Qualities of Effective Assessment Planning

Effective assessment planning:

--Involves stakeholders (faculty members, administrators, students, student affairs professionals, employers, community representatives) from the outset to incorporate their needs and interests and to solicit for later support.
--Begins when the need is recognized; allows sufficient time for development. Timing is crucial.
--Has a written plan with clear purposes that is related to goals people value—to a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment is a vehicle for improvement, not an end in itself.
--Bases assessment approaches on clear, explicitly stated program objectives.

. . . [Most] colleges and universities have been influenced to begin the assessment process by the necessity of responding to an external requirement—a state or governing board mandate or self-study guidelines imposed by an accrediting body . . . . If assessment is not to become a perfunctory response designed merely to fulfill the minimum requirements of an external mandate, it must engage those who need to be involved. . . For example, at the time that a major curricular change is to be introduced, program graduates and employers may be invited to comment on the effectiveness of the prior curriculum and to suggest new student outcomes that are desirable from heir perspective. Faculty will have an interest in learning whether the new curriculum they develop is more effective than the one it replaces and assessment can be introduced at this point as the tool that provides evidence of that effectiveness.

A good program will be guided by a plan that begins with clearly stated goals and objectives . . . In the academy, programs should be based on the outcomes for student learning and development that faculty (and other stakeholders) believe to be important. If objectives are stated in terms of what students should know and be able to do, suing action verbs, it will be relatively easy to see what assessment measures are most appropriate. . . In addition to specific objectives and multiple measures, a plan for assessment should include a timetable . . . It is neither feasible in terms of people’s time and other resources nor necessary to use every assessment tool every semester, or even every year. But there should be a schedule for applying every relevant measure over a period of years.