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) are similarly monitored and enforced by department personnel.

The Houghton University Health Center regularly ensures compliance with federal, state, and local guidance related to health issues on campus. In 2019, the New York State Department of Health conducted an audit of institutional immunization records and reported that Houghton was in full compliance with the requirements for post-secondary schools (2.8.2.f NYSDOH Audit). Additionally, the Health Center annually submits an immunization survey indicating compliance (2.8.2.g Post-Secondary Immunization Survey).

As other institutions across the globe responded to COVID-19, so too Houghton implemented measures to ensure the safety of students in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations and guidance

(2.8.2.e COVID Compliance). A Corona Care Team was implemented to support the needs of students, and a PREP Team was developed to serve as an institutional decision-making body, addressing the academic, facility, program, and employee needs.

The Houghton University Safety and Security Department has numerous systems and practices in place to make the campus as safe as possible. While campus safety will always be the main motive, many programs also comply with federal, state, and local requirements. For example, each year, the University gathers records from local and state police, as well as student discipline files and the Title IX Office's crime and fire data that is reported on the federal Clery collection site. Much of this information is also included in the Annual Security Report, which can be found on the University webpages. Also, the Wireless Emergency Notification System (WENS) is contracted through Inspiron Logistics to notify the campus community of threats to the community and active emergencies. Officers receive CPR/AED training and are certified as New York State Security Guards, which involves an extensive background check in addition to the training as set forth by the state.

Criterion 9. *Periodic assessment of ethics and integrity as evidenced in institutional policies, processes, practices, and the way these are implemented.*

There are many ways that ethics and integrity are assessed both inside and outside the institution. The University's close tie to The Wesleyan Church, detailed above, ensures that it remains in compliance with the Church's doctrinal and ethical positions and distinctives (Wesleyan Discipline 2.9.1). Periodic strategic planning allows Houghton to ask how well it is carrying out its mission (Strategic Plan 2023 1.1.a.9). As detailed above related to academic freedom, when faculty perceive a need to clarify or adjust the University's approach, there is the means to do so. Staff (2.9.2 Staff Grievance) and faculty grievance policies (2.9.3 Faculty Grievance) have been updated within the last decade. Going forward, the University needs to remain focused on how it intentionally and regularly assesses its institutional ethics and integrity.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Houghton has thorough policies. For those inclined to use formal channels to resolve grievances, Houghton has a pathway to make this happen in all the requisite areas. There is a clearly written rubric and policy with which faculty can measure their progress toward tenure and promotion. Students are protected against arbitrary enforcement of disciplinary proceedings.
- Houghton has worked diligently to reduce the cost of education and provide pathways for all potential students to access education. The price reset and, more recently, the Founder's Promise program, make education affordable for almost any family. This is to be commended and celebrated. It goes significantly further than most schools, making it plausible for Houghton to positively answer the initial line of inquiry, "To what degree do we fulfill the commitment to provide affordable, quality Christian education to people of diverse backgrounds?" The Student Financial Services Office deserves special commendation for their tireless work to communicate clearly and transparently with families about the cost of a Houghton education.
- Houghton has improved internal communication. Administration is in consistent contact with faculty, staff, and students about issues of concern to the whole University community. The President receives open questions from the floor at town hall meetings at least three times per year. Weekly emails from the Provost and Dean of the Chapel, as well as a monthly newsletter, keep employees updated and connected.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Houghton will continue to focus on the implementation of policies. Houghton University's policies demonstrate a mission-driven commitment to faculty and staff governance and student support. It is important to maintain and document a process of continual review and revision of policies with influenced stakeholder groups.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. Continue emphasis on and commitment to access and affordability for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 5.2).
2. Review and revise policies as needed to make Houghton an increasingly transfer-friendly destination for students with college credit (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 5.6).
3. Implement a revised framework for recruiting and selecting mission-aligned employees (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 6.1).
4. Ensure that recruitment for open positions includes efforts to recruit men and women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 6.2).

CHAPTER 3

STANDARD THREE: DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

OVERVIEW

The Houghton University community has engaged in an in-depth review and analysis of its student learning experiences and has determined that Houghton University provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all program, certificate, and degree levels regardless of instructional modality. At Houghton University, all learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting, are consistent with higher education expectations. We have determined that Houghton University has sufficiently achieved all criteria included in this standard as well as requirements of affiliation 8, 9, 10, and 15.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

1. How are programs and learning experiences designed and delivered to ensure rigor and relevance to the learning experience?
2. How do we evaluate Houghton's course offerings for relevancy to help decide what courses to continue offering, what to cut, and what new courses to offer?
3. How are student learning experiences designed and delivered by qualified and supported faculty?
4. Does Houghton's general education curriculum provide a well-rounded education in the liberal arts and sciences for all students?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Criterion 3.1. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities: certificate, undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional programs leading to a degree or other recognized higher education credential, of a length appropriate to the objectives of the degree or other credential, designed to foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning.*

Houghton University currently offers 96 post-secondary degrees, of which ten are associate degrees, 79 are bachelor's degrees, and seven are master's degrees. Fourteen different degree options are available online, and seven different degree options were available through mostly in-person courses offered primarily at the Houghton Buffalo extension site (Catalog-Academic Information-Majors p. 52-55). In addition, Houghton University maintains several articulation agreements with partner institutions (3.1.1 Articulation Master). In addition to articulation agreements with other institutions for transfer of student credits, Houghton has agreements with high schools for dual enrollment and admittance into Houghton's undergraduate programs, as well as with other universities for Houghton students to complete graduate degrees, primarily in the medical professions.

Since Houghton's last MSCHE re-accreditation in 2015, many changes have been made regarding degrees offered at Houghton University, including upgrading online delivery options and establishing Houghton Online, forming new articulation partnerships with neighboring institutions, and establishing

extension sites in Buffalo. New master's-level degrees were added in education and business, and several new baccalaureate programs were added. In 2016, a major revision of the general education program was accomplished, affecting all degree programs across the board (3.1.2 Revision Questions; 3.1.3 Revision Report).

Houghton University's student learning programs and opportunities are characterized by rigor, coherence and appropriate assessment of student achievement throughout the educational offerings, regardless of degree level or delivery and instructional modality. This has been accomplished through Houghton's academic organizational structure, the process for approval of new programs, and the major revision of general education requirements. These essential elements have been applied to the implementation of fully online degrees, the offerings available at an urban location in Buffalo, and the partnering of institutions with various articulation agreements.

One example can be found in the actions following CREDO Higher Education Consulting's 2016 review of programs at Houghton, in which they identified several programs that showed potential for serving more students. The Provost, in accordance with the previous strategic plan, assembled a team of faculty that included area Deans and a panel of alumni who worked in various industries to conduct feasibility studies, review peer institutions, and design the new programs. The Director of Houghton University Buffalo East Side supported the effort to create the new Criminal Justice AS degree. In keeping with Houghton's evaluative process, Academic Council screened the proposed programs and approval was obtained from both faculty at-large per vote at faculty meetings and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) through a rigorous application process. The required courses for each program and the total credit numbers required for each degree option were scrutinized by each of these bodies (3.1.4 Criminal Justice).

Noteworthy, prior to the work mentioned above, Electrical Engineering (BS) was approved and included a lengthier and more rigorous route for obtaining NYSED approval. A similar process was used, but the stipulation from NYSED to add four new engineering faculty positions was beyond Houghton's capabilities.

In 2019, two new fully online master's-level programs were established: a master of business administration (MBA) and a master's in education literacy (MSED). Both graduate programs are offered in six eight-week blocks—throughout the fall, spring, and summer semesters. The programs were initiated by proposals from the Department Chair to the Interim Chief Academic Officer and Dean of the Faculty. A procedure devised by the Provost was followed, including proposed coursework, sections on rationale and strategic fit, enrollment potential, primary competition, and significant new costs. Academic Council (per channels of Houghton's organizational structure) was included to screen the proposed programs, and approval was obtained from both faculty at-large per vote at faculty meetings and from NYSED through a rigorous application process. The required courses for each program and the total credit numbers required for each degree option were scrutinized by the various levels of proposal review and were established by vote from informed faculty at-large who attended faculty meetings (3.1.5 MSED Development, 3.1.6 MSED Proposal).

In 2015, major revisions began on Houghton's integrative studies program, including a name change to general education program. The revisions were brought about through a rigorous academic-inclusive effort by a team that included members of the Committee on Academic Effectiveness, Interested Faculty, the Social Science Area Dean, Director of Houghton Online, Houghton Librarian, and Director of Integrative Studies. Together they attended the AAC&U Institute on General Education and Assessment.

Upon return from the AAC&U Institute, the Director of Integrative Studies worked with faculty to rewrite Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). The CAE and Area Deans drafted seven new ELOs to replace the previous 15 based on the strategic plan and mission statement. Before the end of the fall 2015 semester, the seven new ELOs were passed with faculty approval. The spring 2016 semester was spent using those new ELOs and principles gleaned from the AAC&U Institute to craft a proposal for revision of the Integrative Studies program. Feedback was gathered from various discipline areas by Area Deans. The Area Deans took various ELOs to their faculty and worked on proposals, including course development. By the end of the fall 2016 semester, a new general education program was approved by faculty and launched in the 2017-2018 academic catalog. Some of the drafting work was accomplished on the floor during faculty meetings, which included one significant amendment: the addition of a third Bible/theology requirement (3.1.2 Revision Questions, 3.1.3 Revision Report, 3.1.7 Revision Timeline, 3.1.8 Revision Presentation).

The general education program revision was efficient and successful in securing support from the main constituents—the faculty. Most faculty were included in the process, even at the drafting level, and the newly proposed curricula were designed at an appropriate length of program and in alignment with the new ELOs (3.1.2 Revision Questions). Notably, the revised program simplified and streamlined the requirements, making it easier for students to understand which courses counted toward general education curriculum.

Brokering articulation agreements with external institutions involves the Provost's Office, key faculty who are vested in the agreements, and similar parties from the external institutions. The agreements have timetables and are subject to updates and renewals. Faculty from the respective academic areas are consulted for course equivalency determinations (3.1.1 Articulation Master).

Faculty and administration at Houghton have a collegiality that is healthy and vibrant. Most parties agree that governance regarding curricular development and changes is well shared. Bi-weekly faculty meetings are well attended and include all faculty and most administration. The faculty meetings are presided over by an elected Faculty Moderator who is charged with serving as the primary facilitator of interaction on matters of general and common concern between the faculty and the administration. The Provost sets the agenda for the faculty meetings in consultation with the Faculty Moderator, and a staff member of the Provost's Office collects the minutes for the meetings.

Since 2015-2016, there have been five different individuals serving in the highest-ranking faculty administrator position (each holding a unique title, some of them interim). Due to the hiring of a new President in 2021 and a new Provost in 2022, it is likely that the highest-ranking faculty administration position will stabilize. Each transition with these personnel has brought with it delays in program evaluations; however, these personnel have forged ahead with program genesis, general education revisions, etc. Much of this work has been accomplished due to the hard work and adaptability of Houghton's leadership and faculty. Adherence to the strategic plan and a concurrent increase in Houghton's enrollment have been priorities.

Criterion 3.2. *Student learning experiences that are designed, delivered, and assessed by faculty (full time or part time) and/or other appropriate professionals who are:*

Criterion 3.2a. *...rigorous and effective in teaching, assessment of student learning, scholarly service, as appropriate to the institution's mission, goals, and policies.*

Houghton's faculty are effective in accomplishing Houghton's mission to "provide an academically challenging Christ-centered education in the liberal arts and sciences to students from diverse traditions and economic backgrounds, and equips them to lead and labor as scholar-servants in a changing world" (Catalog-General Information-Mission p. 3). All Houghton employees—faculty and staff—must be Christians who annually affirm their adherence to the Articles Faith of the sponsoring denomination (Faculty Handbook 1.3). Faculty often start class with prayer or a brief devotional. Additionally, faculty take notice when students seem to be struggling, either academically or personally, and take time to help students in and out of the classroom. In addition, many faculty seek opportunities to engage with students in informal settings outside of class, from gatherings in homes to intramural games on the Quad.

Criterion 3.2b. ...qualified for the positions they hold and the work they do.

Houghton's Faculty Handbook states that all faculty members must have earned their terminal degree, with some exceptions for faculty candidates who have substantial experience in the field that they will be teaching (Faculty Handbook 4.1.1.4). For example, a hire in the communication department did not have a terminal degree, but had 27 years of experience as "Director, Public Relations, Developing Markets" for Xerox Corporation before coming to teach marketing, public relations, and advertising at Houghton. This faculty person recently retired from teaching at Houghton (3.2.b.1 Communication Interview). As of May 2023, 52 of the 62 (84%) full- and part-time faculty at Houghton have terminal degrees (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info).

Criterion 3.2c. ...sufficient in number.

Houghton, as of May 2023, employs 62 full- and part-time faculty and 50 adjunct faculty (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info). The Faculty Handbook states that 24-25 hours during the combined fall and spring semesters is normal and expected for full-time faculty (Faculty Handbook 4.1.1.1). Seventeen of the 62 (27%) full- and part-time faculty are teaching more than 25 hours in the 2022-2023 academic year (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info). This suggests that Houghton may need to hire more faculty in certain areas or reduce the number of courses offered. Additionally, approximately 20 faculty teach summer courses each year; these courses are not included in the 24-25 expected hours.

Houghton's student-to-faculty ratio is currently 11.54 students to 1 faculty member (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info). The average class sizes for Houghton's various modes of delivery for the fall 2022 semester are as follows: Houghton, NY, campus: 15; Buffalo site: 15; online undergraduate programs: 6; graduate music programs: 6; online MBA program: 8; online MSED program: 5 (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info).

The student-to-faculty ratio and average class size suggest that Houghton is not lacking in number of faculty, which seems at odds with the number of faculty that are over the 25-hour course load. Possible explanations could include:

- Faculty taking on more administrative load as the number of staff members has been reduced
- Too many courses offered given the number of faculty
- The result of general education courses adding to faculty loads
- Certain majors experiencing recent growth in the number of students, resulting in those majors not having sufficient faculty for the current academic year

Houghton does evaluate the student-to-faculty ratio at the program and major level. Within the last 10 years, Houghton created an electrical engineering major that received accreditation through New York State. But after a few years, Houghton was unable to attract enough faculty for the program, and eventually decided to drop the electrical engineering program (3.2.c.1 Engineering Info). While having to cut the program is unfortunate, it displayed the ability to know when a program is not going to be feasible and make the decision to remove it.

Criterion 3.2d. *...provided with and utilize sufficient opportunities, resources, and support for professional growth and innovation.*

Faculty Onboarding

All new full-time faculty members attend a one-day New Faculty Orientation prior to the start of the semester where they are provided with important information on the campus, academic policies, tenure, and promotion and an introduction to the academic community's unique history and culture. The Orientation is also an opportunity to connect with other new faculty within the same cohort and to meet the key administrators and staff from across campus.

In addition, new faculty participate in a New Faculty Seminar, which meets bi-weekly through their first year of teaching. The Seminar develops and expands on many of the topics covered in their first year of teaching as well as providing opportunities for deeper conversations around issues of faith and scholarship. New faculty are provided with one-course load release in their first semester of teaching.

Faculty Development Opportunities

One or two Houghton faculty are granted sabbaticals each year (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info). The Faculty Handbook (Faculty Handbook 4.3.3.3) outlines the evaluation table for granting sabbaticals.

At the beginning of each year, continuing and returning faculty must submit an Individual Professional Development Plan. Area Deans review these plans with their faculty to ensure they are well thought out and will provide the necessary goals for the faculty to grow over the year (Faculty Handbook 4.3.3.2).

One area of continued financial support for faculty development has been the Shannon Summer Research Institute (SSRI), which annually awards up to six faculty with \$6,000 for themselves and two students to conduct research in math and natural sciences. SSRI awards are competitive based on submission and evaluation of research proposals.

Houghton University seeks support opportunities for faculty innovation through removing administrative roadblocks to curricular and pedagogical revisions and encouraging faculty to stay current with pedagogical developments in their discipline. One example of faculty having space to innovate is the development of a new science honors topic, which is redesigned every three years around a new challenge or topic. Faculty receive a three-credit load release for development of a new science honors topic and project.

Houghton's Faculty Development Committee (FDC) is given \$10,000 of grant funds annually to allocate to faculty attending conferences, giving presentations, doing research, etc. Each faculty member has a limit of \$900 that they can request and be granted annually. Faculty can make requests for funds at four separate times during the year, and those applications are reviewed and approved by the FDC.

According to the current FDC Chair, 12 of the 16 grant fund requests made in the 2022-2023 academic year have been at or above the \$900 cap, meaning that many faculty must pay for a portion of their professional development activities out of pocket or use departmental budget funds when possible (3.2.d.2 FDC Info). Limited additional funding is also available from the Provost's Office for professional development activities that exceed the \$900 limit.

Criterion 3.2e. *...reviewed regularly and equitably based on written, disseminated, clear, and fair criteria, expectations, policies, and procedures.*

Faculty Evaluations

Faculty are evaluated in a variety of ways by students, peers, area Deans, and the Provost. One way that student review happens is at the end of each semester, students fill out a CampusLabs IDEA Course Evaluation. Houghton has a longer version and a shorter version of the evaluation. These course evaluations provide faculty and administrators with key feedback, both quantitatively and qualitatively, related to overall ratings, student progress on relevant learning objectives, and observations of teaching methods. Tenured faculty are given the choice of which survey they want to use and which courses they want to have evaluated, although they must select at least one lower-level course and one upper-level course each semester. Untenured faculty, including those on the tenure track, must use the longer survey and are required to do evaluations for each course taught (3.2.e.1 Course Evals).

In addition to the course evaluations, faculty are evaluated by peers both within and without the major area through classroom observation and review of syllabi, advising, and scholarly and creative work. Faculty are also evaluated by area Deans in a comparable manner, as well as by students and the Provost (Faculty Handbook 4.5.2). Tenure track faculty are evaluated by self-study review every two years; post-tenured faculty go through the same review process every four years.

Houghton also hires adjunct faculty, as necessary, to supplement the full-time faculty and ensure courses are offered with appropriate frequency. While some departments rarely employ adjunct faculty, others, such as the Greatbatch School of Music, depend on adjunct faculty to be able to offer instruction in highly specialized instrumental areas. The Faculty Handbook states that adjunct appointments can be made for one semester or one year. After completing the agreed-upon semester or year of teaching, if the area wants to have the adjunct's contract re-issued, the area must demonstrate that the adjunct's teaching has been evaluated according to Houghton's standards (Faculty Handbook 4.1.3).

Houghton's Rank & Tenure Committee, chaired by the Provost, oversees promotion and tenure cases. Generally five to eight faculty are promoted each year, and four to six tenure cases are heard (3.2.b.2 Faculty Info; 3.2.e.2 Tenure Schedule).

Criterion 3.3. *Academic programs of study that are clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution in a way that students are able to understand and follow degree and program requirements and expected time to completion.*

Publication of Academic Programs

The Houghton University catalog is posted online in a searchable PDF format and contains full descriptions of the programs and degrees offered, concentrations and minors, and course descriptions

(3.3.1 Catalog Screenshot). Paper copies of the catalog are also available for purchase. The catalog is reviewed and updated yearly by the Registrar's Office and the relevant academic areas.

Upon declaring a major, students and faculty advisors are sent a copy of the audit sheet for the selected major that includes a clear list of requirements to graduate. These audit sheets are readily available to students on the Registrar's page of Houghton's website (3.3.2 Audit Screenshot). An example audit sheet for one of Houghton's majors is included (3.3.3 Audit Example). Audit sheets are also linked from the individual departments' webpages.

At the end of a student's junior year (or the year before the student plans to graduate), students are individually provided with a detailed graduation audit breakdown from the Registrar's Office that lists all the requirements remaining for graduation. This gives students and advisors ample opportunity to address any misunderstandings as well as to ensure that subsequent course selection accomplishes all that is necessary.

To further assist with timely degree completion, the Registrar's page on the website lists all the course offerings and class schedules for the next semester in advance of registration (3.3.4 Courses Screenshot). An example course offerings PDF is included (3.3.5 Course Offerings). Academic calendars and final exam schedules are also accessible through the Registrar's webpage (3.3.6 Dates Screenshot).

Academic petitions, as defined in the University catalog, are available for students to submit when they would like to request waiver of a specific requirement or academic rule, permission for a special academic condition or activity, or enrollment in more than 18 credit hours in a semester (Catalog-Academic Information-Policies-Academic Petitions p. 49). Academic petitions that students have submitted over the last four years are few; 43 were submitted in 2022 (3.3.7 Academic Petitions). Of these, the majority came at the beginning of the academic calendar and not during the second semester, closer to graduation. This shows that students can understand and complete degree and program requirements in the expected time.

While the website does list some articulation agreements and affiliation programs and the requirements entailed (3.3.8 Nursing Screenshot), not all are posted or easily found (for example, the chiropractic articulation is not currently listed). Similarly, although some potential four-year plans are posted on the website (3.3.9 Pre-Med Screenshot), most are not. In addition, although audit sheets are on the website, they must be printed out and physically filled in. The ability to electronically "check-off" completed courses on audit sheets would be a benefit to students. A system that allows students to discover related courses and courses that fulfill certain requirements would also be helpful. When asked about this, the Registrar stated:

Houghton's current student information system does have a built-in degree audit system (called, "Academic Plan"). Plans have been created by the Registrar's Office for most majors. However, we have encountered problems during the testing phase. There appear to be some irregularities in the implementation of the vendor's design that we are having trouble working around. We have met with the vendor and there are no near-term solutions that don't involve significant adjustments to Houghton's majors. The Registrar's Office is currently working with Tech Services to see if there are other possible affordable options for automated degree audit systems (3.3.10 Automated Systems).

Criterion 3.4. *Sufficient learning opportunities and resources to support both the institution's programs of study and students' academic progress.*

Academic Resources

With an institutional student-to-professor ratio of 11.54:1, most Houghton programs are sufficiently staffed with proper instructors who show expertise in their fields. Houghton also employs several part-time faculty members, with half of responding programs stating the need for instructors to cover areas outside of their expertise and to offer classes that are necessary for their given major. Though the size of Houghton's faculty is appropriate for the number of students, the ratio is not consistent across programs, and some have fewer faculty than their current enrollment would indicate is needed. This has led to systemic overloads for faculty in some programs, and the institution is working to address this through strategic hiring. Regarding the number of faculty and its impact on course scheduling, the Registrar states: "We make sure the students meet their major requirements. I don't know that Houghton's faculty levels are necessarily problematic. However, there are occasions when we don't offer all of the course's students need at the times they need them. In these cases, we tend to look at substitutions and even academic petitions to help make it so that students do not have to stay longer. Houghton's faculty levels are probably fine for the number of students we have" (3.4.2 Courses Offered).

All Houghton University programs have a consistent and clear path to graduation for their students and are periodically updated by program faculty to adjust to available personnel and resources. One such example can be found in the Department of Physics, which rebuilt the physics and applied physics majors in the 2022-2023 academic year. Aside from maintaining the strong curriculum, there were two main goals in adjusting: increase the amount of research experience and make the majors small enough that students can double major in math (a common desire). The first goal was initially accomplished when the curriculum was rebuilt for electrical engineering and was maintained when curriculum was rebuilt again after closure of the electrical engineering program. Most faculty agree there are adequate facilities, equipment, and supplies. Academic budgets are limited at Houghton, as they are at many institutions, and faculty often have to work to address shortfalls in material budgets through a combination of thrift, ingenuity, and sacrifice. The Institution has been working to address these issues in instructional spaces, particularly through the work of the Advancement Office.

The Paine Center for Science recently underwent a complete renovation, and the art building has recently had a new roof and new woodshop tools installed. Though some upgrades have been completed in the Chamberlain Center, there are ongoing needs across campus for updates and improvements in instructional facilities, equipment, and supplies. Houghton offers a number of offices and departments that support students in their academic progress:

- The Center for Student Success: Offers mental health counseling, academic support and accessibility services, accommodations, testing centers, peer tutoring, and vocational exploration and counseling.
- Residence Life: Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students, Assistant Resident Directors, Resident Directors, and Resident Assistants all coordinate to assist students with academic and personal needs. Residence Life coordinates with other student resources to evaluate and assess the needs of students.

- Writing Center: Part of the Center for Student Success, the Writing Center is staffed by faculty and student writing consultants available to assist in research and writing assignments from introductory writing to thesis and dissertation.
- Library and Research: Full-time and part-time librarians are available to assist with research and resources.

Criterion 3.5. *At institutions that offer undergraduate education, a general education program, free standing or integrated into academic disciplines, that: a. offers a sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity, and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field; b. offers a curriculum designed so that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. Consistent with mission, the general education program also includes the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives; and c. in non-U.S. institutions that do not include general education, provides evidence that students can demonstrate general education skills.*

General Education

As an institution of the liberal arts and sciences, Houghton's general education program requires students to complete coursework across ten categories: Integrated Humanities, Biblical and Theological Studies, Social Science, Global Competence, Writing, Natural Science, Abstract and Quantitative Reasoning, Art and Music, Wellness, and Transitions. Depending on the category, specific courses or a selection from a broad menu are required. For most students who are completing a BA, BS, or BFA, the standard general education curriculum amounts to 40-45 credits (3.5.1 GenEd Requirements). For most students, these courses are taken independently of their major field of study, though one or two often overlap with major requirements.

In a few circumstances, the number of required courses for general education is reduced in recognition that these students are already taking a substantial number of credits, often more than required to graduate. Specifically, the general education requirements are modified for transfer students who already have more than 25 credits and matriculated at a different institution. Houghton recognizes that these students have typically already made progress in another general education program with courses that may not exactly align with those at Houghton. To honor this and facilitate the transition to the Houghton program, these students must still complete coursework in each category, but the number of courses is reduced in Integrated Humanities, Social Sciences, and Global Competence (3.5.2 GenEd Transfer). Likewise, to accommodate the substantial credit requirements for a BMus degree, the minimum number of credits is reduced to 32, requiring coursework from each of the major categories, but fewer courses and more flexibility (3.5.3 GenEd BMus). The general education curriculum for an AA degree is essentially the same as for a BA, BS, or BFA, with a secondary option to add a liberal arts area of focus while reducing the minimum number of credits from 45 to 40 but still requiring at least one course from each category (Catalog-Academic Information-Requirements p. 52).

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the current general education curriculum was implemented in 2017, following a major revision informed by the Institution's Essential Learning Outcomes (3.5.4 GenEd Design). The general education categories support Essential Learning Outcomes 1, 3, 4, and 7. The other outcomes, 2, 5, and 6, are addressed across the curriculum, but particularly in

upper-level major-specific courses or co- or extra-curricular opportunities, rather than in general education courses (3.5.5 ELO mapping).

Each general education category is reviewed and assessed on a three-year cycle (3.5.6 Assessment Cycles) based on the outcomes and tools identified for that category (3.5.7 GenEd Objectives). Revisions and policy changes to the general education program are overseen by the Academic Council, which includes the Director of General Education (3.5.8 AC Charter), and are then approved by majority vote of the faculty. The greatest number of changes have occurred in the Writing-Enriched and Global Competence categories, which were intentionally designed to be taught across multiple subject areas. Faculty can apply for their course to be designated as fulfilling one of these requirements (3.5.9 Global Competence, 3.5.10 Writing-Enriched). To prevent an ever-growing list of courses that meet these requirements, they are periodically reviewed and culled as necessary. In spring of 2022, three categories originally called Humanities, Changing World, and Mathematics were renamed to Integrated Humanities, Global Competence, and Abstract and Quantitative Reasoning, respectively.

Global Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity

Students take two courses in the Global Competence category. The learning outcomes for this category are that students will be able to: (1) articulate ways in which they are shaped by their own culture and how that shaping influences their interactions with others in this changing world, (2) demonstrate how the subject (language, anthropology, etc.) enables them to see the world from the cultural perspective of the other as they interact and serve in a multicultural context, and (3) identify informed, thoughtful, holistic, and biblical ways to respond to the issues and problems that Christians collectively face in this changing world (3.5.7 GenEd Objectives). Courses that fulfill this category must address the above outcomes but can come from any area of the University (3.5.9 Global Competence). Representative, frequently taken courses include Cultural Anthropology, Intercultural Communication, Psychology of Race and Racism, and Introduction to Global Issues.

Written Communication

Students take one standard introductory college writing course, WRIT 101—Writing in the Liberal Arts, and a second “writing-enriched” course. Writing-enriched courses can be taken either as specific upper-level writing courses, or as courses integrated within a major field of study that include discipline-specific writing instruction to hone writing skills within relevant contexts. In either case, the key component of a writing-enriched course is at least 20 pages of writing with at least three instances of iterative, formative feedback (3.5.10 Writing Enriched). Courses designated as meeting this requirement are vetted by the Academic Council and approved by vote of the faculty as a whole. Approximately half the major fields of study have a writing-enriched course, most often the senior capstone seminar (3.5.11 Writing Courses).

Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning

Prior to the general education revision in 2017, the Natural Sciences requirement was for two standard lab science courses, often the same foundational courses that students who were majoring in these areas would take, such as General Biology I. This created tension in designing and delivering these courses for two populations of students whose educational objectives and needs were markedly different—namely, the need to maintain the technical detail and rigor required for students preparing for medical school exams while at the same time replacing the quantity of technical detail with emphasis

on the underlying scientific reasoning for general education students. To remedy this, the science faculty developed two new courses specifically designed to meet the needs and objectives of the general education program: STEM 141—Science as a Human Endeavor, and STEM 142—Science and Society (3.5.12 STEM guidelines). The objective of these courses includes: “Students will learn sufficient scientific background to be able to identify the fundamental scientific principles underlying many of the issues presented in the current news and be able to participate in rational, informed discussion on these topics,” and “Students will be able to solve quantitative and conceptual problems and demonstrate understanding of the role of experimentation in one or more of the natural sciences” (3.5.7 GenEd Objectives). Likewise, the mathematics general education curriculum was revised in 2017 with the addition of a new course to better meet the educational needs of students and expanding the requirement to include data science and computer science. Houghton faculty designed a specialized general education course, STEM 140—Reason and Abstraction, that “explores topics in mathematics, computing, or data science with a focus on historical context and/or applications to other disciplines and real-world problems. Students develop effective mathematical/computational thinking and communication skills through open-ended inquiry and explore how these skills can inform and enrich a Christian life. This course cultivates an appreciation for the ways in which reasoning and abstraction contribute to problem solving and emphasizes conceptual understanding rather than computational proficiency” (3.5.12 STEM guidelines; Catalog-Course Descriptions p. 52). Note that this course was originally named MATH 141—Mathematical Exploration, but the name was changed to better communicate the focus of the course and to align with the numbering of other STEM general education courses.

Critical Analysis and Reasoning

In addition to the STEM courses, the flagship courses of the general education curriculum are the Integrated Humanities sequence. Created in the 2017 revision and modelled after the innovative and highly successful First-Year London Honors program, this three-course sequence combines the disciplines of history, philosophy, and literature to explore the development of Western culture from the earliest civilizations to the present. Students develop critical reading and thinking skills as they take an integrated approach to studying philosophy and literature by reading primary sources in their historical context (3.5.4 GenEd Design).

Ethics

Consistent with the mission to provide an “academically challenging Christ-centered education,” the general education program includes the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives within the framework of a Christian worldview. Students take an introductory course in understanding and interpreting the Bible, a second course exploring the breadth of theological perspectives in Christianity, and a third upper-level course continuing deeper investigation into biblical studies or theology. These courses provide a solid academic framework for understanding the foundational tenets of Christianity and the resulting systems of values and ethics. Although Houghton is specifically aligned with The Wesleyan Church, these courses explicitly explore the “diversity within the Christian tradition, both historically and today,” and “engage with reflective theology on current issues and doctrinal disagreements” (3.5.13 Intro Christianity).

Exploration of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives also occurs in the Integrative Humanities sequence as students study the development and changes in philosophy, ethics, and values of Western society through contemporary primary literature covering more than two millennia.

Oral Communication, Technological Competency, and Information Literacy

These topics are not explicitly covered in Houghton's general education objectives with the understanding that students will have opportunities to make progress in these areas throughout the curriculum and will receive discipline-specific instruction within their major fields of study. In 2022, the Academic Effectiveness Committee discussed several options for adding Information Literacy as a component of the general education curriculum. However, it was decided that in most cases it was most effective to address this topic within the discipline-specific contexts of the Writing-Enriched courses. The library faculty have periodically assessed a sample of research papers from capstone courses and found that in general Houghton seniors demonstrate good information literacy across several categories and have improved slightly over the last few years (3.5.14 Information Literacy).

Criterion 3.6. *In institutions that offer graduate and professional education, opportunities for the development of research, scholarship, and independent thinking, provided by faculty and/or other professionals with credentials appropriate to graduate-level curricula.*

Graduate Education

Houghton University offers graduate programs leading to the Master of Arts (MA), Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Music (MMus), and Master of Science (MS). These four degrees are offered through three different programs. The Greatbatch School of Music offers both an MA and an MMus. The education department offers an MS in education. The business department offers an MBA (3.6.1 Faculty Meetings). Each of Houghton's graduate programs is designed to offer opportunities for students to engage in research, scholarship, and independent thinking as deemed appropriate for their specific disciplines (3.6.2 Graduate Bulletin).

Master of Science in Education (MSEd)

The MSEd has a sequence of three courses that allow each student to be trained in and practice independent research. LEDU 520 Educational Research 1—Teachers as Researchers is designed to introduce students to the work of academic research in the field of education, requiring students to study the distinctions between action research, qualitative research and quantitative research. The second course in the sequence, LEDU 524 Ed. Research 2—Cultivating & Sustaining Professional Communities of Practice is designed for students to begin engaging in their own research, requiring students to design their own research project, complete a literature review, collect data, and write up their findings. The specific area of focus for the research encourages independent thinking by allowing the topic to be entirely at the discretion of the student, and the research must fit within the degree's focus of literacy. Finally, students participate in LEDU 550 Capstone Seminar—Critical Reflective Literacy Pedagogy, which requires students to deliver a formal presentation of their research to faculty and fellow students. In addition to this course sequence, students are encouraged to present their research at the International Congress on Qualitative Research Conference (3.6.1 Faculty Meetings).

Faculty in the MSEd program either have completed a PhD in literacy/reading or have a master's degree and significant work experience in a pertinent area for their class (3.6.3 Faculty Degrees).

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

The MBA program is seen as an “applied program” with an emphasis on connecting coursework with each student’s current work responsibilities. As a result, the MBA curriculum requires all students to work on a personal integrative project that weaves together course content, original research, and personal workplace application. The skills needed for research appear in several classes: MBA 509—Data Analysis for Decision Making, MBA 518—Accounting Information and Financial Control, and MBA 611—Integrated Marketing Communication. As a unit, these courses are designed to help students gain the necessary skills to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research at their place of business. With these research skills acquired, students work throughout the program on either a change project for their existing business or an entrepreneurial project for a new business idea. At the culmination of the MBA program, students must participate in a four-day residential course: MBA 651—Integrated Project. During this residency, students present their final project with a poster presentation and formal oral presentation given to the faculty and other students (3.6.1 Faculty Meetings).

The faculty for the MBA program have appropriate degrees and professional experience for the courses they are teaching (3.6.3 Faculty Degrees).

Master of Art in Music and Master of Music (MA and MMus)

Both degree tracks offered at the graduate level with the Greatbatch School of Music (GSoM) offer adequate opportunities for students to experience research and independent thinking. Both programs are initiated with a required course, MHS 520—Research and Bibliography (3.6.2 Graduate Bulletin p. 36), which introduces students to the tools of research within the discipline of music and concludes with a substantial research project comprised of a research paper of 22-28 pages in length, a class presentation, and a poster presentation (3.6.1 Faculty Meetings).

In addition to this initial course, all graduate music students work toward a concluding project. The MA students are expected to complete a thesis or a lecture recital. The MMus students must create a concluding recital or portfolio. All these final projects require students to think independently about their particular areas of interest and complete adequate research to sharpen their projects’ focus. Throughout the process, students meet with an advisor who has been assigned based on the particular topic selected by the student (3.6.2 Graduate Bulletin p. 34-35).

In the graduate music programs, all overseeing faculty have doctorate degrees in the areas they are teaching (3.6.3 Faculty Degrees).

Criterion 3.7. *Adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval on any student learning opportunities designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers.*

Third-Party Educational Providers

Houghton has a number of partnerships with third-party providers, and these relationships are internally approved and periodically reviewed (3.7.10 Contract Review). The Director of the Office of Vocation and Calling oversees partnerships with providers that offer credit-bearing internships to students (3.7.1 Internship Oversight). Included as evidence is the Academic Internship Agreement Policy for Handshake (3.7.2—Agreement Policy), as well as the fillable form for the Academic Internship Agreement (3.7.3 Form Questions; 3.7.4 Liability Form). The fillable form requires a description of the

internship, specific learning objectives, and evidence of learning. The form must be signed by a faculty supervisor and an on-site supervisor. These signatures should ensure review of the internship to ensure learning objectives are clearly stated, as well as the means of assessment. This process should provide adequate review and approval of internships.

Acadeum is the primary course-sharing partner for Houghton University. These are courses offered by other colleges that Houghton students take to meet requirements at Houghton (3.7.5 Sharing Partners). Houghton also briefly participated in Campus.edu, an additional course-sharing partnership. Houghton University has contracts on file for both Campus EDU and Acadeum, although Houghton's Campus EDU contract ended on June 1, 2023. Contracts such as these are reviewed and approved through the Office of the Vice President for Finance. Course-sharing partners are utilized when Houghton is not able to offer a course needed to meet a requirement for a major. The course taken through the partner is identified with the help of a faculty advisor or the Associate Provost to ensure that the course will meet the proper requirement. Before a student can enroll in the course, the syllabus will be approved by the faculty advisor or appropriate dean, confirming that the course meets the necessary Houghton requirements. There is, however, no follow-up to ensure that the teaching institution's course syllabus was actually followed. Though course approval based on a syllabus gives reasonable rigor to the approval process to ensure appropriate content is taught, a final review or evaluation after the course is taken should be undertaken periodically to ensure courses routinely used for course sharing actually meet expectations.

Houghton also has dual enrollment agreements with some high schools (3.7.6 Dual Approval, 3.7.7 Third Parties). The dual enrollment articulation agreements (3.7.8 Dual Articulation) must be signed before a dual enrollment course can be offered. The agreement specifies that only content approved by the University will be taught in the course and that the course syllabi must be approved by Houghton before the course starts. Only instructors approved by the University may teach the course, thus ensuring some degree of control and review of the process. Faculty and course content approval for dual enrollment courses are made with the help of a faculty liaison who reviews teacher credentials and course content. The agreements specify that the University has the right to evaluate the professor, course, and student success at the end of every course offered. If the evaluation does not meet the standards of learning for Houghton, then the University reserves the right to terminate the agreement. Although the agreement allows for review to take place, it cannot be assumed that evaluation occurs each time. This gap has been identified in the review process. An agreement review policy is being drafted to ensure all external partner contracts/agreements will be reviewed regularly to ensure that the services provided still meet the University's needs (3.7.9 Third-Party Review).

Criterion 3.8. *Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs providing student learning opportunities.*

Program Assessment

The effectiveness of the academic programs providing student learning opportunities at Houghton University is periodically assessed in two primary ways: through the departmental self-study process and through the annual assessment process using Nuventive Improve (formerly called TracDat). Other places where academic programs are assessed include disciplinary accreditation (in certain disciplines like music and education) and, for programs that consist of a single or small number of courses (like honors programs and off-campus programs), through the CampusLabs IDEA Course Evaluation System.

Since 1984, the official policy for periodic program assessment has been: “All academic programs in the college are scheduled for a five-year review and evaluation” (Faculty Handbook 3.15). This has been primarily implemented by requiring each academic department to produce a self-study of the academic majors and programs in its purview every five years (3.5.6 Assessment Cycle). However, the official guidance from the Provost’s Office contradicts this, stating that department self-studies are to be carried out every seven years (3.8.1 Assessment 2018; 3.8.2 Departmental Assessment). The self-study reports examine the goals, outcomes, resources, and connections with the strategic plan and University mission for each major and program and makes recommendations for improvement. The self-studies are submitted to the Academic Council and the Provost, who provide feedback and a summary to the Board of Trustees. The Provost works with the department toward implementing the recommendations of the self-study. The University recently eliminated the position of Academic Department Chair, necessitating further revision of the plan for program assessment. The schedule for department assessment is prepared by the Provost. Just prior to the previous Middle States visit, a review schedule (3.8.3 Review Schedule) was established to ensure all majors would be assessed in the following five-year cycle. Shortly thereafter, in 2014, it was decided that departmental program review would be suspended for most programs in order to focus on re-accreditation by Middle States (3.8.1—Assessment Status). The departmental review process was revised and simplified in 2018 and restarted in 2019 so that the self-studies would be ready in time for the next Middle States report (3.8.2 Departmental Assessment).

To streamline and standardize the collection and documentation of assessment data needed for preparing the self-studies and for accreditation, Houghton began using Nuventive software in 2012. Educational outcomes for each major were entered into the software, along with the indicators that could be used to assess progress toward meeting each outcome. Each year departments are responsible for updating the assessment results stored in Nuventive, as well as discussing and recording actions to be taken for continuous improvement. Beginning in 2019, a day-long University-wide “Assessment Day” was instituted for the purpose of gathering faculty together to receive instructions, assess their programs, and record their results in Nuventive. Since the last Middle States re-accreditation, only three departments have completed self-studies—the Department of Art; the Department of History, The Department of Political Science and Philosophy; and the Department of Psychology and Criminal Justice (3.8.4 Program Summary). Two departments, education and the Greatbatch School of Music, have completed reports and received disciplinary accreditation (3.8.5 Education Report; 3.8.6 Music Report). Therefore, since the last Middle States visit seven years ago, only 31% of departments, representing 25% of the majors, have been reviewed as part of the departmental self-study or accreditation process (3.8.7 Nuventive Summary).

Former department chairs, and, in cases where the department chair had left the faculty, longstanding faculty members in the department, were surveyed about the departmental self-studies (3.8.8 Email Responses). Of the five departments completing the self-study or a similar review from an external body, four departments have received no feedback from the Provost or the Committee on Academic Effectiveness, and one department (music) because of faculty turnover did not know if feedback had been received. Of the departments that did not complete a self-study in the past seven years, only five out of 11 responded to the survey, and all five indicated there was not a plan for their discipline to complete a self-study prior to the Middle States re-accreditation in 2023-2024. Most respondents indicated that there was not enough time remaining to carry out the required alumni surveys and to bring in outside evaluators.

Other educational programs of the University that have not traditionally fallen under a single department include general education, honors programs, off-campus programs, online studies, and the Buffalo (and formerly Utica) extension programs. The honors and off-campus programs have not prepared formal self-study reports, but evidence exists that program assessment has taken place (3.8.9 Honors Strategy, 3.8.10 Honors Addendum, 3.8.11 OCS Survey). The online studies program (officially a separate department in the 2021-2022 catalog) and the programs offered at the Buffalo extension site (and formerly Utica) were officially to be assessed as part of the majors in the former departments (3.8.12 Online Studies). However, while the psychology department mentioned the online and Buffalo programs in their self-study (3.8.13 Psychology Report), the business department did not write a self-study or assess the online programs in Nuventive. The general education program is completing its three-year cycle of formal assessment in spring 2023. Data has been entered into Nuventive for some categories, but a report has not been prepared.

Though departmental recordkeeping of annual assessment activities using Nuventive has been inconsistent (3.8.7 Nuventive Summary), it does show improvement over time. Of the approximately 32 majors listed (note, some majors, such as biochemistry and chemistry, are assessed together because of their similarity), all but one (data science) have a set of outcomes listed in Nuventive. Over the period of 2015-2022, 38% of the majors have been assessed, rising from 28% in the 2015-2016 academic year to 59% in 2020-2021, before falling back to 41% in 2021-2022. During the same time period, the number of Nuventive reports indicating action taken as a result of the assessment process rose from 10% to 19%. Business administration, intercultural studies, and psychology majors have Nuventive assessment records every single year during the period, but other majors, including accounting, data science, music (BA and graduate), and humanities have never been assessed in Nuventive. Many majors have recorded inadequate or inconclusive assessment data, and many have recorded data for only a couple of years. For example, the writing major was only assessed in 2019-2020, no action was taken, and “Criterion Met? Inconclusive Data” was listed for every outcome. Two minors out of approximately 52 have outcomes in Nuventive, but only one, family studies, has assessment data recorded. Presumably this is because the minors are evaluated along with the corresponding majors, and indeed the minors are included in the self-studies from the departments of art, psychology and criminal justice, history, political science, philosophy, education, and music. Of the other educational programs, such as general education, honors programs, off-campus programs, online studies and the Buffalo (and formerly Utica) extension programs, only the general education program has recorded assessment data in the Nuventive system.

In summary, Houghton University’s curriculum successfully fulfills its mission to “provide an academically challenging Christ-centered education in the liberal arts and sciences.” Houghton’s faculty is appropriate to the size of the institution and possesses the appropriate expertise and credentials for the programs that are offered. Houghton faculty and staff are remarkably invested in the success of their students and the Institution and have sustained excellence in their programs even as financial resources have become more limited. Houghton’s faculty members are proud of the Institution’s innovative and wholistic approach to general education and are equally committed to excellence in graduate education.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Houghton has well-qualified faculty (having terminal degrees or a wealth of experience in their teaching subject) that serve Houghton’s mission and goals and excel in teaching and assessment of student learning.

- The revised general education program is aligned with learning outcomes and incorporates several innovative courses that integrate disciplines and are designed around Houghton's outcomes for general education students.
- Houghton continues to maintain a dynamic set of programmatic offerings, regularly initiating new programs, fields of study, and delivery methods, while at the same time evaluating and terminating unsustainable programs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Houghton's record of program assessment does not reflect the faculty's commitment to excellence and rigor, as has become clear in the self-study process. The University has renewed its commitment to meaningful and consistent program assessment.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. Provide resources and a program of professional development to equip new and continuing employees to effectively and meaningfully integrate their Christian faith and their work (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 1.2).
2. Migrate to a new Enterprise Resource Planning software to streamline processes, increase data visibility, improve data quality, and increase overall productivity (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 4.2).
3. Expand opportunities and resources to support employees' professional development (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 6.5).

CHAPTER 4

STANDARD FOUR: SUPPORT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

OVERVIEW

The Houghton University community has engaged in an in-depth review and analysis of its student experiences across all settings, levels, and instructional modalities. Houghton University recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. Houghton University is committed to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective student support system sustained by qualified professionals that enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success. We have determined that Houghton University has sufficiently achieved all criteria included in this standard, as well as requirements of affiliation 8 and 10.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

1. How are we determining, identifying, and meeting the needs of students, as well as providing access to support services for students across all platforms, campuses, and modalities?
2. How are we supporting and measuring the effectiveness of underrepresented student groups?
3. How equitable and consistent is a student's experience in their interaction with employees?
How is the college assessing and answering this question?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

The evidence used in this analysis was gathered through individual meetings, emails, institutional reports, and the University website. The evidence was then assessed using the guidelines provided in the Evaluation of Evidence document (4.1.1 Evaluation of Evidence) shared with all Middle States co-leads for evaluating the credibility of the evidence gathered for Standard 4. Evidence was then organized to align with the narrative component, ensuring all cited evidence was represented in the evidence inventory and text.

Houghton University demonstrates evidence of meeting the following Standard Four criteria:

Criterion 1. *Clearly stated, ethical policies and processes to admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are compatible with institutional mission.*

Admission Process

Houghton University enrolls students in a variety of degree types and learning modalities. For all prospective students, the Admissions Office seeks to make the application process simple, transparent, and accessible for all students and endeavors to recruit students from diverse backgrounds. Houghton evaluates the application and application process each year to make sure it is collecting robust and pertinent information while eliminating any barriers to the process with the goal of creating accessibility for all students. The most significant changes made in the past several years include the following:

- Fall 2018 Application Cycle: No longer requiring standardized test scores for non-honors applicants.
- Fall 2021 Application Cycle: No longer requiring standardized test scores for all applicants. This was implemented after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Fall 2022 Application Cycle: No longer requiring recommendation letters. This was implemented when evidence indicated that a letter of recommendation was rarely influential in the decision to admit a student. This change in practice resulted in students moving from application submission to application completion.

Completed Applications

	Fall 2023*	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total Completed	564	457	475	429	451
Completion Rate	80.2%	86.2%	64.6%	66.6%	66.1%

*As of December 6, 2022

	Fall 2023**	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total Completed	1,111	830	922	930	910
Completion Rate	80.0%	89.3%	83.9%	84.7%	83.3%

**As of May 31, 2023

	Fall 2023***	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total Completed	1,166	867	973	971	934
Completion Rate	78.9%	89.2%	85.1%	85.5%	83.7%

*** Final

- Fall 2023: Removed \$40 application fee so all students can apply for free.

Applications

	Fall 2023*	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total	703	530	735	644	682

*As of December 6, 2022

	Fall 2023**	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total	1388	929	1099	1098	1092

**As of May 31, 2023

	Fall 2023**	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total	1477	972	1144	1136	505

***Final

To further streamline the application process, all students are considered for merit-based scholarships and the honors programs through admission application; there are no separate applications for these opportunities. At Houghton, each student's application file is read individually and holistically, and the Admissions Office offers every student a timely decision.

Deposits

	Fall 2023**	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Fall 2019
Total	278	191	224	187	260

**Final

As evidenced by the charts above, the total number of applications for fall 2023 has increased to a six-year high, and there were also more deposited students for fall 2023 than there have been for the previous six years.

As we look ahead now to Fall 2024, a similar positive trend in completed applications and overall applications is evident.

Completed Applications

	Fall 2024*	Fall 2023	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020
Total Completed	572	560	454	475	426
Completion Rate	78.2%	81.4%	86.0%	65.0%	66.6%

*As of December 5, 2023

Applications

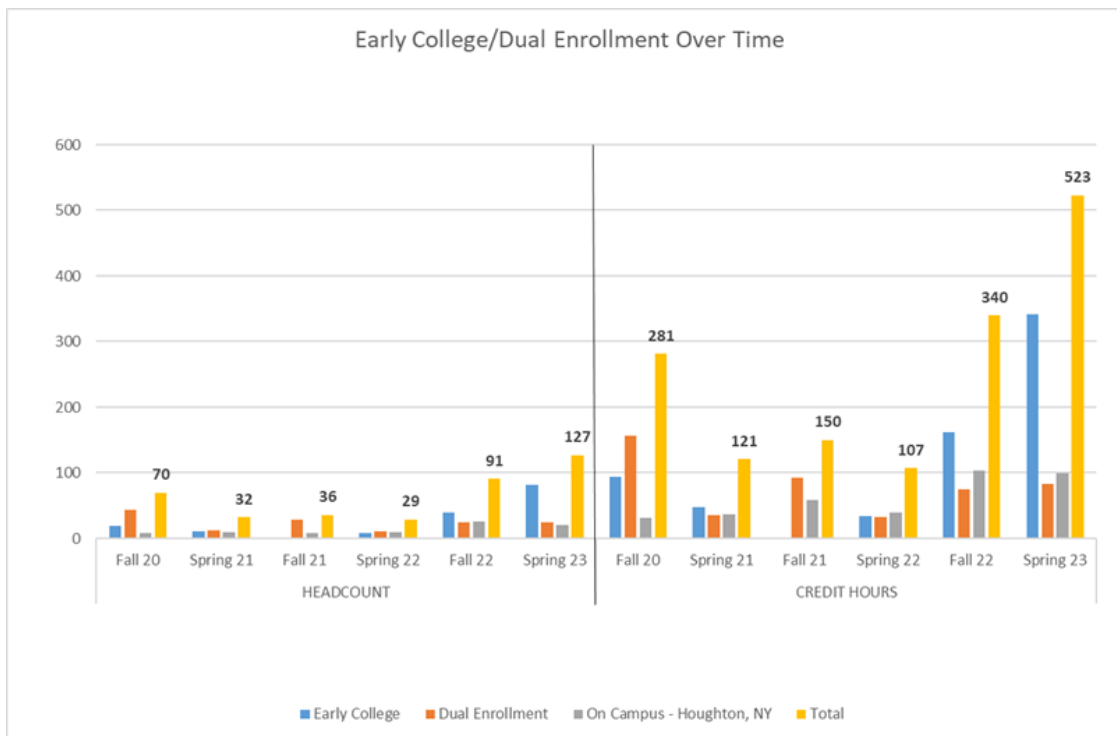
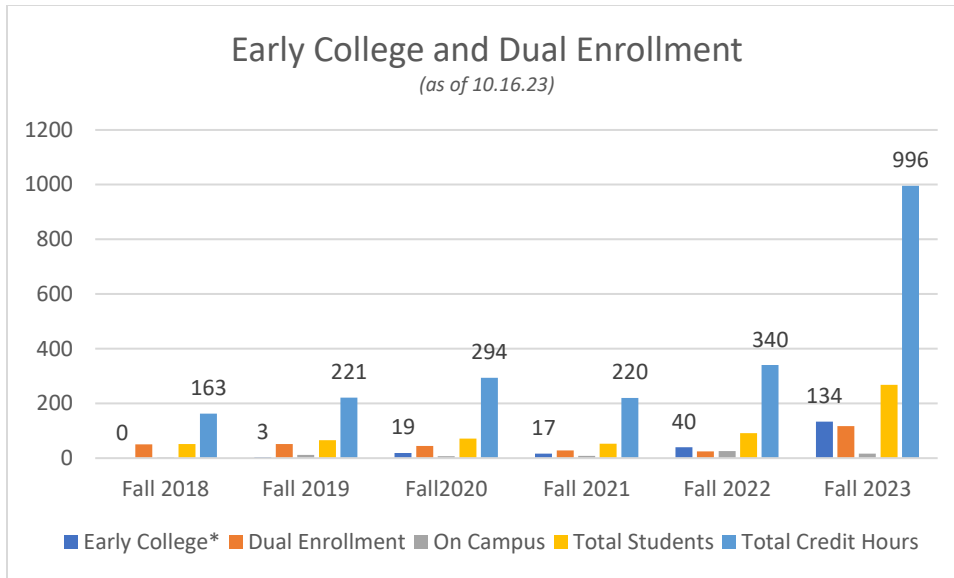
	Fall 2024*	Fall 2023	Fall 2022	Fall 2021	Fall 2020
Total	731	688	528	731	640

*As of December 5, 2023

The expectation for online admission is to provide students with support throughout the enrollment process. Aligned with Houghton’s overall mission, the addition of the graduate and online programs provides a wide range of students access to a Houghton education.

Early College / Dual Enrollment / Partner Schools

During the 2022-2023 academic year, Houghton University began to expand partnerships with high school students from New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, and Alabama, as well as Puerto Rico, Tunisia, Kenya, and Cameroon. These initiatives aid in developing enrollment while introducing Houghton to a more diverse population of students. In fall 2022, the University had partnered with 12 private high schools, which doubled to 25 partners by spring 2023. At present, we have a total of 30. In summer 2023, Houghton launched its first ever Summer Christian School Symposium as a way to meet the need for collaboration and support among regional Christian schools. The graph below indicates growth from fall 2018 through fall 2023 (4.2.1 Partnership Email). This is an area of strategic investment of time, resources and personnel, particularly in the area of early college and dual enrollment, which aligns with Houghton’s mission. These touchpoints with high school students are often a first access point for students.



A page for partner schools was added to the Houghton website in spring 2023 to serve as a resource for current and prospective partners (4.2.2. Partner Schools Webpage). It outlines the benefits of partnership, provides quick access to related links and resources, and includes web forms for partner school requests such as VIP visits, speaker requests, and dual enrollment certification inquires. It also lists current partners. In 2022-2023, early college applications increased from 40 in fall 2022 to 134 in fall 2023. Houghton continues to add new partners who are interested in dual enrollment and early college classes for their students. The University has designated a staff position to serve as the Director of Strategic Partnerships and Graduate Admission. This ongoing work is intended to serve as an additional pipeline for new students and Fall 2023, received 15 students (6% of the total class).

Student Financial Services

The Student Financial Services Office (SFSO) at Houghton University endeavors to make a Christ-centered liberal arts education financially obtainable. This is facilitated through offering financial options, gracious counsel, and various resources. The goal of the SFSO is to support students in achieving their God-given potential.

Cost of Attendance (Expenses)

The cost of an education at Houghton University is transparent from a student's first interaction, whether they are viewing the website or receiving an award letter. The fee schedule is published online and includes all direct costs such as tuition for each modality, housing and meal plan options, fees, etc. (4.1.a.7 SFSO tuition costs). Every financial aid award letter demonstrates the direct costs that a student can expect to pay. It is clearly stated on the student's award letter that the cost listed does not include course-related fees. These will not be known until registration is completed. The SFSO website also includes the estimated indirect costs a student can expect, such as transportation and course textbooks. The transparent pricing holds true for all Houghton students with the goal to maintain this standard so that prospective students and families can anticipate the tuition cost and plan accordingly. More information can be found in the evidence inventory (4.1.a.7 SFSO tuition costs).

In every program, the SFSO strives to keep the costs as low as possible for Houghton students. This is done through collaboration with the SFSO that works closely with the Admissions Office, the Comptroller, and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to maintain all pricing and budgets. Each year when the costs are approved by the Board of Trustees, the Student Accounts Manager updates the fee schedule on the website. The overall goal continues to be to determine what is fiscally responsible for the institution and equitable for Houghton students. One commitment to this goal is demonstrated by having the pricing set and posted to the Houghton website prior to the first financial aid package of the new year.

The overall goal is continuing transparency, streamlining charges, and avoiding extra costs. Achieving the pricing reset and covering awarded aid with actual donor dollars was a significant accomplishment. This allowed the SFSO to more clearly discuss Houghton's pricing model with prospective families. A tangible example from summer 2023 was SFSO's involvement in "Passport Day" for deposited students. Accepted students went through a series of stations to prepare them for starting their Houghton experience. The SFSO station worked to ensure that there was a clear understanding of the student's cost and meet any gap that remained.

Financial Aid

All U.S. citizens and eligible non-citizens can apply to receive federal aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Residents of New York State should also complete the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) application if they wish to be considered for state aid. There is no partiality based on gender, race, or religion. An Affidavit of Financial Support is required for all international students. All U.S. citizens and eligible non-citizens can apply for federal and state aid. Graduate students are only eligible for federal unsubsidized loans. Complete information can be found on the Houghton website and in the academic catalog, including a Net Price Calculator (4.1.a.5 Net Price Calculator).

A financial aid package is sent to every student. The SFSO uses the information from the FAFSA and the New York State TAP application to create an offer and determine other aid eligibility, such as institutional aid and loans. Residential undergraduate students are the only population eligible to receive institutional aid. Each student is considered individually and evaluated in light of their specific financial situation. All full-time undergraduate Houghton students are eligible for federal and state aid. Students who complete some courses in Buffalo, NY, and online students are eligible for only federal and state aid. When packaging residential students, need-based funds from the federal and state government are applied first. The next step is to award institutional academic scholarships followed by institutional need-based funds. Lastly, federal loan funds are awarded. The financial aid package is mailed and/or emailed to the student. Further communication is followed by a phone call or email if the student or their family has any additional questions.

SFSO counselors assist students by answering questions regarding their FAFSA or TAP application. All student types are awarded federal funds through the administrative system PowerFAIDS. The financial aid counselor in charge of NY aid views the state award on the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) site and enters the information onto the student's package screen. The financial aid counselor responsible for federal aid downloads the FAFSA into PowerFAIDS and reviews the information for accuracy. The financial aid counselor then requests further information or verification from the student if needed. Every package created is reviewed by members of the SFSO prior to being sent to the student. Students are advised regarding remaining financial aid eligibility, Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) requirements, responsible borrowing, and who to contact in the SFSO with questions (4.1.a.9 Financial Aid Policies). Online students were given a survey in which a section was dedicated to the SFSO (4.1.a.2 Financial Aid Online). This allows the office to gauge the level of satisfaction from students regarding the financial aid process.

Each year the SFSO evaluates all packaging procedures for efficiency. An example of improvement is uploading a copy of the award letter into the admission system, Slate, so that the SFSO staff can take a team approach in assisting students' understanding of their aid packages. Houghton implemented the Slate platform from Technolution in 2017. In 2023, the SFSO met with the athletic department to discuss the delayed timeline of the FAFSA forms this upcoming year. The SFSO also plans to visit the dining hall to encourage students to complete the FAFSA as soon as possible this year. Another area of continued improvement is required staff attendance at webinars and training sessions to understand the changes made to federal financial aid regulations.

Scholarships / Grants

Institutional academic scholarships are awarded to residential campus undergraduate students on the basis of high school GPA. The Highlander Award/Scholarship is \$1,500 to those with a GPA of 3.5 or higher. The Provost Award/Scholarship is given to those with a GPA of 3.0-3.49. The James S. Luckey Scholarship is awarded by an interview process to candidates of the Houghton Honors Program. Institutional grants are awarded according to need after federal and state aid is determined. Other opportunities are graduate assistantships for graduate students and the Wesleyan Scholarship for traditional undergraduate students who are affiliated with the Wesleyan Church. All scholarships and grants are clearly listed with specific criteria on the Houghton website. Traditional and graduate students are the only populations that are eligible to receive institutional financial aid (scholarships). More information can be found in the academic catalog and inventory (Catalog pp. 19-25, 4.1.a.8 SFSO Website).

During the 2022-2023 academic year, eligible residential undergraduate students began receiving a new scholarship called the Founder's Promise Scholarship (4.1.a.3 Founders Promise). Students who are determined to be Pell eligible through the FAFSA will receive combined aid that equals the cost of tuition. The total award will include Pell, TAP (if a NY resident), academic merit awards (if a recipient), and the Founder's Promise Scholarship. It is available to both in-state and out-of-state students. The Founder's Promise Scholarship is missionally driven and is named after Houghton's founder and namesake, who often signed his letters, "Yours for fixing up the world," and began the institution with the purpose of educating young people in Allegany County, particularly those from lower socioeconomic situations and poverty.

Each student is considered individually and evaluated for their specific financial situation. The Admissions Office receives a student's application and transcripts. These documents are uploaded into the admission platform—Slate. Slate communicates directly with the financial aid system, PowerFAIDS. The financial aid counselor reviews this information and awards the appropriate scholarship or grant to the student with the assistance of PowerFAIDS packaging formulas and algorithms.

Every award that is given to a student is reviewed by members of the SFSO team. This is the system of checks and balances that ensures the University is awarding scholarships and grants correctly. Student Financial Services also communicates directly to the student or their parents regarding their specific aid package. Based on these conversations and the family's understanding, the SFSO team assesses how effective their work is. Each year the institution evaluates how it can further financially assist its students. The role in SFSO is to continue communicating and assisting students as they work through the application process.

Loans

There are three different loan options available to finance a student's education. Through the federal government, a student may borrow Federal Direct loans, and their parents may utilize the Parent PLUS loan. Alternative loans are also available to be borrowed by the student with a credit-worthy co-signer. All loans must be awarded and calculated under the regulations put forth by the federal government. Federal student loans are available to all U.S. citizens by completing the FAFSA form. Private loans are also available to credit-worthy applicants. Students who receive federal loans complete an exit interview before graduation. All Houghton students and graduates have access to a site called EdRepay, which is a partnership with Edamerica (4.1.a.1 EdRepay and Loans). In addition to educational materials and repayment strategies, this site includes modules for budgeting and money management. Students are first introduced to this site during their first year in the Transitions course, an orientation course required of all first-year students to help acclimate them to college life.

If a student or parent wishes to borrow money, they must complete the necessary application and documentation in order to be eligible. The federal government requires that the student complete the Loan Entrance Counseling and Master Promissory Note prior to loan disbursement. Student instructions are listed on the federal student aid website. Alternative loans can be viewed and compared by visiting the Great Lakes Educational Loan Services website (4.1.a.4 Great Lakes). Once federal loans are originated by the Common Origination and Disbursement site, they are distributed to the student's account by Houghton's Operational Specialist. Private loans are certified online by Great Lakes Educational Loan Services, and disbursements are scheduled. The student and their family need to initiate this process if they intend to borrow funds to finance the student's education. The Operational Specialist is responsible for originating and disbursing all federal loans and applying private loans to the

student's account. Of all undergraduate students, 58% take federal loans; of all graduate students, 50% utilize federal loans.

Currently, the SFSO is working with a consulting group to streamline files sent and received from Central Operations Database (COD). The SFSO is committed to communicating with students regarding responsible borrowing and loan repayment. Houghton students can make use of the third-party loan advising and counseling provider, Ed Financial (4.1.a.1 EdRepay and Loans), as a resource when making these important decisions.

Repayment

SFSO works closely with the Registrar's Office to track each student's enrollment at Houghton University. A student's attendance may stop due to graduation or withdrawal. No matter the reason, every student must be informed of their rights and responsibilities as they enter repayment. All students who have borrowed federal loans are included. Every student who ceases to attend Houghton University and has borrowed federal funds must complete an exit counseling session. Residential students have the opportunity to have their counseling face to face, but online students and those who take some classes in Buffalo, NY, all receive their information online.

Graduating students receive an email from SFSO requesting that they attend a mandatory exit counseling session. Upon completion, they are directed to go to the federal aid website to complete the online exit counseling session and begin the six-month post-grad window. Staff cross reference those who attended with the graduate list. The staff then emails any student who did not attend the initial session. These students are then directed to complete the online exit counseling. Students who are enrolled in online courses or take courses in Buffalo, NY, are sent instructions on how to obtain and complete the exit process. They are also encouraged to visit EdFinancial for additional information. The Financial Aid Operations Specialist is responsible for scheduling the exit counseling session and providing all students with the required materials. Houghton receives notification via the US Department of Education's Common Origination and Dispersant (COD) system when a student's exit counseling has been completed. All students are given a copy of their email confirmation that the session has been completed.

The SFSO is currently working on a way to include this information as a component of the Houghton Hub (Campus Groups) app, which would allow students direct access to complete the exit counseling in a more efficient manner and more easily track completion. The graduation list is located on a shared site via the employee intranet portal to ensure all graduates are accounted for.

Refunds

Houghton University's refund policy is in accordance with the regulations set by the U.S. Department of Education. The policy applies to all students and those who withdraw. The full policy is available on the Houghton website for students and families to reference (4.1.a.1 EdRepay and Loans). Credit balances caused by financial aid are refunded after careful evaluation of the student's account and eligibility for aid. If a credit balance refund is due to the student, the refund is made to the student within 14 days, as required by the federal regulations for Title IV funds. A credit balance on student accounts as a result of withdrawal will be refunded a minimum of two (2) weeks after the student has officially withdrawn through the Registrar's Office. The Houghton website includes all policies for student accounts (4.1.a.6 SFSO Accounts Policies).

In accordance with federal regulations, when financial aid has been disbursed, refunds are allocated in the following order: Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans; Federal Direct Subsidized Loans; Federal Perkins Loans; Federal PLUS loans; Federal PELL Grants; Federal SEOG; other Title IV assistance; other federal sources of aid; other state, private, and institutional aid; and lastly, the student. Refunds are issued in the form of a check made payable to the student and mailed to the student's preferred address. The student may also request to pick up the check at the SFSO. Federal refunds for Parent PLUS loans are issued to either the student or the borrower (whomever was selected on the application). These checks must be cashed within 180 days from their issue date. After this period, uncashed checks become stale dated and are non-negotiable; they must be voided back to the student's account and returned to the federal government no later than 240 days after the check was issued.

The SFSO uses a system of checks and balances that includes the Student Accounts Manager, Accounts Payable Specialist, and Financial Aid Operations Specialist. A withdrawal form is produced and subsequently passed through the office. Each individual reviews the form for accuracy, including the specifics of the refund calculation and the amount due to the federal and state government. Each individual signs this form. This is a system that has proven to work. Refunds and calculations of federal funds are reviewed by external auditors, and Houghton has had clean audits thus far. Future goals include offering students the option of direct deposit vs. check only.

Validation Process

One of the ways that Houghton is able to make sure it is complying with many federal rules is by the institutional system of validation. No aid can be applied to a student's account until the student is validated. In fact, a student is not allowed to arrive on campus until the steps have been completed. The requirements for this are readily available on the website, as well as regularly communicated in both email and postal mail to all incoming students, and communicated by phone calls and emails to returning students (4.1.2 Validation process).

The checklist for validation includes FAFSA, TAP application, loan steps, required health forms, and final transcripts. The SFSO continually monitors this process to ensure that Houghton complies with all federal regulations. Therefore, students cannot physically move into residence halls until staff confirm completion of each document.

The Admissions Office helps throughout the summer to make sure the incoming class is working through their checklist. The SFSO assists as well by contacting students for missing items. The Admissions Office, Health Center, Student Life, and SFSO all work together on this. The Student Accounts Specialist is the one who gives the final word of approval through confirmation of documents in Slate, the billing site (PowerCampus), and PowerFAIDS.

In summer 2022, the Institution held the first annual "Passport Day" in mid-July to help the incoming students complete their checklists. This process is regularly reviewed to ensure efficiency and thoroughness. Lastly, the SFSO is audited annually in the spring by Lumsden & McCormick, LLP. The SP 2023 review determined that the University is in full compliance with no adjustments needed (4.1.a.10 SFSO Audit).

Orientation and Transitions

Residential students are assigned to an orientation course, either Transitions 102 (first-year students) or Transitions 104 (transfer students). Residential new students return early to campus for Orientation. Fall sport student athletes and student leaders return earlier for pre-season and training leading up to Orientation. The Director of Student Engagement plans the events, which are designed to welcome new students to campus (4.1.c.7 Orientation Schedule). Upon arrival, students are greeted by the admissions team, student leaders, and employees of Houghton before going to their respective residence halls. The entire community then joins in the Wesley Chapel in the afternoon of move-in day for a service of dedication and worship followed by a farewell to family members. This long-standing tradition is an opportunity for community prayer with students, parents, faculty, and staff in attendance. New students are introduced to their Transitions Leaders and are grouped into Transitions Groups of approximately 11-15 other incoming students the first evening of move-in day. The Transitions Leader, who is a trained returning student, continues to lead this small group throughout the first half of the semester to help with their acclimation to Houghton. Annually, generally in October, Admissions and Student Life representatives meet to review the Orientation program and identify elements to continue because of their effectiveness and/or positive reception by new students and their families.

Graduate, undergraduate online, and early college students also have an Orientation Guide (4.1.c.3 NSO Guide 2021), which introduces all new students to the student portal, student email access, and many other valuable resources. Online students are given an electronic copy of “Houghton Online New Student Orientation Guide,” as well as access to a Moodle course titled “Transitions 200” (4.1.c.9 Student Success Syllabus).

During the Transitions course, the Alumni and Community Engagement Office members share information about Houghton’s founder and past presidents to ensure students understand the legacy of Houghton University.

International students, missionary kids, and third-culture kids (TCKs) are invited to return to campus early for the InterConnect Program. Students attending with an F-1 Visa attend an Immigration Workshop that covers topics like the I-20, I-94, U.S. Visa, student on-campus employment, OPT, and CPT (4.1.c.8 Immigration Workshop). Students are also provided the opportunity during InterConnect to form friendships and adjust to the community before joining in the larger Orientation following InterConnect. Following each InterConnect program, a staff person records notes for areas of improvement for the following year (4.1.c.6. InterConnect Evaluation).

At the end of the fall semester, students are sent two different surveys—an Orientation evaluation and the course evaluation for the Transitions class. Data from Transitions is recorded in Nuventive as part of the general education area. The Director of Student Engagement collected this in fall 2022 through the Campus Groups, “Houghton Hub,” and reviews the responses in planning subsequent Orientation offerings (4.6.4 Course Evaluations, 4.6.5. Orientation Evals 2022). Based on student feedback, several new elements have been incorporated into the Orientation and Transitions programs for fall 2023. These include the following: students will complete a service project together with their group; each group will have a volunteer mentor from the wider University community (faculty, staff, or emeritus faculty who continue to live in the community); a teaching guide for the Transitions Leaders will better facilitate their small group sessions and provide consistency for all new students; Clifton Strengths for Students will be utilized to replace a skills assessment tool; and the tour rotation portion from Transitions will be replaced with a student scavenger hunt during Orientation weekend to allow them to

find the location of various campus resources and the location of their first class of the semester (4.1.c.5 Transitions 102 syllabus, 4.1.c.10 Transitions 104 syllabus).

Academic Advising

Students' interactions with faculty have consistently been demonstrated as an area of satisfaction. Houghton faculty serve as academic advisors for students rather than professional advisors. According to the National Resource Center, only 43.2% of four-year institutions use faculty members as advisors (4.1.c.11 NRC Advising Infographic). Compared to private institutions in the Northeast, other Christian colleges, and other small colleges, Houghton students assessed their interactions with faculty as "excellent" at a higher percentage. The main area of weakness that emerged from the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) is in students' perception that "faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course," which was lower than within the same comparison groups (4.6.1 SSI).

Prior to registration for courses, students are required to meet with their advisors. Students and faculty advisors receive instructions to facilitate the process of registration. Each spring semester, "Advising Day" is set aside with no classes to allow students to meet with their advisors to prepare for the upcoming academic year (4.1.c.12 Student Instructions, 4.1.c.13 Faculty Instructions). All students are listed as "undecided" when entering. For students who are still deciding upon an academic major, a faculty person from the Provost's Office or the Office of Vocation and Calling serves as the student's advisor to offer additional support as the student explores possible area(s) of interest (4.1.c.17 Guide to Assigning). Faculty do not begin serving as academic advisors until their second year of employment at the University to allow for acclimation/familiarity and training with the advising process. The Registrar's Office provides training that includes outlines for supporting students through the advising process (4.1.c.14 Advising Workshop, 4.1.c.18 Advising Meetings Outline). A group of faculty remain on contract over the summer to create all new students' schedules based on a preference form that each newly admitted and deposited student submits (4.1.c.15 Scheduling Process, 4.1.c.16 Course Preference Form).

Student Success

In fall 2019, the University launched the Center for Student Success, which brought together several existing offices in one location on the main floor of the Chamberlain Center, which houses academic classrooms and faculty offices. The Center is comprised of the following services and centers: Academic Support and Accessibility Services, Counseling Services, Office of Vocation and Calling, Military and Veteran Support Services, and the Writing Center. There are also support services for Veterans' affairs. The overarching question asked of personnel in the office is this: "How are students better because of the work we do?" Student Life staff, including the CSS team, meet with their supervisor three times a year for evaluation and goal setting (4.6.8 Employee Eval Form).

The mission statement of the Center for Student Success reads, "The Center for Student Success at Houghton University equips students for academic, personal and professional success through an individualized investment in your growth and development designed to accelerate your God-given potential." According to the 2021-2022 Annual Report for the Center (4.1.c.2 2021-2022 Annual Report), the table below outlines the number of staff and the number of unique students who utilized services through individual appointments (this does not factor in group events, such as workshops and classroom presentations, students utilizing tutoring services, classroom presentations, etc.; it is individual meetings with staff team members):

2021-2022 Academic Year

	Number of staff	Unique students for individual appointments
Academic Support & Accessibility	3 (FTE)	231
Counseling Services	3 (FTE)	258
Vocation and Calling	1 (FTE)	152
Writing Center	5 student writing consultants	138 sessions

At the end of each semester, the CSS conducts a survey of any student who had an appointment with the staff during the respective semester (4.6.2 CSS Survey Instrument).

Counseling

Students seeking individual counseling can find the intake forms on the Houghton website as well as by scanning a QR code displayed in the Center or using a public laptop housed in the Center. In 2022-2023, there were three full-time counselors. Using the Titanium counseling form (4.1.c.1 Titanium Counseling Form) and CCAPS, the Center is conducting ongoing assessment of symptoms following an intake form. Students also complete an exit form. The Center for Student Success creates an annual “End of Year Report” that outlines student usage, demographics, and all counseling data (4.1.c.2 2021-2022 Annual Report pp. 16, 26).

Counseling Services offers:

- Individual counseling
- Walk-in counseling hours, three times per week
- Education/consultation
- Crisis intervention

Wellness Programming

- Anxiety Workshop (with Counselor and Associate Director of Center for Student Success)—a closed group for individuals on the waitlist for general counseling; it runs for three weeks.
- Wellness Wednesdays (run by Counselors and Center for Student Success Coordinator) —weekly programming around education, relaxation, and creativity. It is open to all of campus.
- Student Support Network (Counselors)—peer support network that students are nominated for. They apply and go through a eight-week training program to be a resource and support for their peers. It is offered at least once a year, if not each semester.
- De-Stress Fair—spring program targeted toward college student stress. Offers a variety of activities, including animals.

Because of the positive response to programming, a Wellness Counselor was added as a full-time staff person in the Center for Student Success for the 2023-2024 academic year.

Academic Support

Prospective students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level to which they have applied go through an Admissions committee review to determine what additional student support services

should be required for each student. Those who need additional support will receive a light-loaded schedule (12 credits vs. 15) and be placed in WRIT 101: Writing in the Liberal Arts (WILA) and/or College Study Methods. The faculty who schedule new students' courses during the summer have instructions for how to identify which students need a light-load schedule or need "Full Support Services" (4.1.b.1 Special Circumstances). If a student has a score below 550 on the SAT, advisors are provided a guide to place them into STEM courses that will give the strongest foundation (4.1.b.2 STEM SAT Support). In fall 2021, Houghton partnered with Pharos360 to create a system of academic alert for all students called "Compass." This system replaced a home-built mechanism to better identify ways to support students holistically. Personnel representing a wide range of offices on campus (faculty, athletics, student life, etc.) meet regularly to review students who may need additional supports to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom.

For non-residential undergraduate students completing courses online and/or at the Buffalo extension site, the Assistant Director of Online Student Success and Academic Services (a role that became the Director of Houghton Online in spring 2023) collaborates closely with the Admissions Office and Student Financial Services, as well as the Director of Academic Support and Accessibility Services, to support this population from acceptance through graduation. In January of 2023, a new Admission Rubric was adopted that removed light-load for online students. Throughout recent years, the Assistant Director of Online Student Success and Academic Services has collaborated with employees from the residential campus to add additional support for online students. Online students are able to access chapel services through an audio link, receive "The Bridge" (a weekly email from the Dean of the Chapel that includes a link for meeting with the Dean), a student ID, and access to the resources of the Willard J. Houghton Library. For the 2022-2023 academic year, the Assistant Director of Online Student Success and Academic Services worked with approximately 47 students as an academic advisor. The Assistant Director sends weekly email check-ins and offers office hours each week (including one evening per week for those who work during the day). For students who are placed on academic probation, she works with the student to create an accountability and self-discipline plan and meets over Zoom.

Criterion 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.*

Transfer Credits

Houghton University accepts transfer students from other universities and colleges following the guidelines stated in the University's transfer policies and guidelines (4.1.d.8 Gen Ed Transfer Policy, Academic Catalog Transfer Guidelines pp. 15-18). These policies and guidelines have been reviewed by the Academic Effectiveness Committee to provide clearer guidance for transfer students. An element of the transfer process is ensuring students provide all previous transcripts and any competency reports beyond what is traditionally expected of a high school education—this may be demonstrated through AP, CLEP, or IB exams (4.2.3 Transfer GenEd Guide, 4.2.4 Transfer CLEP, 4.2.5 Transfer AP).

Criterion 3. *Policies and procedures for the safe and secure maintenance and appropriate release of student information and records.*

Securing Student Files

The Houghton Registrar website includes links to all FERPA Forms (4.3.3 FERPA webpage and forms, 4.3.4. Request to Prevent Disclosure of Directory Info). Students are expected to complete a FERPA permissions form upon enrollment that they can update at any time; this form allows or restricts parents or guardians from seeing conduct, financial, and academic records (4.3.2 Request to Release Ed Record). Records may be challenged through the Registrar's Office to request a hearing to review records that one feels include "inaccurate or misleading information" (4.3.5 Request Hearing to Challenge Ed Records).

FERPA forms are uploaded into the CMS (PowerCampus). Student Life staff have access to this information in the student retention software program, Compass, for quick access. Student Life staff are trained annually on appropriate processes for releasing information to inquiries. When a student requests academic support or accessibility services documents from the Center for Student Success to be sent to an external source, the student is required to sign a record release form that indicates specifically which primary documents are to be released and to whom they be sent. When it is necessary to release mental health records to both internal (e.g. health center, athletics) and external sources, students must sign a Release of Information form, granting permission for the Counseling Center to release records (4.3.1 Release of Info Counseling). Additionally, student mental health records are securely housed in a HIPPA compliant electronic health records platform (Titanium). As per New York state health records guidelines, records are deleted after a minimum of six years since point of last contact. The Center for Student Success Executive Director confirmed with Houghton IT staff in spring 2022 that deleted electronic records are permanently deleted from the server as regular system updates are conducted (4.3.10 Titanium Record Deletion).

The Registrar, Director of Financial Aid, Executive Director of the Center for Student Success, and Vice President for Student Life are all involved in securing students' files. Records are kept of the percentage of students who have completed FERPA permission information and are assessed and sent annually via a Consumer Information Disclosure. During a Data Management Audit (4.3.8 Data Audit Themes) conducted in 2020, further FERPA training was suggested to the President's staff based on the findings (4.3.6 Data Management Assessment and Recs). Additionally, a data glossary (4.3.7 Data Glossary) was developed to improve communication between various departments across campus to ensure all data is handled properly (Catalog pp. 20 and 42-43, Faculty Handbook Section 7.7).

Criterion 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.*

Co-Curricular Student Experience

Co-curricular programming at Houghton seeks to challenge and support students while building community and having fun as they develop holistically throughout their time on campus. Many of these program offerings are facilitated through the departments of Student Engagement, Residence Life and Housing, Office of Spiritual Life, Center for Student Success, Greatbatch School of Music, and the University Health Center.

In order to provide a co-curricular experience that supports the needs of students holistically, the Student Life Leadership Team (Director of Student Engagement, Director of Safety & Security, Director of Residence Life & Housing, Director of Health Services, Dean of the Chapel, Director of Center for Student Success) meet regularly, chaired by the VP for Student Life to discuss student development trends, coordinate on-campus programming initiatives and calendars, and address campus concerns as they arise related to the student experience. The Office of Student Life is guided by an area mission that is undergoing revisions for the fall 2023 (4.6.13. Student Life Mission and Outcomes). The Director of Athletics regularly participates in these meetings, as athletics comprise a significant percentage of the student body (approximately 32% of the total student body and 34% of the Fall 2023 incoming class) and athletics has close connections to the student experience. Every three years, Houghton participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey conducted by Indiana University School of Education and collaboratively shares data with like institutions through the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), of which Houghton is a member (4.5.2 NSSE Administration Summary, 4.5.3 NSSE CCCU Consortium Report, 4.5.6 NSSE Engagement Indicators, 4.5.5 NSSE Frequencies and Statistical Comparisons, 4.5.4 NSSE High-Impact Practices, 4.5.7 NSSE Multi-Year Report).

The Student Council serves as the primary representative organization for the Houghton University student experience as they represent their constituents' needs and collaborate with the leadership of the Director of Student Engagement, Vice President of Student Life, Dean of Students, and University President to provide care for the Houghton campus community.

Safety and Security

The Safety and Security Office offers safety checks, rounds, and information sessions to the entire community throughout the year. A certified security officer is on duty 24/7/365. Student leaders receive additional training in safety for the Residence Halls. Crime statistics are available on the Safety and Security Website. The annual Safety and Security "report is designed to demonstrate the safe nature of this remarkable community we call Houghton as well as show that we are in compliance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security and Crime Statistics Act" (4.6.6 Annual Security Report).

The Current Students page on the website details what Title IX is and links to the policies and contact information for the University Title IX Coordinator (4.4.4 Title IX Website, 4.4.5 Title IX Policy). All new students meet the Title IX Coordinator during Orientation, at which time the policy is explained. New student athletes return to campus earlier and receive additional information about Title IX (4.4.6 Athlete Title IX meeting, 4.4.7 Athlete Title IX Speaker Notes). Houghton also has a bias procedure which outlines departments and personnel who share the policy with campus constituents (4.3.9 Bias Procedures p. 2). Each spring semester, the Office of Student Life conducts the Title IX Climate Survey (4.6.10 Climate Survey, 4.6.11. Climate Survey Narrative, 4.6.12. Climate Survey 2021). The Vice President for Student Life reports on this data to the Board of Trustees, considering ways in which the department might make improvements.

Residence Life and Housing

Each year the Residence Life and Housing Office recruits, hires, and trains Resident Assistants (RAs) who support community living within University residence halls. Training includes a semester-long Leadership Training seminar in the spring semester prior to employment and extensive training in August prior to the start of the academic year. This training includes best practices for student engagement, development of appropriate residence hall activities, spiritual life, crisis response, conduct issues, and

mental health support. A crucial element of the RAs’ support of the student experience is the reporting of concerns through the Compass Student Concern reporting system. RAs are able to submit updates or reports that are received by the Dean of Students and the Vice President for Student Life, who then follow up as appropriate.

Office of Spiritual Life

Whereas Houghton is a Christian university, the spiritual life of students is centrally important to the experience that they receive while enrolled within the community. The staff of the Office of Spiritual Life meet regularly with students to help them process issues related to their spiritual development. Through individualized and group programs, small groups, Bible studies, and the Emmanuel Scholars program, students are offered opportunities to grow and develop in their faith.

University Health Center

The Health Center is centrally located on campus to serve the health needs of students. The Center is staffed by two licensed registered nurses and a licensed physician, who are available to meet with students during regular business hours. In addition, the physician is available for on-call consultation and support. The University has coordinated with a local pharmacy to deliver prescriptions directly to the campus Health Center so that students who do not have their own car and are not able to get to the pharmacy can easily retrieve their prescriptions from the campus Health Center.

Athletics

Houghton University provides a competitive athletics program in accordance with NCAA Division III, Empire 8, and National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) guidelines and expectations (4.4.8 Division III 23-24 Manual, 4.4.1 Empire 8 Webpage, 4.4.2 NCCAA Webpage). Houghton University athletics takes very seriously the requirement to remain in compliance with division standards for competition, as evidenced by a full-time Associate AD position in athletics with a dedicated load to compliance.

Aligning with the University’s mission, athletics works to fulfill its mission: “It is the mission of the Houghton University Athletics Department to glorify God by educating and developing men and women leaders who compete with excellence, lead by character, and exemplify Jesus Christ in our world” (4.4.3 Athletics Mission). Athletics plays a significant role in the lives of the student athletes as an integral part of the education mission to “equip them to lead and labor as scholar-servants in a changing world.” The role athletics plays in the overall enrollment of the University should not be underestimated. The following chart illustrates the impact athletic recruiting has had on the overall enrollment of the University in recent years:

Athletic Recruiting	Goal (New Students)	Actual (New Students)	Percent
2018-2019	88	86	97.73%
2019-2020	88	99	112.50%
2020-2021 (COVID-19)	89	70	78.65%
2021-2022	73	89	121.92%
2022-2023	76	83	109.21%
2023-2024	77	94	122.08%

The dip in the recruiting goal in 2021-2022 was due to the decision to discontinue the men’s and women’s lacrosse programs. Highlights from the 2022-2023 academic year include:

- Men’s tennis advanced to NCAA National Tournament for the second time in three seasons.
- Women’s basketball competed in the NCCAA National Tournament.
- The field hockey team competed in the Empire 8 Championship game.
- Club disc golf, in its inaugural year, tied for fourth place at the College Disc Golf Nationals tournament.

Looking ahead, Men’s volleyball has been added to the athletic program and will launch its first season in 2023-2024. In alignment with the University’s new institutional strategic plan priority Enrollment 5.8 (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan), the athletic department will be strategically looking to expand athletic offerings for both female and male student athletes in the next five years.

Men’s Varsity Programs Offered (2023-2024)	Baseball, Basketball, Cross Country, Soccer, Tennis, Indoor and Outdoor Track & Field, Volleyball
Women’s Varsity Programs Offered (2023-2024)	Basketball, Cross Country, Field Hockey, Softball, Tennis, Indoor and Outdoor Track & Field, Soccer, Volleyball

The Student Athletic Advisory Committee (SAAC), mandated by the NCAA and the Empire 8, serves an important role in the student experience of the student athletes. The committee serves as venue for an open dialogue between the student athletes and the athletic department administration with the purpose of enhancing the athletic experience for the student athletes and the Houghton community. The Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics (CIA) (comprised of faculty, athletic department staff, and students) oversees and implements policies that govern the intercollegiate athletic program including (but not limited to) policies on frequency of play, missed class, academic eligibility, etc.

As part of the annual assessment and review of personnel and programs, student athletes have the opportunity to provide feedback through an anonymous survey (4.6.9 Athlete Eval Sample).

Athletic Advisory Board

The Athletic Advisory Board was developed to support the student athlete experience at Houghton. It is comprised of 15 alumni and supporters of Houghton athletics. The board meets two times a year and has three subcommittees: (1) Student Experience, (2) Hall of Honor, and (3) Engagement. The Student Experience subcommittee is focused on ensuring that teams are supported by a member of the board who prays for them and encourages them during and out of season. This committee also identifies projects that can help improve facilities and programs within athletics. The Hall of Honor subcommittee celebrates the athletic accomplishments of Houghton student athletes through an induction ceremony and installment of a plaque in one of the facilities. The Engagement subcommittee is focused on fundraising and membership of the board. Together each of the subcommittees ensure that the athletic teams of Houghton are supported.

Greatbatch School of Music Opportunities

One of the hallmarks of Houghton University is the Greatbatch School of Music. Through the Greatbatch School of Music, residential students have the opportunity to participate in ensembles or other music-

related activities such as attending concerts, recitals, lectures, lessons, and courses. A unique feature of the Greatbatch School of Music is that any student can be involved in both curricular or co-curricular opportunities regardless of their major or minor—including all ensembles, courses, lessons, performances, and facilities. Each ensemble includes non-major student members. Music has historically been a part of Houghton’s campus life, and students regularly perform at non-musical events, such as chapel, special dinners, athletic activities, the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting tradition, and many more settings. Through the Artist Series program, students are given the opportunity to observe rehearsals and performances of some of the world’s leading musicians, participate in masterclasses with guest musicians, and, on occasion, perform in concert with them. In recent years, students have been able to participate with the Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine, the Cecilia Ensembles, Cantus, and more.

In addition to on-campus offerings, both choral and instrumental ensembles have a significant history of touring. In the 2022-2023 academic year, the Choir Tour was able to resume a tour throughout the Northeastern U.S. following several years that were suspended due to COVID-19 travel limitations. Tours are open to all student participants in the touring ensemble regardless of their degree program.

Through the University’s undergraduate and graduate programs, students of all majors are able to perform in a variety of ensemble types and sizes. Among other opportunities, students can perform with instrumental and vocal ensembles (Wind Ensemble, Symphony Orchestra, Percussion Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble, Houghton Choir, Women’s Choir, Men’s Choir, Chamber Choir), they have the opportunity to experience collaborative performance in small groups, they are able to study and perform as soloists, and they can join Joshua Band—the contemporary chapel house worship band—and perform in one of the musical theater or opera productions. Music at Houghton University is for everyone, including residents from the surrounding area. This is one way that faculty and staff are able to interact outside the classroom with current students.

Indicators of Student Success

According to the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) (4.6.1 SSI), student satisfaction with knowledge of campus events dipped from 2017 to 2022. Over the course of the 2022-2023 academic year, multiple offices on campus collaborated to implement a centralized “Hub” for Houghton students, employees, and recent alumni. This Hub includes a streamlined calendar, more targeted email communication, and links to the various online sites such as Moodle, Student Self-Service, the Handshake Career Services platform, the library, chapel services, athletic events, and more.

Retention and Guidance

The rates of retention and persistence at Houghton University are and have long been above national averages. While the Admissions Office and Student Life Office spearhead efforts to continuously improve these rates, the work of retention is truly a holistic endeavor, including participation of all faculty and staff (4.1.c.4 Retention and Grad Rates).

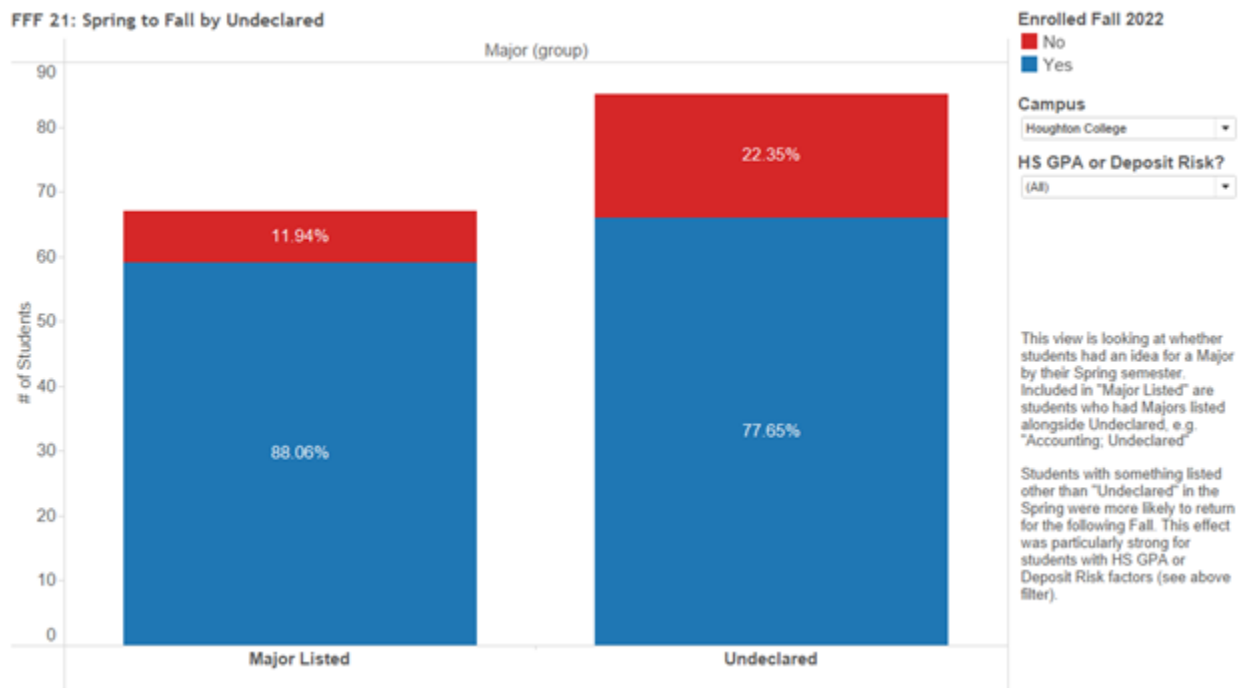
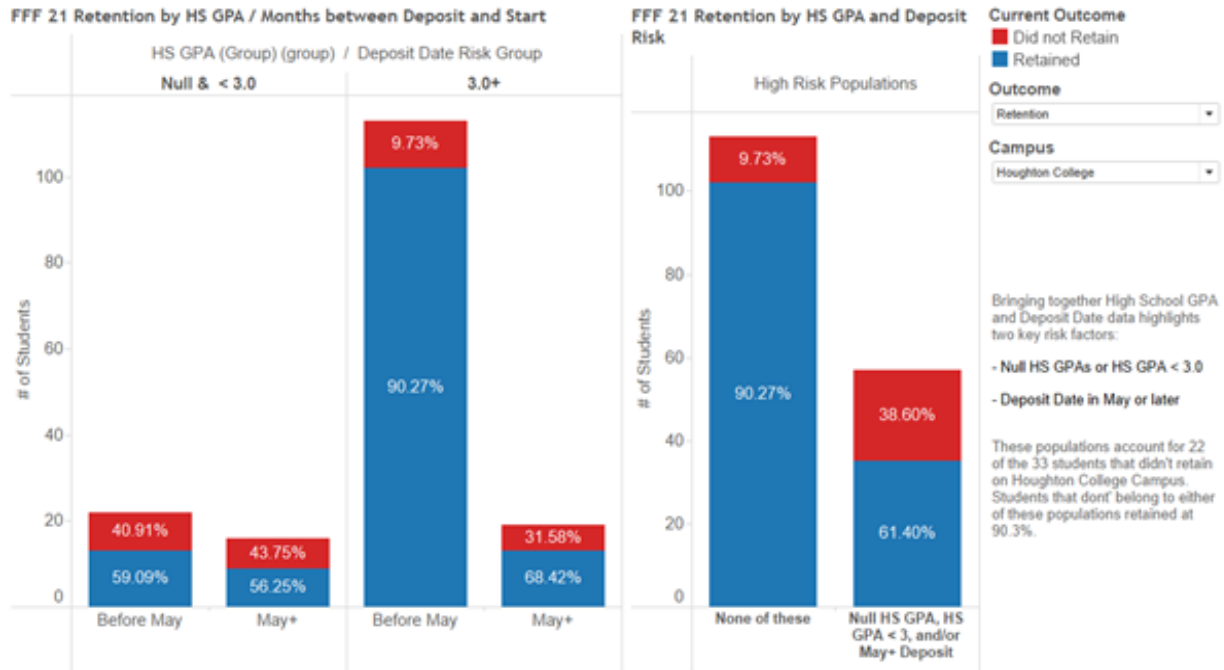
**Comparison of retention graduation rates for “full-time first time in any college”
Main Campus Undergraduate students
entering from 1992 to present**

Updated November 2022

Year Entered	2nd Year Retention rate	3rd Year Retention rate	3 Year Graduation rate	4 Year Graduation rate	5 Year Graduation rate	6 Year Graduation rate	8 Year Graduation rate
2021	81.8%						
2020	75.7%						
2019	88.1%		12.9%				
2018	79.0%		12.0%	57.0%			
2017	82.8%		11.7%	59.7%	64.5%		
2016	79.9%		15.7%	57.0%	61.4%	63.8%	

Most recently, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that all private non-profit four-year colleges have an average retention rate of 75.5% in 2020, 75.9% in 2019, and 77.2% in 2018 compared with Houghton’s rate of 75.7%, 88.1%, and 79% in those respective years (4.1.c.4 Retention and Grad Rates, 4.5.1 Spark Report).

To further improve Houghton’s above-average retention rates, the institution implemented a student support program in the fall of 2021 called “Compass” using the Pharos 360 program. This software enables the Institution to provide faculty and staff with a one-stop mechanism to communicate student concerns to the Student Life Office and Center for Student Success staff, collaborate with various offices to provide intervention and keep a unified record of that support, and create a consistent means of collating and protecting student disciplinary and educational records. In addition to the cross-campus communication improvements this software provides, the retention reporting mechanisms present in the system are far more robust than previous tools the Institution has used. This enables the Student Life Office and the Center for Student Success and Retention Committee to look more closely at retention rates of various demographic subgroups, allowing for a more targeted intervention approach for students who have various retention risk factors. A report in the fall 2022 from Pharos 360 showed, for instance, that students who deposited late (within four months of the first day of classes) and who had a high school GPA below 3.0 were retained at only 61.4% compared to students without these risk factors, who were retained at a 90.3% rate. These reports continue to help the Institution to shape an effective retention strategy in future semesters. The institution has identified that the following groups have been at higher risk for not being retained based on available data: first-generation college students without alumni in their family, African-American students (particularly male students), and first-year students who have not yet declared a major by the spring of their first year. The availability of these statistics should continue to improve the Institution’s retention work in the future. The investment in this software is further evidence of Houghton’s commitment to continuously improving student retention and persistence (4.6.3 Persistence Retention 2022).



First Destination Survey

The Office of Vocation and Calling (OVC) collaborates with the Advancement Office, the Survey Coordinator, and the Director of Data Quality and Reporting to conduct the First Destination Survey (FDS). The Institutional Review Board (4.1.d.1 FDS IRB Application) approves the standard questions from the National Association of Careers and Employers (NACE) and supplemental survey annually (4.1.d.2 FDS IRB Approval). Survey responses are sent to all anticipated graduates in December and May

via email through the Handshake Career Services platform. OVC staff attend Commencement practice the week before graduation to have graduates complete the survey. Data collection was limited for the classes of 2020 and 2021 due to virtual Commencement in 2020 and the survey being only presented via email following graduation for 2021. Outcome data for the classes of 2021 and 2022 is provided below; data is currently being collected for those who graduated in August and December 2022. Houghton follows the IPEDS calendar, which groups August, December, and May graduates each year. The aggregate data collected is reported to NACE to provide benchmarking with other institutions of higher education. All graduates are surveyed, including associates, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees, as well as all learning modalities and locations. Students who indicate they are “still looking” are offered Zoom appointments with OVC staff as well as curated resources in the Handshake platform, such as résumé rubrics, networking guides, and cover letter guidelines.

	Class of 2021	Class of 2022**
Response Rate	48%	80.2%
Percent Employed*	98.2%	96.6%
Not Seeking	0.0%	0.5%
Still Looking	1.8%	3.0%

*Includes Working, Continuing Education, Military, and Volunteering

**As of May 2023

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

Houghton University does not partner with any third-party providers for these services; therefore, we consider this sub-standard not applicable.

Criterion 6. *Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of programs supporting the student experience.*

Houghton Promise

Houghton students have the opportunity to apply for a tuition-free bonus-year to serve as “our commitment to you about the quality and value of your Houghton education and about the superb preparation you will receive for your future” (4.1.d.3 Houghton Promise Webpage, 4.1.d.4 Houghton Promise Fact Sheet, 4.1.d.5 Bonus Year Policy, 4.1.d.9 HU Promise Info Sheet 20-21). Students who are not offered employment or accepted into graduate school upon graduation have the opportunity to apply for a fifth year. Students must indicate their rationale and goals and their plan for covering their living expenses. In addition, they must demonstrate the steps they took for seeking employment or graduate admission. The application is reviewed by representatives from Academic Support and Accessibility, Student Financial Services, Student Life, and Vocation and Calling at the time of graduation. Two students were approved for the 2022-2023 academic year. The form submitted on the website is sent to the Provost’s Office, which then contacts the involved offices for their review. A sample approval email is included with redacted student information (4.1.d.6 Houghton Promise Approval). One of the fifth-year bonus-year recipients in 2022-2023 was able to complete coursework to strengthen his application for medical school and scored in the 99th percentile on the MCATs.

Alumni Resources

Graduates continue to have access to the Handshake Career Services platform for job search, employer reviews, curated resources, and ongoing support through appointments with OVC staff. The Alumni Office provides ways to stay connected through social media sites, an Alumni Directory (4.1.d.7 Alumni Directory), information on reunions, University events, and regional alumni events and opportunities. The Alumni Office also provides “relocation services,” which connect alumni with one another around the world. This means recent graduates who are relocating to a new area can work with the Alumni Office to meet alumni and explore the new location/area, including insights regarding housing, a church home, local resources, etc. Graduates receive emails including details about alumni services, EdFinancial links, OVC, and Handshake assistance as part of the First Destination Survey email campaign six months after graduation.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

The 2022 State of Students reviewed data from the SSI and from NSSE surveys to find the following strengths of the student experience at Houghton (4.6.7 State of Students):

- Students identify that they are able to develop a strong community of support with peers, faculty, and community members.
- Advising is a strength where students experience strong guidance and direction from faculty as they navigate the complexities of their academic program.
- Students value academic excellence that is experienced both inside and outside the classroom.

Houghton University provides an individualized and supportive student experience. The relationships among students, faculty, staff, local emeritus faculty, employee families, and others in the area offer a strong network of support and mentorship for students. The Compass Circle of Care model provides a means for identifying individual students who may need additional support. The admissions counselors get to know prospective students well and provide customized acceptance letters. The Financial Aid awarding process provides transparency and clarity to each new student. It is common to find faculty and staff and their families eating with students in the dining hall, attending church together, inviting students for meals, and attending athletic competitions.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Emerging from restrictions implemented at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, one area for improvement is to enhance and encourage opportunities for faculty and staff to interact with students outside of the classroom. One immediate action taken was the Staff Council created incentive programs and provided refreshments at multiple athletic events throughout the year.

The State of Students highlighted that students’ perceived sense of belonging has dropped considerably compared to surveys from 2017. However, compared to peer institutions, Houghton students reported higher on-average perception of a “supportive environment” at Houghton.

The implementation of the “Houghton Hub” through the Campus Groups platform has streamlined multiple event calendars into one place. For the 2023-2024 academic year, one of the goals for the Houghton Hub will be to increase faculty and staff use so that they are better able to discover a variety

of events taking place where they can interact with students. An area for improvement is overall communication between students and the wider campus and community.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified, through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities, the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. Enhance Student Life—sponsored events and activities to increase student participation and engagement in campus life (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 7.1).
2. Continue growth and development of Campus Groups (Hub) with an emphasis on equipping students for lifetime wellness, spiritual formation, and disciple-making (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 7.2).

CHAPTER 5

STANDARD FIVE: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

Houghton University is committed to assessing and investing in student learning and achievement. The Houghton University community has engaged in an in-depth review and analysis of its Educational Effectiveness Assessment system, drawing on data available from Nuventive Improve reports, policy documents, and the minutes from various committees and councils. This review has shown that Houghton students do accomplish the educational goals of their program of study, degree level, institutional mission, and appropriate expectations of an institution of higher education. Houghton University has sufficiently achieved all criteria included in this standard, as well as requirements of affiliation 8, 9, and 10.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

1. How does the University's educational assessment systems contribute to improvement in academic and institutional effectiveness?
2. How does the University use information from program reviews to implement change?
3. To what degree is assessment of student learning data used to plan and budget for academic programs and services?
4. How does assessment of student learning data inform professional development activities?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Criterion 1. *An accredited institution possesses and demonstrates clearly stated educational goals at the institution and degree/program levels, which are interrelated with one another with relevant educational experiences, and with the institution's mission.*

Houghton University's seven Essential Learning Outcomes (5.1.0.1 Institution Goals and Essential Outcomes) reflect its institutional values as a Christ-centered university of the liberal arts and sciences. The outcomes are accessible to all faculty on a shared folder and all faculty are required to include these on their course syllabi so students can see how specific goals and outcomes align to each course (5.1.0.2 Syllabus Checklist for Chairs). The general education program is directly tied to Houghton's seven Essential Learning Outcomes in two documents all faculty can access (5.1.0.3 GenEd Mapping to ELOs, 5.1.0.4 ELO Mapping).

1. Express the foundations of the Christian faith, including biblical knowledge and basic theological concepts, charitably and coherently.
2. Practice scholarship informed by a Christian view of the world with integrity and respect for all.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of human cultures and the natural world by engaging with enduring and contemporary questions.
4. Demonstrate intellectual and practical skills, including critical reasoning, effective and creative communication, and quantitative thinking through application to progressively more challenging problems and projects.

5. Demonstrate depth of knowledge of the content, purposes, methods, and limitations of a specific discipline and apply it to complex projects.
6. Practice ethical decision making, creative problem solving, and teamwork for service and leadership in the home, workplace, church, and community.
7. Demonstrate the ability to engage a changing and culturally diverse world with courage and understanding.

The University catalog includes descriptions of program and major requirements (pp. 56-240). Audit sheets are also available for each major on the University website (for example, 5.1.0.5 Major Website Example—Psychology and audit sheets 5.1.0.6 2022-2023 Theology BA BS and 5.1.0.7 2022-2023 Mathematics BA), as are audit sheets for each minor (5.1.0.8 2022-2023 Minors). A list of all courses offered in person or online each semester is published on the University website (5.1.0.9 Course Offerings Spring 2023). According to data collected on Nuventive Improve, 96% of all majors/programs (100% leaving out sunseting and brand-new FA 2024 programs) have degree/program learning outcomes specified (5.1.0.10 Programs Missing Data). Programs currently assessed include the general education program and graduate programs. Honors programs have not been consistently assessed, an area of improvement which will be discussed later in this chapter. See Table 2 for the list of Houghton’s current majors and programs.

Table 2: Houghton’s Current Majors and Programs

Major or Program Name
Graduate Program – Business Administration
Graduate Program – Literacy Education
Graduate Program – Music
Major – Accounting
Major – Applied Design & Visual Communication ²
Major – Applied Physics, Engineering Emphasis ³
Major – Art
Major – Behavioral Neuroscience (NEW FA 2022)
Major – Bible
Major – Biochemistry
Major – Biology
Major – Biomedical Sciences (NEW FA 2022)
Major – Business Administration
Major – Business – Human Resources Management
Major – Business – Organizational Management
Major – Chemistry
Major – Communication
Major – Computer Science
Major – Criminal Justice
Major – Data Science
Major – Education: Adolescence
Major – Education: Inclusive Adolescence
Major – Education: Inclusive Childhood

Major – English
Major – Environmental Science
Major – Environmental Studies
Major – Equestrian
Major – Exercise Science
Major – Global Studies (NEW FA 2023)
Major – History
Major – Intercultural Studies
Major – International Development
Major – Mathematics
Major – Music
Major – Music Composition
Major – Music Education
Major – Music Industry
Major – Music Performance
Major – Music with Non-Music Elective Studies
Major – Neuroscience (NEW FA 2022)
Major – Philosophy
Major – Physics
Major – Political Science
Major – Psychology
Major – Sport, Recreation, and Wellness Management
Major – Theology
Major – Writing
Major – Worship Arts (NEW FA 2022)
Program – General Education

While Houghton has pre-professional pathways (e.g., pre-art therapy), they are not individual programs; rather, they are recommended majors and minors students can enroll in that best prepare them for graduate work in a given area (5.1.0.10B Pre-Art Therapy). The 3 + 1 nursing program involves an accelerated three-year bachelor’s degree in a related area at Houghton with an additional year at a separate institution (Indiana Wesleyan University). A student’s Houghton major is therefore assessed, but the nursing program is assessed by Indiana Wesleyan (5.1.0.10C Email on Pre Pathways).

Program ELOs are also mapped to Institutional ELOs. The general education ELOs are mapped to each of the seven institutional ELOs (5.1.0.3 GenEd Mapping to ELOs, 5.1.0.4 ELO Mapping). Ninety-six percent (100% if sunseting and brand-new FA 2024 majors are excluded) of programs/majors have institutional ELOs mapped to degree/program outcomes (5.1.0.10 Programs Missing Data).

Both the University’s mission statement and its published philosophy include parallel language of developing “scholar-servants” who can lead in a “changing world” in the name of Christ. The philosophy statement more specifically elucidates skills (e.g., listening, problem solving, etc.) graduates should have developed while enrolled. A commitment to developing scholar-servants has been central to Houghton’s identity for over 140 years, and this language can be found throughout the University’s curriculum and

programs. The University catalog includes for each program a summary (starting at page 56), in some cases overtly identified as a mission statement (see biology, p. 63), of the goals of the program. Many of these program statements use similar language to the University mission statement (examples: business and economics [p. 87] mentions equipping students “with skills to be Christlike scholar-servants”; the general education statement [p. 132] directly references the University mission statement; the sport, recreation and wellness management description [p. 230] mentions “enabling [students] to become effective scholar-servants”. Each program also has a webpage, several of which include program overviews and objectives (5.1.0.14 music MA webpage, 5.1.0.15 biology major webpage). The general education page directly cites the Institution’s mission and links the program to it (5.1.0.16 general education webpage).

Degree/program goals met in each course are listed in course syllabi (5.1.0.2 Syllabus Checklist). The syllabus checklist is housed on a SharePoint drive accessible to all faculty. Required courses for each program are listed in the University catalog (starting at p. 57 with art). These are also listed online (e.g., the psychology area’s audit sheets can be found on the psychology major’s webpage under “Degree Requirements” (5.1.0.5 Major Website Example—Psychology). Note that having program and institutional goals clearly stated and mapped to each other is necessary to fulfill Requirement of Affiliation 10, integrating educational goals with assessment results for institutional planning.

Criterion 2. *Organized and systematic assessments, conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals, evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/program goals. .*

Houghton assesses educational goals using organized, systematic assessments. The following sections describe in detail the regular (i.e., every seven years, annually, or every semester) and organized assessment of program and course outcomes.

Meaningful Curricular Goals Are Defined with Defensible Standards for Student Achievement

All faculty have access to Houghton University’s seven Essential Learning Outcomes on a shared drive (5.1.0.1 Institution Goals and Essential Outcomes). Ninety-four percent of majors/programs (98% if new, FA 2023, or sunseting majors are excluded) have assessment tools and criteria specified on Nuventive Improve (5.1.0.10 Programs Missing Data). The general education program, for example, specifies a percentage of students who must earn a particular grade on a cumulative assignment, final project, or final exam (5.2.a.1 Example GenEd Assessment Tool).

Students have access to their academic plans through a platform called Online Self-Service, which allows them to sign up for courses and monitor their academic progress through unofficial transcripts updated each semester. They can also track their progress using audit sheets accessible online. Students are required to meet with their academic advisor at least once per semester for course planning, and advisors are directed through training to provide important reminders of program and graduation requirements (5.2.a.3 Advising Workshop, 5.2.a.4 Faculty Advisor Training Graduation Requirements). The Registrar’s Office has also created an online advising course for faculty, which serves as an institutional repository of important information, ideas, example advising sessions, etc. (5.2.a.3b New Advising Course, 5.2.a.3c Advising Course Screenshot).

Data Is Regularly Collected on Student Achievement of Institutional and Degree/Program Goals in a Sustainable Way and Is Reported to Stakeholders

The primary areas of assessment data collection are related to annual program-level data, graduation and retention data, course evaluations, student surveys, midterm grades for struggling students, departmental self-studies, and administrative oversight of course syllabi. Note that in reporting assessment data to stakeholders, this section also speaks to Requirement of Affiliation 8, that the University makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes.

Annual Program-Level Assessment Data Collected

Since institutional ELOs are mapped to program ELOs in Nuventive Improve, data collected at the program level provides evidence of assessment at both levels. Every year at the end of the spring semester, faculty meet for Assessment Day (5.2.b.1 Assessment Day Email). The primary goal of this day is to enter up-to-date assessment data at the program level in line with previously specified assessment tools (e.g., percentage of students meeting some criterion on a final project, major field test, or project), revisit assessments and decide whether to revise or replace them, and discuss proposed changes because of the data. Note that, in line with Requirement of Affiliation 9, data for all programs regardless of modality (online or in person) or site (e.g., Houghton vs. Buffalo) are entered in Nuventive Improve by each specific program. Excluding majors too new to have graduated seniors (new since 2019), 95% of majors/programs have entered this sort of assessment data since 2018 with 71% entering data in the most recent full academic year of 2022-2023 (5.1.0.10 Programs Missing Data). See Table 3.

Table 3

Academic Date Range	Number of Majors/Programs with Assessment Data, Excluding New since FA 2019	Percentage of All Majors/Programs with Assessment Data, Excluding New since FA 2019
2021-2022	24	57%
2022-2023	30	71%
Total since 2018	40	98%

Assessment Day is a relatively new concept for Houghton, and the University has been exploring various options for increasing and supporting faculty participation. Though there is still room for improvement, the success of these initiatives can be seen in Table 3.

Graduation and Retention Data

At the institutional level, the Director of Data Quality and Reporting, Kurt Habecker, produces reports every employee can access based on data entered on a central repository called PowerCampus. They include Houghton’s historical and current enrollment, graduation rate, retention rate credit hours sold per area, average class size, and tuition fees (5.2.b.5 Intranet Link to Fact Book, 5.2.b.6 Fact Book).

Course Evaluations

As part of the rank and tenure process (5.2.b.7 Dossier Requirements), faculty courses are evaluated at several levels at regular intervals. For non-tenured faculty, every course (regardless of site or modality, as per Requirement of Affiliation 9) is evaluated every semester by students via the CampusLabs platform. Tenured faculty are required to have one upper-level and one lower-level course evaluated every year. The average response rate has been 57.58% across each semester, including summers and a

brief January term, since fall 2019. The response rate has been a bit higher for the traditional fall and spring semesters since fall of 2019 (61.23%). Fall semesters had a higher response rate (66.09%) than spring semesters (56.37%), and summer sessions had the lowest rate (48%; 5.2.b.8 Course Evaluation Response Rates; though this can still be helpful, according to 5.2.b.8b Nulty 2008 Response Rates Evaluations). See Table 4.

Table 4

Overall since Fall 2019	58.64%
Fall and Spring Semesters Only	61.23%
Fall Semesters Only	66.09%
Spring Semesters Only	56.38%
Summer Terms	48.00%
J-Term (Single Term in January 2021)	75.00%

Note. Numbers reflect the average student response rate per class.

CampusLabs reports include formative feedback (which teaching practices should be retained vs. improved), quantitative summary statistics, and qualitative comments. These reports are submitted to the Rank and Tenure committee at year two, year four, and year seven, with the idea that any consistent complaints from students (e.g., timeliness of feedback) be addressed as the course continues to be taught and improved.

Student evaluations are supplemented by observations and evaluations from both peers and deans in years two, four, and six of a faculty member's time at Houghton or at the point of a promotion (5.2.b.7 Dossier Requirements, 5.2.b.9 Faculty Observation Guide). At post-tenure review, which occurs every four years, student and peer course evaluations may be submitted along with other documentation (e.g., documented teaching strategies and/or course/curriculum development) as evidence of teaching effectiveness (Faculty Handbook 4.7.14.1).

Adjunct and part-time faculty courses are assessed via student course evaluations and peer review, and contract renewal is dependent on successful classroom performance. An annual contract can be renewed if, among other things, the faculty member has participated in the course evaluation system and discussed the results with the Area Dean. Consideration for a three-year renewable contract after five years of service is based on the same course evaluation data used in year four for tenure-track faculty (Faculty Handbook 4.1.1.2 and 4.6.5).

Two programs, education and music, are nationally accredited. The Greatbatch School of Music has been accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) since 1946. The school conducts a substantial self-study every ten years followed by a site visit reviewed by the NASM Commission on Accreditation, which decides on accreditation renewal, deferral, or denial. Every new program within the school is submitted for plan approval and final approval after three students have graduated from that program (5.2.b.10 Music Accreditation). The Houghton University Teacher Education Program is accredited by the Association for Advancing Quality in Teacher Education (AAQEP). This accreditation lasts for seven years or until Houghton University ceases to be a member in good standing, whichever is earlier. Annual reports are due by December 31 of each year (5.2.b.11 Education Accreditation).

Student Surveys

Houghton collects data using the National Survey of Student Engagement every three years. It assesses high-impact practices (service learning, learning community [like honors], research with faculty, internship/field experience, culminating senior experience) and what they call “engagement indicators” like quantitative reasoning, higher-order learning, collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, effective teaching practices, supportive environment, etc. This is shared with faculty by the Provost as needed. Houghton University conducted the NSSE survey in spring 2023, in keeping with its three-year cycle. The former Committee on Academic Effectiveness had as part of its responsibilities looking over NSSE survey data and communicating it to faculty (5.2.b.13 Committee on Academic Effectiveness Responsibilities), but following the dissolution of the AEC, the Academic Council will take on this responsibility starting fall of 2024. Houghton also surveys recent graduates each year using the NACE First Destination Survey (5.2.b.14 First Destination Survey Use) to collect post-graduation employment, volunteering, or further education information.

Midterm Grades for Struggling Students

Midterm grades for students with a C- or below are required to be submitted to the Registrar (5.2.b.15 Midterm Grades Submit Policy). The Office of Academic Support and Accessibility Services contacts each student with a C- or below to set up a meeting and talk through options to improve (5.2.b.16 Midterm Grades Procedure). At approximately week three of the semester, faculty fill out a brief “Stoplight Survey” in which they rate students as in need of immediate intervention, in need of some guidance, or progressing fine. This information is shared with the Compass Concern Committee (5.2.b.17 Faculty Herald 9_29_2022.pdf, 5.2.b.18 Department Chairs Meeting 10.12.2021).

Departmental Self-Studies

Departments are scheduled to complete a self-study where they report on data they have collected over the past five years on a seven-year cycle (5.2.b.19 Department Self-Study Cycle). This incorporates analysis of achievement of learning outcomes for students, curricular changes needed, enrollment, degrees earned, grad school employment metrics, benchmarked tests, scholarly activity of faculty, program changes defended, use of resources, and changes made or planned. The Committee on Academic Effectiveness and the Provost receive these self-studies annually and are responsible for providing feedback to program members and the department chair (5.2.b.13 Committee on Academic Effectiveness Responsibilities). Results are shared with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, who can ask to meet with department members for discussion. Frequent turnover in the Provost’s Office combined with a presidential transition and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic largely derailed Houghton’s department assessment plan, and the Provost’s Office has worked with faculty to define and implement a new assessment cycle. Additional information on program assessment can be found in Chapter 3.

Criterion 3. *Consideration and use of assessment results for the improvement of educational effectiveness consistent with the institution’s mission.*

Houghton uses assessment results to improve educational effectiveness by improving pedagogy, curriculum, retention and graduation rates and reviewing/revising/budgeting for academic programs and support services

Parallel to the previous section, here we provide evidence that the following data is used to improve various components of educational effectiveness: annual program-level data, graduation and retention data, course evaluations, student surveys, midterm grades for struggling students, departmental self-studies, and Area Dean oversight of course syllabi. Here we also address Requirement of Affiliation 10, integrating educational goals for improvement with assessment data.

Annual Program-level Assessment Data

As mentioned above, faculty enter annual assessment data in May on Assessment Day into Nuventive Improve. While there is an option in the software to enter “actions,” that is, intended modifications to assignments or courses in response to assessment data, many programs did not make use of this feature until this most recent assessment year (2022-2023). Whereas only about half (57%) of programs/majors (excluding those who have not graduated seniors yet; new since 2019) entered actions in 2021-2022, that percentage increased to 69% in 2022-2023 (5.1.0.10 Programs Missing Data).

The former Committee on Academic Effectiveness has up to the end of 2022-2023 had the task of reviewing course proposals and curricular changes (including adding new majors) within the general education program to ensure alignment with program outcomes for both online and on-campus classes. The Committee on Academic Effectiveness has also reviewed Houghton’s general education learning outcomes. For instance, the committee highlighted three specific general education components— bible/theology, changing world, and math—as being up for review in 2021-2022 (5.2.b.19 Department Self-Study Cycle, 5.3.b.1 4.29.22 CAE Minutes). They were also responsible for programming the annual Assessment Day where programs enter yearly assessment data (5.3.b.2 3.18.22 CAE Minutes. 5.3.b.3; 4.7.22 CAE Minutes). Starting in 2023-2024, Academic Council will take on these tasks.

The former Committee on Academic Effectiveness was also tasked with advising the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment to ensure that institutional learning outcomes align with the University’s mission statement and institutional goals. They were also tasked with reporting to the Provost and Academic Council whether programs are assessing their learning outcomes annually (5.3.b.4 CAE Charter). The committee recently reviewed the institutional ELOs (5.3.b.5 2.22.23 CAE Minutes). Starting in 2023-2024, Academic Council will advise the Provost on alignment between institutional ELOs and the mission statement/institutional goals. The new Director of Assessment will report to the Provost and Academic Council on the annual program assessment.

Graduation and Retention Rates

Analysis of higher-than-average retention rates impacted Houghton’s decision to bolster the honors programs, advertising and budgeting of the Highlander Wilderness Adventure Program, and budgeting and expansion of the NCAA DIII athletics program, which added men’s volleyball. Graduation and retention data also informed the decision to adopt student-support software known as Compass and student engagement software known as Campus Groups. The first helps identify at-risk students for intervention, and the second helps improve the student experience. Data also led to the creation of a new position, Director of Campus Recreation, student government restructuring to increase participation, and the closing of a residence hall temporarily to help students connect in the face of

declining enrollment. Finally, retention and graduation data led to the addition of staff in the Counseling Center, a new part-time Intercultural Student Coordinator position, and expansion of new student orientation (5.3.b.6 Retention Graduation Data Use, 5.3.b.7 Retention Intervention Report). While there is no formal process for the Provost to review graduation and retention data directly with program or department personnel, the data has some impact on budgeting. According to the Provost, though there is not a direct correlation between program budgeting and enrollment, budgets would likely not increase for programs with declining enrollment (5.3.b.8 Provost Enrollment Budgeting).

Department Chairs (now Area Deans) regularly discuss in their meetings with the Provost strategies for low-enrolled courses, enrollment caps, and per-student pay to balance faculty compensation and cost to the University (5.3.b.9 Chairs Meeting 12.14.21). The former Committee on Academic Effectiveness used this data, too: In April of 2022, they heard a report from the Registrar's Office and discussed modifications to AP scores for transfer students to improve transfer rates (5.3.b.1 4.29.22 CAE Minutes). Faculty regularly vote on changes like these, as well as new course and curricular change proposals from departments, typically intended to accommodate staffing changes or increase interest among prospective students. For example, in the November 3, 2022, meeting, a proposal was made and approved to allow international students to meet half of the global competence requirement for general education with language proficiency the meeting minutes in 5.3.b.11 Faculty Herald 11_17_2022 specify some representative course changes. Faculty receive reports on institution-wide enrollment, strategic planning, and challenges facing the institution.

Course Evaluations

The course evaluations at the student, peer, and Area Dean level are intended to ensure that pedagogical practices be continuously improved and updated over time. To justify promotion and tenure, faculty need to demonstrate that they have incorporated feedback and changed pedagogical practices where warranted. In the Faculty Handbook, this is explicitly pointed out: "all student course evaluations may be reviewed where there is need to document improvement or when such a review would assist the Rank and Tenure Committee in its deliberations" (Faculty Handbook 4.4.3.2). Further, if improvement has not been demonstrated (that is, if consistent issues are pointed out across multiple semesters of evaluations), these are required to be reported to the Rank and Tenure Committee by the Area Dean: "While Rank and Tenure reviews will usually focus primarily on the nationally normed quantitative data, the department chair must review all student comments and report to the committee if there are any patterns (repeated by more than one student, in more than one course or semester, or for one course over more than one semester) of comments related to significant issues such as, creation of a hostile learning environment, sexual harassment, or use of inappropriate language, or poor teaching practices (such as inadequate preparation, lack of clarity of assignments, cancellation of classes)" (Faculty Handbook 4.4.3.2).

Annually, faculty are required to submit Individual Professional Development Plans to their Area Dean (Faculty Handbook 4.3.3.2, 5.3.b.12 Individual Professional Development Plan Template). This self-review is intended to help faculty early in the tenure process document evidence of pedagogical improvement and setting and meeting research or project goals. It is also used for post-tenure self-review.

Student Surveys

The Committee on Academic Effectiveness is tasked with advising the Provost and Director of General Education with regard to their review of the National Survey of Student Engagement as well as other surveys that allow comparisons between Houghton and other schools (5.2.b.13 Committee on Academic Effectiveness Responsibilities, 5.3.b.4 CAE Charter). This has not happened in recent years because of a high turnover rate in the Provost position and the AEC committee, as well as the pandemic itself. The committee began reviewing and revising its policies with plans to re-take up the role of reviewing the NSSE this year (5.3.b.5 2.22.23 CAE Minutes); however, with the dissolution of the AEC, Academic Council will now take on the responsibility of reviewing the NSSE and other surveys starting in 2023-2024.

Midterm Grades for Struggling Students; Compass

Every semester at the midpoint, students with grades C- or below are contacted by the Academic Support and Accessibility Services team to set up a one-on-one meeting where strategies for improvement can be discussed (5.2.b.16 Midterm Grades Procedure). Those who require intervention early in a course according to the “Stoplight Survey” are contacted by the Compass Concern Committee to help them as they continue in the course (5.2.b.17 Faculty Herald 9_29_2022, 5.2.b.18 Department Chairs Meeting 10.12.2021). At any point in the semester, students can visit the Academic Support and Accessibility Services Office for study tips and advice and can apply for a tutor to assist them (5.3.b.14 Academic Support and Accessibility Services).

Departmental Self-Studies

As part of departmental self-study procedure (5.2.b.19 Departmental Self-Study Cycle), on a seven-year cycle, departments report on data they have collected over the past five years and survey program alumni. These reports include assessment data, student numbers, strengths, and weaknesses and are reviewed by an external reviewer, whose feedback is included in the overall report. The report itself was submitted until 2022-2023 to the former Committee on Academic Effectiveness and the Provost, both of whom provided feedback, and results reported to the Board of Trustees. The Provost’s Office is working with faculty to develop and publish a new timetable for department self-studies. Starting in 2023-2024, Academic Council will receive these reports along with the Provost and provide feedback. Any recommendations are then implemented. These reports provide data for justifying hiring faculty, expanding or eliminating majors, modifying curriculum, and understanding whether retention and graduation rates are faltering or improving over time.

The former Committee on Academic Effectiveness was tasked with advising the Provost and Director of General Education about their review of departmental self-studies (5.2.b.19 Departmental Self-Study Cycle). They were also tasked with reporting annual assessment and review of individual department and program progress to the Academic Council and Provost (5.2.b.13 Committee on Academic Effectiveness Responsibilities). In December 2021, the Committee on Academic Effectiveness highlighted the five departments up for program review and discussed implementing the feedback (5.3.b.15 12.8.21 CAE Minutes). On November 16, 2022, Standard 5 committee member Alison Young Reusser met with the Committee on Academic Effectiveness, with the conclusion drawn that the current document that describes the timeline for department self-study and review of institutional ELOs will be revised to clarify the distinction between institutional ELO deadlines and general education ELO deadlines (5.3.b.16 11.16.22 CAE Minutes). The working documents reflecting this revision process are 5.3.b.4 CAE Charter and 5.3.b.17 Assessment Cycles Drafting, and minutes from a more recent committee meeting discussing these: 5.3.b.5 2.22.23 CAE Minutes. Starting in 2023-2024, Academic Council will advise the

Provost with regard to departmental self-study review and the new Director of Assessment will report annual assessment data to Academic Council and the Provost.

Planning, Conducting, and Supporting a Range of Professional Development Activities

Here evidence shows that the following data is used to implement professional development: faculty surveys, external consultant reports, and historical research funding data. Here the University again addresses Requirement of Affiliation 10, integrating educational goals for improvement with assessment data.

Faculty Surveys

Thanks to a generous external grant, the University offered its first Faculty Scholarship Day (5.3.d.1 Faculty Scholarship Day Program 2022) in spring 2022, with its second occurring in spring 2023. In its first year, 11 faculty presented their projects during a poster or oral session, and then one faculty member gave a keynote address on a recent book. Though the post-event survey (5.3.d.2 Faculty Scholarship Day 2022 Survey) had a low response rate (15 faculty and two staff responded), most respondents found the poster session effective or highly effective at providing engagement with the faculty presenters. One commented that it was helpful to see the breadth of work by faculty and another found the keynote address well-delivered. The Faculty Development Committee added lecture-based programming in 2023 to accommodate colleagues in disciplines where poster presentations are not the norm (5.3.d.3 Faculty Scholarship Day Program 2023).

While not based on survey data, discussion between the previous and current Chair of the Faculty Development Committee resulted in modifications to the New Faculty Seminar, a biweekly meeting with new faculty hires to help them adjust to Houghton University and be supported as they teach (5.3.d.4 New Faculty Seminar Spring 2023, 5.3.d.5 New Faculty Seminar Fall 2022, 5.3.d.6 New Faculty Orientation Schedule 2022). In 2022-2023, the seminar also included more research-based pedagogical advice and content that encouraged faculty to reflect on their teaching.

Past Research Funding Data

The Faculty Development Committee continues to award small grants of up to \$900 for faculty conferences and research. The average amount requested per each of the four annual funding periods (rounds) is \$2,855.42, and the FDC is able to award an average of 83.17% of the funds requested (\$2,374.83). Excluding the pandemic year 2020-2021 where funds weren't as necessary since people did not attend in-person research conferences, the percentage of funds requested (\$3,414.48) that the committee awarded (\$2,566.93) was even lower, at 75.18%. Though Houghton is committed to supporting faculty scholarship to the greatest extent feasible, it is clear that demand currently outpaces capacity in this area. See Table 5 and the document 5.3.d.8 FDC Grants Since 2019.

Table 5

	Amount requested	Amount awarded	% awarded
Average across all rounds since 2019-2020	\$2855.42	\$2374.83	83.17

Average excluding 2020-2021 (pandemic impacted conference need)	\$3414.48	\$2566.93	75.18
---	-----------	-----------	-------

Informing Others About Houghton University and Its Programs

Here the evidence shows that the University relays data on enrollment, retention, programs, etc. to the Board of Trustees, prospective students, and donors. In other words, assessment data is not solely used for internal purposes but is shared with relevant parties outside the faculty and administration. This section addresses Requirement of Affiliation 8, that the University makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes.

Board of Trustees

The President reports to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees every four to six weeks and to the full Board of Trustees three times per year the document 5.3.b.11 Faculty Herald 11_17_2022 includes November 3, 2022 meeting minutes in which President Lewis shared part of his presentation made to the Board of Trustees with the faculty). The faculty moderator also represents faculty viewpoints at the Board’s Academic Affairs Committee meeting and the meetings of the full Board (5.3.f.1 Report to Board of Trustees 4-2-22). The Registrar prepares an annual census of enrollment, retention, and transfer data and shares it with the Board (5.3.b.7 Retention Intervention Report).

Prospective Students

Houghton’s public-facing website reflects curricular changes, program changes, semester-by-semester course offerings, etc. so individuals outside the Institution are aware of the final product, so to speak, of the assessment and improvement process. One program (Encore), which recruits individuals who have already graduated from college, uses weekly emails to inform their students of programming options. The pandemic halted the program for two years, but there is a plan to start encouraging these individuals to participate in online and in-person courses (5.3.f.2 Encore Program Email, 5.3.f.3 Sample Encore Programming).

Donors

The Vice President for Advancement and the Advancement Team annually report to endowment donors the endowment fund performance and amount of scholarships provided to students. They also report on Houghton’s annual One Day Giving Challenge on Houghton’s public-facing website. In addition, they use a calendar year-end appeal for the student scholarship and share examples of success stories and outcomes in the semi-annual Houghton Magazine and quarterly donor newsletters (James S. Luckey Society, 1883 Society, Soaring Eagles Society). Annual Alumni Awards are shared generally and are another way to relate success stories, but little assessment data is used for these. Financial assessments (annual audits, 990s) are available upon request (5.3.f.4 Sharing Data with Donors).

Criterion 4. *Adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval of assessment services designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers.*

Houghton University does not currently use any third-party assessments.

Criterion 5. Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of assessment processes utilized by the institution for the improvement of educational effectiveness.

The Committee on Academic Effectiveness was responsible for periodically assessing institutional ELOs as well as general education program ELOs (5.2.b.13 Committee on Academic Effectiveness Responsibilities). According to the document 5.2.b.19 Departmental Self-Study Cycle, each institutional ELO was assessed by the former Committee on Academic Effectiveness every three years. In 2015, the list of 15 institutional ELOs was reviewed and revised down to seven (5.1.0.11 Email on Mission ELO Mapping, 5.1.0.12 Mapping Mission to GenEd ELOs). Following the dissolution of the Academic Effectiveness Committee, the review and assessment of the institutional and general education program ELOs will be conducted by the Academic Council, beginning with the 2023-2024 academic year. (2022-2023, 5.3.b.16 11.16.22 CAE Minutes, 5.3.b.5 2.22.23 CAE Minutes, 5.3.b.4 CAE Charter).

The Academic Council plays a key role in the ongoing review of Houghton’s assessment practices, as they have been given the charge to “ensure that all academic programs of the college are consistent with the college’s mission, learning outcomes, and academic objectives,” and to “ensure the coherence and effectiveness of our general education program” (5.5.0.3 Councils and Committees Handbook 2023-2024). Student course evaluations and surveys, such as NSSE, are offered on a regular cycle under the supervision of the Provost’s Office. In addition, periodic department self-studies will continue on a newly established timetable (5.3.b.17 Assessment Cycles Drafting). Deans regularly review evaluations and course syllabi to ensure that institutional expectations and objectives are being met.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Houghton’s mission statement is readily available online and in print, and its language and priorities are echoed in program descriptions and in the general education curriculum.
- Houghton University has clearly stated educational goals at the Institution and degree/program levels. The majority (96%) of majors/programs (100% of non-new, non-sunsetting majors) have clearly stated goals and 96% of majors/programs (100% of non-new, non-sunsetting majors) have mapped these goals to institutional learning outcomes.
- Academic progress toward program and general education goals is regularly assessed by advisors and the Registrar’s Office. The Registrar’s Office offers an online training course for faculty (5.5.0.2 Advising Workshop Plan, 5.2.a.3b New Advising Course, 5.2.a.3c Advising Course Screenshot).
- Houghton assesses outcomes in an organized and sustainable way for students and faculty.
- Assessment results are considered for the improvements of educational effectiveness consistent with the Institution’s mission.
- Retention rates impacted Houghton’s decision to bolster the honors programs, the Highlander Wilderness Adventure Program, and athletics. They also contributed to the adoption of student support software Compass and student engagement software Campus Groups, the creation of a new position (Director of Campus Recreation), the restructuring of the student government, and the addition of staff in the Counseling Center.
- Assessment is assessed through Academic Council regular and periodic review of ELOs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In summary, Houghton University's assessment infrastructure is healthy, and the Institution is committed to engaging in meaningful and regular assessment. The recent appointment of the Director of Assessment and the institutional investment in Nuventive are evidence of recent steps to strengthen assessment practices. It is also clear, however, that there remain several areas where the Institution can further bolster its assessment procedures. These include:

- Improve faculty participation in Assessment Day and increasing to a 100% rate for data entry at all levels of assessment in Nuventive (currently around 70%). Also, ensuring that the five key data points are recorded in Nuventive: (1) Program outcomes; (2) Outcomes mapped to institutional ELOs; (3) Specific assessment criteria/tools specified; (4) Annual assessment data for those tools entered; (5) Follow-up actions specified as a result of assessment data.
- Work to increase student course evaluation response rates, which are currently around 59%.
- Consistently adhere to department self-study guidelines and timelines. This has been hampered by turnover in the Provost's Office (four in five years), a presidential transition, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Houghton emerges from those disruptions, the Institution expects to return to a pattern of regular department assessment.
- Increase support for faculty scholarship and professional development.
- Develop additional resources to support faculty in their work as academic advisors.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified, through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities, the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. Further support and enhance academic advising resources available for faculty and students (1.1.8.9 Strategic Plan 2023, 2.3).
2. Refine majors and policies to allow undergraduate students greater opportunities for elective studies and intellectual exploration (1.1.8.9 Strategic Plan 2023, 2.4).
3. Further refine and develop attractive graduate programs strongly aligned with institutional mission, market demand, and opportunity for enrollment growth (1.1.8.9 Strategic Plan 2023 2.5).

CHAPTER 6

STANDARD SIX: PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

OVERVIEW

The Houghton University community has engaged in an in-depth review and analysis of its planning, resources, and plans for continual institutional improvement. Houghton University's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with one another and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals. Houghton University continuously assesses and improves its programs and services and responds effectively to opportunities and challenges. Houghton University has successfully achieved all criteria included in this standard, as well as requirements of affiliation 8, 10, and 11.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

1. How is data collected and analyzed to inform future planning and resource allocation to fulfill the University's mission and goals?
2. How does Houghton's allocation of funds, endowment, and admission/enrollment data compare to other institutions? What conclusions can be drawn and what changes should be suggested based on this benchmarking?
3. How do Houghton's salaries compare to similarly sized institutions? What goals should be established?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Houghton's immediate past strategic plan, *Preparing for our Future*, covered the period from 2020 to 2023 (1.1.c.1 Strategic Plan). The plan was purposefully timed by the University to expire two years after the immediate past President's retirement, thereby allowing the new President time to become familiar with the University while leading implementation of a current strategic plan. The new President would then have the opportunity to lead the development of a new strategic plan during his second year, coinciding with the completion of the University's MSCHE self-study. To support the development of the new strategic plan, Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Planning and Compliance, Dr. Natasha Davis was hired in summer 2022. Responsibilities for this new Executive Leadership Cabinet-level position have included forming and leading a stakeholder advisory committee to help facilitate community engagement in the development of the new plan and facilitating the engagement of the University's Executive Leadership Cabinet and the Board of Trustees in plan development (6.1.6 Position Impact NDavis). Dr. Davis's primary charge was the coordination of community resources and input on the development of a new strategic plan that is for the period of July 2023 to July 2028 (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023).

Criterion 1. *Institutional objectives, both institution wide and for individual units, that are clearly stated, assessed appropriately, linked to mission and goal achievement, reflecting conclusions drawn from assessment results, and are used for planning and resource allocation.*

This criterion is met through the two strategic plans, *Preparing for our Future 2020-2023*, and the *Houghton University Strategic Priorities 2023-2028, Pursuing Christ-Centered Excellence*. Both are discussed and analyzed throughout this chapter.

Criterion 2. *Clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for constituent participation and incorporate the use of assessment results.*

A strategic plan (1.1.c.1 Strategic Plan) titled *Preparing Our Future* articulated the Institution's mission, vision, and goals. Each goal was broken into projects and tasks. Relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPI) were associated with each. The plan was developed according to the following timeline: (6.2.3 Plan Outreach Message)

1. February 2020—Present a draft to a “select committee of the board”—a group tasked with assisting with the development of the strategic plan.
2. February–April 2020—Meet by Zoom with a select committee of the board. Discussion of plan with internal stakeholders—This initial intent has been rendered largely impossible by the interruption of COVID-19. All things considered, the Institution believes it must go forward with its timeline, making provision for appropriate flexibility in various particulars once it is able to engage internal stakeholders more fully in longer-term thinking.
3. April 2020 meeting of the Board of Trustees. Provisional approval of the direction of the plan
4. May–June—President's staff working retreat to continue to prepare for multiple scenarios in fall 2020, incorporating as many key elements as possible of longer-term strategic vision.
5. October 2020—Confirmation of strategic plan 2020-2023.

The onset of COVID in spring 2020 hindered extensive discussion of the plan with various stakeholders and constituents. Therefore, the plan was largely developed by the former President's Executive Leadership Team. While moving forward with due haste was necessary at the time, it is fully acknowledged that the lack of community participation was a major weakness of the 2020-2023 plan. The Executive Leadership Team acknowledges that, and the community has expressed that reality as well. University leadership committed to fully engaging constituents in the development of the next strategic plan (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023). The 2020-2023 plan included a corresponding series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure the University's progress toward the completion of tasks and progress toward the achievement of the plan's goals and objectives. Data was collected to measure the University's progress annually or semiannually, depending on the specific indicator, and summary data was monitored and reviewed regularly by the Executive Leadership Team. Reports on the University's progress on achievement plan goals and objectives were provided to the Board of Trustees annually as part of the President's report to the Board (1.1.g.1.a 2020 Strategic Plan KPI).

Case Study—Affordability

One of the major outcomes of the 2020-2023 strategic plan was related to affordability (Goal III, Objective A, Project 1). The University developed and implemented a new pricing model that reduced the price of tuition by approximately half. A small team of faculty and staff was assembled to evaluate the possibility of a price reset. The resulting initiative had the goal of ensuring affordability for economically disadvantaged students. Of benefit to all students was much greater transparency in

pricing. Unfunded institutional aid was eliminated, and the sticker price of tuition and fees better reflected the actual cost of attendance. As they studied and developed the new pricing model, the small team visited Utica College (which had successfully implemented a pricing reset). The team interviewed leaders and staff, reviewed documents, and collected data. Extensive data analysis was done. The resulting plan was implemented for the 2020-2021 academic year—during the COVID-19 pandemic. While implemented fully for that academic year, communication and marketing of the plan were severely impacted by the pandemic. Full-scale efforts to market the University’s pricing reset and new cost model did not go into effect until the 2021-2022 academic year.

Houghton experienced a slight increase in the percentage of Pell-eligible students in the 2021-2022 academic year, but the percentage of Pell-eligible new students fell rather dramatically in 2022-2023. While the pandemic likely played some part in the decline of Pell-eligible new students, the University decided further action was needed. Houghton engaged a financial aid consultant to conduct extensive financial analysis with the intended result of revising the University’s overall financial aid packaging strategy. The results of that analysis showed that the pricing reset had had a relatively minimal impact on the out-of-pocket costs of economically disadvantaged students and families, especially Pell-eligible students. In response, for the 2023-2024 academic year, Houghton developed and announced the Founders Promise Scholarship (6.1.3 Founders Promise) with the intention of ensuring affordability for Pell-eligible students and increasing the number and percentage of Pell-eligible students attending Houghton (6.1.4 FA-23 Model, 6.1.5 FA-23 Targets). Evidence shows the result of the analysis and the Financial Aid Target Grids. University leaders hold regular meetings with the financial aid consultant throughout the recruiting season.

This case study is one of many examples of how the University consistently collects, reviews, and analyzes relevant data and uses that data to inform program and plan development; inform board, administration, and faculty decision making; and inform adjustments to strategy and program development.

Updated Strategic Planning Process

A new role at Houghton, Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Planning, was created for the primary purpose of facilitating stakeholder engagement in the development of the new strategic plan. In this role, Dr. Natasha Davis assembled a Strategic Planning Committee. The committee served as an advisory council, providing feedback and recommendations throughout the strategic planning process. The committee included representation from the following areas: Student Council, Department of Athletics, Center for Student Success, Academic departments (math, science and music), admissions, Student Financial Services, Alumni Board, and the Houghton community. The Strategic Planning Committee and the Executive Leadership Cabinet advised President Lewis on the development of the strategic plan. Board of Trustees members were engaged throughout the development of the plan, primarily through conversations with each of the Board’s standing committees and the Executive Committee of the Board. A listening session for all Board members was scheduled to solicit final feedback on the near-final draft of the plan. The final version was submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval in April 2023, and the plan was implemented on June 1, 2023.

The figure below provides a timeline of the strategic planning process:

Map of Strategic Plan:

Integrated Planning Timeline-Fall Term 2022		
Date	Activity	Integrated Planning Steps
October 2022	Formation of Strategic Planning Committee	Assess the Landscape
October 2022	Planning Meetings	Planning Roadmap Developed
Late October-Early November 2022	Discussion of Strategic Planning to Campus (Key Constituents)	Communication Point
	Stakeholder Survey (Listening Sessions/Focus Groups)	Communication Point Data Collection
	Initial Meeting of Strategic Planning Committee	Communication Point
	Strategic Planning Committee Begins Work	Communication Point
Mid-to Late November 2022	Stakeholder Survey (Listening Sessions/Focus Groups)	Communication Point
	Share Strategic Planning Process (ELC)	Communication Point
December 2022	Working Draft Process Begins	Analyzing Data

Integrated Planning Timeline-Spring Term 2023		
Date	Activity	Integrated Planning Steps
January 2-6, 2023	Working Draft Process Continued	Communication Point
January 12, 2023	Share Outline of Strategic Plan with ELC Strategic Planning Committee Meetings Finalized	Listening Session/ Feedback/Communication Point
January 13, 2023	Draft emailed to campus Stakeholder groups	Feedback/Communication Point
January 17-20, 2023	Meetings with Strategic Planning Committee Meetings with Campus Constituency Groups Updates to Board of Trustees/Draft	Create Plan-Communication Point
January 23-31, 2023	Meetings with Campus Constituency Groups	Create Plan-Communication Point

	Updates to Board of Trustees/Draft	
February 1-9, 2023	Meetings with Campus Constituency Groups Review of Feedback/Revisions to Plan	Create Plan-Communication point
February 10, 2023	Updates to Board of Trustees at Virtual Meeting/Draft	Create Plan-Communication Point
February 13-28, 2023	Meetings with Strategic Planning Committee Provide next round of drafts to President/ELC	Create Plan-Communication Point
March 1-31, 2023	Meetings with Strategic Planning Committee Edits/Revisions to Plan	Create Plan-Communication Point
April 3-5, 2023	Final Revisions to Plan	Create Plan-Communication Point
April 11-14, 2023	Final Draft shared with President/ELC for final review	Create Plan-Communication Point
April 17-18, 2023	Board of Trustees Confirmation of Plan	Communication Point

Criterion 3. *A financial planning and budgeting process that is aligned with the institution’s mission and goals, evidence-based, and clearly linked to the institution’s and units’ strategic plans/objectives.*

The Institution’s financial planning and budgeting process is coordinated by the Finance Office and the President, with input from all institutional budget managers and the Executive Leadership Cabinet. A computerized system is used to collect the requests (6.3.1 Budget Process, 6.3.2 Budget Requests). Budget requests must be linked to the strategic plan or area goals. Budget increase requests are reviewed by the appropriate Vice President, the CFO, and the President. As with most small institutions, resources limit the number and types of increases that can be accommodated, thereby requiring careful comparison to institutional goals.

The Finance Committee (FC) of the Board of Trustees is involved throughout the budget planning process. Preliminary discussion occurs in the October meeting each year, with a draft budget presented in February for feedback, and final approval of the following year’s budget by both the FC and the full Board of Trustees in April. Likewise, the President shares the status of the current budget regularly to the Executive Committee of the Board.

A copy of the 2023-2024 budget approved by the Board of Trustees is included in the evidence inventory (6.3.4 2023-2024 Budget). The focus of longer-term financial planning (three- to five-year outlook) is necessarily predicated on increasing enrollment and retention to strengthen the overall financial outlook of the University. Longer-term budget planning is an area that is admittedly somewhat inconsistent and needs improvement. The primary reason for this is that over the last five years or so, the focus has been almost entirely on ensuring that sufficient resources are available for the current and following year. The difficulty in accurately projecting enrollment year over year makes longer term financial planning extremely difficult. This is precisely the reason that one of the institutional priorities is

to “strengthen the financial position of the University through increases in student admission and retention.”

Criterion 4. *Fiscal and human resources as well as the physical and technical infrastructure adequate to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.*

Houghton University provides the fiscal and human resources to support its operations. As noted above, an institutional priority is to “strengthen the financial position of the University through increases in student admission and retention.” As a primarily tuition-driven institution, increasing enrollment is critical to the success of Houghton’s future.

Enrollment Initiatives

In reflecting on the fall 2022 admissions cycle, the last two years were mapped to better understand why the new/transfer/returning student numbers did not increase to what might called “pre-pandemic levels.” The impact of the pandemic, for a variety of reasons, extended beyond just two recruitment cycles (fall 2020 and fall 2021).

Applications trailed prior years throughout the fall 2022 cycle, and the efforts employed to make gains were not able to fully address the deficit. The University has an exceptional Admissions team. The University’s social media engagements and followers are growing significantly due to increased attention, and the University’s marketing efforts were enhanced with additional funds over the prior year. In the end, it was still not sufficient to pull in the class number desired.

Looking at the last three recruitment years in isolation, from pandemic start in March 2020 to initial mask-free activity on the campus in March 2022, reveals the following numbers:

Fall 2020 – 189
Fall 2021 – 222
Fall 2022 – 189

The primary reason for the increase from fall 2020 to fall 2021 is due to the tuition reset, which initially impacted the fall 2021 incoming class. There was an increase in applications for fall 2021 (more than any of the prior three years), but that ultimately did not yield well. Regardless, there was an increase in class size over fall 2020. This gave the illusion of a slow but positive return to higher class numbers. With this in hand, Houghton confidently projected 250 new enrollments for fall 2022.

Here are a few of the primary reasons why the Institution did not reach the fall 2022 objective:

1. No Travel / No Summer Camps / Only Virtual Events
 - a. No events on campus spring 2020 / summer 2020 / fall 2020 / spring 2021
 - i. Summer 2021: open houses resumed; camps resumed with no overnights.
 - ii. Fall 2021: masked travel to fairs by NAACAP / masked on-campus events.
 - iii. Spring 2022: masked travel to fairs—heavy travel! / first non-masked event held on campus was in March—accepted student/family day.
 - iv. Summer 2022: two summer open house events / camps resumed with overnights / return to normalcy.

This limited activity hurt the Institution’s ability to connect with high school juniors in 2020-2021 (the incoming class of fall 2022).

- b. During this timeframe (2020-2022), Houghton had to rely heavily on purchased names in a space where it did not have strong brand recognition. These purchased junior and senior high school student names represented individuals who generally did not know Houghton. They are known (industry-wide) to convert at a lower rate.

Based on external benchmarking, the median conversion rate of a purchased name into a legitimate inquiry is generally less than 5% (1 to 2% is not uncommon for a Christian institution). Of those inquiries, about 70% will submit an application. About 70% of those application submissions will be admitted. Approximately 20% will enroll. A rough example to show how this plays out, using the general number of names we purchased, is shown below:

# of Names Purchased	100,000
# of inquiries (2%)	2,000
# of inquiries to submit application (70%)	1,400
# of applications admitted (70%)	980
# of admitted enrolling (20%)	196

- c. Inferior on-campus visit experience (when compared to others)
 - i. New York State was a particularly challenging state to operate in during the pandemic. Families reported over and over that during the pandemic, masking regulations were less stringent in other neighboring states and full college tour experiences were had throughout the fall 2022 cycle elsewhere.
 - ii. Personalized tours did not return to normal until April 2022.

2. Weak Brand Position—The institutional brand was not as strong as other key competitors going into the pandemic. A stronger brand presence going into the pandemic was one of the primary reasons why some schools had their highest classes ever that fall, while Houghton is still working its way back.

- a. Some evidence of how known Houghton is can be evidenced in part by the fact that legacy and employee dependent enrollments made up more than 32% of the incoming classes for fall 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Looking forward, Houghton has taken a multitude of steps to improve enrollment for fall 2023 and beyond. Certainly, living in a generally post-pandemic world is significant for a small campus such as Houghton.

In spring 2022, Houghton made a strategic decision to travel to as many in-person fairs as possible in an effort to make up for lost time, logging more miles in the spring of 2022 than in any other spring in recent Admissions Office memory. The summer of 2022 then allowed a return to the Kingdom Bound Festival (a significant event for western NY) and for Houghton to host two on-campus open house events.

This travel, significant speaking engagements and interactions President Lewis had with a variety of key audiences (alumni included), and deliberate efforts to clarify Houghton’s message, have allowed for an early lead in residential applications for fall 2023. This lead started in July and has been maintained as of

this writing. Specifically, applications are up by 279 over last year and ahead of any prior year (back to fall 2018) by 30. Similarly, there are 100+ more admitted students and 14 more deposits, all very positive signs that Houghton is recovering.

Houghton has increased resource allocation (both financial and personnel) to be more sharply focused on a specific set of strategies likely to yield better results with the target market. Included are:

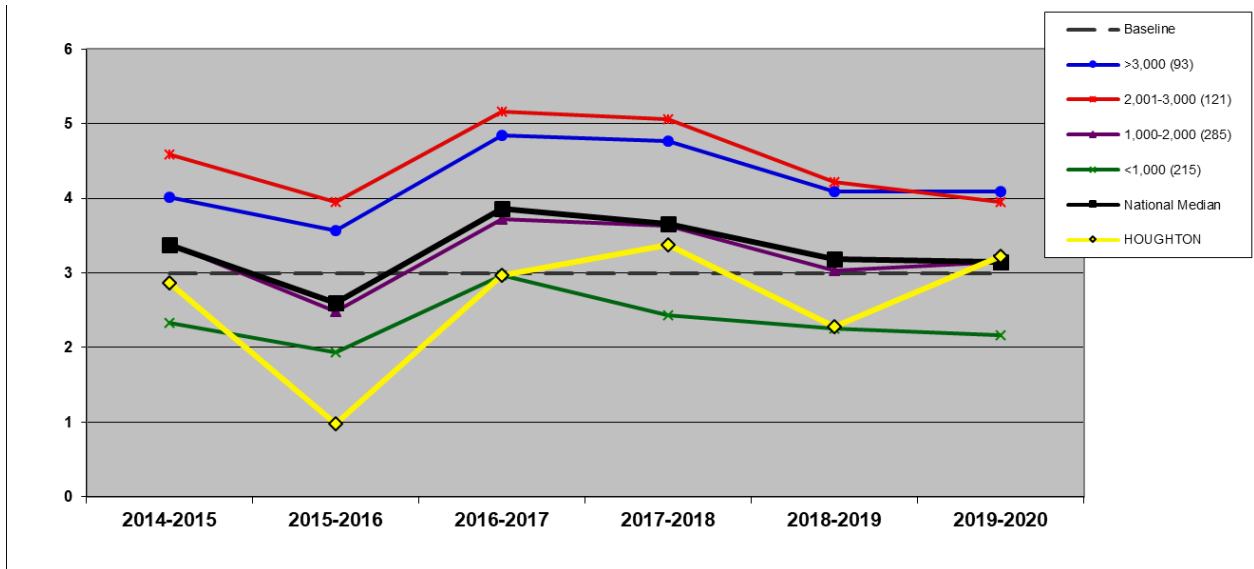
1. Early college and dual enrollment
2. A focus on areas where significant investments (in physical plant) have already been made: athletics, Greatbatch School of Music, equestrian, Paine Center for Science
3. K-12 Christian school partnerships
4. Embedded industry-recognized certifications, where possible
5. Clarity of message
6. Better financial aid leveraging
7. Tighter brand standards and recognition building (new style guide)
8. Even more attention to the University's website using heat mapping tools for iterative adjustments to reflect the user-preferred experience
9. Predictive modeling tools and purchased name scoring
10. Additional investments in marketing to extend the University's brand and generate more visibility
11. Parents, parents, parents

The new initiatives are working. The Institution anticipates enrolling its largest incoming class in six years in fall 2023 (6.3.3 Fall 2023 Admission).

Financial Analysis

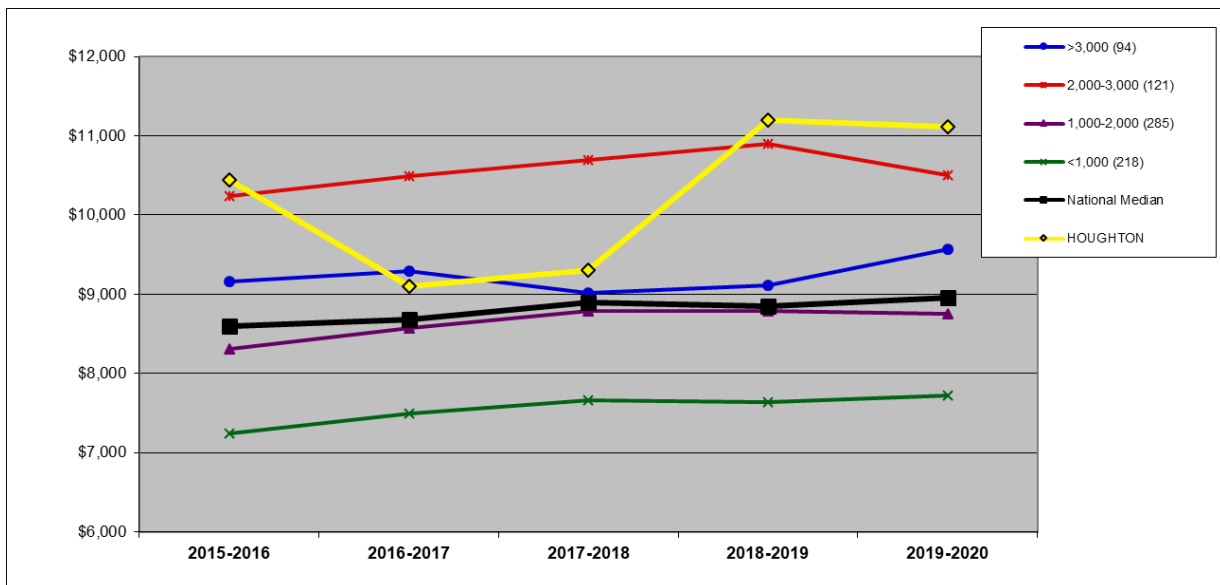
Despite decreasing enrollment, Houghton has been able to provide the financial resources necessary to deliver programs. The following chart, culled from a report by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), presents the Financial Indicator Score (FIT) for Houghton as compared to independent colleges and universities of various sizes (6.2.4 CIC Data). According to the CIC, the score "presents a clear assessment of the institution's financial performance over time with benchmarking comparisons to similar institutions." The score is different than and should not be compared to the Department of Education Financial Responsibility Score.

As can be seen by the chart, Houghton's FIT performance generally exceeds that of other colleges with fewer than 1,000 students.



The CIC advises that those with an FIT score of two to three should “perform a thorough review of institutional effectiveness.” The self-study process, the recently commenced strategic plan update, and the just-announced academic program review set for January 2023 are ways Houghton is performing such a review.

The following chart from the same CIC report compares the instructional expense per student as compared to other institutions of various sizes. The chart clearly shows Houghton spending significantly more per student in instructional expense than other institutions. Of course, this is a “good news, bad news” scenario. It clearly indicates that adequate resources are provided. Of course, continuing to spend this much per student is not likely sustainable. This is part of the reason that Provost Davies facilitated an academic program review in spring 2023.



Finally, as with most small institutions, Houghton’s finances were helped tremendously through the various institutional HEERF payments received from the federal government related to the pandemic.

The University recognized the following revenue in the year indicated. This does not include payments received for distribution directly to students.

Fiscal Year 2020	\$697,968
Fiscal Year 2021	\$1,238,970 (plus \$2,673,700 for PPP loan)
Fiscal Year 2022	\$1,700,090

ERC

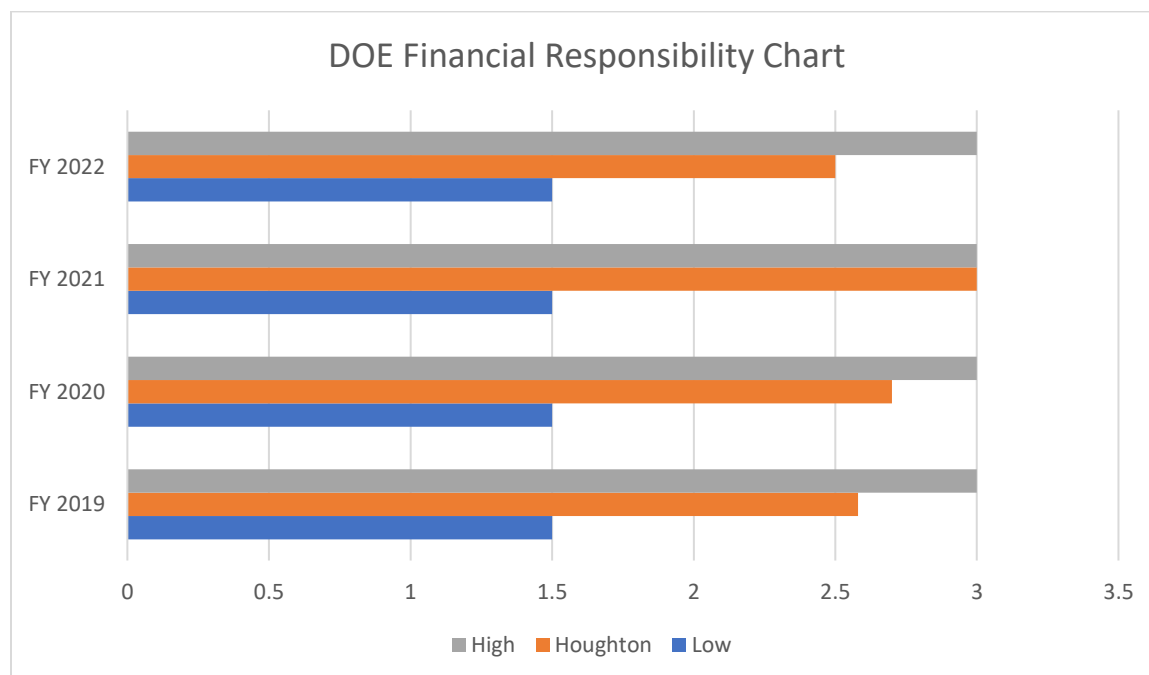
Additionally, in March 2023, after an external review by a fee-based consultant, Houghton filed for approximately \$4 million from the Employee Retention Credit program. While the amount was booked in fiscal year 2023, the funding is not anticipated until well into fiscal year 2023-2024.

S&P Ratings

In January 2022, as part of the bond issuance process, S&P Global assigned Houghton College a BBB-rating with Stable outlook. This is an investment grade rating. The rating was affirmed in April 2023 (6.7.10 S&P Rating-2022, 6.7.11 S&P Rating 2023).

DOE Financial Responsibility Scores

The chart below highlights Houghton’s Department of Education Financial Responsibility Scores. Fiscal Year 2019 2.58, Fiscal Year 2020 2.7, Fiscal Year 2021 3.0, Fiscal Year 2022 2.5. These composite scores reflect the relative financial health of institutions of higher education. The scale runs from -1 to +3. A score greater than or equal to 1.5 indicates the institution is considered financially responsible. Schools with scores of less than 1.5 but greater than or equal to 1.0 are considered financially responsible but require additional oversight. These schools are subject to cash monitoring and other participation requirements.



Forbes

In its article titled “Forbes Strongest and Weakest Colleges in America—Behind Forbes 2022 Financial Grades,” Forbes rated Houghton University’s finances a C+. While a C+ is certainly not the grade we aspire to, the financial analysis shows that Houghton’s finances (according to Forbes) are stronger than many similar institutions (6.4.1 Forbes Rating).

Endowment

Houghton University’s endowment, as of June 30, 2023, totaled \$72.6 million. Managed by the Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees in accordance with the Investment Policy (6.4.3 Investment Policy), the performance of the endowment is strong as compared to benchmarks (6.4.4 Chemung Endowment, 6.4.5 Vanguard Endowment). The investment committee works with independent financial advisors in its management of the endowment.

Human Resources

Houghton is blessed to have incredibly dedicated staff and faculty members who are committed to the institutional mission. Other than positions in difficult-to-fill fields, Houghton has been able to hire necessary faculty members. Evidence 4.2 shows the newly hired faculty members and directors over the last several years (6.4.2 New Hires). Of utmost concern is the compensation paid across the Institution but primarily to faculty colleagues.

Copied below is a comparison of how Houghton’s faculty salaries compare to other institutions in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), an organization with members that tend to compete with Houghton for faculty members. Houghton remains 15-17% below the median salary of other institutions. This problem is clearly recognized by Houghton’s administration and Board of Trustees. Thus, a stated priority in this self-study of “Improv[ing] employee recruitment and retention through increased salary and enhanced benefits.” The recently approved strategic plan also identifies salary and benefit issues as a priority.

COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES					
National Key Leaders and Faculty Salary and Compensation Survey: Confidential					
2022-2023 (Data as of Fall 2022)					
Position	N.	Median	Your Institution	Rank	HC Below Median
Professor *	95	74,947	63,482	78	-15.30%
Associate Professor *	98	66,500	56,633	78	-14.84%
Assistant Professor *	98	60,241	50,000	81	-17.00%
All Faculty *	71	65,347	57,685	56	-11.73%
* The mean is the faculty salary that is used for your institution.					

To effectively address this issue, the overall revenue of the Institution (largely driven by enrollment) must increase. In accordance with the strategic plan, significant salary adjustments were made in the

technology services staff and key admission and marketing staff effective September 1, 2023. A token 2% across the board increase was also granted.

Criterion 5. Well-defined decision-making processes and clear assignment of responsibility and accountability.

The University’s Compact for Shared Governance (6.5.1 Compact for Shared Governance April 2021) was developed collaboratively by the Board of Trustees, faculty, and administration, and was approved by the Board of Trustees in spring 2021. The Compact clearly and comprehensively outlines expectations for shared governance at Houghton. It delineates lines of primary and secondary decision-making authority, sets expectations for consultation and collaboration in decision, and importantly affirms a culture of collaborative decision making. Notably, consultation and collaboration are expected in all instances regardless if lines of decision-making authority are clear or not. The Compact is referenced and referred to regularly by BOT leadership, University administration, and faculty leaders. A brief timeline of the Compact’s development and communication is below:

October 20, 2020	Executive Session of the BOT Discussion on Shared Governance
February 5, 2021	Full BOT discussion on a draft of a revision of the college constitution, titled The Compact for Shared Governance, which was presented to the trustees for feedback. Trustees are asked to give written feedback as soon as possible.
March 29, 2021	Email memo sent from Academic Dean’s Office and President to faculty for comment/feedback (also included in April 1, 2021, Faculty Herald)
April 1, 2021	Post on Dean’s SharePoint site: Herald 36_11 April 1, 2021. As reflected in the minutes from the April 1, 2021 faculty meeting, the task force members were: Brandon Bate, Ben Lipscomb, Cathy Freytag, Ken Schenck, Dan Bates, and Terry Slye. This group represents faculty, administration, and Board members.
April 19, 2021	<i>From Board of Trustee Minutes:</i> The Trusteeship Committee is recommending the document “The Compact for Shared Governance,” which was shared in the materials to the Board. The recommendation was approved with a voice vote.
February 3, 2022	In faculty meeting, President Lewis reminded the faculty The Compact for Shared Governance is available via a link to Dean’s SharePoint

Criterion 6. Comprehensive planning for facilities, infrastructure, and technology that includes consideration of sustainability and deferred maintenance and is linked to the institution’s strategic and financial planning processes.

Annual Deferred Maintenance

Each year, the Director of Facilities and the Chief Financial Officer review the facility needs of the Institution as informed both by the Facilities Assessment Report and other benchmarking reports provided by the University’s facilities partner, Sodexo (6.6.1 Facilities Benchmark, 6.6.2 2019 Facilities Report, 6.6.3 2022 Facilities Report). Feedback is also solicited directly from facility employees. A schedule of repairs/upgrades is then created to be included in the budget. Unfortunately, as with most small institutions, the annual budget does not allow for adequately addressing deferred maintenance

issues. Significant deferred maintenance issues, especially in the residence halls, continue to be a challenge. Recent campaign assessment meetings hosted by Advancement and President Lewis have focused on feasibility of including significant residence hall improvement in the next capital campaign.

Funded Facility Improvements

Houghton's loyal alumni and friends continue to be a source of funding for facility improvements. See the section "Impact: The Campaign for Greater Houghton" below. Among the most recent are:

1. Paine Center for Science: general improvements, data science center, and renovated labs.
2. Equestrian: construction of new indoor riding arena, significantly increasing ability to serve students and host equestrian events.
3. Nielsen Center: installation of new, safer bleachers, rebranded basketball courts.

Technology Services

The technology services department is a small but nimble staff. Recruitment for open positions in this area has been challenging. Houghton has tended to depend on "growing our own" by hiring young, recent alumni and training them.

The technology services department was able to pivot quickly at the beginning of the pandemic and provide the necessary tools to deliver education in a remote fashion. As cybersecurity has become an increasing concern, Houghton has outsourced cybersecurity training to Knowbe4 and increased the repercussions for not completing the training. Additionally, the Institution engaged an outside organization to conduct the initial penetration testing (6.6.4 Pen Test).

A project coordinated by outside consultant Apple Pi has helped Houghton better integrate the Student Records (Power Campus) and Financial Aid (Power Faids) software programs to increase efficiency in both areas.

CORE Education has completed an assessment of technology across campus and provided an Executive Summary (6.6.5 CORE). The University has now contractually engaged CORE Education to provide technical support and leadership in alignment with technology priorities and objectives identified in the new strategic plan.

Criterion 7. *An annual independent audit confirming financial viability with evidence of follow-up on any concerns cited in the audit's accompanying management letter.*

The University engages an auditor annually to perform an independent audit. A 990 is also filed annually as is legally required. The completion of the audit is overseen by the Audit Committee (AC) of the Houghton University Board of Trustees. The AC meets with the auditors prior to the audit and then again after completion of the audit to present the results. The AC then provides the entire audit and management letter to the full board for their information (6.7.8 2020 Management Letter, 6.7.5 2021 Management Letter, 6.7.2 2022 Audit Management Letter). Any items raised in the management letter are carefully considered and acted upon if warranted. No significant deficiencies or material weaknesses have been identified.

As is evident by reviewing the financial statements (6.7.7 2020 Financial Statements, 6.7.4 2021 Financial Statements, 6.7.1 2022 Financial Statements), the University conducted an RFP process and selected new auditors, beginning with the 2021-2022 audit. The RFP was conducted at the request of the AC, not due to any disagreement with the prior auditor but simply because it was felt to be a best practice to review auditors after an extended period with the same auditor. The last three audit reports are available in the evidence inventory (6.7.9 2020 Single Audit, 6.7.6 2021 Single Audit, 6.7.3 2022 Single Audit).

Criterion 8. *Strategies to measure and assess the adequacy and efficient utilization of institutional resources required to support the institution's mission and goals.*

The evidence of this particular criterion is a review of the strategic plan and related KPIs (6.8.1 KPI). If KPIs and other goals are being met, then it can logically be assumed that sufficient resources are being supplied to support the Institution's mission and goals. This is also evaluated as part of the annual budgeting process when adjustments are made in the budget based on input from cost center managers and discussion with the President (6.8.2 April 2023 Full Board Budget).

Criterion 9. *Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal processes, and availability of resources.*

Impact: The Campaign for Greater Houghton College

Houghton's most recently completed comprehensive campaign, IMPACT, was completed May 31, 2022. IMPACT surpassed its \$70 million goal, raising a total of \$70,523,420. Publicly launched in October 2017, IMPACT celebrated the *transformative impact* a Houghton education has on its students, the *ongoing impact* a Houghton education has on its alumni, the *Kingdom impact* Houghton alumni continue to have on the world, the *local and regional impact* Houghton has on its communities, and the *legacy impact* donors have in shaping the future of Houghton University. The overall goal of the campaign was to expand Houghton's capacity for national and global impact.

The campaign focused on three distinct priorities: (1) Access and Affordability, enabling a Houghton education to be more accessible and affordable for students; (2) Strategic Campus Enhancement, supporting capital projects vital to Houghton's future; and (3) Academic and Experiential Investment, supporting curricular and co-curricular work on campus and the expansion of greater Houghton. Access and Affordability was supported with gifts totaling \$41,042,539. Strategic Campus Enhancement projects were supported with a total of \$24,473,749 in gifts, providing for the completion of three key capital projects (the Kerr-Pegula Athletic Complex, the Equestrian Event Center, and extensive renovations throughout the Paine Center for Science). In addition, \$5,007,132 was received for Academic and Experiential Investment, endowing programs and professorships and expanding the regional and global reach of Houghton University. Accordingly, 90 new endowed scholarships were created.

The success of IMPACT, as well as annual continued generous support, demonstrates the overwhelming support of the many employees, alumni, and friends of the University. For example, on the University's annual One Day Giving Challenge in April, more than 1,883 donors gave in excess of one million dollars. For the last two years, more than 2,000 donors have given or committed to more than \$1.8 million in gifts. The University has now entered the silent phase of its next comprehensive campaign. In winter and spring 2023, the President and Vice President for Advancement and External Engagement met

individually with over 60 couples or individuals to share ideas about draft priorities for this next campaign (6.9.1 Campaign Assessment Questions, 6.9.2 Case for Capital Investment, 6.9.3 Case for Endowment, 6.9.4 Case for Access Affordability). The formative feedback provided from these donors is being used to finalize the Institution's priorities as the comprehensive campaign progresses.

In closing, the following areas of strength, opportunities for improvement, and initial strategies for continuous quality improvement have been identified.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Houghton University continues to provide a strong strategic planning process as evidenced by the completion of the 2020-23 plan and the development of the 2023-28 plan.
- Houghton University remains focused on affordability in line with its mission as evidenced by the tuition reset and focused work of the Advancement Office.
- Houghton University has increased focus on branding and marketing.
- Houghton has been able to provide the financial resources necessary to deliver current programs and services despite economic realities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The University looks to continue investment in employee salaries, digital tools, and deferred maintenance. Houghton University has made a commitment to a closer examination and analysis of employee salary and benefits as compared to like institutions. Improvement in offering competitive salaries and benefits will help to recruit and retain excellent employees in their fields. As identified in the self-study, there are a number of priorities dependent upon the improvement of Houghton University's information technology and data security tools, as well as investing in deferred maintenance projects of buildings and grounds.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. Complete one major student residence renewal project that will enrich student life and significantly improve accessibility, safety, security, and privacy (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 3.1).
2. Establish a Data Governance Committee with a clear vision and goals for forming and enforcing data-governance policies, setting up procedures and processes for data access and usage, defining data standards, and monitoring and auditing data usage and collaboration across departments (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 4.1).
3. Substantially enhance employees' salary and benefits packages (1.1.a.9 Strategic Plan 2023, priority 6.3).

CHAPTER 7

STANDARD SEVEN: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND ADMINISTRATION

OVERVIEW

The Houghton University community has engaged in an in-depth review and analysis of the policies and practices related to its governance, leadership, and administration. As the information contained in this chapter will show, Houghton’s policies and practices allow the Institution to meet its stated mission and goals and meet the expectations within the standards of accreditation. We have determined that Houghton University has sufficiently achieved all criteria included in this standard, as well as Requirements of Affiliation 12 and 13.

DESCRIPTION OF LINES OF INQUIRY

The lines of inquiry were developed specifically related to categories of criteria required to be examined, and those lines were developed around four areas of investigation. The lines of inquiry were shaped as follows:

1. To what extent does Houghton University maintain its autonomy within the bounds of its relationship to The Wesleyan Church?
2. To what extent do the various bodies of governance, leadership, and administration demonstrate the appropriate credentials, skills, expertise, and resources to fulfill their responsibilities, support the work of the President, and further the mission of the Institution?
3. To what extent are the various bodies of governance, leadership, and administration evaluated, and in what ways is the data from those evaluations reported and used to inform decision making?
4. To what extent does the structure, policy, and procedure of the Institution and its various bodies of governance, leadership, and administration support the work of the Institution in the furtherance of its mission?

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Establishing and Protecting Mission and Vision: Authority, Autonomy and The Wesleyan Church

The Wesleyan Church maintains a system of five educational institutions. “These institutions specialize in viewing the whole range of learning as it relates to God’s plan and purpose, blending the various departments of knowledge into a meaningful whole, and in providing for the application into a meaningful whole, and in providing for the application of all of this to a variety of pre-professional, professional programs.... At the same time, each of the four liberal arts colleges, within this broader emphasis, gives high priority to programs specifically designed to produce professional and lay leaders for the Church” (7.2.b.1 Wesleyan Standards p. 101, GBP-2120). The church is committed to the principle of academic freedom as a necessary element of “God’s mandate to pursue truth” (7.2.b.1 Wesleyan Standards p. 104, GBP 2154). While Houghton University is a ministry of the Church, it is governed by the Houghton University Board of Trustees.

The State of New York provides the legal authority for the governing of Houghton University as an educational institution of The Wesleyan Church in the College Charter (7.2.a.1 College Charter). As amended (last in 2022), the charter continues as the legal basis of the corporation. When combined with The Educational Standards of the Wesleyan Church, it provides the foundation for the governance of Houghton University. The Wesleyan Church entrusts the administration of Houghton University to the Board of Trustees, whose bylaws become the primary operational framework for the college (7.1.1 Governance Compact).

The philosophy of governance, leadership, and administration at Houghton University is set forward in The Compact for Shared Governance. It articulates the means by which the Board of Trustees shares its governing authority in the daily operation and decision making of the University among the relevant stakeholders for the accomplishment of the mission of the University. The Compact stipulates those stakeholders as the Board of Trustees, the President (including the administration), faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends. This model is intended to promote a complementary and collaborative, rather than an adversarial, approach. While The Compact for Shared Governance does not, by itself, have legal authority, the Compact derives its ultimate authority from the Board of Trustees and operationally from the mutual trust and shared purposes in the mission of the University.

The Houghton University Board of Trustees has final authority over all aspects of the Institution, including matters of employment, budgets, investment funds, property negotiations, contracts, educational policies, degrees granted, and all other areas unless specifically excluded by the Charter or Educational Standards. In accordance with The Compact for Shared Governance, the trustees have delegated this authority to other stakeholders while retaining final authority on all matters. The Board exercises control primarily through the President, who “shall have the powers and duties of supervision and management usually vested in the office of the president of a corporation” (7.2.a.2 College Bylaws pp. 6-8 Article III). The faculty also partner in shared governance and are charged with the essentially academic mission of the University: the education of students. The Board draws upon input from the various constituencies of the University and assumes the presence of their representatives at meetings of the Board of Trustees to answer questions from the Board and to communicate to their constituencies the deliberations and work of the Board.

Much of the operational work of the Board is done through nine standing committees, through which the Board maintains its oversight of academic quality and its fiduciary responsibility for the Institution (7.2.3 Board Reference Book pp. 6-14 Article IV). In policy documents, training, and periodic communications to the body, the Board of Trustees is reminded of its responsibility to the Institution and the need to ensure that political, financial, or outside conflicts with governance responsibilities are avoided (7.2.h.1 Conflict Interest 7.2.h.2 Conflict Disclosure; 7.2.h.3 BOT Agendas 7.2.3 Board Reference p. 5 Section II.B; 7.2.b.1 Wesleyan Standards p. 115 GBP-2254). Since the last Middle States review, the Board has commissioned an external review of governance and remains committed to the principles of shared governance. In 2021, the Institution finished its review of The Compact for Shared Governance, led by a task force of trustees, faculty, and administrators. In January 2023 ten members of the Houghton University Board of Trustees attended the Wesleyan Higher Education Board of Trustees conference and Steve Lennox offered a session titled “Sanctifying Context” which addressed the issue of shared governance in Wesleyan higher education. (7.2.g.1 Governance Session).

The President, who serves as a trustee by position, works with the Trusteeship Committee and Board leadership to recruit and vet prospective Board members. The President makes recommendations for Board member consideration to the Trusteeship Committee. Prospective board members who are

recommended by the Trusteeship Committee proceed to consideration by the full Board. Prospective Board members being considered by the full Board are invited to participate in a Board committee meeting and full Board meeting. After vetting and deliberation, the full Board votes on whether to recommend a person for Board membership to the General Board of The Wesleyan Church, which elects trustees for Houghton and each of The Wesleyan Church's five higher education institutions. University Board member election by the General Board is part of the General Board's consent agenda at its fall and spring meetings.

Board members are appointed to four-year terms which may be renewed. Trustees who desire to be reappointed to the Board undergo a self-evaluation and review process (7.2.3.3 2023 BOT Self Evaluation). Following that process, upon recommendation of the trusteeship committee, approval of the Board, and reelection by the General Board of the Wesleyan Church, trustees may be appointed for additional terms of service. There are not limits on the number of terms trustees may serve.

The Board, in consultation with the President's Office, carefully monitors the composition of the Board and considers Board composition as well as member experience, expertise, and background when soliciting and considering prospective Board members. The Board also annually evaluates the performance of the President within the framework of shared governance.

Administrative and Strategic Leadership for Mission Accomplishment

President

In 2020, the Board engaged the firm Academic Search to develop a search prospectus for the next President of Houghton University. Working in conjunction with the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and staff, Academic Search developed a robust description of the roles and responsibilities of the President of Houghton University. As described in the leadership agenda of the Search Prospectus, the assumed roles of President at Houghton are as follows: strengthen enrollment; enhance financial sustainability; continue to articulate, pursue, and live Houghton's unique identity; advance a culture of strategy, innovation, and execution; and lead in a manner that exemplifies the values of the Church and the community (7.3.c.1 Presidential Prospectus pp. 9-11).

These roles were accurate to the President at the University prior to 2020 and remain so under the current President. They encompass leadership, management, and relationship within the structure of shared governance and align with outlined responsibilities in the University's Compact for Shared Governance. Those responsibilities are described as follows: serve as Chief Executive Officer; direct and coordinate daily operation toward fulfilling the mission; institute regular and ongoing institutional planning and assessment processes; ensure ongoing compliance; ensure involvement in appropriate networking bodies; provide vision and leadership for the entire educational program, including spiritual formation, academic programs, and co-curricular programs; ensure the development of the annual budget; provide vision and leadership for campus-wide programs; provide vision and leadership for recruitment, development, and retention of a diverse faculty and staff; provide vision and leadership for recruitment and retention of the student body; provide vision and leadership for campus development; provide leadership for the Advancement program; ensure appropriate legal counsel is obtained; interpret and implement all matters of policy; serve as a member of the faculty; serve as an *ex officio* member of all committees of the University; communicate regularly with the Board of Trustees; represent and interpret the University and its programs internally and externally; and provide for succession planning (7.1.1 Governance Compact pp. 5-6).

A review of President Wayne D. Lewis, Jr.'s, résumé, educational background, relevant publications, and previous work experience demonstrates that there is substantial evidence supporting his ability to fulfill the above-described responsibilities and further the mission of Houghton University (7.3.b.1 Lewis resume pp. 1-5).

Executive Leadership Committee

Previously referred to as the President's Staff, and now referred to as the Executive Leadership Cabinet, this group of individuals is "recruited, developed and retained by the president, in consultation with the Chair of the Board and the Executive Director of Education and Clergy Development Secretary of the Wesleyan Church, to assist in the implementation of the President's responsibility for the operations of the College [sic] and to whom the president may appropriately delegate authority..." (7.1.1 Governance Compact p. 6). Although it has varied in composition over the years as different needs and opportunities have arisen, the current Cabinet includes only leaders who report directly to the President, including: Provost (i.e., Chief Academic Officer); Vice President for Finance (i.e., Chief Financial Officer); Chief of Staff; Vice President for Advancement and External Engagement; Vice President for Student Life; Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment; Director of Athletics; and Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Planning and Compliance (7.3.d.1 ELC Webpage).

The Compact for Shared Governance outlines the following members of the administration: President, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief of Staff. It further allows for additional officers as needed at the President's discretion and additional resource members as the President deems appropriate (7.1.1 Governance Compact p. 6). Per the Compact, the Executive Leadership Cabinet collectively has the following responsibilities and obligations: serve as an advisory group to the President relative to daily operations; provide an appropriate administrative liaison to the committees of the Board of Trustees; lead the University in the ongoing work of strategic planning; provide leadership for recruitment, development, and retention of relevant faculty and staff; facilitate communication among areas of the University; partner with the Chief Financial Officer in ensuring alignment of resources to priorities and assuring fiscal responsibility; provide leadership for various councils, committees, and task forces; serve as voting members of the faculty. Additional responsibilities are outlined in the individual job descriptions for each administrative position (7.1.1 Governance Compact p. 7).

Members of the Executive Leadership Cabinet participate in meetings with the Board of Trustees as resource persons. The President serves as a voting member of the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee of the Board, and the Committee on Trusteeship and as *ex officio* on the Investment Committee of the Board. The Provost serves as a resource person to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board. The Vice President for Advancement and External Engagement serves as a resource person for the Advancement Committee of the Board. The Vice President for Finance serves as a resource person for the Audit Committee of the Board, the Finance Committee of the Board, and the Investment Committee of the Board. The Provost and the Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment both serve as resource persons to the Enrollment Management Committee of the Board. The Vice President of Student Life and the Athletic Director serve as resource persons to the Student Life Committee of the Board (7.2.3 Board Reference pp. 7-13).

Evidence collected relative to the members of the Executive Leadership Cabinet include each member's résumé or curriculum vitae, as appropriate. Review of these documents describes the ability of each current member of the Executive Leader Cabinet to perform both overall administrative responsibilities

and individual position responsibilities in a manner that effectively supports the University and promotes advancement of the mission of the University.

Advancing the Mission: Policy, Procedure, and Praxis

Faculty

The faculty partner in shared governance and are charged specifically with the educational mission of the University. The faculty are all contractually employed teaching faculty, as well as the President and administrative staff, who have been granted faculty status according to the provisions of the Faculty Handbook. Faculty members are primarily expected to focus on teaching and research in their particular fields of study. They also share in the transformation of the whole person, including the mentoring, advising, and the spiritual and co-curricular environment of the campus community.

The faculty holds primary responsibility under The Compact for Shared Governance for setting academic standards, developing the curricula, creating and maintaining a distinct liberal arts curriculum in the Wesleyan tradition, assessing student outcomes, pursuing scholarship in their areas of expertise, drawing upon technology appropriately, maintaining the library collection and appropriate educational resources, determining the qualifications for graduation, and recommending candidates for academic degrees. In other areas, the faculty partners with the administration, working collaboratively in the areas of recruitment, development, retention, and the evaluation of its members for promotion and tenure.

The faculty expresses its authority on curricular matters primarily through regularly scheduled faculty meetings. In other matters of governance, faculty are represented formally on all permanent University councils and committees, and when appropriate, on task forces as well. The faculty further elect a Faculty Moderator as the presider over the meetings of the full faculty, who also serves as the Chair of the Faculty Concerns Committee, and the primary communicator between the faculty and the administration or Board of Trustees. Faculty interests should also be represented to the Cabinet and the Board of Trustees by the Provost. During the summer, when many members of the faculty have been off contract, the Deans may be consulted to make sure that faculty interests in governance are represented (7.2.b.1 Wesleyan Standards p. 24 GBP-2344.2; 7.1.1 Governance Compact pp. 7-8 II.C; 7.1.10 Faculty Handbook). The faculty moderator (elected by the faculty) presents a report (both written and verbal) to the full Board of Trustees during their regularly scheduled meetings.

With the implementation of The Compact for Shared Governance in 2021, the Faculty Concerns Committee, working together with the administration, has begun the task of revising the Faculty Handbook, which had not been significantly re-written in a generation. Chapter One was finished in 2022. Revisions on the rest of the Handbook remain ongoing.

With a smaller full-time faculty than in previous decades, faculty continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure Houghton remains a high-functioning and transparent University. In the spring 2023 semester, the faculty revisited the council committee structure and reduced the number of committee seats that must be filled by the faculty while maintaining a robust system of collaboration (5.5.0.3 Councils and Committee Handbook).

Staff and Administration

The staff of Houghton University is represented in the governance structure through the Staff Council. This body was formed from the Staff Cabinet, with its charter approved by the Executive Leadership Council on November 8, 2021. The purpose of this body is to “promote the cause of Christ and Houghton College [sic] by maintaining an important communication link between staff members and administration and to encourage staff engagement at the College [sic].” The Council serves in an advisory capacity to the Office of Human Resources and focuses on the areas of communication, engagement, and professional development (7.1.2 Staff Charter p. 1).

The Council consists of seven voting members—six elected by the staff and one appointed by the President. Additionally, one representative from the Office of Human Resources serves *ex officio*. Representatives are elected from the following areas of the University: academics, Advancement/President’s Office, athletics, enrollment, finance, and student life. Three officers—Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary—are elected annually (7.1.2 Staff Charter p. 2).

In practice, the Council meets on a monthly basis from August through May, with the President meeting at least once per semester with the Council. Additionally, they organized two all-staff meetings each semester, also attended by the President and Cabinet members as appropriate. Minutes of these meetings are made available to all staff members through the employee intranet. In 2022, the Council performed an all-staff survey under the guidance of Human Resources and with the approval of the Executive Leadership Cabinet. This is a new practice established by the current members of the Council and anticipated to occur annually with the aim of improving communication among staff, Human Resources, and administration.

The Chair (or other representative as appointed by the Council) presents a report to the Board of Trustees twice annually, and a print version of this report is provided to the President and the Executive Leadership Cabinet through the Vice President for Finance (who oversees Human Resources and is therefore the Council’s direct link to the Cabinet). This position is considered a resource position to the Board of Trustees and attends open sessions of the Board. The President has a standing invitation to Council meetings and has verbally indicated an open-door policy with the Chair of Staff Council.

Students

The students of Houghton are key constituents in the educational community. The University exists for the purpose of their transformation into servant-scholars, training in their respective fields, and equipping for a lifetime of learning in the world while serving that world with the gifts God has given them. The student body participates in the shaping of this curriculum and of the learning community itself primarily through the Student Council and through representation where appropriate, on University councils, committees, and task forces. In particular, the students have been actively represented on the faculty’s Academic Council, which reviews and approves all curricular matters that come before the full faculty. The Student Body President and the University President meet monthly to discuss matters of concern to the student body (7.1.4 Student Council, 7.1.5 Student Bylaws). Other Student Council officers meet regularly with assigned members of the Cabinet. The Student Council President presents a report to the full Board of the Trustees during their regularly scheduled meetings. The Student Council President serves as a resource person on the Student Life Committee of the Board.

Alumni and Related Constituents

The alumni constituents are represented in the governance structure primarily through the Alumni Advisory Board, as well as through their strong presence on other volunteer Boards of the University, including the Board of Trustees, the President's Advisory Board, and the Athletics Advisory Board. Fourteen of the 15 members of the Athletics Advisory Board are alumni (7.1.6 AAB Roster); 9 of the 11 members of the President's Advisory Board are alumni (7.1.8 PAB Roster); and 20 of the current 29 members of the Board of Trustees are alumni (7.2.b.1 BOT Roster).

The Alumni Advisory Board is made up of 11 alumni and two staff resource persons. The Board representatives include members of a variety of classes from 1969 to 2019. They represent diverse industries and geographic regions of the country (7.1.7 AB Roster). The purpose of the Alumni Advisory Board is to engage the University's alumni base (Alumni Association Bylaws p. 1). The Board works with the Senior Director of Alumni and Community Engagement, who reports to the Executive Leadership Cabinet through the Vice President for Advancement and External Engagement. The Alumni Board Chair or other designated representative from the Alumni Board serves as a resource person to the Board of Trustees and reports to the trustees twice annually on the operations of the Alumni Advisory Board (7.1.9 AA Bylaws p. 1).

Accomplishment of Mission: Assessment, Reporting, and Evaluation

Board of Trustees

"The College[sic] and the Board are committed to a practice of periodic performance reviews. As part of its process to ensure the Board meets its governance responsibilities, and to coordinate activity among its committees, the Board Performance Objectives show the major responsibilities of the board as a whole, and its committees, and set a schedule for performing various responsibilities" (7.2.3 Board Reference p. 3). All trustees were provided the opportunity to participate in the President's evaluation at the conclusion of his first term. Additionally, Board members have participated in an ice cream social with students prior to the fall Board Meeting and dinner with faculty and spouses during their on-campus Board meetings.

President

One of the identified responsibilities of the Board of Trustees is "selecting, assessing, developing and supporting the President" (7.2.3 Board Reference p. 2). Per the Board Reference Book: "In the second year of each four-year term, the Board chair shall propose, and the Board shall elect, a committee to conduct an evaluation of the President and report the results thereof to the Board. The Board's current practice is to conduct an annual performance review of the president, and discuss the results with the President and the Board" (7.2.3.1 Board Reference p. 6, 7.2.3.2 Annual Presidential Review F23).

Executive Leadership Cabinet

The Executive Leadership Cabinet (ELC), referred to in The Compact for Shared Governance as the President's Staff, has in said Compact a list of eight responsibilities owned by the Council as a whole: (1) advise the President in the daily operations of the College [sic]; (2) serve as administrative liaison to the committees of the Board of Trustees; (3) lead the College [sic] in the ongoing work of strategic planning; (4) provide leadership in recruitment, development, and retention of employees; (5) facilitate

communication among the areas of the College [sic]; (6) align resources with priorities and assure fiscal responsibility; (7) provide leadership to councils, committees, or task forces within their areas of leadership; and (8) serve as voting members of faculty (7.1.1 Governance Compact p.7). These responsibilities serve as the basis for evaluation of the performance of the Executive Leadership Council. Individual responsibilities of ELC members are more thoroughly specified in the job descriptions and position impact statements of individual members. ELC members are evaluated annually by the President as part of the University's performance assessment system. Additionally, ELC members' responsibilities align with corresponding University strategic priorities and associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Core functions of the ELC are addressed at one or two Executive Leadership Cabinet retreats each year and either weekly or bi-weekly at routine meetings. ELC members serve as resource persons to the committees of the Board (see board lists). Both under previous leadership and current leadership, those individuals responsible for guiding the strategic plan process sit on the ELC (which now includes the Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Planning and Compliance). Each ELC member is responsible for the fiscal management of the departments under his or her auspices, is routinely involved in the annual budget process, and evaluates financial matters at routine ELC meetings.

AREAS OF STRENGTH

- The governance structure of Houghton University exhibits a number of strengths upon which it can continue to build for future thriving and success. Most significant of note is the University's Compact for Shared Governance, which is well crafted, concise, and highly useful in the life of the Institution. This Compact, governing the many functions across the Institution—including faculty, administration, trustees, students, and alumni—provides Houghton with a structural strength that will benefit the Institution and those it serves for years to come.
- The University benefits from dedicated and highly qualified members of the Board of Trustees and Executive Leadership. These individuals use their skills and knowledge for the good of the Institution and work well both within their individual areas and as a team. These groups have made significant changes in recent years toward increased transparency and collaboration, signaling positive cultural change.
- The third area of strength to note is the significant positive changes in the level of transparency and collaboration around the development of the newest iteration of the University's strategic plan. Stakeholders at all levels of the Institution have been invited to participate and provide a voice in the development of the strategic plan, signaling a significant change from previous strategic planning processes.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

While recent trends have shown positive changes in terms of communication, transparency, and collaboration across the Institution, there remain opportunities for ongoing improvement. The greatest work can be done in the area of communication flows, improving upon the methods by which stakeholders receive communications in ways that are equitable and timely.

While The Compact for Shared Governance is a highly successful and useful document, not all of the policies and procedures housed therein have been fully implemented. Particularly of note is the existing committee structure. The structure was designed for a larger employee body and at this time requires

right-sizing so as not to overburden faculty, staff, or administration with undue amounts of committee service.

The third most necessary improvement is the updates to both the faculty and staff handbooks. Due to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and several years of changes in administrative personnel, the respective handbooks have not received the attention from which they would benefit.

INITIAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Houghton University has identified, through the self-study process and the development of strategic priorities, the following strategies for continuous quality improvement:

1. The most significant strategy for continuous improvement in the area of governance is strong encouragement for the Board of Trustees to continue their recent steps toward connecting with employees during their time on campus. This type of connection inspires long-term cultural change, increased collaboration, and increased trust and confidence.
2. This type of strategy can also be continued with the administration, particularly outside of their institutional departments in an effort to build interdepartmental relationships for long-term and collaborative flourishing.

CONCLUSION

The last two years has given Houghton University the time and space to ask questions, gather evidence and reflect upon our past, present and future. Starting in Fall of 2021 with the self-study institute, our community has engaged in deep discernment as to how we collectively achieve ***Excellence for the Glory of God***. Under the leadership of President Lewis, Co-Chairs Monroe-Baillargeon and Burrichter, and the Self-Study Steering Committee, we have successfully concluded our journey of self-study and confirm through evidence, that all standards of accreditation and requirements of affiliation have been met. We look forward to your review.

Self-Study timeline:

- September thru November 2021: Self-Study Institute
- January 7, 2022: Launch of Self-Study campus wide
- March 8, 2022: Self Study Design Submitted
- October 25, 2023: Final Self-Study report submitted
- November 8, 2023: President Lytle- Review Team chair, campus visit
- April 21-24, 2024: Self-Study Team visit.