

## Chapter 2. Overview of the Assessment Process

Before considering the details of creating and implementing an assessment plan, it might first be useful to supply an overview of the process. Prior to establishing the actual plan, each program must make important decisions which in themselves represent the early stages of the assessment process (and to which the following chapters will be devoted). These decisions are

- defining the program mission statement (Chapter Three);
- identifying the program goals and outcomes for students (Chapter Four);
- choosing the assessment tools (Chapter Five).

Perhaps the most challenging of these tasks is to decide on program learning goals with which most faculty can live. It is not unusual for faculty of any given department to differ on program goals. For example, while some faculty in a political science department may see the more important goals as an understanding of historical knowledge bases, other faculty in the same department might want to emphasize research application. Even so, faculty can learn to compromise by discussing the sum total of goals and then arriving at a list of broad based goals. What is most vital to the assessment process, however, is that the core goals can directly measure students' learning. Most assessment practitioners agree that it is important that departments do not rely on goals that indirectly measure student learning.

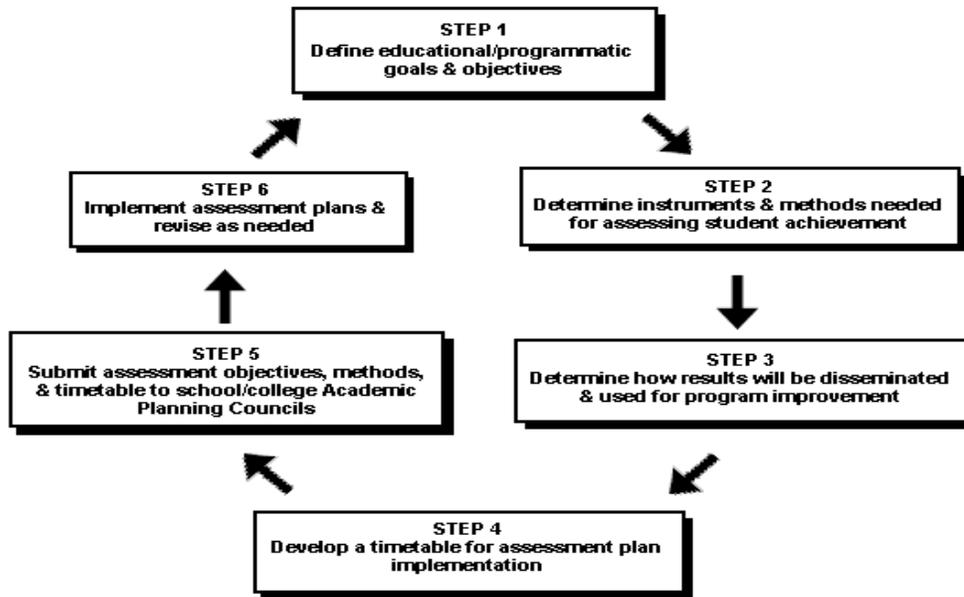
Once these decisions have been made, departments can then move to the next stage, the actual implementation of assessment (Chapter 6). As noted by experts, though, the devil is always in the details of implementation. Once programs have established the learning outcomes, these further decisions must be made:

- the methods for collecting evidence to assess learning outcomes;
- the number of students involved in the process (i.e. sample size);
- the personnel and resources needed for coordination and data analysis;
- the potential training needs of evaluators;
- the best approaches for sharing and discussing the results with colleagues.

An assessment plan attains reliability in large part when the tools and the measures are consistently used. Validity is attained when faculty have a role in its creation. (Validity is “the degree to which an assessment measures (a) what is intended, as opposed to (b) what is not intended, or (c) what is unsystematic or unstable; source: University of Maryland Center for the Study of Assessment Validity and Evaluation).

The figure below depicts the steps in developing and implementing an assessment plan. The process is intentionally circular in order to evoke the idea of continual improvement (adapted from the University of Wisconsin-Madison web page).

**Developing and Implementing a Departmental Assessment Plan for Programmatic Improvement**



Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison web page