Specialized accrediting bodies have long been at the forefront of the assessment movement in higher education and have exerted important influences on program and institutional assessment and improvement. As a consequence, the academic programs these bodies approve are frequently among the first on a campus to consider ways to assess student competence. This book focuses on approaches to assessment undertaken by professionally oriented programs that participate in specialized accreditation.

The contributors to this volume answer such questions as: How do accreditors encourage attention to the assessment of student learning? How do faculty on the campuses respond to these actions by accreditors? What can we learn from the accredited disciplines about defining learning outcomes, promoting thoughtful campus planning for assessment, and improving student competence?

The book opens with two foundation chapters. The first examines the concept of student competence and reviews the historical and political contexts in which assessment takes place. The second examines best practices in carrying out assessment, including the important roles of faculty development and assessment leadership.

The body of this volume describes how faculty in eight professionally oriented disciplines have developed and practiced assessment on their campuses and the lessons these faculty offer to colleagues in their own and other disciplines. The book also includes a chapter on the use of authentic assessment within several disciplines on a single university campus, and another chapter about the British quality assurance movement. The final chapter reviews the current practice of assessment within the eight featured disciplines; the role accrediting bodies play in fostering assessment in these disciplines; and the lessons, issues, and challenges that are common across disciplines.

The stories and examples presented in this book – covering issues as diverse as faculty and student involvement, the role of outside stakeholders, and balancing external guidance and institutional autonomy – will provide immediate practical guidance for faculty and administrators active in assessment regardless of their discipline.
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