

## **The Need for Assessment of Student Learning**

Northwestern University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Association's five "Criteria for Accreditation" include significant components of assessment of student learning outcomes. These will be an essential consideration in the next accreditation visit scheduled for 2014-2015. To be prepared for that visit, Northwestern's Schools, departments and programs must initiate procedures for assessing student learning. Though there is no "one-size-fits-all" procedure, the following "Guiding Principles" are an organizing template that should be used by Schools, departments and programs as they develop their student learning outcomes assessment plans.

### **Guiding Principles of Assessment**

1. The primary responsibility for developing, implementing, and evaluating student outcomes assessment plans rests with the faculty; however, student outcomes assessment fosters greater improvement when representatives from both inside and outside the educational community are involved.
2. Assessment of student learning is most effective when it begins with clear explicitly stated educational values, reflects an understanding that learning is multi-dimensional, and is a long-range, dynamic, and evolving process.
3. Assessment of student learning focuses on the effectiveness of programs, not individual faculty members or students.
4. Assessment results compare current and previous performance of a program, not one university program to another.
5. Assessment of student learning is based on the use of multiple quantitative and qualitative measures and addresses standards of performance as they relate to improvement; student outcomes assessment methodology should be regularly evaluated and altered as needed to foster further improvement.

### **University Resources Available for Assessment**

Through the Searle Center for Teaching Excellence and other resources, Northwestern will provide support to programs, departments and Schools to help them develop assessment plans best suited for each. All plans will be approved reviewed by the Provost and the Assessment Council for completeness and effectiveness. The Assessment Council is a Provost-appointed committee of faculty and staff that will monitor plans and timelines for implementation and execution.