The Scholarly Questions of Assessment

[T]he basic questions of assessment are scholarly in the best sense:

--We’re spending time and resources trying to achieve student learning—is it working?
--When we claim to be graduating students with qualities like “critical thinking” or “scientific literacy,” do we have evidence of our claims?
--We have the impression that our students are weak in area $X$—would more systematic research back up this impression and help us understand the weakness more thoroughly?
--When we identify a weakness in our students’ learning, how can we best address the problem?
--How can we improve learning most effectively in a time of tight resources?

The Benefits of Assessment

Assessment need not be complicated, and rightly used it can be a powerful instrument for improvement. Good information in the right hands is potentially the best lever for change. If assessment is done properly, it can provide a basis for wiser planning, budgeting, and change in curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, programming, and student support, rather than wasting resources on the latest educational fad or on vague notions about what might be effective . . . . Further careful attention to students’ learning by departments and the institution can help create a climate of caring and engagement that supports students’ own commitment to their learning.

From the Chapter 1, pp. 5-6, of Assessment Clear and Simple; A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education by Barbara E. Walvoord (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004)