# LINING IT ALL UP

**INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

**THROUGH**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING**

**AND**

**ASSESSMENT**

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*Assessment comes from the Latin word assidere - to sit beside*

Institutional effectiveness is the quintessential CQI activity. It is the process through which the institution defines its objectives (identifies institutional purpose and direction), determines how well they are achieved (evaluates institutional performance) and uses the information for continuous improvement. It follows the PLAN/DO/CHECK cycle beginning with setting the mission, values, and goals of the institution, which are defined through the strategic planning process; moves the strategic plan forward through operational planning; incorporates the evaluation of actual results achieved against desired outcomes through assessment activities; and utilizes the information to modify the objectives and improve performance.[1] The process needs to invade the fabric of the institution systematically through a series of concentric circles that begin at the institutional level and permeate each of the lower levels.[2]

Institutional Level

VP Area Level

Division Level

Program/Department Level

Course/Activity Level

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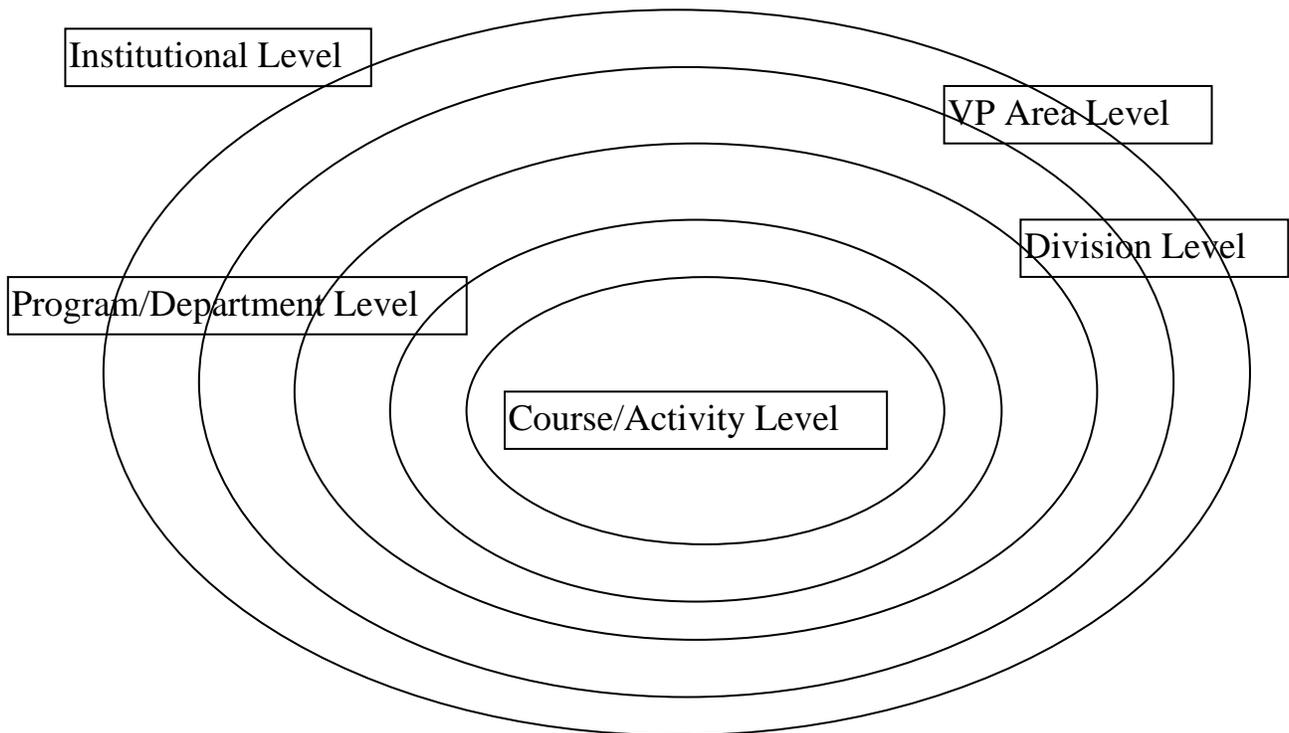
[1] Southern Polytechnic State University Institutional Planning Summary 1997/98, 1.4
[2] Mary E. Huba, "Formulating Intended Learning Outcomes for Your Program" 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference, (Cincinnati: June 13,1998)

The process begins at the institution level with strategic planning, where the vision of the institution is set through the mission statement and strategic initiatives. The strategic plan, which sets the long term direction of the institution, should be revisited every three to five years to ensure the continued relevance (currency) of the mission and initiatives in a changing environment. The operational plan moves the strategic plan forward through the identification of objectives (expected outcomes, i.e. what we want to happen), action plans (what we are going to do to make it happen), and resource requirements needed to achieve the strategic results. An appropriate assessment plan must be embedded into the planning process so that the success/impact of the activities contained in the action plan can be measured, and the degree to which the objectives were achieved evaluated. The information obtained through assessment is then used to identify the appropriate objectives and action steps needed for the next operational planning cycle to ensure continuous improvement.[3] With the framework established at the institutional level, each planning unit must also identify their role within the institutional plan by repeating this process as appropriate for their level. At each level the mission statement and expected outcomes become more succinct based on the area/function. Two notes may be helpful. First, the process of developing the mission statement should focus on bringing views and values together through "conceptual convergence" rather than on form, structure and language.[4] Second, the focus of the objectives is never simply on what we do but on what we expect to occur as a result of what we do and how we will know that it did occur. The following matrix depicts the scope of the process. Plan Builder, a planning software package, provides an excellent tool through which to work.

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[3] Southern Polytechnic State University Institutional Planning Summary 1997/98.
[4] Dr. Susan Hatfield, 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference, (Cincinnati: June 15, 1998).

|  | Institutional | VP Level | Division | Program/ Department | Course/ Activity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mission Statement |  |  |  |  |  |
| Initiatives |  |  |  |  |  |
| Objectives |  |  |  |  |  |
| Action Plan |  |  |  |  |  |
| Resource Needs |  |  |  |  |  |
| Assessment Plan |  |  |  |  |  |
| Improvements suggested |  |  |  |  |  |

Although writing expected outcomes might seem to be an onerous task, there are some guidelines that may prove helpful. First, a unit should look to have no more than six to eight outcomes it is accountable for and only one or two they are actively working to accomplish in a given year. There are certain characteristics to consider when writing outcomes. When writing a learning outcome, for example, it is suggested that it should be:

1. Student-focused rather than professor focused
2. Focused on the learning resulting from an activity rather than on the activity itself.
3. Compatible with institutional mission and the value it represents.
4. Compatible with learning outcomes at higher levels such as the institution level or the academic program level.
5. Should focus on important, non-trivial, aspects of learning that are creditable to the public.

6. Focused on skills and abilities that are central to the discipline based on professional standards of excellence.
7. General enough to capture important learning but clear and specific enough to be measurable.
8. Focused on aspects of learning that will develop and endure but that can be assessed in some form now.[5]

Although the wording of these guidelines appears to have an instructional focus, they are applicable for non-instructional areas also since many of these areas reinforce the principles introduced in the instructional arena. For example, the intent of the activities/programs provided through student activities may be to contribute to such general education outcomes as tolerance, citizenship, or appreciation of the arts through hands-on activities. As the intention of the characteristics is to ensure that a customer and value-received focus is maintained, they even provide insight into the characteristics for areas where student learning is not the focus of the service provided. "Do"/implementation of the plan is the next step in the cycle, followed at the appropriate time, by the "check," i.e. assessment.

Where as the planning process moves from the top down to ensure that the work of each lower unit supports the vision and mission of the higher unit, the assessment process must move from the bottom up to trace the impact of the activities back up through the institution on the accomplishment of the overall goal, because the achievement of a given institutional objective is the culmination of the achievement of many departmental and divisional expected outcomes.[6] The

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[5] Mary E. Huba, "Formulating Intended Learning Outcomes for Your Program", 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference, Cincinnati Ohio, June 13, 1998.
[6] Huba, June 13, 1998.

struggle is where and how to begin this process. As stated above, the process is begun through the planning process with the development of the assessment plan. According to Dr. Susan Hatfield, the critical steps for doing this include:

1. Brainstorming within the units to identify a list of measures (criteria through which it is possible to tell if the goals were achieved) that are appropriate. First, identify what measures are currently being used, and then identify new measures.

2. Evaluating each measure (criteria) suggested and selecting the most appropriate ones.

3. Identifying the appropriate assessment methods.

4. Creating a plan for collecting the data.

5. Prioritizing the goals, selecting one or two per year

6. Setting timelines and milestones.

There are eight questions that are useful to evaluate the utility of a measure:

A.) Is the measure (criteria) important not merely interesting.

B.) Is there a method for collecting data or does information already exist to measure the measure (criteria)?

C.) Will the interpretation of the data for this measure (criteria) be easily understood and have a clear meaning?

D.) Will fluctuations/changes in the measure (criteria) be a result of the department/unit's actions, i.e. within their control? If not, do not use it.

E.) Is it possible to measure the measure (criteria) in a way that preserves its integrity?

F.) Does the measure (criteria) change over time?

G.) Does the measure signify achievement of the goal, not just success of an activity?

H.) Will the measure provide information that can be used for improvement?[7]

The tool most effective for beginning the process at the bottom is through the program/department review. Through the program review both the processes and outcomes of the program can be assessed. Examples of processes included curriculum/courses, curriculum management, instruction, student development, faculty development, advising and co/extra curricular activities. Examples of outcomes include student learning, student growth, student development, regional services, student success, and student satisfaction.[8] Some outcomes such as student learning require direct methods of assessment while others, like student satisfaction must be measured through indirect methods of assessment.[9]

In order to conduct the most effective program review, Jon Wergin set forth four challenges that need to be faced. The first is to be clear about what quality means. According to Mr. Wergin, "quality should be thought of as how we contribute to the common good, which is served by the free search for truth and its free exposition," suggesting that there is more than one view of quality and its meaning must be negotiated among the various stakeholders. To achieve this, it is necessary to identify how well the program assessment process promotes both the value for excellence and the fitness for use. The second challenge is to make program assessment address the interests of practitioners by ensuring that it

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[7] Dr. Susan Hatfield, Dr. Darrell Krueger, and Dr. Timothy Hatfield, "Starting Points: Developing a Department Assessment Plan", 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference, (Cincinnati: June 15, 1998).
[8] Hatfield, Krueger, Hatfield, June 15, 1998.

encourages interaction around practice-relevant topics. The third challenge is to make the program review a real peer review where the process allows the participants to have the opportunity to sit together and make meaning of the results. His fourth challenge is to utilize the program review to encourage cultures of the institution to shift from individual to collective responsibility, which is developed when the program has a clear sense of collective mission; differential faculty/staff roles to allow people to draw upon their expertise and their interests in a fashion that best contributes to the mission of the program; the work of the faculty/staff is focused as a team; and the unit is evaluated based on the extent to which it contributes to the mission of the next larger unit.[10]

In closing, institutional effectiveness is not a project, a tedious task with no relevance or consequence to the work at hand, or a response to external mandates. Nor is it a mechanism to evaluate individual performance. Each process described above clearly requires an interaction/dialogue within and across each unit of the institution. For this to occur, institutional effectiveness must be an integral part of the institutional processes. It must be integrated into every level and aspect of the culture of the institution. Research clearly suggests that this is only possible where there is full administrative commitment and faculty involvement.[11] The institution must sense an urgency to improve its services through self-assessment.[12] Therefore, the focus of institutional effectiveness must be internal with the goal of quality and integrity of the work of the institution.

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[9] Dr. Peggy Maki, MECC98, (Cape Cod: June 5, 1998).
[10] Jon Wergin, "Assessment of Programs & Units: Program Review and Specialized Accreditation", AAHE Assessment Conference, (Cincinnati: June 14, 1998).
[11] Debra K. Cartwright and Candace C. Young, Integrating Assessment into Institutional Culture and Change", 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference, (Cincinnati: June 15, 1998).
[12] Lion F. Gardiner, "Developing a Sense of Urgency for Change and for Using Assessment" 1998 AAHE Assessment Conference, (Cincinnati: June 15, 1998).