

## **Background on Assessment at HLSCC**

Institutions of higher learning are increasingly involved in conducting assessment within their academic programs and administrative support units. The desire to know how well the institution and its programs are doing and to improve service and student learning are all motivators for conducting assessment.

For HLSCC to remain accredited by Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), it must continue to demonstrate that it has an active assessment process that examines its services and programs and leads to improvement. According to MSCHE (Standard V) an accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

1. Clearly stated educational goals at the institutional and degree/program levels, which are interrelated with one another, with relevant educational experiences, and with the institutions mission.
2. Organized and systematic assessments conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals, evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/program goals.
3. Consideration and use of assessment results for the improvement of educational effectiveness.

At the beginning of the accreditation process, HLSCC established a goal that all academic and administrative units would develop mission statements, learning outcomes, and measures to assess and improve programs, operations, and services. In 2009, a Student Outcomes Assessment Committee (SOAP) was established and charged with the responsibility of providing direction, coordination, support, and evaluation of student outcomes assessment activities across all areas of the College. Currently, every academic department and student support service unit is required to submit in the Fall an assessment plan for the coming year and document the results of their prior assessments. These plans and results are submitted by the program assessment coordinator to the department or unit head for review, and then submitted to the appropriate Dean for approval and presentation to SOAP. In 2012, the Department of Outcomes Assessment was established to provide support to HLSCC's program assessment process. The production of this handbook is a continuation of that support.

## Introduction to Program Assessment

Assessment is a *systematic, continuous* way of generating feedback on performance. As a systematic process, it involves the following components: clearly articulated goals and expected outcomes, valid and reliable ways to evaluate progress toward those goals, and the use of assessment data to inform decision-making. Assessment is a continuous activity undertaken with the College's mission in mind. An effective assessment process is one that employs reflective analysis aimed at improving the climate for teaching and learning at HLSCC.

Assessment can occur at five levels within the institution:

- institutional assessment (involves assessment of college-wide characteristics and issues)
- academic and administrative unit assessment (involves assessment of college processes and services)
- program assessment (involves assessment of academic and support programs)
- course assessment (involves assessment of a specific course)
- classroom assessment (involves assessment of individual students at the course level typically by the class instructor)

This handbook focuses on program assessment.

**Program assessment or student outcomes assessment is defined as the systematic and ongoing method of gathering, analyzing, and using information from various sources about a program and measuring program outcomes in order to improve student learning.** Program assessment should not be an evaluation of individual students, faculty, or staff. It is a process used to provide a program with feedback on its performance with the intent of helping to improve the program and in particular, improve student learning.

The four main purposes of program assessment are:

1. To provide feedback to faculty and staff on how the program can be improved
2. To inform faculty and other decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the program
3. To capture and demonstrate to students, faculty, staff, and outsiders what the program is accomplishing
4. To provide support for college decision-making activities such as program review and strategic planning, as well as external accountability activities such as accreditation

When developing the assessment plan for your program, always refer back to the four main purposes of assessment: improve, inform, prove, and support.

Effective program assessment helps you answer these questions:

1. What are you trying to do?
2. How well are you doing it?
3. Using the answers to the first two questions, how can you improve what you are doing?
4. What and how does a program contribute to the development and growth of students?
5. How can student learning be improved?

The assessment process of your program should try to address these questions. Remember to refer to them while you are conducting your assessment activities.

A task force from the American Association of Higher Education developed nine *Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning*. The nine principles include:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is more likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.