

## Overview of Outcomes Assessment

### What is Outcomes Assessment?

Outcomes Assessment (OA) is the process of collaboratively collecting information that will tell an organization whether the services, activities, or experiences it offers are having the desired impact on those who partake in them. In other words, is the organization making a difference in the lives of the individuals it serves?

In higher education, at its simplest, Outcomes Assessment has three stages:

1. **Defining** the most important goals for students to achieve as a result of participating in an academic experience (outcomes)
2. **Evaluating** how well students are actually achieving those goals (assessment)
3. **Using** the results to improve the academic experience (continuous improvement)

### Who benefits from Outcomes Assessment?

One of the great advantages of Outcomes Assessment is that when done in a systematic way, it has benefits for people throughout the institution, from our students to the faculty to the administration.

#### For students, Outcomes Assessment will:

- communicate clear expectations about what's important in a course or program
- inform them that they will be evaluated in a consistent and transparent way
- reassure them that there is common core content across all sections of a course
- allow them to make better decisions about programs based on outcomes results

#### For faculty, participating in Outcomes Assessment will:

- help them determine what's working and what's not working in their courses or programs
- facilitate valuable interdisciplinary and intercampus discussions
- provide powerful evidence to justify needed resources to maintain or improve programs
- allow them to tell their story to individuals outside their area (e.g. administrators, employers, prospective students, transfer institutions, politicians) using evidence
- provide reassurance that all faculty teaching a particular course agree to address certain core content

#### For administrators, Outcomes Assessment will:

- demonstrate an institutional commitment to continually improving the academic programs and services offered by the College
- provide valuable data to support requests for funds from state and local government and private donors
- demonstrate accountability to funding sources
- provide valuable data for academic planning and decision-making
- enable them to inform elected officials, local businesses, and potential donors about the College's impact on our students and our community in a very compelling and convincing way.

Finally, systematic Outcomes Assessment is now a **requirement for accreditation** by all higher education accrediting organizations.