

VCU's Model for Assessment and Quality Enhancement

WEAVE

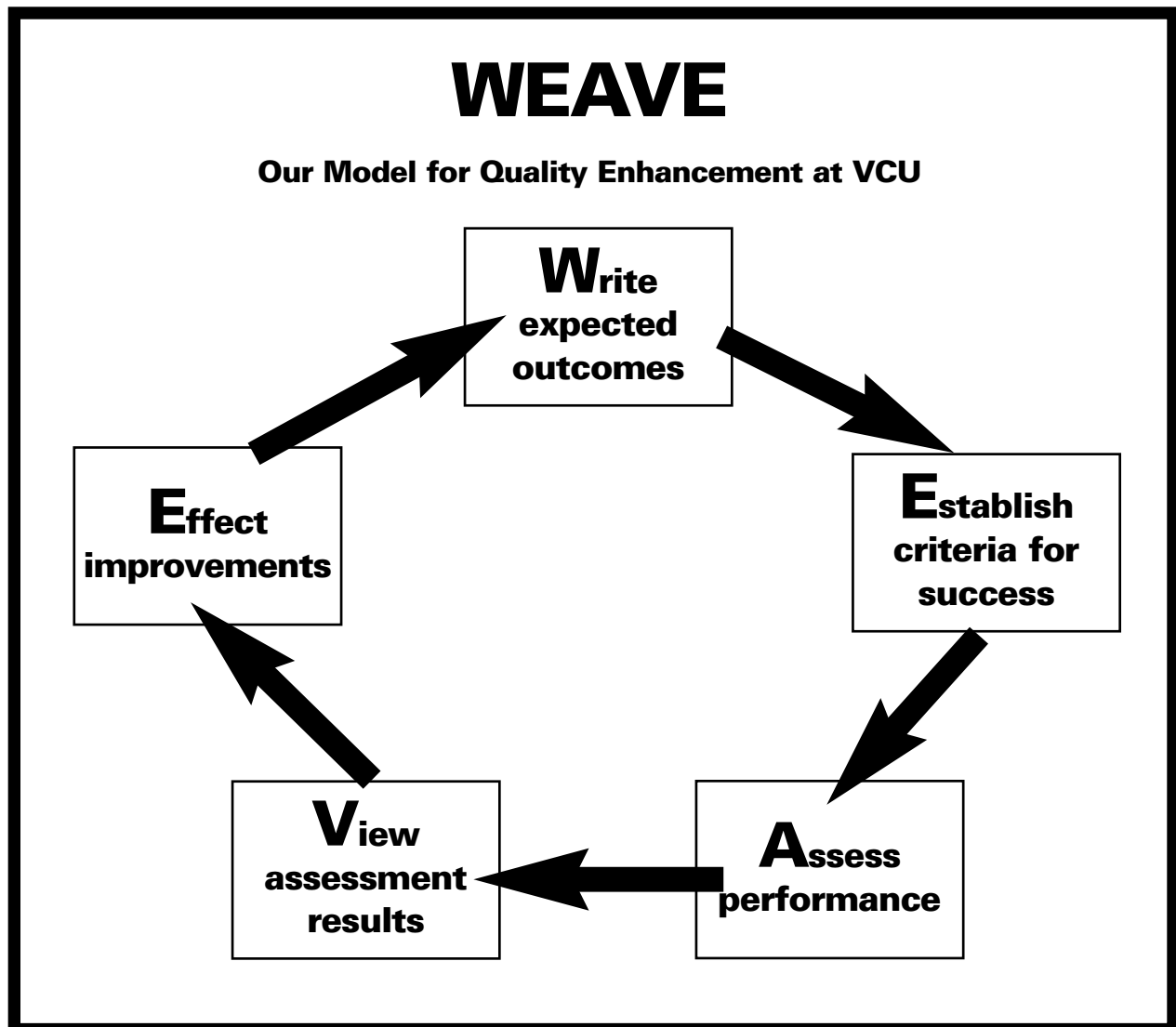
Discussions with faculty, deans and program directors tell us that most units are already doing some assessment of their programs. We now are establishing a shared framework for the ongoing assessment efforts and ensuring that all units participate in the process.

Our goal is to weave the various strands of planning, program review, assessment and evaluation into a tapestry that truly tells the story of our university — a tapestry that integrates these various strands in a seamless institution-wide vision. This tapestry will demonstrate the many ways VCU effectively accomplishes its mission and will show our process for continuing improvement.

You are part of a much larger effort; every unit within the university is involved in this implementation and assessment of institutional effectiveness as VCU works to:

- write expected outcomes.
- establish criteria for success.
- assess performance.
- view assessment results.
- effect improvements.

The WEAVE cycle begins when you articulate goals and objectives. Once you establish those expected outcomes for your program, you determine how to measure how well those goals and objectives are being met. Next you conduct the assessment activities and determine results. Then you and others in your program (or administrative and educational support unit) review the results and determine any actions to be taken, including any changes you will make to improve learning or services.



WEAVE Quality Enhancement for Administrative and Educational Support Units

SACS uses the term “Administrative and Educational Support Units” for a wide range of programs and activities that do not award degrees. At a complex university like VCU, these units have many different missions and serve very different people. Even so, it is possible to work through the WEAVE process to develop appropriate assessment approaches for any unit. While you are WEAVEing, consider how you can integrate any relevant professional standards, criteria, etc., into your thinking.

Write Expected Outcomes

Step 1: Articulate the mission or purpose of your unit.

Your unit’s mission statement or statement of purpose links the functions of your unit to the overall mission of VCU. In formulating or revising a purpose or mission statement that is integrated into the university’s mission, you should review the university’s mission and identify how your unit supports VCU’s mission.

Here are a few questions for you to consider in formulating the purpose or mission of your unit:

- What is primary function of your unit?
- What core activities are involved?
- What should those you serve experience after interacting with your unit?

Step 2: Define your unit’s objectives.

Here are three categories of objectives:

- **Outcome statements** concern gains you want those you serve to make — for example, what can someone do after interacting with your program?
- **Process statements** concern the accomplishments of your unit’s functions, such as:
 - level or volume of activity
 - efficiency with which you conduct the processes
 - compliance with external standards or regulations
- **Satisfaction statements** describe how those you serve rate their satisfaction with your unit’s processes or services.

In drafting objectives, it may help to create a flowchart of your unit’s work processes to determine what your unit will accomplish and what students, faculty, staff, and others will think, know or do following the provision of the service.

Consider such questions as:

- What are the most important results or impacts that should occur as a result of your unit’s activities?
- What are your critical work processes and how should they function?

- What does the end user experience through interaction with your unit?

SMART is an acronym that is often used to determine how well an objective is formulated. A good objective is a SMART objective when it is:

- **Specific** – Be clear about what your unit plans to accomplish, as well as when, where or how. For example, “we will expand our services” does not specify how or by how much or for how many customers the services will be expanded. Words such as *develop*, *encourage* and *enhance* lack specificity. Action words such as *locate* or *reduce* make objectives more specific.
- **Measurable** – Quantify your objective as to targets and benefits, so that your unit can determine if it has reached the objective.
- **Achievable** – Know the objective is something that your unit can accomplish. It is fine to accomplish your objective in incremental steps over several years.
- **Realistic** – Make sure the objective is something that can be done practically in a specific time frame or for a specific amount of money.
- **Time-bound** – When will the objective be done? Tie the objective to a specific time frame.

Establish Criteria for Success

Step 3: Determine appropriate assessment measures and criteria.

Once you establish your unit’s objectives, define and identify the sources of evidence you will use to determine whether you are achieving expected impacts. You must detail what will be measured and how it will be measured.

For each outcome, create measures that help your unit in making critical decisions about its processes and services. Build an inventory of existing evaluation and assessment activities. Ask colleagues in similar units at other institutions how they assess their efficiency and effectiveness. When designing your assessment, you should use multiple measures. A composite of results can yield a more realistic picture of your unit’s performance.

Common types of assessment

- Attitudinal – measures of satisfaction from those you serve
- Direct – counts of unit services
- External – validation (neutral party, auditor, professional standards)

Criteria or targets for success

Always aim for a criterion level that stretches your unit's performance. For example:

- How well should we serve our clients?
- 95 percent of our users will be "very satisfied or satisfied" with our services.
- At least 80 percent of eligible employees will participate in training.
- 90 percent of the transcripts will be sent within three days.
- 90 percent of the forms will be processed without errors.

Assess Performance of Unit**Step 4: Conduct assessment activities.**

Put your assessment plan into action. You must set a schedule for conducting assessment activities. Some assessments may take place monthly, others annually and others even on a triennial basis. Conduct a focus group of those you serve, survey people who have participated in your unit's activities, have an expert come through and review your processes. This time is to find out what others say about your operation.

View Assessment Results**Step 5: Analyze the findings from your assessments.**

Once the results from your assessments have been collected, see what they can tell you about your program. Consider asking questions such as:

- What can you infer from the data?
- What future actions will you take?
- What changes have you made (or will you make) based on assessment results?
- What are the budgetary implications?

As your unit discusses the assessment results and their implications, celebrate when your unit has accomplished what it planned to accomplish. Come to a clear understanding and agreement on areas that still present opportunities for growth and improvement.

Document the findings of assessment. Summarize your results for reporting purposes; be sure to retain details of documentation on file for reference purposes if needed. As you discuss results, revisit and improve your assessment measures.

Effect Improvements to Increase Unit Performance**Step 6: Use your results.**

You have not completed the quality enhancement process until you "close the loop" and use results to make improvements to services. Typical changes in services include:

- revising organizational structure
- reallocating resources
- revamping administrative procedures
- modifying or expanding relations with public or external agencies

The decisions you make regarding the course of action for the following year also may lead to a restructuring or revision of your unit's objectives for the following year.