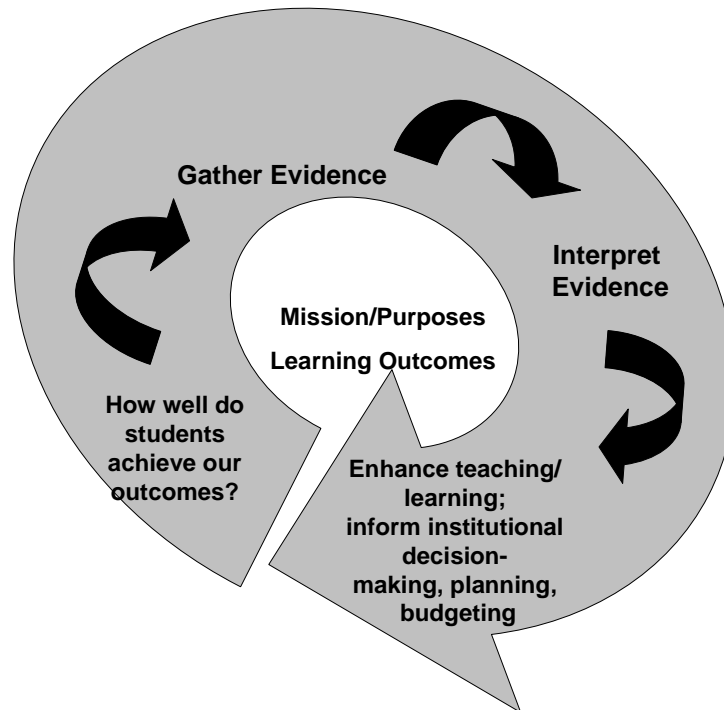


THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Assessment is an ongoing, iterative process that uses results to inform decisions and make improvements. In order to improve, careful planning is necessary. Learning goals and outcomes must be clearly specified, appropriate measures must be selected, data collection must be carefully executed and most importantly results must be shared for improvements to occur. The figure below illustrates a cycle of interlinked activities that facilitate continuous improvement. (Figure adapted from Maki, 2004)



Seven Steps to Closing the Loop

Step 1: Creating an Infrastructure for Assessment: Organizing an Assessment Committee

Before beginning, it is important to set up the appropriate infrastructure for assessment in order to ensure that the process is self-sustaining. We strongly suggest that programs a committee with a rotating chair who will lead the process. This will alleviate faculty workload as well as provide quality assurance for planning and dissemination. The assessment process is more likely to be self-sustaining if faculty collectively agree on what is important, buy into assessment procedures, and decide as a group what the data mean and how to improve.

Step 2: Defining the Mission of the Program

Each program should formulate a mission statement that will constitute a broad statement of its goals, values, and aspirations.

Step 3: Defining the Program Learning Outcomes

Each program should formulate at least three learning outcomes that describe the specific abilities, knowledge, values, and attitudes it wants students to acquire as a result of the program.

Step 4: Selecting assessment methods and identifying targets

Programs may use several different methods to measure student learning outcomes and must include direct measures of learning for each learning outcome. This is a WASC requirement. They should also identify expected levels of performance for each outcome.

Step 5: Collecting the Data

It is important to determine how the data collection will be implemented (i.e., who will collect the data, where it will be collected, and who will be sampled). All data should be reported in the form of group data to ensure the privacy of those who are assessed.

Step 6: Analyzing the Results

It is important to summarize and report the data in a meaningful way to communicate findings to program faculty. One person in every program should be in charge of writing up the report.

Step 7: Closing the Loop

No matter how results turn out, they are worthless unless they are used. The results of assessment data should be disseminated to faculty in the program as well as faculty outside of the program to obtain their ideas about how to improve the program. WASC is particularly interested in seeing documentation for this step. In some cases changes will be minor and easy to implement, while others will be more difficult and will have to be implemented over multiple years.