

*The following is a new Chapter Reference for Chapter 4—insert after page 67.  
It provides an important new tool for institutions and Consultant-Evaluators.*

## Chapter Reference A

### ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: LEVELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Updated March 2002

#### INTRODUCTION

The *Levels of Implementation* are a tool (1) to assist institutions in understanding and strengthening their programs for assessment of student academic achievement and (2) to provide evaluation teams with some useful characteristics, or descriptors, of progress to inform their consultation and their recommendations related to those programs.

The clusters of characteristics contained in *Levels of Implementation* emerge from rigorously applied research analysis of content found in team reports, the source of Consultant-Evaluators' discussion of assessment at scores of institutions. The term, *Levels of Implementation*, as used in this document, is to be understood as descriptive and not definitive. Therefore, the *Levels of Implementation* provide markers of the progress institutions have made in developing their assessment programs. **As institutions and teams use the Levels, it is unlikely they will find any assessment program exhibiting all of the characteristics associated with a particular level at any given time. Moreover, not every assessment program will progress through each level and characteristic before it becomes an effective, ongoing system of processes that results in the continuous improvement of student learning. The Commission's research continues, and as its learning grows, these characteristics will be modified and updated.**

Instead of a structured, uniform set of levels of implementation of assessment, the complexity of the *Levels of Implementation* indicates fluid and dynamic patterns of characteristics. **The patterns of characteristics across the levels are fluid because within any one institution, different individual units may exhibit characteristics that cut across two or even all three levels. They are dynamic because the goal of assessment is continual improvement of student learning not completion of items on a checklist. Clearly, though, there is a basic assumption that the characteristics are cumulative in nature. That is, not all of the characteristics of Level Two are restated in Level Three, but it is assumed that most of them continue.**

#### INSTITUTIONS

Institutions should find the *Levels of Implementation* useful. Colleges and universities may find it informative to compare their own assessment program against the patterns of characteristics provided for each Level. This gives them a way of evaluating their progress in implementing their assessment plans. The *Levels of Implementation* do not provide a perfect continuum for each pattern of characteristics, but institutions may find it helpful to use the characteristics of the levels to get a sense of where they were one, two, or three years earlier and where they are today. Colleges or universities that have been unable to move their assessment programs forward can compare the characteristics of the level at which they judge their assessment program to be with those of the next higher level, identifying what changes they wish to make for the program to move forward. They can then create action plans to accelerate their progress. Institutions may also find the *Levels* to be a means of confirming that their assessment programs exhibit characteristics that indicate they are successfully implementing their assessment program. Institutions might choose to include in their self-study documents the evaluation of their assessment programs derived from the use of the *Levels*.

#### EVALUATION TEAMS

Evaluation teams may find the *Levels of Implementation* a useful resource in suggesting the types and range of questions that might be asked about the progress an institution and each of its academic programs is making in assessing and

improving student learning. Use of the *Levels* by all teams in evaluating assessment programs of institutions should promote consistency across teams in the advice they give and, if appropriate, the ongoing monitoring by the Commission that they recommend.

As a team reviews an institution's progress in assessment, it needs to consider its basic obligations.

- n No matter the level of the institution's implementation of assessment, the team needs to **give the institution the best consulting advice possible**.
- n No matter the level of the institution's implementation of assessment, the team needs to **recognize the accomplishments** made by the institution in implementing an effective assessment program.
- n **To determine the appropriateness of Commission follow-up**, the team is well advised to limit that follow-up to these specific situations:
  1. Call for a focused visit when the predominant pattern of characteristics locates the institution at Level One and the team finds little evidence that much progress is being made toward Level Two.
  2. Call for a monitoring report (within 3 years) when the predominant pattern of characteristics locates the institution at Level One and the team finds good evidence that progress is being made toward Level Two.
  3. Call for a progress report when an institution at Level Two appears not to be using or lacks the capacity to use data from the assessment program to improve its academic programs and enhance effective student learning.

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## I. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE: a. Collective / Shared Values

<p><b>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p><b>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL TWO</b></p>	<p><b>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement</b> <b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>
<p>– <b>Collective / Shared Values</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A shared understanding of the purposes, advantages, and limitations of assessment has not evolved or is just emerging.</li> <li>2. There is not an institution-wide understanding of the strategies to be used in conducting an effective assessment program.</li> </ul>	<p>– <b>Collective / Shared Values</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A shared understanding of the purposes, advantages, and limitations of assessment exists and is broadening to include areas beyond the instructional division.</li> <li>• Student learning and assessment of student academic achievement are valued across the institution, departments, and programs.</li> <li>• Some but not all academic programs have developed statements of purpose and educational goals that reflect the institutional mission and specifically mention the department's focus on improving student learning, and the importance they attribute to assessing student learning as a means to that end.</li> <li>• The institution has yet to extend its assessment program to include all of its academic programs.</li> <li>• Assessment of general education skills, competencies, and capacities is progressing but has not been fully implemented or was begun but has stalled.</li> </ul>	<p>– <b>Collective / Shared Values</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assessment has become an institutional priority, a way of life.</li> <li>1. Students, faculty, and staff view assessment activities as a part of the institution's culture and as a resource and tool to be used in improving student learning at all degree and program levels.</li> <li>1. Academic units and programs consider assessment of student learning to be integral to their educational operations.</li> <li>1. Assessment of student learning is an integral component of each academic program offered by the institution, including distance learning, non-traditional, off-campus and adult degree programs.</li> <li>1. Academic units and programs regard assessment findings as a source of knowledge essential for continuous improvement in instruction and program offerings.</li> <li>1. Institutional decisions are tied to assessment results.</li> </ul>

## I. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE: b. Mission

### Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs

#### LEVEL ONE

##### – Mission –

- n Neither the institutional statements of Mission or Purposes nor statements of educational goals includes wording about student learning.
- n The statement of departmental purposes and the statement of educational goals of some or all academic units do not show an easily identifiable relationship to the institutional mission and goals.

### Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs

#### LEVEL TWO

##### – Mission –

- The institutional statements of Mission or Purposes or statement of educational goals indicate the value the institution places upon student learning.
- Some but not all of the institution's assessment efforts are recognizably expressive of the sentiments about the importance of assessing and improving student learning found in the Mission and Purposes statements.

### Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement

#### LEVEL THREE

##### – Mission –

- u The characteristics described in Level Two are continued, sustained, and where appropriate, enhanced.
- u Every academic program has a published statement of its purpose and educational goals, developed by the academic unit's faculty, which reflects the institution's Mission and Purposes statements, including those portions directly focused on assessing and improving student learning.
- u The assessment program materials developed at the institutional level reflect the emphasis of the Mission and Purposes statements on the importance of identifying learning expectations, on determining the outcomes of assessing student learning across academic programs, and on using assessment results to improve student learning.

## II. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: a. Faculty

<p><b>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p><b>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL TWO</b></p>	<p><b>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement</b> <b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>
<p><b>– Faculty –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Only a few academic departments or programs have described measurable objectives for each of their educational goals.</li> <li>□ Most academic programs have not identified and used direct measures of student learning.</li> <li>□ Programmatic or departmental faculty members depend exclusively on indirect measures of learning.</li> <li>□ A few academic units have begun to expand assessment activities beyond teacher evaluation of student learning and grades awarded in courses.</li> <li>□ Faculty and staff are questioning the efficacy of the assessment program, and their buy-in to date is minimal.</li> <li>□ Quantitative and qualitative measures are not aligned with academic program goals and objectives.</li> <li>□ Assessment of student learning is limited to those programs whose professional agencies mandate it.</li> <li>□ Many programmatic or departmental faculty are not engaged in assessment activities that get to the core of measuring student-learning outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>– Faculty –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Faculty in many or most departments have developed measurable objectives for each of the program's educational goals.</li> <li>● Faculty members are taking responsibility for ensuring that direct and indirect measures of student learning are aligned with the program's educational goals and measurable objectives.</li> <li>● The Faculty Senate, Assessment Committee, Curriculum Committee, other faculty bodies, and individual faculty leaders accept responsibility for becoming knowledgeable and remaining current in the field of assessment.</li> <li>● Faculty members are becoming knowledgeable about the assessment program, its structures, components, and timetable.</li> <li>● Faculty members are learning the vocabulary and practices used in effective assessment activities and are increasingly contributing to assessment discussions and activities.</li> <li>● After receiving assessment data, faculty members are working to "close the feedback loop" by reviewing assessment information and identifying areas of strength and areas for possible improvement of student learning.</li> <li>● Groups of faculty identified by the institution receive assessment reports and provide suggestions and recommendations to appropriate constituencies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>– Faculty –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ All of the characteristics described in Level Two are continued, sustained, and where appropriate, enhanced.</li> <li>□ Faculty members engage in effective assessment practices.</li> <li>□ Faculty members routinely collaborate to determine appropriate measures for publicly stated goals, objectives, and intended outcomes and to justify and recommend improvements based on corresponding results.</li> <li>□ Faculty members speak both publicly and privately in support of assessment.</li> <li>□ Faculty members systematically educate persons unfamiliar with institutional and departmental assessment programs about their value.</li> <li>□ Faculty members continually explore the uses of assessment in the context of research on learning theories, constructing vs. acquiring knowledge, and active learning strategies.</li> <li>□ Faculty members routinely link their assessment findings to decision making and instructional and program improvement.</li> </ul>

*Faculty – continued on following page*

## II. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: a. Faculty

**Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs**  
**LEVEL ONE**

*Faculty – continued from previous page*

<sup>n</sup> A substantial number of faculty members across the institution do not differentiate between grading in individual courses and the broader measurement of student outcomes across an academic program.

**Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs**  
**LEVEL TWO**

**Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement**  
**LEVEL THREE**

### Levels of Implementation – Patterns of Characteristics

Updated: March 1, 2002

## II. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: b. Administration and Board

<p><b>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL ONE</b></p> <p>– <b>Administration and Board</b> –</p> <p>Concerns about the assessment plan identified in the last Evaluation Team’s Report and/or the APR review (assessment panel review) have not been addressed or not adequately addressed.</p>	<p><b>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL TWO</b></p> <p>– <b>Administration and Board</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board, the CEO, and the executive officers of the institution express their understanding of the meaning, goals, characteristics, and value of the assessment program, verbally and in written communication.</li> <li>The CAO has oversight responsibility for the ongoing operation of the assessment program and for promoting the use of assessment results to effect desired improvements in student learning, performance, development, and achievement.</li> <li>The CAO arranges for awards and public recognition to individuals, groups, and academic units making noteworthy progress in assessing and improving student learning.</li> <li>Deans, directors, and other academic officers demonstrate their commitment to the assessment program by informing senior administrators about assessment results and needs to make improvements in instruction, staffing, curriculum, and student and academic services.</li> <li>Unit heads devise strategies to ensure that their academic departments/programs implement the assessment plans they developed or develop them more fully.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement</b> <b>LEVEL THREE</b></p> <p>– <b>Administration and Board</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All of the characteristics described in Level Two are continued, sustained, and where appropriate, enhanced.</li> <li>Board members routinely champion institutional and other improvement efforts that are based on assessment findings.</li> <li>Board members advocate the continual improvement of student learning as an institutional priority.</li> <li>Senior administrators annually provide resources for the assessment program and provide additional resources necessary to enhance assessment practices and improve faculty’s understanding of assessment principles and use of assessment results.</li> <li>Senior administrators routinely authorize various campus offices (e.g., institutional research) to provide the support services needed to carry out the assessment programs.</li> <li>Senior administrators regularly provide resources for special projects to enhance the assessment program (e.g., pilot projects, summer stipends, departmental grants, and support for assessment symposia).</li> </ul>
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## II. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: c. Students

<p>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs</p> <p><b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs</p> <p><b>LEVEL TWO</b></p>	<p>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement</p> <p><b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>
<p><b>-- Students --</b></p> <p><sup>n</sup> Students know little or nothing about the assessment program. They do not understand how it will be carried out, their role in its success, or how it could be useful to them and future cohorts of students.</p> <p><sup>n</sup> Prospective and incoming students are provided with few or no explicit public statements regarding the institution's expectations for student learning and the student's role and responsibility in that effort.</p>	<p><b>-- Students --</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students are becoming knowledgeable about the institution's assessment program.</li> <li>● There is student representation (undergraduate and graduate, as appropriate) on the assessment committees organized within the institution.</li> <li>● The institution effectively communicates with students about the purposes of assessment at the institution and their roles in the assessment program.</li> </ul>	<p><b>-- Students --</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>u Throughout their academic programs, students are provided formal occasions to reflect upon their academic work and express their thoughts, in oral and written forms, about the levels of success they think they have experienced in achieving the learning outcomes identified and expected by faculty.</li> <li>u Students are regularly required to present oral and written explanations of how work products they have selected demonstrate attainment of publicly stated goals and objectives for their learning.</li> <li>u Student leaders educate their peers about the assessment program through conversations, public presentations, and/or articles in the student newspaper.</li> <li>u Students routinely participate in discussions with the unit faculty about improvements that might be made in areas of learning where assessment results indicate a need for strengthening.</li> </ul>

### III. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT: a. Resources

<p>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs <b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs <b>LEVEL TWO</b></p>	<p>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement <b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>
<p><b>— Resources —</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 The institution has not designated funds in its operating budget to support a comprehensive assessment program.</li> <li>2 The institution does not understand or clarify the difference between the evaluation of resources and processes and the assessment of student learning.</li> <li>3 Sufficient resources have yet to be allocated in the annual E&amp;G operations budget to operate and sustain a comprehensive assessment program.</li> <li>4 The institution does not protect the assessment program from the funding vicissitudes of particular schools, colleges, and units.</li> </ul>	<p><b>— Resources —</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CEO and CAO annually negotiate a budget for the assessment program sufficient to provide the technological support, physical facilities, and space needed to sustain a viable assessment program and for making professional development opportunities available.</li> <li>• In institutions without an Office of Institutional Research (OIR), knowledgeable staff and/or faculty members are given release time or additional compensation to provide these services.</li> <li>• Unit heads endorse the use of departmental funds for professional development in assessment, for faculty release time, and other expenses associated with the department's assessment activities and initiatives based on assessment findings intended to improve student learning.</li> <li>• Resources are made available to assessment committees seeking to develop skills in assessing student learning.</li> <li>• Resources are made available to departments seeking to implement their assessment programs and to test changes intended to improve student learning.</li> <li>• The institution provides resources to support an annual assessment reporting cycle and its feedback processes.</li> <li>• Assessment information sources such as an assessment newsletter and/or an assessment resource manual are made available to faculty to provide them with key assessment principles, concepts, models, and procedures.</li> </ul>	<p><b>— Resources —</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 All of the characteristics described in Level Two are continued, sustained, and where appropriate, enhanced.</li> <li>2 A budget line has been established and sufficient resources are allocated in the annual E&amp;G operations budget to sustain a comprehensive assessment program.</li> <li>3 Funds are available and sufficient to support consultation, workshops, and professional development for faculty in the area of assessment of student learning.</li> <li>4 The Assessment Committee solicits proposals and awards funding for programmatic and departmental assessment activities and initiatives.</li> <li>5 Individuals who have administrative assignments (including deans and department heads) are given the responsibility and authority to use budgeted resources to support academic changes based on assessment findings.</li> </ul>

### III. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT: b. Structures

<p>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs</p> <p><b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs</p> <p><b>LEVEL TWO</b></p>	<p>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement</p> <p><b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>
<p>– Structures –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The structure of the assessment program is beginning to take shape.</li> <li>2. There is little or no infrastructure to support the institution's assessment program.</li> </ul>	<p>– Structures –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an organizational chart and an annual calendar of the implementation of the assessment program.</li> <li>• The assessment program is provided with a Coordinator/Director who reports directly to the CAO.</li> <li>• The CEO or CAO has established a standing Assessment Committee, typically comprised of faculty, academic administrators, and representatives of the OIR and student government.</li> <li>• The administration has enlarged the responsibility of the OIR to include instruction and support to the Assessment Committee, academic unit heads, and academic departmental or program faculty.</li> <li>• The CAO delegates unit heads sufficient authority and resources to conduct an effective assessment program.</li> <li>• Unit leaders (department heads) have responsibility for maintaining successful assessment programs as a part of their formal position descriptions.</li> <li>• Some or many academic units and the Curriculum Committee are requiring that faculty members indicate on the syllabi of previously approved courses and in the proposal for new courses, and for new or revised programs, the measurable objectives for student learning and how student learning will be assessed.</li> </ul>	<p>– Structures –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All of the characteristics described in Level Two are continued, sustained, and where appropriate, enhanced.</li> <li>1. Syllabi for courses being currently offered and all submitted courses and programs state measurable objectives for student learning and provide for the assessment of students' academic achievement.</li> <li>1. The institution maintains a system of data collection that helps sustain an effective assessment program.</li> <li>1. The comprehensive assessment program is evaluated regularly and is modified as necessary for optimal effectiveness.</li> <li>1. Institutional and departmental assessment programs are annually reviewed and annually updated.</li> <li>1. The effectiveness of the changes in curriculum, academic resources, and support services made to improve student learning is evaluated and documented.</li> <li>1. The institution, through its organizational structure, provides financial resources and other support for all aspects of the assessment program, including research and evaluation design, data collection and maintenance, decision-making, and consultation services.</li> <li>1. The institution, through its organizational structure, provides on-line access to assessment data for academic departments and programs.</li> </ul>

*Structures – continued on following page*

*Structures – continued on following page*

## Levels of Implementation – Patterns of Characteristics

**Updated: March 1, 2002**

### III. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT: b. Structures (continued)

<p><b>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p><b>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs</b> <b>LEVEL TWO</b></p> <p><i>Structures – continued from previous page</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the Assessment Committee serve as coaches and facilitators to individuals and departments working to develop or improve their assessment programs and activities.</li> <li>• The Assessment Committee is working with unit heads and with faculty and student government leaders to develop effective feedback loops so that information (about assessment results and the changes tried where those results suggest improvement is needed) can be shared with all institutional constituencies and used to improve student learning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement</b> <b>LEVEL THREE</b></p> <p><i>Structures – continued from previous page</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>u The institution, through its organizational structure, continually fosters accountability by facilitating the integration of planning and budgeting processes with the results of assessment.</li> <li>u The institution, through its organizational structure, systematically and routinely links assessment outcomes to the allocation of resources for the improvement of student learning.</li> <li>u Academic unit heads report annually to the chief academic officer on accomplishments and challenges relating to the unit's assessment program.</li> <li>u Academic unit heads report annually to the chief academic officer on recommended and implemented changes in the previous year's assessment plan.</li> <li>u Information about assessment activities and their results are communicated regularly to the campus community.</li> </ul>
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## IV. EFFICACY OF ASSESSMENT

### Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs

#### LEVEL ONE

##### – Efficacy –

- 1. Implementation of the assessment program is in its infancy, is progressing at a slower than desired pace, or has stalled.
- 2. There is minimal evidence that the assessment program is stable and will be sustainable.
- 3. Confusion exists regarding the different purposes and relationships among: placement testing, faculty evaluation, program review, institutional effectiveness, and the assessment of student learning.
- 4. Assessment of general education skills, competencies, and capacities has not been implemented or has stalled.
- 5. Reported learner outcomes do not correspond with publicly stated goals and objectives for student learning.
- 6. Few academic programs and departments are collecting, interpreting, or using data about student learning beyond the level of the individual classroom.
- 7. Few if any academic programs are using assessment results to improve student learning.
- 8. The assessment program is not designed to provide useful data, which could impact change.
- 9. The data are being collected but not disseminated to constituencies.

### Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs

#### LEVEL TWO

##### – Efficacy –

- Considerable program-level data about student and program performance are available, but individual units vary widely in the degree to which they are using this information to improve the quality of educational experiences.
- Assessment data are inconsistently used as the basis for making changes across the institution.
- The data the assessment program collects are not useful in guiding effective change.
- Assessment data are being collected and reported but not being used to improve student learning.
- Faculty members are increasingly engaged in interpreting assessment results, discussing their implications, and recommending changes in academic programs and other areas in order to improve student learning.
- Many academic units or programs are collecting, interpreting, and using the results obtained from assessing student learning in general education, in undergraduate majors, and in graduate and professional programs.
- Assessment findings about the state of student learning are beginning to be incorporated into reviews of the academic program and into the self-study of institutional effectiveness.

### Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement

#### LEVEL THREE

##### – Efficacy –

- 1. All of the characteristics described in Level Two are continued, sustained, and where appropriate, enhanced.
- 2. Student learning is central to the culture of the institution and finding ways to improve it is ongoing.
- 3. A “culture of evidence” has emerged, sustained by a faculty and administrative commitment to excellent teaching and effective learning.
- 4. Explicit statements regarding the institution’s expectations for student learning are widely publicized.
- 5. Programmatic benchmarks are established against which students’ learning outcomes are assessed.
- 6. The institution publicly and regularly celebrates demonstrated student learning, performance, and achievement.

## Levels of Implementation – Patterns of Characteristics

Updated: March 1, 2002

## IV. EFFICACY OF ASSESSMENT (continued)

<p>Beginning Implementation of Assessment Programs <b>LEVEL ONE</b></p>	<p>Making Progress in Implementing Assessment Programs <b>LEVEL TWO</b></p>	<p>Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement <b>LEVEL THREE</b></p>
<p>– continued from previous page –</p> <p>– <b>Efficacy</b> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The conclusions faculty reach after reviewing the assessment results and the recommendations that they make regarding proposed changes in teaching methods, curriculum, course content, instructional resources, and in academic support services are beginning to be incorporated into regular departmental and/or institutional planning and budgeting processes and included in the determination of the priorities for funding and implementation.</li> </ul>		