

Assessment 101



or...

Everything you always wanted to know about assessment, but were afraid to ask.

Prepared for Swarthmore College Deans Office Retreat, 6/10/05
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Purpose: Introduce concept of Assessment Planning and provide tools, information, and practice to help you get started

- Understand what “assessment” means and why we are doing it
- Learn what the components of an assessment plan are and the steps
- Begin the process of moving from what may seem like a unit’s fuzzy mission to concrete, logical objectives and meaningful indicators to assess them.
- Reduce the fear that many feel when they first try to do this.

Assessment

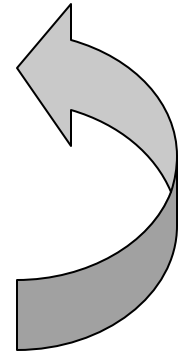
- studying whether a particular activity is achieving its goals, and
- changing that activity as necessary

Assessment Plan

- the formal articulation of that process

Why Assess?

- To see if you are doing a good job
- To demonstrate that you are doing a good job
- To improve services
- To respond effectively to changes
- Because someone out there made you



Don't we already do this?

- Yes!! But it has been non-routine, idiosyncratic, informal, ad hoc, spotty, sporadic, inconsistent...
- Middle States now requires “evidence of assessment for accreditation” – that’s the catalyst for us to formalize and articulate the process. It means we must do a better job of thinking through and keeping records.
- But they do NOT tell us *how* we have to do it – it’s totally up to us!

Middle States says:

“While the Commission expects institutions to engage in outcomes assessment, it does not prescribe a specific approach or methodology. The approach and methodology to be employed are institutional prerogatives and may vary, based on the stated mission, goals, objectives and resources of the institution. Nevertheless, an institution engaged in self-study or periodic review should provide evidence that the assessment of outcomes, particularly learning outcomes, is an ongoing institutional activity.”

Buzzwords...

- TQM
- CQI
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Benchmarking
- Accountability
- Re-engineering
- Plan-Do-Check-Act
- Planning, Strategic Planning
- Outcomes
- Student Learning Outcomes
- I-E-O

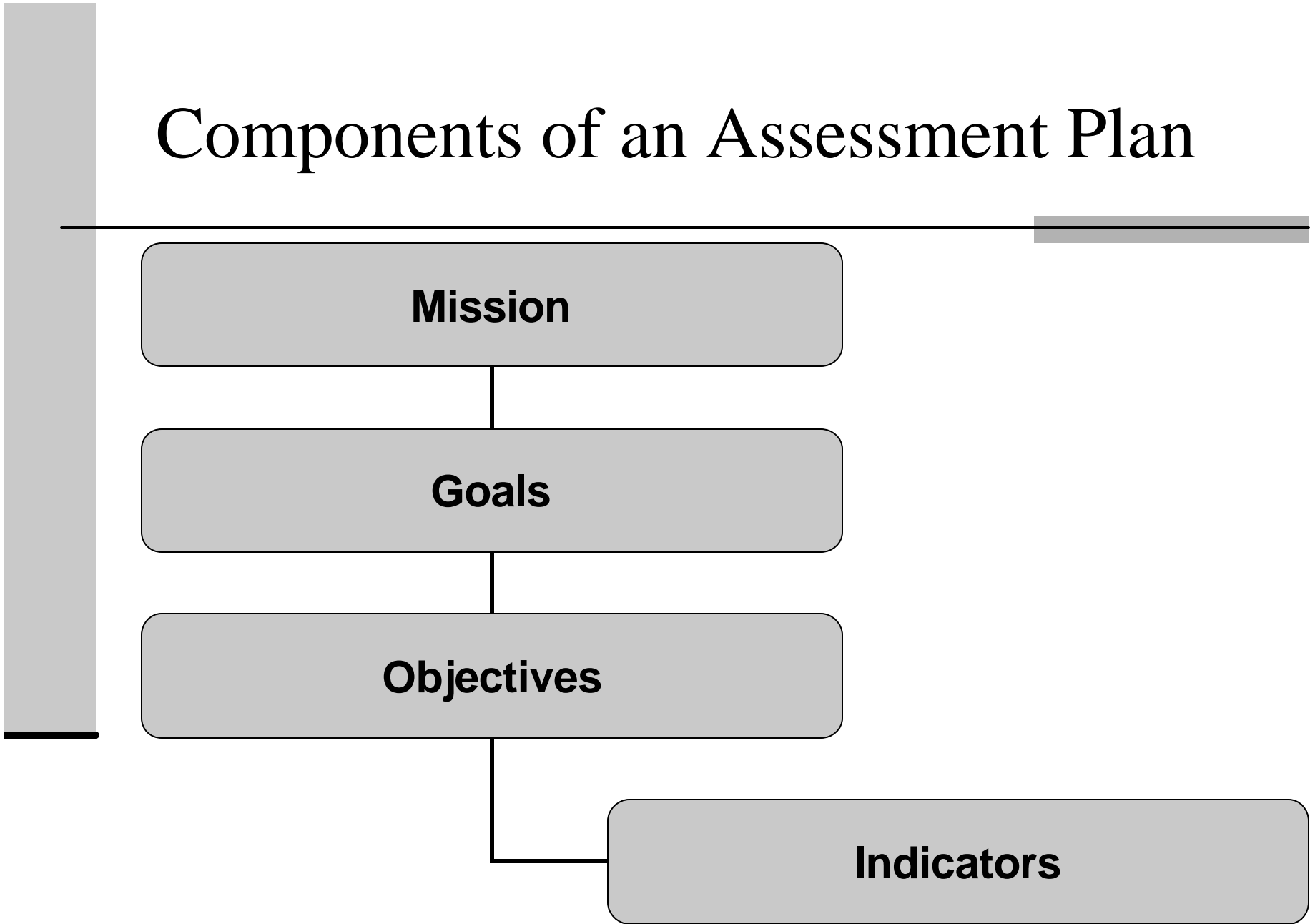
Components of an Assessment Plan

Mission

Goals

Objectives

Indicators



Mission



- Purpose of the function. What is it about, what is it here for, what are its essential values?
- How does it contribute to the mission of the College?
- **Getting started:** Look at catalogue description, job descriptions, annual report, professional associations. Ask yourself, what would the ideal xx function be like?

Examples of Simple Mission Statements

- Institutional Research: To collect information and conduct research to support planning and decision-making across the College.

 - Career Services: To counsel students and alumni as they explore career directions and equip them with the information they need to make good decisions.
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Mission Statement – Psychological Services

- Psychological Services provides counseling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention, psychological testing, psycho-educational programming, and consultation and training to the College community. We serve the students, parents, faculty, and staff of Swarthmore College. Together with the Worth Health Center, Public Safety and the Associate Dean for Student Life, we comprise the Health and Safety Team of the Dean of the College's administrative area.
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Goals

- Given this mission, what are the goals of the unit?
- Goals are more specific than mission, but still somewhat broad and long term.
- They are the major roles and activities of the unit.

Examples of Goals for a Residential Life Office

- To match roommates appropriately.
 - To train Resident Assistants and other Residence Life staff who effectively provide for the safety, comfort, and well-being of residents.
 - To provide programming that contributes to student development and enhances student life.
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Goals for an Institutional Research Office

- ❑ Conduct specialized studies in support of campus needs and priorities.
 - ❑ Conduct, coordinate, and report on survey research.
 - ❑ Collect and disseminate campus data for internal and external reporting purposes.
 - ❑ Serve as a resource for units in need of college data or research expertise.
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Objectives

- These are more specific activities that are directed toward specific goals.
- Objectives should be realistic, given current levels of resources.

Objectives for Academic vs. Non-academic Units

- Student learning objectives and outcomes desired

- Process-oriented
- Student (or other client) Outcomes, if direct education is part of unit's role
- May contain satisfaction or other evaluative measures

Sample Objectives for a Registrar's Office Goal of "Maintain and process student records accurately and efficiently."

- Fill transcript requests promptly
 - Process degree audit requests.
 - Maintain student satisfaction with registration functions.
 - Provide resources to enable students to successfully use on-line registration.
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Objectives for an IR Office Goal of

“Collect and disseminate campus data for internal and external reporting purposes.”

- Annually update and distribute College Factbook
 - Make summary data available on website.
 - Respond to requests from Publishers of guidebooks with accurate and consistent information, meeting deadlines.
 - Complete or coordinate college-wide mandated reports to external agencies with accurate and consistent information, meeting deadlines.
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Indicators

- These are measurable activities that reflect the objectives.
- What are the criteria for success? How will you know if you've achieved the objective?
- It's easy to come up with activities that address your objectives – it can be difficult to come up with measurable activities that reflect effectiveness.

Kinds of measurements

- Counts, rates
- Questionnaire results
- Pre- and post- test measures (for outcomes)
- Can use “primary” (main indicator) and “secondary” measurements (group breakdowns, or further refinement (e.g. x% satisfied and also average >x.x))
- Comparison to standards, benchmarks, best practices, peers
- Focus Groups – less common in assessment, but can be useful to get feedback for further study.
- Many, many kinds, limited only by creativity

Sample Indicators for Career Services Objective of “Engage students in development early and often through various outreach efforts.”

- ❑ Annual attendance at workshops, by class year.
Success = 50% of 1st year, 60% of 2nd year, 70% of 3rd year, 80% of seniors.
 - ❑ Student ratings of general satisfaction with Career Services office on Enrolled Student Survey, by class year. Success = average rating of at least 3.2 for every class.
 - ❑ Drop-in contacts with Career Peer Advisors.
Success = average of 5 students per afternoon, with measurements taken randomly 10 times each spring.
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Indicators for IR Objective of

“Respond to requests from publishers of guidebooks with accurate & consistent information, by deadlines.”

- ❑ Percentage of Deadlines met each year. Success = 98%.

 - ❑ Random data audit conducted of 5 key variables (from a master list) each year across all guidebooks. Success = 100% accurate.
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Written Assessment Plan #1

- Discuss these components
- Describe the time frame and approach for measuring the indicators.

“Closing the Loop”

- Conduct measurements during the cycle
- Describe the **results** of the measurements
- Discuss what the **implications** are.
- The feedback loop is key - what **actions** result from your assessment?

Hypothetical:

IR deadline indicator - met only 90% of deadlines for guidebooks.

- Return to records to determine why 10% missed.
 - E.g. May find that not enough lead time was given to other offices that must contribute.
 - IR create new policy of distributing survey questions within one day of receiving guidebook survey.
 - Incorporate this step into record-keeping and track to see policy was followed. Part of assessment plan.
 - Also as part of assessment plan, continue to monitor deadline hit rate to determine effectiveness of new policy.
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Written Assessment Plan >1

- Demonstrate how feedback from last cycle resulted in changes or improvement to operations.
- Each cycle may require some minor or major changes to the plan itself.
- Review the unit's mission, goals, and objectives.
- Decide focus of plan for following cycle

An Assessment Plan avoids the futility of collecting volumes of random data, by clearly defining what it is we are looking for and why.

Pitfalls

- Taking measurements that are not related to goals
- Waiting until the plan is perfect and elegant before beginning
- Collecting so many indicators that results are overwhelming (“analysis paralysis”)
- Spending more time on measuring things than on doing things

Tips and hints...

- Take an initial inventory of what information you already collect and why.
- Make record keeping of key, simple information part of your normal routine (“fast” but hard vs. “slow” and easy)
- Use a long list and a short list. The long list contains everything you think is important, the short list contains the key, ~most~ important things.
- Start simply and plan to build.

