While its mission, strategic plan, and goals give broader direction to the College, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) places great importance in identifying expected outcomes, assessing the achievement of these outcomes, and providing evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results. Requirements from the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) policy manual and the following goals in the College’s strategic plan specifically provide the impetus for institutional effectiveness:

- **VCCS Policy 8.0.2 – College Planning**: The planning and evaluation processes established at each college should reflect local and regional needs, meet accreditation requirements, and support system-level goals.

- **VCCS Policy 8.2.1.0 – Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Reporting**: Each community college shall maintain a comprehensive planning and evaluation process to promote quality and to demonstrate institutional effectiveness. Colleges shall use a variety of methods to evaluate institutional effectiveness, and shall measure student achievement through outcomes assessment.

- **NOVA Goal I. Student Success**: Northern Virginia Community College will move into the top tier of community colleges with respect to the key indicators of student success.

- **NOVA Goal IV. Excellence**: Northern Virginia Community College will develop ten focal points of excellence in its educational programs and services that will be benchmarked to the best in the nation and strategic to building the College’s overall reputation for quality.

NOVA measures the effectiveness of its educational programs and administrative and educational support services through systematic, integrated, and ongoing planning and assessment processes. NOVA has an integrated multi-pronged planning and evaluation process for identifying and assessing strategic and operational goals.

1. The long-term strategic planning process focuses on reviewing, assessing, and revising the College’s strategic goals that are detailed in NOVA’s Strategic Plan on a three-year cycle.
2. The annual college-level planning processes (the annual planning evaluation and cycle) are linked to the strategic goals of the College and focus on identifying and assessing college-wide goals and outcomes on a yearly basis.
3. NOVA’s educational programs and administrative and educational support service units engage in ongoing assessment to determine whether they achieve the goals and outcomes they set each year.
4) NOVA’s educational programs and administrative and educational support service units also incorporate the results of these assessments in the planning and evaluation process to make improvements to the services the College offers its students.

**Improvements to Planning and Assessment Processes of Educational Programs and Administrative and Educational Support Services**

Since its reaffirmation in 2002, NOVA had made considerable progress in providing structure and oversight for assessing the effectiveness of its various components, including educational programs and administrative and educational support service units. In 2004-2005, NOVA’s leadership completed a needs assessment of the College’s planning and evaluation processes and made major changes in those processes. The College also conducted a gap analysis in 2007-08 in order to identify areas in need of focus and adjustment. Based on the analysis, NOVA made improvements to the following areas that relate to identifying and assessing outcomes and using results for continual improvement.

- Paying special attention to student learning outcomes (SLO), a SLO Lead Faculty was named for each educational program to oversee and coordinate its planning and assessment activities. This structure was later expanded to establish SLO Teams, so that each program has campus representation and more faculty are involved in the assessment process.
- Training opportunities for faculty and staff on SLOs were made available on all the campuses.
- Development of materials for guidance on assessing program goals SLOs, feedback, and follow-up on the process were increased.
- WEAVEonline, the online management system for documenting planning and evaluation, was incorporated into the planning and evaluation process.
- Changes were made to the assessment of general education goals. These enhancements included establishing a shorter assessment cycle; collecting data from more students than required by VCCS; and developing assessments for the two general education competencies that VCCS does not yet assess (Personal Development and Cultural and Social Understanding).
- The need was established for conducting an IE Audit of educational programs as well as administrative and educational support service units.

In addition to these above changes, NOVA also sought to increase the rigor and quality involved with assessing SLOs. While educational programs have always assessed SLOs, a review of NOVA’s evaluation processes led to a more comprehensive and in-depth assessment of student learning. Previously, programs included both SLOs and program goals with no significant distinction between the two types of goal statements in the documentation of their Annual Planning and Evaluation Reports. However, after receiving extensive training in 2009 from the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment (OIR) on how to write SLOs, programs were required to submit 6-10 SLOs; these SLO statements were then evaluated by OIR staff using a checklist and sent back for necessary revisions. After their SLOs were approved (regarding both content and format), programs then submitted a curriculum map in which they detailed the extent to which courses in their curriculum addresses the SLOs; mapping SLOs to the curriculum helped programs ensure that students are given the opportunity to practice and master these knowledge/skills/attitudes. The mapping process also provided programs the opportunity to strengthen the link between course-level learning objectives (which are detailed in the college-wide course content summaries, on which syllabi are based) and program-level SLOs. Programs were also asked to specify the assignments to be collected to measure student achievement of the SLOs.

NOVA not only made defining and assessing SLOs more systematic college-wide, but also added focus to integrating program-level goals with those at the college-level. While educational programs have established program goals that support NOVA’s mission in general, they currently report on at least two goals that are directly aligned with two components of NOVA’s Student Success goal: total number of graduates and course completion rates. Reporting results for these program goals (in addition to a program’s other goals determined by faculty) demonstrates how NOVA’s educational programs are contributing to the College’s mission, strategic plan, and goals.