Swarthmore’s approach to assessment has been catalyzed by our obligations to Middle States, but also driven by the principle that in our efforts to provide an exceptional learning environment we should be self-reflective about our goals and whether we achieve them. We believe that our culture dictates a variety of approaches to assessment and that we are capable of providing the autonomy needed to allow departments and programs to develop their own path under an umbrella of some unifying goals and aspirations.

Our academic assessment plan, initiated by a committee of faculty members in 2006 and recently modified, has three primary components:

1) Annual departmental assessment projects linked to clearly articulated goals for student learning and including direct assessment of student learning, discussed at end of year departmental “retreats,” and reported in the chair’s annual end-of-year reports.

2) Regular self-studies and reviews of departments (external) and programs (internal), every eight to ten years.

3) Course evaluations required of all faculty members – at least one each year by each faculty member, and departmental coordination of common questions and targeted courses. These are discussed with departmental chairs. (This component is currently under review.)

In addition, we are currently working to articulate institutional level goals for student learning, and to use these as a blueprint in helping to coordinate the efforts of academic departments with other areas that support student learning (Dean of Students office, Library, Writing Center, Study Abroad; Physical Education and Athletics; Information Technology Services, etc.)

As we have gradually built support structures for this effort and worked with faculty members on their projects (including Teagle participants), we have recognized the importance of providing a nurturing environment that encourages all efforts in the right direction, and allows projects to evolve from departmental needs and interests. While some of our departments have assessments that are stronger than others, all are making progress.

We have a way to go in having faculty members see assessment as valuable beyond the burden it may impose, but the discussions that this work has generated, within departments as well as across, have universally focused on what we want for our students. This is our inspiration for making assessment work at Swarthmore.