

Spiraling toward Excellence  
in Non-Instructional Units

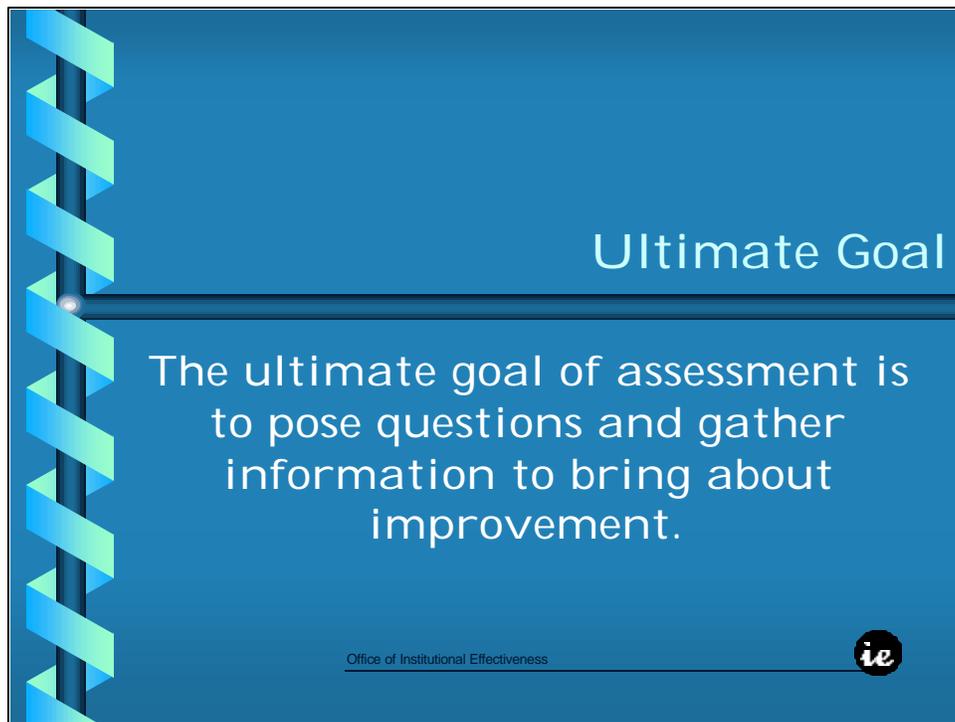
- Defining desired results
- Measuring accomplishments
- Using results to improve

(over... and over... and over again)

Office of Institutional Effectiveness 

**Assessing the Effectiveness  
of  
Non-Instructional Support Offices**

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Austin Community College's assessment process is designed to help faculty, administrators, and staff find ways to ask and answer difficult questions about supporting the teaching and learning process in order to continue to improve the quality of our students' education.

Assessment data is generated as we look to answer questions such as:

- How can we better support students' learning?
- How can we improve the educational success of all students regardless of their educational background, race, gender or ethnicity?
- How can we improve services to students?
- How can we better support instructors' teaching?
- How can we better assist those involved in the teaching process?

Purpose

- To provide concrete information
- To enhance quality of services provided in support of teaching and learning
- To meet SACS requirements

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“Assessment is an on-going process that helps us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of education.”

from T. A. Angelo, November, 1995 AAHE Bulletin v.48,n.3,p.7

“When assessment is absent, crisis-management usually takes its place. The latter is typified by episodic events of laborious, broad data-gathering in response to a criticism or mandate. Data-gathering is followed by efforts to achieve insights from a muddle of information, and the event culminates in the usual hastily written (hopefully credible) report that is soon filed and forgotten. Such hapless events will likely be relived anew, with slight variations, every few years. In contrast, assessment continuously gathers essential data in ways that address clearly formulated hypotheses. More importantly, assessment creates a system of routinely utilized knowledge that can be easily built upon. Assessment prevents crises.”

from Nutshell Notes, The University of Colorado at Denver, v. 4, n. 7

Principles

- Faculty/Staff driven
  - NOT associated with performance evaluation
  - Ongoing/cyclical
  - Leads to improvement

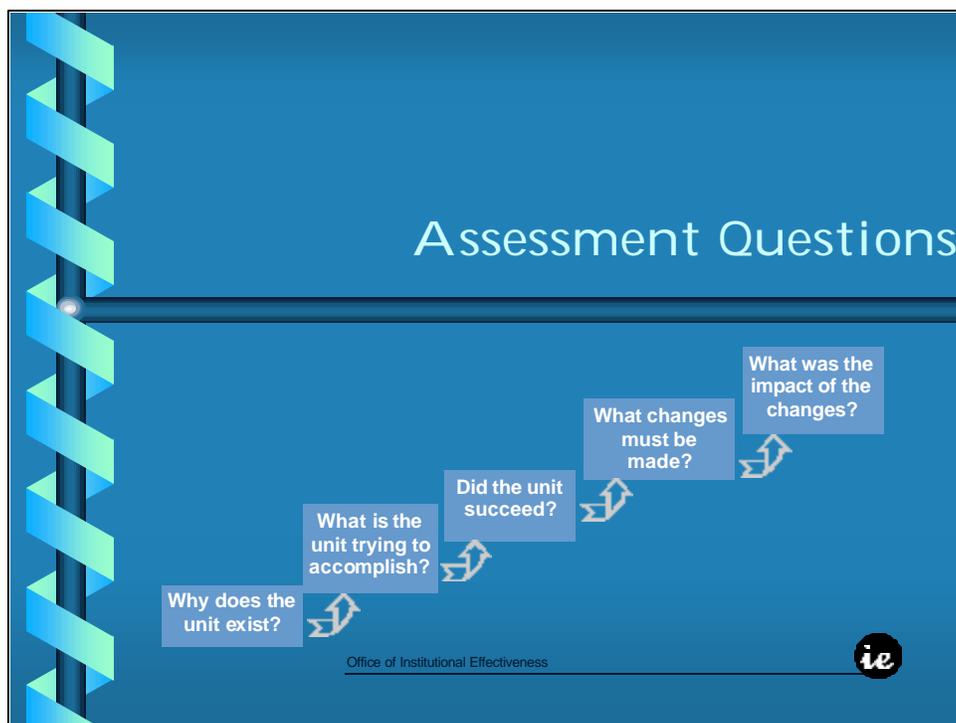
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At ACC, the process of assessing the effectiveness of non-instructional units is staff driven. Staff identify the outcomes, specify the means of assessment, and decide what to do with the results. It is not associated with staff evaluation. The focus is the service the support office provides, not the individual staff member. The results of assessment are used to improve services, not make decisions about the performance of staff.

“Assessment at its best produces collective pride by allowing everyone within an institution to identify themselves with high standards of teaching and learning, commitment to improvement, and an experience of support for that commitment.”  
Nutshell Notes, University of Colorado at Denver v. 4, n. 7

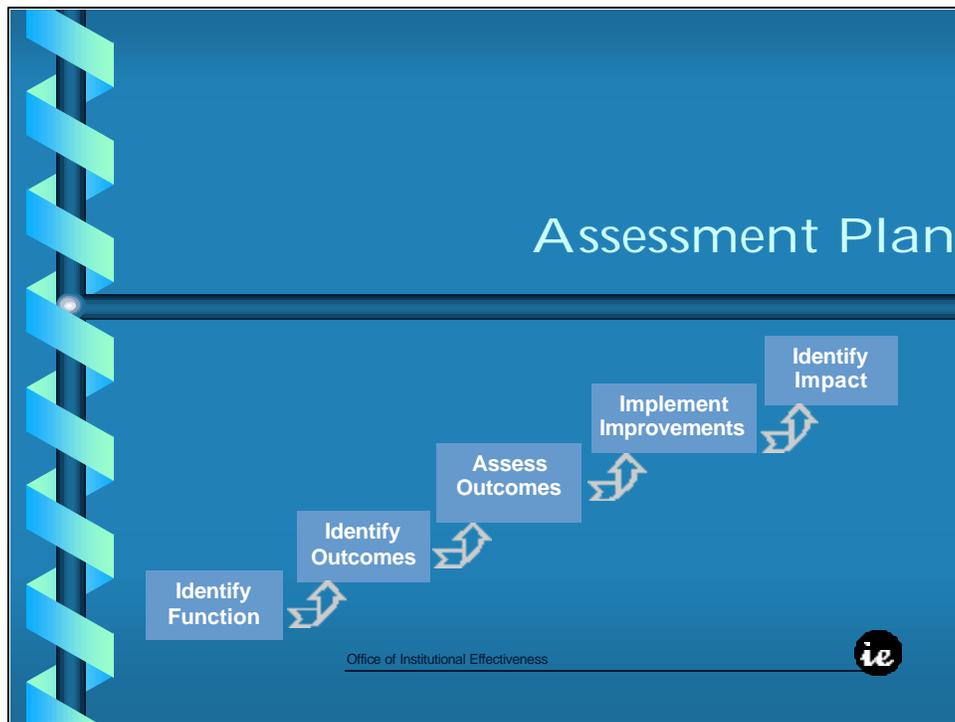
Assessment is a cyclical process. Units are expected to assess their effectiveness as a regular, annual event because the reason for assessment is improvement of services that support teaching and learning.

Assessment focuses institutional attention on quality and improvement. It documents, in specific and understandable terms, that we do what we say we will. It provides concrete information that is used to make improvements in our processes and products, and it documents the impact of those improvements.



ACC's assessment process is guided by the answers to five critical questions. These questions provide the framework for assessing whether the unit is "on track" or needs realignment of its processes and services. Answering these questions creates the five steps for designing and implementing an assessment plan that yields specific information from which decisions may be made to improve the quality of the unit's service.

- *Why does the unit exist?* It is in providing an answer to this question that the unit is able to identify its context within the overall mission of the College and the Master plan, and define its goals.
- *What is the unit trying to accomplish?* Answers to this question identify the unit's intended outcomes and provide the basis for determining criteria and methodology for assessing achievement.
- *Did the unit succeed?* Data that have been gathered in the assessment process are analyzed to determine the answer to this question; the intended level of service is or is not being achieved.
- *What changes must be made?* The unit's answers to this question provide a concrete and specific "map" toward improved services.
- *What is the impact of the changes?* And finally, the answer to this question is the "payoff" of the process--documented change, hopefully demonstrating improved quality.



ACC employs the five-step assessment plan model, identified with Dr. Jim Nichols, to represent the process for assessing outcomes. These steps are dynamic and interactive. The unit's purpose is made concrete and specific in the outcomes it identifies. The outcomes, in turn, are directly addressed by the methods and criteria designed to demonstrate achievement of those outcomes, and improvements are implemented that impact the quality of the unit's function. Completing all five steps ends one assessment cycle. Each successive year, the steps are completed again. Using information and improvement plans from the previous year as the basis for assessment planning the following year creates a continuous quality improvement spiral that supports each unit's efforts to improve the educational experience of students at ACC.

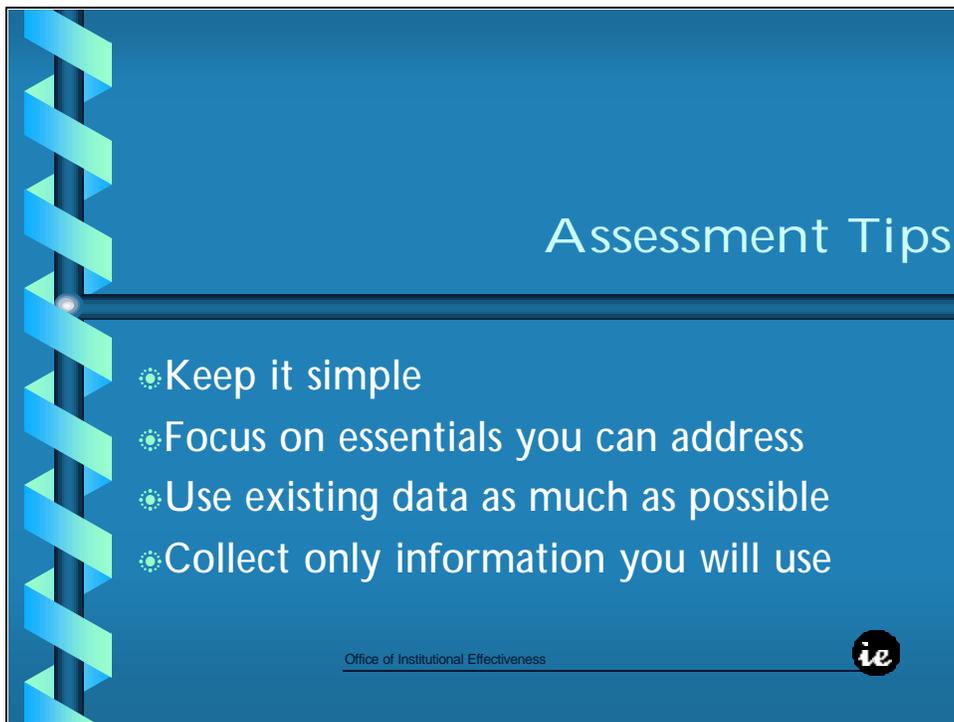
**Step 1. Identify Function:** The unit states its function within the larger context of the College's overall mission.

**Step2. Identify Outcomes:** The unit identifies the results it intends to achieve and defines criteria it will use to determine whether those results have been achieved.

**Step3. Assess Outcomes:** The unit selects methods it will use to assess whether the outcomes criteria have been met, conducts the assessment, and reports the results.

**Step 4. Implement Improvements:** The unit decides what actions it will take, and who will take them, to improve the processes and services it provides.

**Step 5. State Impact:** The unit reflects on the changes that have resulted from its improvement actions.



## Assessment Tips

- Keep it simple
- Focus on essentials you can address
- Use existing data as much as possible
- Collect only information you will use

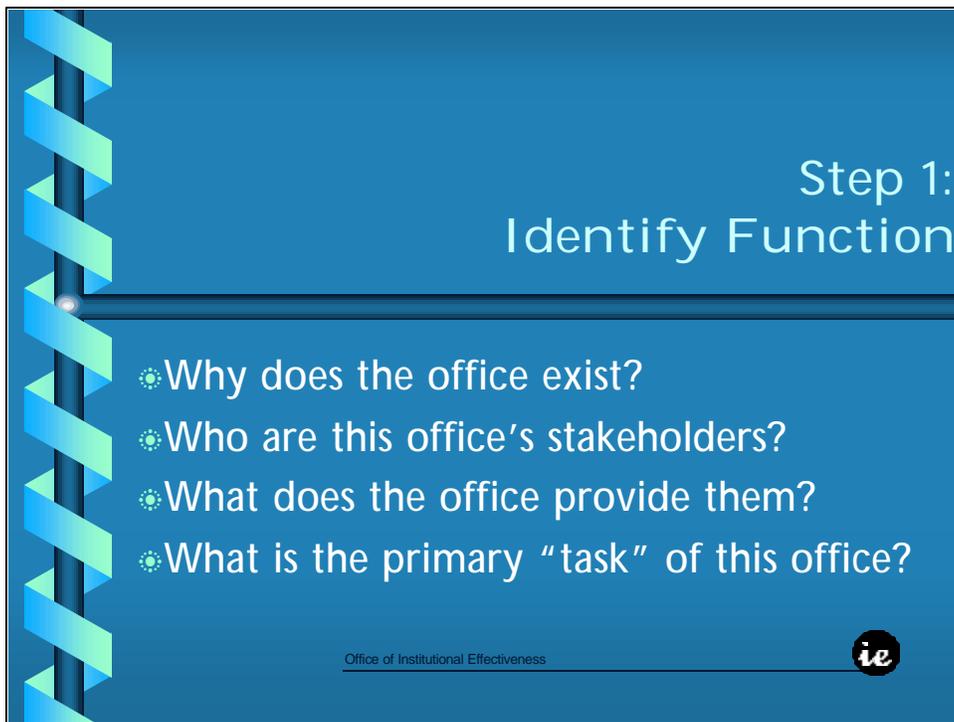
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Because ACC's process of assessing the effectiveness of non-instructional units is staff driven, it is imperative when designing assessment plans that resources be used judiciously. Assessment done poorly can at best be a waste of time and at worst be destructive to collegiality. However, when well done, assessment can improve the quality of supporting teaching and learning. Remember the purpose of assessment is to provide information that can be used to make improvements, not to create "busy work" for staff or faculty.

The following are some thoughts to keep in mind when designing assessment plans:

- Add minimally to the already heavy workload by focusing on those things that are essential and will facilitate decisions that the unit is prepared to make.
- Identify responsibilities of all involved.
- Use existing data as much as possible.
- Collect only information that will be used.
- Incorporate assessment procedures into routine operations of the unit.
- Coordinate surveying efforts with other units where possible.
- Use a cycle of assessment so that all outcomes will be assessed within a 3-5 year period rather than trying to assess all outcomes each year.



## Step 1: Identify Function

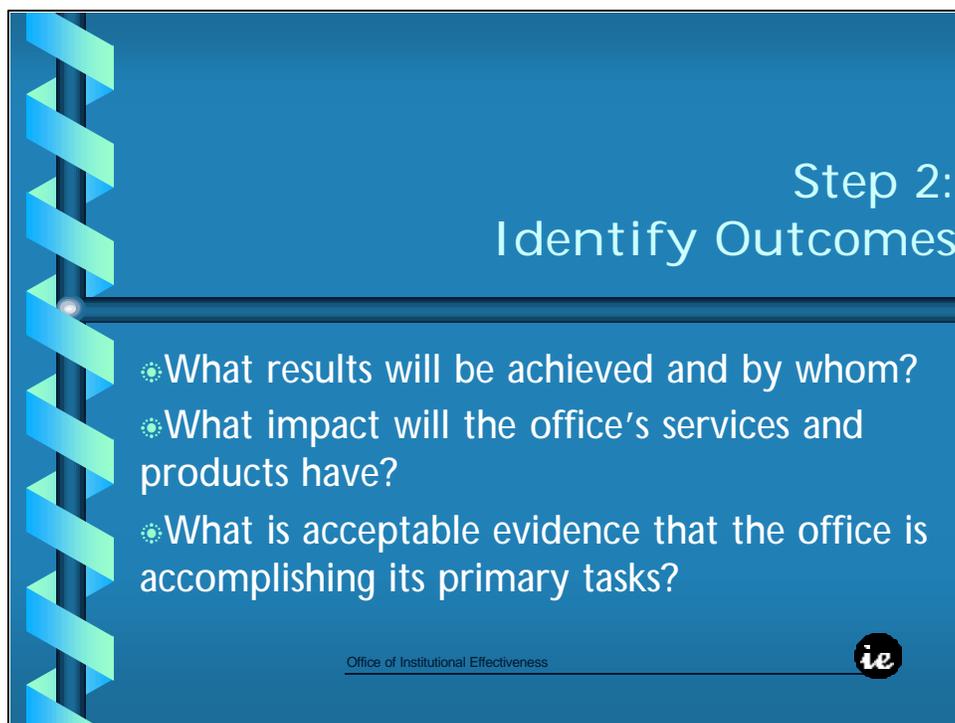
- Why does the office exist?
- Who are this office's stakeholders?
- What does the office provide them?
- What is the primary "task" of this office?

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The first step in any assessment plan is to identify the purpose of the office in terms of the function it serves within the College. Each unit exists as an integral part of the College, and as such is responsible for a specific "task" that assists the College in fulfilling its state-mandated mission. To define its function, the unit must identify its stakeholders and the products and services it provides them.

Documents such as the ACC Mission Statement, the Master Plan, and the Strategic Planning Implementation Plan can help the unit clarify its tasks within the overall functioning of the College.

Stakeholders--those who will be affected by the support office--may include students, but also include other staff, faculty, and administrators in the College, vendors, and other members of the public as well.



## Step 2: Identify Outcomes

- What results will be achieved and by whom?
- What impact will the office's services and products have?
- What is acceptable evidence that the office is accomplishing its primary tasks?

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Outcomes statements are needed before appropriate assessment tools and procedures can be selected or designed. Outcomes statements that are both clear and measurable greatly facilitate the identification of appropriate assessment tools. A unit's outcomes serve as the foundation for assessment planning. They are the most important part of designing the assessment plan, and often, the most difficult as well.

#### Outcomes statements

- provide direction to the unit
- communicate what the staff in the unit deem important
- describe the intended results of the unit's processes or services
- should "speak to" only one result
- should be consistent with the mission of the College
- should identify key functions, not details
- should be clear--so the unit will know when it's accomplished
- need not be quantifiable, merely verifiable

## Step 2: Identify Outcomes

<p><b>Goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Broad, future oriented statements</li> <li>· What program is striving toward</li>   <li>· Refer to processes/activities</li> <li>· Used in policy making and program planning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Brief statements of results</li> <li>· Describe behaviors of stakeholders</li> <li>· Refer to results of processes</li> <li>· Used to assess effectiveness and provide improvement information</li> </ul>
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Goals are what we plan to do, outcomes are what we expect will happen when we do what we planned.

At a minimum, outcome statements should describe stakeholder behaviors that staff would accept as evidence that the support office is performing its function.

Goal statements are helpful for guiding the implementation of improvement activities, but are sometimes too general, broad, or vague for developing specific tools to assess the effectiveness of services provided in support of student learning. Goals provide the context for outcomes.

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes

Practice Exercise: Goals or Outcomes

- Increase student voice in the decision-making model by establishing a student government association.
- Student participation in college-wide committees/councils, task forces, and focus groups will increase.

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Which of these statements is a goal statement (what we will do or cause to happen) and which is an outcome (what will happen as a result of what we do) statement?

See answer below.

Answer:

The goal is to “Increase student voice in the decision-making model by establishing a student government association.”

The outcome is that “Student participation in college-wide committees/councils, task forces, and focus groups will increase.”

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes

Practice Exercise: Goals or Outcomes

- Faculty, staff, and students will have access to electronic resources from off-campus locations.
- Increase access to LRS resources; implement remote user access to electronic resources.

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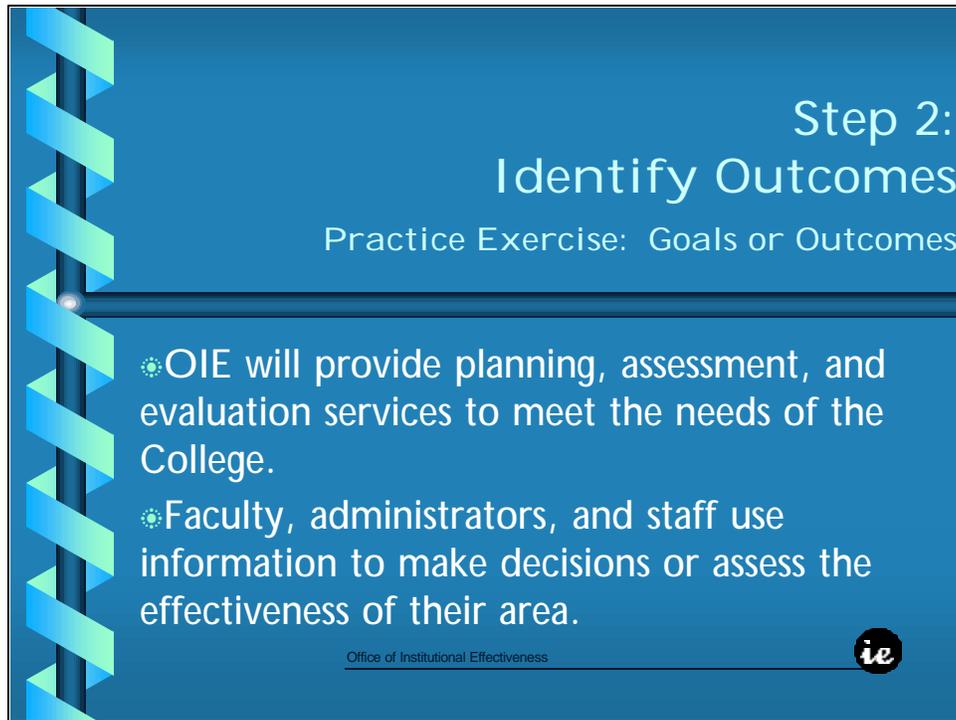
Which of these statements is a goal (what we will do or cause to happen) statement and which is an outcome (what will happen as a result of what we do) statement?

See answer below.

Answer:

The outcome is that "Faculty, staff, and students will have access to electronic resources from off-campus locations."

The goal is to "Increase access to LRS resources; implement remote user access to electronic resources."



**Step 2:**  
**Identify Outcomes**  
Practice Exercise: Goals or Outcomes

- OIE will provide planning, assessment, and evaluation services to meet the needs of the College.
- Faculty, administrators, and staff use information to make decisions or assess the effectiveness of their area.

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Which of these statements is a goal (what we will do or cause to happen) statement and which is an outcome (what will happen as a result of what we do) statement?

See answer below.

Answer:

The goal is to "... provide planning, assessment, and evaluation services to meet the needs of the College."

The outcome is that "Faculty, administrators, and staff use information to make decisions or assess the effectiveness of their area."

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes  
Practice Exercise : Outcome Statements

•Peace, order, and safety on the campus will be promoted by deterring and preventing criminal activity.

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Create an outcome statement that would provide 'evidence' that demonstrates achievement of this goal. Remember to state the WWW (Who will do What and When).

•Who? Faculty, staff, and students

•What? Will feel safe

•When? While on the campus

See example outcome statement below.

Faculty, staff, and students will feel safe when they are on the campus.

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes

Practice Exercise : Outcome Statements

- Provide safe, clean, maintained and visually attractive buildings and grounds to be enjoyed by students, faculty, and staff.

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Create an outcome statement that would provide 'evidence' that demonstrates achievement of this goal. Remember to state the WWW (Who will do What and When).

- Who? Faculty, staff, and students
- What will they do? Report they are satisfied
- When? When they are on campuses

See example outcome statement below.

Faculty, and staff will report they are satisfied with the safety, cleanliness, maintenance, and visual attractiveness of the campus buildings and grounds they visit.

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes  
Practice Exercise : Outcome Statements

- Expand outcomes assessment to all areas of the College.

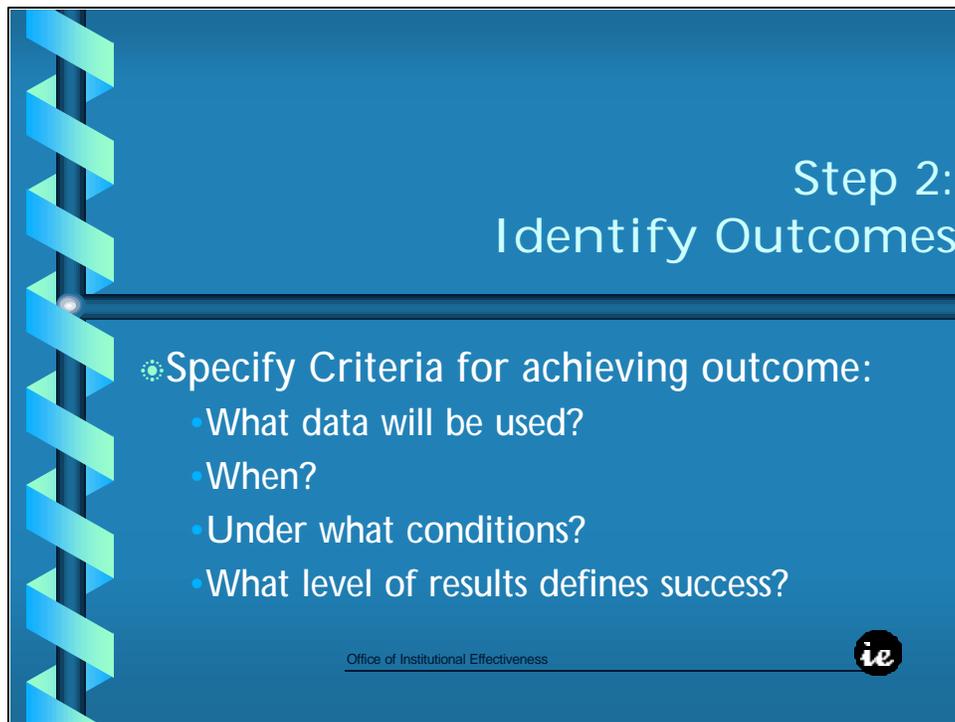
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Create an outcome statement that would provide 'evidence' that demonstrates achievement of this goal. Remember to state the WWW (Who will do What and When).

- **Who?** Instructional and non-instructional College units
- **What will they do?** document all five steps of their annual assessment plan for their program or office into the ULEA database
- **When?** by June 15 of each year

See example outcome statement below.

Instructional and non-instructional College units will document all five steps of their annual assessment plan for their program or office into the ULEA database by June 15 of each year.



## Step 2: Identify Outcomes

- Specify Criteria for achieving outcome:
  - What data will be used?
  - When?
  - Under what conditions?
  - What level of results defines success?

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Criterion statements define the specific standards that will identify successful achievement of the intended outcome, including the data that will be used, who will demonstrate achievement of the outcome, when, and under what conditions. All staff should be able to easily understand the results the office is seeking and what constitutes achievement of those results.

Standards and conditions must be identified before the data are collected. The criterion statement provides the context within which the results are to be used. Lack of specific standards will result in data that lack meaning relative to whether or not the unit is successfully achieving its intended outcomes.

Sometimes a unit may not know what specific standards are reasonable before implementing an assessment plan. In such cases, the criteria should indicate benchmark data are being collected to determine standards. The results of that assessment cycle can then be used to define standards for successive assessments.

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes

Practice Exercise : Outcome Statements

- 90% of students, faculty, and staff responding to the annual spring Customer Satisfaction Survey will report they feel safe on the campus.

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Identify the critical elements of this outcome statement.

- Standard? 90%
- Who? students, faculty, and staff responding
- Based on data from? Customer Satisfaction Survey
- When? Annually in the spring
- What? report they feel safe on the campus

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes

Practice Exercise : Outcome Statements

- 90% of students, faculty, and staff responding to the annual spring Customer Satisfaction Survey will report they are satisfied with the safety, cleanliness, maintenance, and visual attractiveness of the campus buildings and grounds they visit.

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Identify the critical elements of this outcome statement.

- Standard? 90%
- Who? students, faculty, and staff responding
- Based on data from? Customer Satisfaction Survey
- When? annually in the spring
- What? report they are satisfied with the safety, cleanliness, maintenance, and visual attractiveness of the campus buildings and grounds they visit

Step 2:  
Identify Outcomes

Practice Exercise : Outcome Statements

- By June 15 of each year, 100% of instructional and non-instructional College units will have documented all five steps of their annual assessment plan for their program or office into the ULEA database.

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Identify the critical elements of this outcome statement.

- **Standard?** 100%
- **Who?** instructional and non-instructional College units into the.
- **Based on data from?** ULEA database
- **When?** By June 15 of each year
- **What?** will have documented all five steps of their annual assessment plan for their program or office

## Step 3: Assess Outcomes

- Define methodology
  - What data will be collected?
  - By what means?
  - How will it be analyzed?
  - By whom?
  - When?

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“You can’t fix in analysis what you bungled in design.”

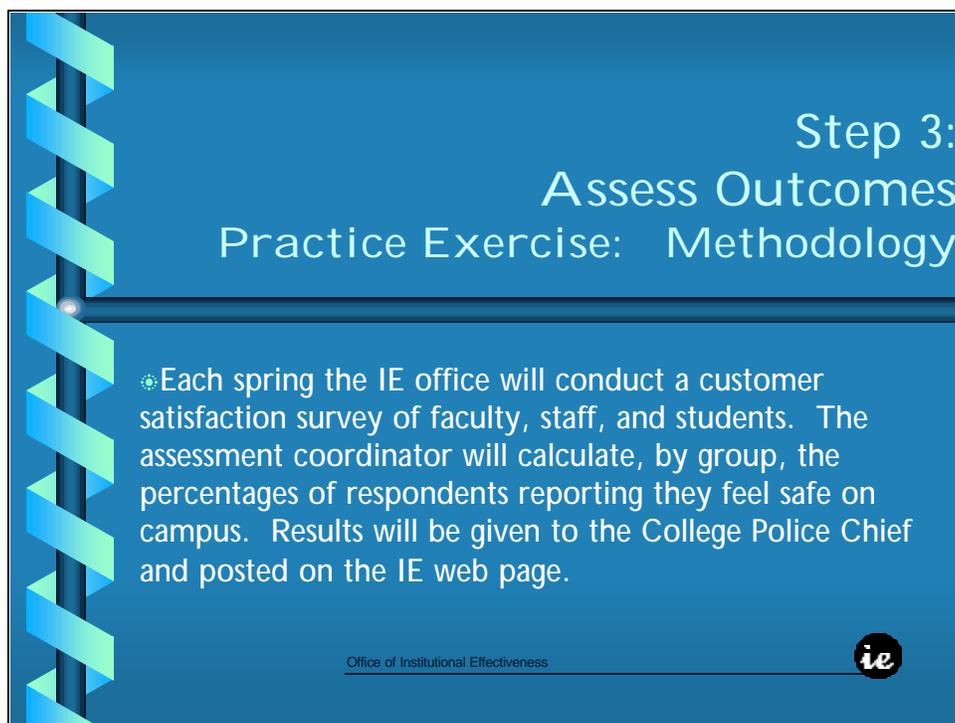
Richard Light, *By Design*

The methodology moves assessment from planning to implementation. It is the “recipe” for collecting the data. It describes the actions that must be taken (and by whom) to determine whether the criteria have been met. Together, the criteria and methodology provide the means with which to adequately, accurately, and specifically document the achievement of outcomes.

The methodology must identify who will be responsible for gathering and analyzing the data, and when. Be sure the responsible person or office is aware of their responsibility.

In describing the methodology, keep in mind assessment is concerned with aggregate performance. Also consider what data are already readily available in the office or college.

A variety of assessment techniques may be used, including surveys of stakeholders, productivity information, cost analysis, error rates, etc.



**Step 3:**  
**Assess Outcomes**

**Practice Exercise: Methodology**

• Each spring the IE office will conduct a customer satisfaction survey of faculty, staff, and students. The assessment coordinator will calculate, by group, the percentages of respondents reporting they feel safe on campus. Results will be given to the College Police Chief and posted on the IE web page.

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Identify the critical elements of this statement of methodology.

- **Tool?** customer satisfaction survey
- **When?** Each spring
- **How analyzed?** calculate, by group, the percentages of respondents reporting they feel safe on campus
- **Reported to?** College Police Chief and posted on the IE web page
- **Who is responsible?** IE office and assessment coordinator

**Step 3:**  
**Assess Outcomes**

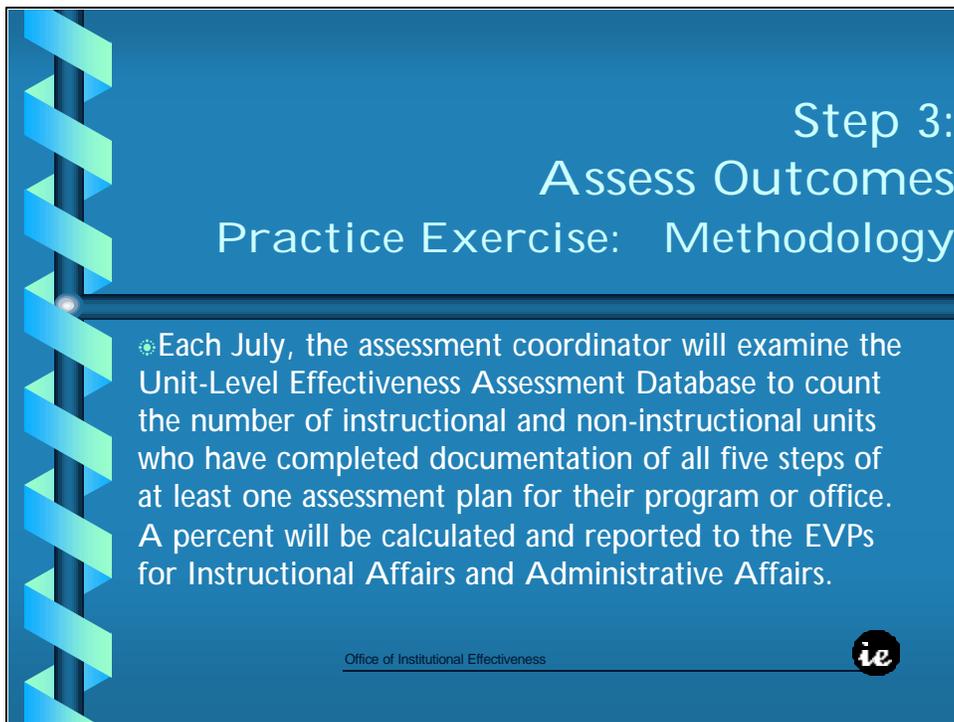
**Practice Exercise: Methodology**

- Each spring the IE office will conduct a customer satisfaction survey of faculty, staff, and students. The assessment coordinator will calculate, by group, the percentages of respondents reporting they are satisfied with the safety, cleanliness, maintenance, and visual attractiveness of the campus buildings and grounds they visit. Results will be given to the AVP, Facilities and Maintenance and posted on the IE web page.

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**ie**

- Identify the critical elements of this statement of methodology.
- Tool? customer satisfaction survey
- When? Each spring
- How analyzed? calculate, by group, the percentages of respondents reporting they are satisfied with the safety, cleanliness, maintenance, and visual attractiveness of the campus buildings and grounds they visit
- Reported to? AVP, Facilities and Maintenance and posted on the IE web page
- Who is responsible? IE office and assessment coordinator



Step 3:  
Assess Outcomes

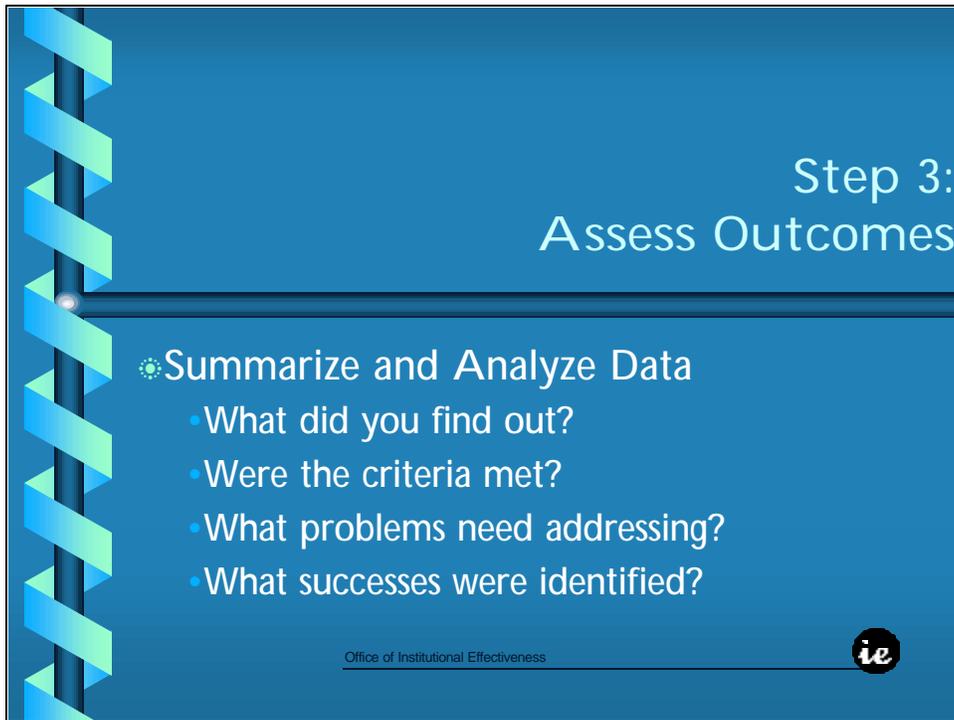
Practice Exercise: Methodology

• Each July, the assessment coordinator will examine the Unit-Level Effectiveness Assessment Database to count the number of instructional and non-instructional units who have completed documentation of all five steps of at least one assessment plan for their program or office. A percent will be calculated and reported to the EVPs for Instructional Affairs and Administrative Affairs.

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**ie**

- Identify the critical elements of this statement of methodology.
- Tool? Unit-Level Effectiveness Assessment Database
- When? Each July
- How analyzed? count the number of instructional and non-instructional units who have completed documentation of all five steps of at least one assessment plan for their program or office and calculate percent
- Reported to? EVPs for Instructional Affairs and Administrative Affairs
- Who is responsible? assessment coordinator



## Step 3: Assess Outcomes

- Summarize and Analyze Data
  - What did you find out?
  - Were the criteria met?
  - What problems need addressing?
  - What successes were identified?

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Once the data have been collected, they must be summarized, analyzed, and shared with office staff to determine whether the outcome has been achieved. If the purpose of assessment is to improve performance, this step is the payoff! If the criterion was clear, the methodology sound, each result should indicate whether the level of service is or is not being achieved.

Keep in mind most data require quite a bit of time to analyze if they are to be effective in providing information for decision-making.

Sometimes a unit discovers the methodology it used did not provide the data it was seeking. If, after the first assessment cycle, the unit discovers it does not have the data it needs to determine whether the outcome was achieved, that fact constitutes the "results" for the cycle and the improvement plan should include revisiting the methodology for assessing the particular outcome.



## Step 4: Implement Improvements

- What changes need to be made?
- What additional data are needed?
- What resources are needed?
- What actions do you plan to take?
- Who is responsible?

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**ie**

Once the data are analyzed the unit should be able to see whether it has achieved its intended outcome.

Where the criterion is met or surpassed, the unit may rightly conclude that no change is needed and report, "No action required." If, when the same outcome is assessed the next year, the results are repeated and the staff can insure the criterion was met, the unit should consider assessing a different outcome in the following cycle.

In the case where the results indicate the criterion level was not met, the unit needs to evaluate its results further to determine what needs to be done to improve the likelihood of achieving the outcome.

The unit makes an action plan that includes what will be done, who will do it, and by when. This step is what makes the difference between "assessment" and "busy work."

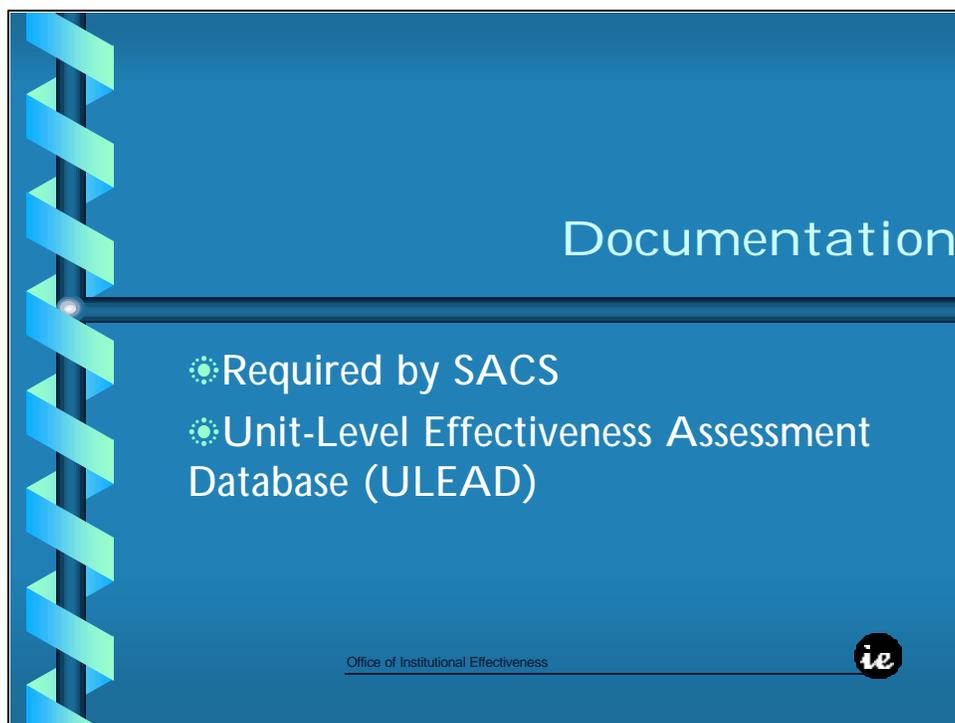
Step 5:  
Identify Impact

• How has your office/unit improved the quality or quantity of what you do as a result of your improvement action plan?

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At least a year after implementing the improvement plan, the unit should be able to reflect on the impact its improvement actions have made on the quality of its services.

Data from subsequent assessments should demonstrate improvement. If that is not the case, perhaps the outcome criteria and methodology, or even the unit's function statement need revisiting to determine whether they are appropriate to measure the effectiveness of the office.



The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requires colleges it accredits to document their institutional effectiveness process.

The ACC Unit-Level Effectiveness (ULE) Database was designed to provide a centralized web-based venue where all College units document their assessment process. As required by SACS, documentation may be entered into the database at almost any time during the year. However, the deadline for completing documentation of all steps of the assessment plan is June 15 of each year. The database will be closed to data entry from June 15 through July 15 to allow the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to run reports on the status of unit-level documentation of assessment.