While there are a variety of assessments that could be done at a university, but for accreditation purposes the primary assessment of degree programs is focused on verifying that students actually achieve the stated learning outcomes for the program.

Montana State University's accreditation agency (NWCCU) makes the following statement in their Standards for Accreditation document:

The institution documents, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that students who complete its educational courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve identified course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Faculty with teaching responsibilities are responsible for evaluating student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.

Assessment is not just a good educational practice, it is a required component of our accreditation process. The assessment process requires the participation of all instructional faculty members, but if the assessment process is well designed, the time required for assessment can be controlled.

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the assessment process. There is a companion document, Developing an Assessment Plan, that goes through each step in greater detail.

The basic assessment process for a degree program is diagrammed below:

**Assessment in a nutshell**

**Program to be Assessed**

- **Define Outcomes**
- **Identify Indicators**
- **Develop Rubrics**

**Collect Data**

- **Assign Thresholds**
- **Score Data**
- **Assess Scores**
- **Review Assessment and Response**

**Respond to Assessment**

- **Means of scoring**: A shared way of scoring student achievement of the outcome
- **Targets**: What percent of students should achieve proficiency for the program to be deemed successful on this outcome?

**Data source**: Collect a random sample of student work for study

**Means of assessment**: Identify assignments in advanced classes where students will demonstrate outcome (best if required classes)

**Archival summary report**: Did we make those changes? Document assessment and reasons for program changes.

**What changes should we make, if any, to help students meet our goals for them?**

**Faculty discussion of how did students do? Where are they meeting our threshold for success? Where should we target for improvement?**

**Faculty subcommittee studies student work and scores it using rubric**