CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN

Any undertaking benefits from some kind of plan. . . . Assessment is no different; it will be more effective and successful if you plan your work. (Suskie, 2009, p.98)

Topics Presented in Chapter 2

♦ Basic steps of assessment

Basic Steps of Assessment

Following three decades of experience with assessment of student learning as described in Chapter 1, a consensus has emerged about best practices, including the basic steps of the assessment process. The most concise representation of this is Walvoord's (2010) "Three Basic Steps of Assessment":

- Goals. What do we want students to be able to do when they complete our program?
- *Information*. How well are students achieving these goals, and what factors influence their learning?
- Action. How can we use the information to improve student learning?

Goals are sometimes referred to as learning outcomes or learning objectives. They are the starting point of the assessment process. They must be developed by the faculty and staff members who have designed academic and co-curricular programs. As described in Chapter 3, goals may exist in a variety of areas and at a variety of levels; and there are best practices for framing them effectively. Information is the collection of data and an analysis process. There are many resources to assist faculty and staff members with this step, including Ball State's Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Several chapters of this workbook are designed to assist with this step. Action is sometimes referred to as "closing the loop." It is the most important step in the assessment process and involves making meaning of the assessment results and using them for improvement.

Maki (2004) suggests adding value to the assessment process with two additional steps beyond those suggested by Walvoord:

- *Curriculum*. Where do students have the opportunity for learning?
- *Expectations*. What is the expected level of performance?

Developing and using curriculum maps aids interpretation and use of assessment results by linking goals to courses or other educational experiences. Chapter 4 highlights the development and use of curriculum maps. Explicitly stating expectations up front as assessments are developed and comparing results with expectations also helps with interpretation and follow-up action. This step is increasingly required by accreditors, such as the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission. Chapter 11 provides faculty and staff members with strategies for deciding upon expectations.