Assessment and Quality Enhancement for Institutional Effectiveness at TCU

Texas Christian University

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This guide is designed to help departments and units better understand the quality enhancement planning steps that Texas Christian University programs and services will use.

This institution-wide effort will allow TCU to document effectiveness and show commitment to ongoing improvement, but more importantly, this process will ensure that student learning is measured and enhanced on a regular and continuous basis.

In this guide, are the elements of quality enhancement planning for:
- Academic programs — those involved in degrees or support of degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, doctoral and first-professional levels, as well as those awarding certificates at the post-baccalaureate and post-master levels.
- Administrative and educational support units.
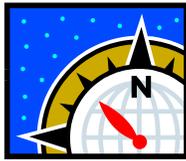
Assessment is a way we can document our effectiveness. A systematic, ongoing cycle of setting goals, measuring attainment of those goals, and using the results to make informed decisions is crucial to continuous improvement. Assessment data provides information that is necessary to inform good decision making about what we should do in the future to enhance our effectiveness as an institution.

Good assessment can promote quality enhancement at all levels of the university by providing us with the necessary evidence to guide effective decision making in many areas: including programmatic changes, classroom teaching modifications, support service adjustments, policy or procedure revisions, campus climate improvements, and structural reorganizations.

Simply put, we need to know how we are doing before we can do better. In addition to these internal purposes, we will use assessment to respond to external requests for accountability.

Assessment findings and use of results are of major importance to the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and to external accrediting bodies for many TCU academic programs and services. We also want and need to assure students, parents, legislators and other stakeholders of the university's effectiveness.

Thinking in these terms, it is easy to understand the three key purposes of assessment:
- **To improve** – This evaluation is formative. Assessment activities provide a feedback loop to help shape or form better programs and services.
- **To inform** – Assessment activities can show a clearer picture of what is really happening in a program or unit and can inform others of contributions the program or unit makes.
- **To demonstrate** – This evaluation is summative. Assessment activities provide evidence to sum up what a program or unit is accomplishing and providing in a way that can be persuasive to students, faculty, staff and the larger community.

Outcomes Assessment

So what exactly is outcomes assessment? Here is a working definition, followed by a set of questions that can be used as a checklist when thinking through the quality enhancement process:

Outcomes Assessment is a systematic process of gathering and interpreting information to discover if a program is meeting established objectives and then of using that information to enhance the program.

A good assessment process can answer three related questions:
- What are we trying to do?
- How well are we doing it?
- How are we using what we discover to improve what we will do in the future?

For each program, student learning outcomes assessment will determine whether that program is helping students achieve intended learning outcomes in the major, in general education, or in other areas -- and, more importantly, where they are not learning. Knowing the areas where students are not learning as much as desired is essential in order to inform the decision making process. Assessing outcomes allows TCU to focus on what those students know and can do after they complete a specific program. Information that departments and units often collect can include:

- Actual student work products (papers, portfolios, etc.)
- Satisfaction surveys and other self-report information
- Rates of student achievements (acceptance to graduate school, passing rates of certification exams, etc.)
- Reports of others (supervisor evaluations, etc.)

Of these, the first one (actual student work products) is the information that will be most useful in determining if students have learned what is described in the outcomes. This is different from using grades, however. While course grades are based on actual student work products, what goes into the calculation of a grade might be more than what is necessary to see if a student has mastered material for a specific student learning outcomes. For example, a grade might include attendance or other course requirements that are not part of a specific learning outcome. For these reasons it is not considered appropriate or meaningful to use grades as a measure for student outcomes assessment.

Assessment Learning Cycle:
Are you doing what you think you are doing?
Step One: What are you trying to do?
Define intended program learning objectives: specifically, what do you want your graduates to know and actually to be able to do?
Step Two: How will you know if you are successful?
Define observable, measurable, actual outcomes that will tell you how well each objective has been met.
Step Three: How successful were you?
Compare observed outcomes to intended outcomes: how well did you meet your objectives in general, and your student learning objectives in particular?
Step Four: What should you do about it?
Accept or modify program objectives, outcomes, and assessment measures to better achieve target objectives in next cycle.

Creating "Assessment for Learning"

When used together with best practices in teaching and effective facilitation of student involvement, assessment is just another way to look at the ongoing cycle of setting goals and outcomes, measuring them to see how well they have been achieved, and making appropriate changes to courses, programs, and the assessment process. This is important because the information gained through the assessment process can provide information to guide curriculum revision, planning, and the support of programs toward the goal of enhanced student learning.

These three elements (teaching, student involvement, and assessment) can gradually build a "culture of evidence" where the feedback from assessment becomes a regular and essential component of program development.

Gather Evidence

Interpret Evidence

Mission/Goals
Objectives
Outcomes

How well do we achieve our outcomes?

Make decisions to improve programs: enhance student development and learning; inform institutional decision-making, planning, budgeting.

*Adapted from Maki, 2001, and Bresciani, 2003.

Important Note: Outcomes assessment is not an evaluation of individual students or of individual faculty or staff; rather, it is a process that provides each academic program, department, school/college, or related administrative unit with valuable feedback about overall performance related to curriculum, learning success, and/or services and goals. The assessment focus of each department/unit is on showing how the purpose or mission of the university is being accomplished through that particular unit. The emphasis is on the benefits or results of the learning or services provided — on the outcomes that are experienced by those involved. Is TCU's mission being accomplished through the work done by your area?

Information about SACS and Accreditation

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the SACS philosophy of accreditation. SACS expects each institution to engage in an ongoing program of improvement, to demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission, and to document quality and effectiveness. The following core requirements and comprehensive standards from the new Principles of Accreditation spell out the details of SACS' expectations and can be found on the Web: www.sacscoc.org.

Section 2 - Core Requirement 2.5
The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institutionwide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Section 2 – Core Requirement 2.12
The institution has developed an acceptable Quality enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

Section 3 - Comprehensive Standard 3.3
The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs (including student learning outcomes for educational programs) and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

While there are additional items listed in the Principles of Accreditation, the above demonstrate the importance of the assessment and quality enhancement process in the ongoing accreditation process. "Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a traditional U.S. philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system" (from the SACS *Principles of Accreditation*).

SACS and Accreditation

Since TCU is accredited by SACS, it is essential that we meet the requirements outlined in their Principles for Accreditation. However, the information and processes that are required by SACS are also considered to be good practice. "Accreditation by the Commission on Colleges (SACS) signifies that an institution has a purpose appropriate to higher education and has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that purpose. Accreditation indicates that an institution maintains clearly specific educational objectives that arte consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that it is successful in achieving its stated objectives."

In addition, SACS "supports the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission; the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely; and the right of students to access opportunities for learning and the open exchange of ideas." It is essential, therefore, that TCU follow these guidelines in order to meet SACS standards, but more importantly, so that we can continue to provide excellent mission-specific educational opportunities for our students.

SACS Commission on Colleges adheres to the following fundamental characteristics of accreditation (from www.sacscoc.org):

- Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary and is an earned and renewable status.
- Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements.
- The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.
- Accreditation is self-regulation.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.
- Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.
- Accreditation requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.
- Accreditation acknowledges an institution's prerogative to articulate its mission within the recognized context of higher education and its responsibility to show that it is accomplishing its mission.
- Accreditation expects an institution to develop a balanced governing structure designed to promote institutional autonomy and flexibility of operation.
- Accreditation expects an institution to ensure that its programs are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students.

Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

Given the importance of assessment in planning for academic quality enhancement, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) asked key higher education leaders to develop guidance for good practice in assessing student learning. Many of these principles are quite useful for assessment of administrative and support areas as well. The principles recognize that our work is complex and meaningful. As quality enhancement planning occurs, think about how your plan puts the following nine principles into action:

- The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
- Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
- Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
- Assessment is a goal-oriented process.
- Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
- Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.
- Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative.
- Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
- Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
- Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

For the complete Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning, see Appendix A.
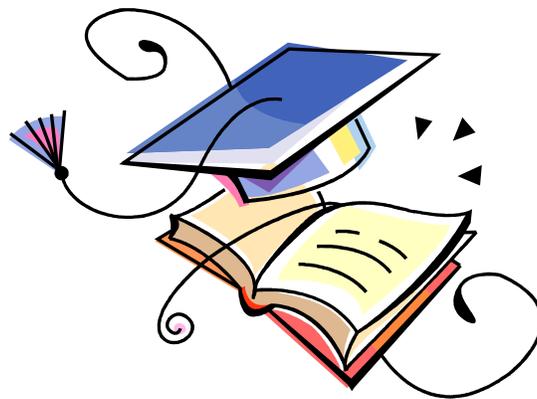
Assessment as a Transformational Process To Enhance Quality

Transformational Assessment

Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, indicated that assessment and its use for accountability is actually a way to tell the story of the department or unit for which the assessment is done. In Shulman's metaphor of storytelling, assessment becomes a means for building the narrative that can be shared outside of the department.

> "The story told by an assessment is thus ultimately a function of the dimensions of measurement that determine the possible directions the narrative might take. So accountability requires that we take responsibility for the story we commit ourselves to telling. We must make public the rationale for choosing that story as opposed to alternative narratives…only then should we defend the adequacy of the forms of measurement and documentation we employ to warrant the narratives we offer."

Viewing the assessment process as a means to sharing information is essential. Nevertheless, the assessment process should not be developed only for others. Assessment must provide meaningful and appropriate information to those that created the process.

Assessment data can and will be used for accountability. Parents, potential students, and the public deserve to know what higher education is doing. Accountability has an important role. But to only gather assessment data to show others what is occurring seems to be a very large, hugely time-consuming task that will intentionally never impact or inform decision making about the teaching and learning process. Assessment that is designed to provide information to transform teaching and learning is both necessary and essential.

Transformative assessment is a process that will inform decision making that is appropriate, meaningful, sustainable, flexible and ongoing, and uses data for improvement with the potential for substantive change. While the data that is collected can also be used to demonstrate outcomes to others, transformative assessment is principally focused on how to enhance student learning. For more information about transformative assessment, contact Dr. Catherine Wehlburg in TCU's Office for Assessment & Quality Enhancement.

TCU's Model for Assessment and Quality Enhancement

Discussions with faculty, deans and program directors tell us that most units are already doing some assessment of their programs. We now are establishing a shared framework for the ongoing assessment efforts and ensuring that all units participate in the process. TCU's goal is to weave the various strands of planning, program review, assessment and evaluation into a tapestry that truly tells the story of our university — a tapestry that integrates these various strands in a seamless institution-wide vision. This tapestry will demonstrate the many ways TCU effectively accomplishes its mission and will show our process for continuing improvement.

Each department and unit are part of a much larger effort; every unit within the university is involved in this implementation and assessment of institutional effectiveness as TCU works to:
- Write expected outcomes
- Establish criteria for success
- Assess Performance
- View assessment results
- Effect improvements
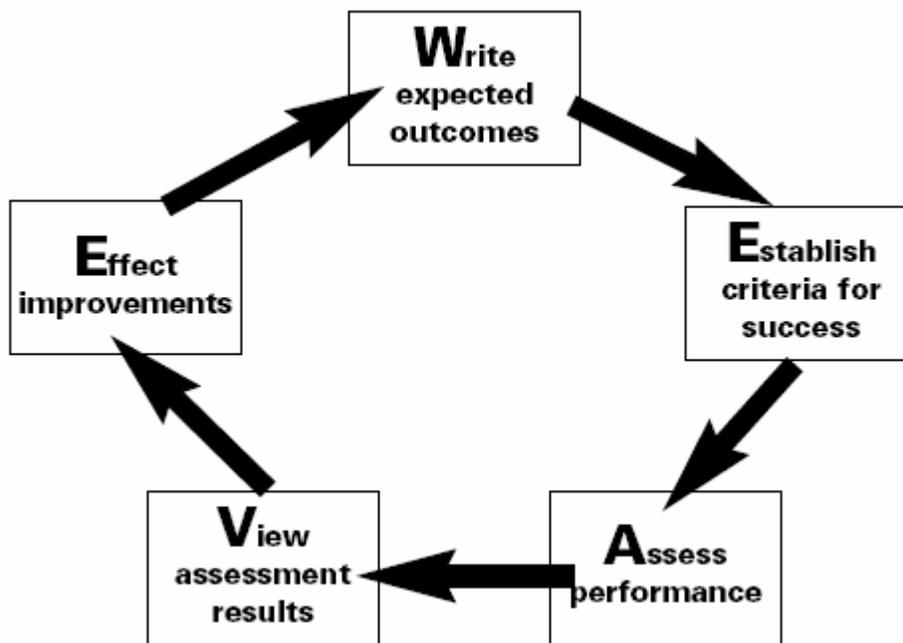
The WEAVE cycle begins when goals and objectives are articulated. Once these are established, each unit must determine how to those goals and objectives and decide how well they are being met. Next, conduct the assessment activities and determine the results and findings. Then the department or administrative and educational support unit reviews the results and determine any actions to be taken, including any changes that need to be made to improve learning or services.

Specific Information

Academic Programs
Administrative/Support Programs

Academic Programs

When developing and implementing outcomes assessment strategies for an academic program, it is important to keep in mind three purposes: to improve, to inform and to prove. Each department or unit needs to design an assessment process that provides information that can be used to determine whether intended outcomes are being achieved and how programs can be improved.

Write Expected Outcomes

Step 1: Articulate the mission or purpose of your academic program.
Your program's mission statement or statement of purpose links the program or department to your college or school and ultimately to the overall mission of TCU. In formulating or revising a purpose or mission statement that is integrated into the university's mission, review the university's mission and identify how your academic program supports TCU's mission.

Step 2: Define educational and programmatic goals and objectives, including desired student learning outcomes.
If any single step is the key for assessment planning, this is it. You will assess student learning relative to the educational goals and objectives you agree upon and establish for your program or department.

A goal is a general statement about the aims or purposes of education in your program. Goals are long-range outcomes that are written in broad, sometimes vague language.

An objective is a specific statement that describes a desired learning outcome for your program. This concept of a learning outcome seems to be the most difficult type of objective for people to understand, but it is really quite straightforward. Peter Ewell, a well-known national assessment researcher, puts it this way: "A student learning outcome … is … defined in terms of the particular levels of knowledge, skills and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of collegiate experiences."

You might choose the following objectives to assess:
- **Knowledge outcomes:**
  - Major or discipline content
  - Modes of inquiry
- **Core Curriculum outcomes (also see www.core.tcu.edu):**
  - Religious Traditions
  - Historical Traditions
  - Literary Traditions
  - Cultural Awareness
  - Global Awareness
  - Citizenship and Social Values
- **Skills outcomes:**
  - Those required for effective practice in the discipline or in future employment
  - Ability to work with others
  - Listening skills
  - Teamwork or leadership
- **Attitudes and values**
  - Personal
  - Social
  - Ethical

- **Behavioral outcomes** (most of these are outcomes that are important to your program but do not give direct evidence of student learning):
  - Current students
    - Persistence and choice of major
    - Course selection and completion
  - Former students
    - Employment information
    - Graduate school or other further education
    - Professional activities
    - Community contributions
    - Evaluation of satisfaction with the program's preparation

Establish Criteria for Success
Step 3: Identify and describe appropriate assessment instruments or methods.
After you have identified goals and objectives, decide on appropriate assessment approaches. What sources of evidence could you gather that would convince you (and others!) that your students are reaching the desired learning objectives?
Remember the nine principles: comprehensive assessment strategies frequently require the use of more than one assessment to determine program effectiveness. Before you feel overwhelmed, here are a couple of points to keep in mind:
- It is possible to stagger assessments – not every assessment has to be conducted every semester or every year. They can be done on a biennial or triennial basis, if appropriate.
- Course grades – while a source of information about individual student achievement, these do **not** provide information about overall programmatic outcomes.

Step 4: Establish criteria for learning success.
It is important to know what level of achievement will tell you that your program helps students achieve learning success. Here are only a few examples; think of what is important to you:
- 70 % of students can solve a complex, real-world problem using skills developed in your program.
- A panel of experts rates highly the performance of students on their oral presentations in a capstone course.
- 75 % of students can take reference materials and write an acceptable speech for a town council.
- The program advisory group reports that graduates have appropriate entry-level skills.
- 80 % of students can pass your professional licensure exam on the first attempt.
- Panels of reviewers confirm that student portfolios reflect progressive development of critical thinking skills over time in your program.
- 95 % of students and employers of graduates indicate satisfaction with your program.
- Interviews with graduating seniors indicate that students are overwhelmingly pleased with your program, but desire more internship possibilities.

Assess Performance of Students
Step 5: Conduct assessment activities.
Put your plan into action. Conducting assessment activities could include having a panel read a set of papers, taking a sample of oral presentations and reviewing the videotapes, or conducting a focus group with seniors. This time is marvelous to see what students can do, find out what they think and look more closely at your curriculum. Think through developing the tools you will need.

If you plan assessments so that they are comparable over time and the sample sizes are adequate, you can gather valuable feedback on your program's effectiveness.

View Assessment Results
Step 6: Analyze the findings from your assessments.
What are the implications of the findings? How did students do compared to your expectations? What program changes could you make to improve student knowledge and skills that did not reach criterion success levels? What can you infer from the data? What future actions should your program take?

As you discuss the assessment results and their implications with others in your program, remember to celebrate what the program has accomplished in relation to what it hoped to accomplish. Are students achieving expected outcomes? This time also is for you to revisit and improve your assessment measures.

Remember to document assessment findings. Summarize the results for reporting purposes, but be sure to retain details of documentation in your own files so that you can review performance, and progress, over time.

Step 7: Implement changes to enhance quality.
The results of this process should not sit on your shelf. To avoid having done a hollow exercise, you must "close the loop." If you have moved through the steps of this model, you will have evidence in hand that is important to you; use it to make improvements in your academic program in order to improve student learning. How can you help students develop the outcomes you wish to see? Perhaps you need to add or modify learning opportunities, give more chances for students to develop their skills in certain areas, or improve advising so that students take courses in a sequence that helps them develop key skills.

Also, review the assessment plan. Is it time to make changes in goals and objectives? Are the assessment methods giving you the quantity and quality of information you need?

The best time to update objectives is in July of each annual reporting cycle. The assessment cycle will start the year, approximately in July, with goals and objectives in place, assess how well we are doing through the year, and then report results of assessment activities and implications for future actions in June, modifying objectives for the following year. This will enable the academic year (beginning in August) to be the start of measuring the already-established outcomes.

<u>Benefits of Using Assessment</u>
Of course, even without formal assessment procedures, faculty have constantly explored in their own ways what worked well and what didn't, and then used those observations and impressions to make changes in their courses and curriculum. Formal assessment (like the type discussed here) simply makes those informal activities more systematic, more focused, more effective, and more public. Assessment can facilitate improvement through a variety of venues. When faculty members are directly involved in the development, implementation, and analysis of assessment activities, a number of specific benefits result.

Because assessment can provide information about the knowledge and skills students have as they enter a course…	**Faculty can** design instruction to target the knowledge and skill levels students should have upon finishing a course and better determine the levels of thinking or reasoning appropriate for the course.
Because assessment can provide reliable data on student learning…	**Faculty can** rely less on the comments that appear on student evaluations as indicators of their success in teaching.
Because assessment can make available richer data about the effects of the curriculum or teaching methods…	**Faculty can** engage in more productive conversations about the status of student achievement and make better decisions about how it might be improved.
Because assessment can yield more reliable data about instruction…	**Faculty can** make reliable decisions about innovations or experimental projects in instruction and share successes more easily.
Because assessment can provide evidence that faculty make a difference in student learning…	**Faculty can** enjoy greater satisfaction in their work as educators.
Because assessment can offer a larger view of student needs and accomplishments…	**Faculty can** identify directions for future instructional development.

*Adapted from *Program-based Review and Assessment*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Fall, 2001).

Specific Information for
Administrative and Support Programs

SACS uses the term "Administrative and Educational Support Units" for a wide range of programs and activities that do not award degrees. At a university like TCU, these units have many different missions and serve very different people. Even so, it is possible to work through the WEAVE process to develop appropriate assessment approaches for any unit. While you are "WEAVEing", consider how you can integrate any relevant professional standards, criteria, etc., into your thinking.

Write Expected Outcomes

Step 1: Articulate the mission or purpose of your unit.
Your unit's mission statement or statement of purpose links the functions of your unit to the overall mission of TCU. In formulating or revising a purpose or mission statement that is integrated into the university's mission, you should review the university's mission and identify how your unit supports TCU's mission.

Here are a few questions to consider in formulating the purpose or mission of your unit:
- What is primary function of your unit?
- What core activities are involved?
- What should those you serve experience after interacting with your unit?

Step 2: Define your unit's objectives.
Here are three categories of objectives:

- **Outcome statements** concern gains you want those you serve to make — for example, what can someone do after interacting with your program?
- **Process statements** concern the accomplishments of your unit's functions, such as:
    - Level or volume of activity
    - Efficiency with which you conduct the processes
    - Compliance with external standards or regulations
- **Satisfaction statements** describe how those you serve rate their satisfaction with your unit's processes or services.

In drafting objectives, it may help to create a flowchart of your unit's work processes to determine what your unit will accomplish and what students, faculty, staff, and others will think, know or do following the provision of the service.

Consider such questions as:
- What are the most important results or impacts that should occur as a result of your unit's activities?
- What are your critical work processes and how should they function?
- What does the end user experience through interaction with your unit?

SMART is an acronym that is often used to determine how well an objective is formulated. A good objective is a SMART objective when it is:

- **Specific** – Be clear about what your unit plans to accomplish, as well as when, where or how. For example, "we will expand our services" does not specify how or by how much or for how many customers the services will be expanded. Words such as *develop*, *encourage* and *enhance* lack specificity. Action words such as *locate* or *reduce* make objectives more specific.
- **Measurable** – Quantify your objective as to targets and benefits, so that your unit can determine if it has reached the objective.
- **Achievable** – Know the objective is something that your unit can accomplish. It is fine to accomplish your objective in incremental steps over several years.
- **Realistic** – Make sure the objective is something that can be done practically in a specific time frame or for a specific amount of money.
- **Time-bound** – When will the objective be completed? Tie the objective to a specific time frame.

Establish Criteria for Success
Step 3: Determine appropriate assessment measures and criteria.
Once you establish your unit's objectives, define and identify the sources of evidence you will use to determine whether you are achieving expected impacts. You must detail what will be measured and how it will be measured. For each outcome, create measures that help your unit in making critical decisions about its processes and services.

Build an inventory of existing evaluation and assessment activities. Ask colleagues in similar units at other institutions how they assess their efficiency and effectiveness. When designing your assessment, you should use multiple measures. A composite of results can yield a more realistic picture of your unit's performance.

Common types of assessment
- Attitudinal – measures of satisfaction from those you serve
- Direct – counts of unit services
- External – validation (neutral party, auditor, professional standards)

Criteria or targets for success
Always aim for a criterion level that stretches your unit's performance. For example:
- How well should we serve our clients?
- 95 % of our users will be "very satisfied or satisfied" with our services.
- At least 80 % of eligible employees will participate in training.
- 90 % of the transcripts will be sent within three days.
- 90 % of the forms will be processed without errors.

Assess Performance of Unit
Step 4: Conduct assessment activities.
Put your assessment plan into action. You must set a schedule for conducting assessment activities. Some assessments may take place monthly, others annually and others even on a triennial basis. Conduct a focus group of those you serve, survey people who have participated in your unit's activities, have an expert come through and review your processes. This time is to find out what others say about your operation.

View Assessment Results
Step 5: Analyze the findings from your assessments.
Once the results from your assessments have been collected, see what they can tell you
about your program. Consider asking questions such as:

- What can you infer from the data?
- What future actions will you take?
- What changes have you made (or will you make) based on assessment results?
- What are the budgetary implications?

As each unit discusses the assessment results and their implications, celebrate when
the unit has accomplished what it planned to accomplish! Come to a clear understanding
and agreement on areas that still present opportunities for growth and improvement.
Document the findings of assessment. Summarize the results for reporting purposes;
and, be sure to put these into the WEAVE Online Assessment Management system. As
you discuss results, revisit and improve your assessment measures.

Effect Improvements to Increase Unit Performance
Step 6: Use your results.
The quality enhancement process is not completed until the "loop is closed" and the
results are used to make improvements to services. Typical changes in services might
include:

- revising organizational structure
- reallocating resources
- revamping administrative procedures
- modifying or expanding relations with public or external agencies

The decisions made regarding the course of action for the following year also may lead
to a restructuring or revision of your unit's objectives for the following year.

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assessment cycle will start the year, approximately in July, with goals and objectives in
place, assess how well we are doing through the year, and then report results of
assessment activities and implications for future actions in June, modifying objectives for
the following year. This will enable the academic year (beginning in August) to be the
start of measuring the already-established outcomes.*

Assessing Departmental and Unit Assessment Plans

Assessing the Assessment Plan

While specific learning outcomes will differ widely from unit to unit across campus, there are some elements of an assessment plan that should be included. An Assessment Plan Rubric (Appendix B) has been created in order to give meaningful and appropriate feedback to departments. In addition, each department/unit is encouraged to use the Assessment Plan Rubric to regularly update and modify their existing plan so that the specific assessment plan meets the needs of the department/unit. The Assessment Plan Rubric is designed to be constructive and formative in terms of helping to continuously improve the assessment process across campus.

Elements of an Effective Program Assessment Plan
Ultimately, each department/unit will tailor their specific program assessment approach to respond to departmental goals and timelines, taking into account internal expectations, external requirements, or both. In general, however, your department will want to complete the following steps to develop an effective program assessment plan. In the following chapters, each of these elements will be discussed in detail. An effective assessment plan should contain the following:

- The *Mission Statement* is the initial point of reference for any department, unit, or course. It is a concise statement of the general values and principles that guide the curriculum. In broad ways, it sets a tone and a philosophical position from which follow a program's goals and objectives; therefore, the mission statement is also a statement of *program vision*. The mission statement can and should be short. The mission statement should define the broad purposes the program is aiming to achieve, describe those the program is designed to serve, and state the values and guiding principles that define its standards.

- *Learning* (or *Program*) *Outcomes* are brief, clear, focused statements of specific intended outcomes. The Outcomes should clearly align with the Mission Statement. Each outcome should be stated in the form of an "action verb" combined with a description of a very specific ability helps translate objectives into observable abilities or behaviors students can actually demonstrate and TCU can actually measure. It is not necessary to measure each outcome each academic year. But, if an outcome is listed in an assessment plan, it should be measured in a regular and meaningful time period. Ideally, outcomes should:
  - focus on what students (or users of your service) will be able to do rather than what is taught or programmed
  - sufficiently specific to convey the expectations for success
  - Indicate conditions under which the outcome behaviors are observable
  - Indicate the target level of performance needed for success when appropriate

- *Measures* of outcomes should be designed to measure each outcome. Measures might be already embedded in a course or program, or they might need to be created in order to address a specific outcome. Measures should

provide the evidence that is useful to the department or unit. Each outcome must be linked to at least one measure and each measure should inform at least one outcome. Using multiple measures are often a very good way of getting a picture of an outcome that might be difficult to measure (for example, "critical thinking" or "ethical leadership"). Ideally, measures should:

- o Include direct measures of student learning or of the behavior that is being measured
- o Be described clearly
- o Include a description of the intended sample when appropriate
- o Describe when the measure will be given (e.g., during a capstone class)
- o Be explicitly linked to specific learning objectives

- *Findings* will describe what the measures indicated about each outcome. When these are put into the WEAVE Online Assessment Management System, they are put in narrative form. The purpose of the findings are to demonstrate how the department/unit analyzed the measures and how the analysis relates to whether or not the outcome(s) was met, partially met, or not met. Remember, if all of the outcomes are shown to be met in the findings, then either the expectations of the department/unit are too low, or the department/unit has reached perfection. It is, in most cases, the former. Ideally, findings should:
  - o Be specific (the results from each assessment method provided)
  - o Be interpreted in relation to the assessment itself
  - o Be interpreted in relation to the program/department/unit outcomes
  - o Include sufficient summaries of the results

- *Action Plans* describe what the department/unit is going to do given the findings. This is where changes to be made are outlined. The action plans should align with the findings. In other words, if a measure demonstrated that one of the outcomes is not being met, there should be an action plan that describes specifically what the department/unit will do to try to do to improve in that area for the next year. Ideally, action plans should:
  - o Fully describe decisions (e.g., to change or not change programs/courses) based on assessment
  - o Provide explanations of how assessment results informed decisions
  - o Be linked to specific assessment results

Assessing the Assessment Plan can be done by using the rubric in Appendix B. Each department/unit is encouraged to use this rubric to self-assess and make modifications when necessary. The Office for Assessment & Quality Enhancement can help with this process.

Additional Resources

For More Information…

Assessment manuals from the University of Wisconsin, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Texas A&M were very helpful in developing this guide.

All of the texts listed below (and more) can borrowed from the TCU Office for Assessment & Quality Enhancement. Contact Dr. Catherine Wehlburg for more information about any of the following:

- **Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses** by Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed (Allyn and Bacon, 2000) has a number of real university examples of learning outcome statements and of rubrics or criteria defining success.
- **Assessment Essentials** by Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999) is an excellent introduction to the assessment process in higher education.
- **Planning for Assessment – Mission Statements, Goals and Objectives: A Guide for Colleges and Universities** by L.F. Gardiner (Office of Learning Assessment, New Jersey Department of Higher Education, 1989) has help on writing goals and objectives.
- **Effective Grading** by Barbara Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998) "discusses how the grading process may be made more effective in individual classrooms and how the information about student learning that the grading process yields may be used within an institution's assessment plan." (Preface, xvii).
- **Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction Within a University Writing Program** by Richard H. Haswell. At many institutions, writing assessment is not necessarily considered fundamental to writing instruction and there is little communication between the assessment program and the composition program. This book demonstrates that writing assessment and instruction programs may be successful partners.
- **Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education** by Barbara E. Walvoord. This book is an "Assessment 101" book designed to be a step-by-step guide for those who are new to the assessment process.
- **Students at the Center: Feminist Assessment** Edited by Caryn McTighe Musil. This book focuses on the assessment process used by Musil and her colleagues as they worked on a grant focused on a women's studies project.

From the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time.
Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore, a firmer basis for improving our students' educational experience.

3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process.
It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations — those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experiences along the way — about the curricula, teaching and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.

5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic. Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative.
Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none; improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This linked series may mean tracking the progress of individual students, or of cohorts of

students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This principle implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.

8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and continually worked. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making and avidly sought.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. There is a compelling public stake in education.
As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation — to ourselves, our students and society — is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

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Assessment Plan Rubric

Criteria	A Model for Others Value = 4	Acceptable Value = 3	Needs Some Modification Value = 2	Not acceptable Value = 1	Score	Comments
Mission Statement						
Mission Statement is clear and specific to the unit						
Outcomes						
Specific Learning Outcomes are identified (at least 3 total)						
More than half of the outcomes are direct measures						
All elements of the mission statement are identified in the outcomes						
Demonstrates conditions under which the outcome behaviors are observable						
Indicates the target level of performance needed for success (when appropriate)						

Criteria	A Model for Others Value = 4	Acceptable Value = 3	Needs Some Modification Value = 2	Not acceptable Value = 1	Score	Comments
Measure						
Each measure is linked to an outcome						
Most of the measures are direct measures						
Each measure is clearly described						
Multiple (3 or more) methods of assessment are identified						
Assessment measures allow student performance to be gauged over time						
Findings						
Findings are entered for each measure						
Each outcomes shows evidence of measurement						
Findings are interpreted in relation to the specific unit outcomes						
Include sufficient and specific summaries of the results						

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Criteria	A Model for Others Value = 4	Acceptable Value = 3	Needs Some Modification Value = 2	Not acceptable Value = 1	Score	Comments
Action Plan						
Fully describe decisions based on assessment						
Provides explanations of how assessment results informed decisions						
Is linked to specific assessment results						
Overall						
The department/unit is using assessment to enhance						