1. What is assessment and why is it necessary?

Assessment is a systematic and continuous process of gathering, analyzing and using information from various sources to demonstrate accountability, quality, efficiency and effectiveness. It promotes transparency in a continuous improvement cycle. It is through the process of assessment that functional areas can evaluate their operational effectiveness based on a pre-defined set of goals and objectives related to your area’s stated purpose. Assessment is a collaborative effort that includes all staff members, as well as any direct or indirect constituents that influence your area or are impacted by your area. Assessment planning enables faculty and staff to answer important questions posed by students, parents, employers, accrediting bodies, and legislators about college and department policies, procedures and other areas crucial to the college’s operations. Basically, the purpose of assessment is to:

- **Improve**: The assessment process provides feedback to determine how the functional area can be improved.
- **Inform**: The assessment process informs division area heads and other decision-makers of the contributions and impact of the functional area to the development and growth of the institution and where appropriate students.
- **Prove**: The assessment process encapsulates and demonstrates what the functional area is accomplishing for students, faculty, staff and external stakeholders.

2. What are some misconceptions about assessment?

3. Who does assessment? I thought that this was something that only faculty had to worry about?

4. How do I begin an assessment plan for our area?

5. What about “Student Learning?” Do I have to relate everything I am assessing to how it impacts student learning?

6. What role does my administrator play in assessment?

7. How do I encourage my staff to participate in assessment?

8. What do we measure and what kinds of information do we collect?

9. What makes for good assessment measures, and how many do you need?

10. What is the difference between direct and indirect measures?

11. Can’t we just resubmit the same report as we did last year since we didn’t do anything different?

12. Should we consistently meet all of our goals each year?

13. When is the due date for my assessment plan and report?

14. What if we don’t have time for assessment?
• **Support**: The assessment process provides support for campus decision making activities such as unit review, resource allocations and strategic planning, as well as external accountability activities such as accreditation.

2. **What are some misconceptions about assessment?**

Assessment is not about collecting data or repeatedly sending surveys to everyone. For assessment to be meaningful, you need to start by asking the right questions. The questions you select to answer will help you determine if you are meeting your goals. After you determine what it is you want to find out then you look to see what type of data you need to collect. Don’t collect the data first without identifying the question or you will be lost in the process and it will not provide any meaningful information. By performing an assessment evaluation that is data driven, it can inform the need for possible changes based on the results of the assessment reporting.

Another misconception is that the results of assessment will be used to evaluate employee performance. Nothing is further from the truth. Staff participation is essential to an assessment plan, but the results are never used to evaluate or judge individual performance. The results of assessment are used to improve programs.

3. **Who does assessment? I thought that this was something that only faculty had to worry about?**

Everybody does assessment in some form or fashion. Assessment is not just for faculty. In higher education, everybody from the administration to the students perform assessment. Our goal is to ensure that assessment is a collaborative effort between faculty, staff and administration. Assessment only works properly when as many people are involved as possible. Every department at FSC has room for improvement and needs to demonstrate accountability.

4. **How do I begin an assessment plan for our area?**

The first thing is to determine your functional area’s responsibilities. This can most easily be accomplished by looking at job descriptions or duties of employees, as well as area responsibilities. If your area has a vision or mission statement, that should be the cornerstone of your assessment. Once you have determined the overall responsibilities of your functional area, you will need to decide on a set of clear and concise goals and objectives. These objectives should be directly related to your functional area’s responsibilities and mission/vision statement if it exists and be measurable. After you decide on your goals and objectives, you need to determine if these goals and objectives are being met. This involves measurement and the determination of targets or benchmarks. Although most measurements are quantitative they don’t have to be. Qualitative assessments can also be used when appropriate or as an added component. Note: If an area easily meets all of its intended goals, perhaps the goals are too low. Remember that it is OK if your area does not meet all of its goals. Assessment data is meant to be followed over time. If some goals are not met in one assessment period this does not necessarily mean that anything needs to change; you should examine trends over time. After a period of time, if goals are consistently not met, then action may need to be taken.
5. What about “Student Learning?” Do I have to relate everything I am assessing to how it impacts student learning?

NO. Not all areas are responsible to evaluate student learning. Quite often you will hear the words “Student Learning” when assessment is being discussed and this is directed at program level assessment. Faculty are accountable for what students learn. However, areas that work directly with students at some level DO affect student learning and contribute to the learning outcomes identified by the college. If your department works directly with students then in all likelihood it affects student learning at some level and one of your area goals should be addressing student learning.

6. How will my area assessment plan and report be used by the college?

All assessment plans and reports for individual areas will be shared with the appropriate Vice Presidents. They will also be collected and reviewed by the assessment subcommittees to be summarized and forwarded to the Assessment Advisory Board. The Assessment Advisory Board will compile all campus wide assessment activities into an annual assessment report to be used by the College Planning and Resource Allocation Committee as well as the College for a variety of reporting requirements.

7. How do I encourage my colleagues – staff members to participate in assessment?

Knowledge of the purpose and goals of assessment usually encourages staff to participate. The assessment process should be meaningful for the area and provide a way to assess business as usual processes. Sometimes things are done a certain way just because it has always been done that way, not because it is the best way. Assessment provides the necessary data to support the need for improvement and to ensure that all staff in your area has a say. Often the best way to encourage staff participation is by responding to the results and showing everyone involved that their participation is making a difference or at a minimal creating awareness. Department heads or directors can also encourage their staff by setting aside a separate time dedicated to assessment. This is best accomplished bi-annually for planning and reporting.

8. What do we measure and what kinds of information do we collect?

Remember the purpose of assessment is to evaluate your general job duties, as well as, anything that comes from your mission or vision statement. If you work directly with students then you would also measure student learning. What kinds of information to collect should be directly related to what you want to know. This will vary by functional area; you can use things such as audit reports, student surveys, faculty/staff surveys, meeting minutes, etc...

9. What makes for good assessment measures, and how many do you need?

The kinds of things that make for good assessment measures include: third party observations, self-administered questionnaires, interviews with students, faculty, and/or staff, and external assessment instrument (audit reports, Federal or State reports etc.) How many measures you need is dependent upon the type of goal or objective you have and the
available measures for that goal or objective. If possible it is good to include one direct and one indirect measure.

10. **What is the difference between direct and indirect measures?**

Direct measures assess performance objectively without the use of opinions, thoughts, or assumptions. A direct measure will usually be very concise and easy to interpret. For example, if the IR department has a goal of submitting SUNY reports on time and accurately every year, then a direct measure would be the records kept by the IR department that indicate whether or not the reporting files were sent on or before the due date and whether or not re-submissions were necessary due to inaccurate data.

Indirect measures assess opinions or thoughts about whether or not your area is meeting its goals of being effective, efficient, and whether or not your area completes all tasks that are expected. Indirect measures are most commonly captured by the use of surveys or interviews.

11. **Can’t we just resubmit the same report as we did last year since we didn’t do anything different?**

No. Each year the functional area benefits from assessment in some way, whether it is from changes made as a result of their own assessments or from those made as a result of a past year’s assessment. Some changes can be made immediately. Other changes will take more time. Nobody denies that good assessment can reveal consistent trends. If your staff is tempted to produce the same report each year with only minor modifications, then it could mean that you and your staff are overly concerned with the process of assessment rather than using it in a meaningful way. Always remember, your assessment report is not your goal. You should be ensuring that your area is doing all that is expected in the most efficient way possible with the tools and the resources available. It is very likely that your assessment goals or objectives will remain constant from year to year; but the report should not.

12. **Should we consistently meet all of our goals each year?**

If every goal/objective is met consistently from year to year, it may mean that the expected results/targets are set too low. Purposefully setting expected results that are easily met defeats the purpose for having an assessment plan. On the other hand, you do not want to set expectations that are impossible to reach.

13. **What is the assessment cycle and what is the due date for my assessment plan and report?**

The assessment cycle is based on the academic calendar and connected to the budget process.

September: **September 15th** Assessment plans submitted
October: Assessment plans reviewed by Assessment Subcommittee (feedback provided)
November – May: Assessments Activities take place
June: Review assessment findings
July: **July 15th Assessment Reports** submitted
August: Assessment Reports reviewed by Assessment Subcommittee (Combined Report submitted to Assessment Advisory Board)
August: Develop new Assessment plan

14. **What resources can the College offer to us?**

An Assessment website will be made available in the summer of 2015, containing on-line resources for functional area assessment as well as student learning assessment. Assessment workshops will be conducted periodically. Feedback on assessment plans and reports will be provided by the assessment subcommittees.

15. **What if we don’t have time for assessment?**

Everyone has time for assessment. Assessment is essential for an area to stay focused on their mission and to stay current with Federal, State, and College policy. Assessment needs to be a top priority in order to demonstrate accountability.