The first edition of Assessment Clear and Simple quickly became the essential go-to guide for anyone who participates in the assessment process in higher education. With the increased pressure to perform assessment to demonstrate accountability, Assessment Clear and Simple is needed more than ever. This second edition of the classic resource offers a concise, step-by-step guide that helps make assessment simple, cost-efficient, and useful to an institution. It contains effective strategies for meeting the requirements of accreditation agencies, legislatures, review boards, and others, while emphasizing and showing how to move from data to actions that improve student learning. This thoroughly revised and updated edition includes many new or expanded features, including:

» Illustrative examples drawn from the author’s experience consulting with more than 350 institutions
» A basic, no-frills assessment plan for departments and for general education
» Tips on how to integrate portfolios and e-portfolios into the assessment process
» Suggestions for using rubrics and alternatives to rubrics, including doing assessment for multidisciplinary work
» Clear instructions on how to construct a coherent institution-wide assessment system and explain it to accreditors
» Ideas for assigning responsibility for general education assessment
» Strategies for gathering information about departmental assessment while keeping the departmental workload manageable
» Information on how to manage assessment in times of budgetary cutbacks

Praise for the Second Edition of Assessment Clear and Simple

“Walvoord’s approach to assessment is wonderfully straightforward; it is also effective in facilitating faculty engagement in assessment. We’ve applied a number of her methods to our campus assessment efforts with success. This book makes assessment both manageable and useful in improving and enhancing student learning.”
—MARTHA L. A. STASSEN, director of assessment, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and president, New England Educational Assessment Network (NEEA)

“Walvoord’s work clearly presents the basics for getting started in assessment of student learning while honestly addressing the complexities of assessment when driven by faculty passion for student learning. This book is a valuable resource for the novice as well as the developing experts who are leading their institutions in academic assessment.”
—BOBBI ALLEN, faculty assessment director, Delta College

BARBARA E. WALVOORD is professor emerita at the University of Notre Dame. She was coordinator of Notre Dame’s regional accreditation self-study, the founding director of four faculty development programs—all of which have won national acclaim—and a consultant on assessment. She is the coauthor of Effective Grading, from Jossey-Bass.
Assessment Clear and Simple
Assessment Clear and Simple
A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education
Second Edition

Barbara E. Walvoord
Foreword by Trudy W. Banta
Contents

Foreword to the First Edition ix
By Trudy W. Banta
About the Author xi

1 For Everyone: The Basics of Assessment 1
2 For Institution-Wide Leaders and Planners 27
3 For Departments and Programs 59
4 For General Education 81

Appendixes
A. Curriculum Map 101
B. Student Consent Form 103
C. Analyzing Audiences for Assessment 105
D. Sample Rubrics 107

Resources 115
References 117
Index 121
To the wonderful people at more than 350 institutions where I have consulted and led workshops—people who have been generous hosts in every way, who have not only listened but also shared their own creative insights and practices, and who have not only sought to learn from my experience but also taught me, challenged me, made me think, and provided me with the examples that fill this book.
IN OUR RESPECTIVE travels around the country talking with faculty about assessment, Barbara Walvoord and I have heard this question many times: “How do we get started in assessment?” That is often followed with a plea, “Isn’t there a simple step-by-step guide we can follow?” Until this point, we have had to say no to that entreaty. But now Barbara has stepped forward to present *Assessment Clear and Simple,* and all of us—the novices who seek help and experienced practitioners who try to provide it—are indebted to her.

In clear, persuasive prose that reflects her grounding in the discipline of English, Barbara brings us a straightforward definition of assessment that emphasizes the use of carefully considered evidence to improve learning. True to her promise in the subtitle to keep her message short, Barbara defines her audience narrowly and then tells each of three groups that they need to read just two of the book’s four chapters! There is an introductory chapter for everyone, then a special chapter each for institution-wide planners and administrators, faculty concerned with assessment at the department or program level, and faculty and staff charged with the responsibility of assessing the general education experience.

Despite promising to keep things simple, Barbara Walvoord is never simplistic in her presentation. She acknowledges the complexity of learning and of the assessment that must match its features. While endeavoring to keep assessment “simple, cost efficient, and useful,” she encourages faculty to set ambitious goals for student learning, even if they may seem ambiguous in terms of their measurement potential. She urges that we not fall into the trap of discarding goals like preparing students to become ethical decision makers and good citizens just because these abilities seem difficult to measure. Even today we can employ questionnaires and interviews to...
ask current students and recent graduates if they perceive that they have experienced growth in these areas as a result of their college experiences, and in future years we can operationalize these concepts and develop more direct measures of associated behaviors.

When faculty are confronted with the necessity of creating an assessment initiative to satisfy a state or board of trustees’ mandate or the requirements of an accreditor, they often respond—quite rightly—“Aren’t we already assessing student learning? After all, we evaluate student work and give grades.” One of the many features of this work that I admire is Barbara Walvoord’s willingness to identify and respond to legitimate concerns about outcomes assessment. In this case, she not only acknowledges that faculty and student affairs staff on every campus are engaged in assessment but includes in every chapter the vital step of completing an audit of all the assessment activities already in place and asking how the use of the data from these activities to improve student learning could be enhanced. In her prior presentations and publications, Barbara has become well known for her advocacy of the use of rubrics to make meaning of grades in the outcomes assessment process. In this volume, we are treated to new examples of rubric construction and of the use of classroom assessment techniques in the quest for data that can help us improve instruction and ultimately learning.

In reviewing such a brief work, my greatest concern was related to the limited ability to provide context for the steps to be taken in inaugurating and sustaining an assessment initiative. Assessment approaches are unique, due primarily to the diverse organizational structures and background experiences, expertise, and personalities of instructors and student affairs staff that constitute the environments on different campuses. Barbara has addressed this concern by providing examples and options for proceeding in a variety of contexts, and in the appendices, specific illustrations designed for a variety of institutions.

Barbara Walvoord gives us detailed examples of reporting formats applicable at department and institution-wide levels. She urges that responses to assessment findings be based on the best current theories of student and organizational growth and development, then cites references that can be helpful in the search for such theories.

I could say more, but I am reminded of Barbara’s emphasis on brevity. My overview, then, is designed simply to whet your appetite for the rich educational experience that lies in the pages ahead. Happy reading!

Trudy W. Banta
BARBARA E. WALVOORD, PH.D., is Concurrent Professor Emerita at the University of Notre Dame. She has consulted and led workshops on assessment, effective teaching, and writing across the curriculum at more than 350 institutions of higher education. She coordinated Notre Dame’s re-accreditation self-study. She founded and directed four college and university faculty development centers, each of which won national recognition. She taught English and interdisciplinary humanities courses for more than thirty years and was named Maryland English Teacher of the Year for Higher Education in 1987. Her publications include Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College, 2nd ed. (with V. J. Anderson; Jossey-Bass, 2010); Teaching and Learning in College Introductory Religion Courses (Blackwell/Jossey-Bass, 2008); Academic Departments: How They Work, How They Change (with others; ASHE ERIC Higher Education Reports, Jossey-Bass, 2000); In the Long Run: A Study of Faculty in Three Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Programs (with L. L. Hunt, H. F. Dowling, Jr., and J. D. McMahon; National Council of Teachers of English, 1997); and Thinking and Writing in College: A Naturalistic Study of Students in Four Disciplines (with L. P. McCarthy in collaboration with V. J. Anderson, J. R. Breihan, S. M. Robison, and A. K. Sherman; National Council of Teachers of English, 1990).