Building Bridges (and Buy-In) for Assessment and Continual Improvement

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Burnt Bridges

Although there are myriad and complex reasons why assessment at CSUSB was viewed negatively by most faculty and staff, most adverse feelings appeared to stem from perceptions of assessment as:
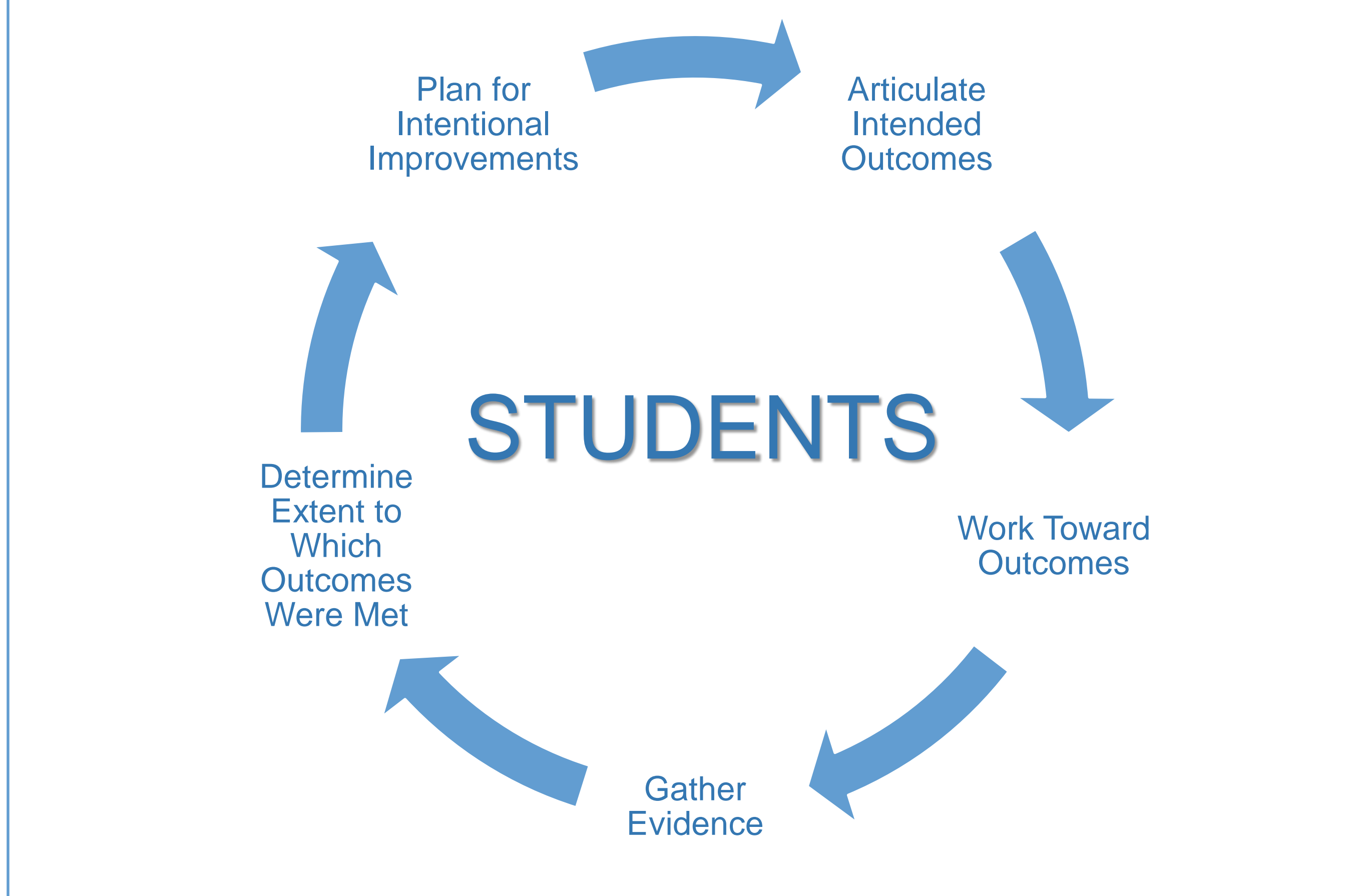
- Top-down, meaningless mandates
- Exercises in box-checking
- Only about accountability and/or accreditation
- Wasted time
- Wholly unconnected to teaching and learning
- Prescriptive

Accreditation/accountability need(s) → Outcomes articulated → Data collected → Report submitted
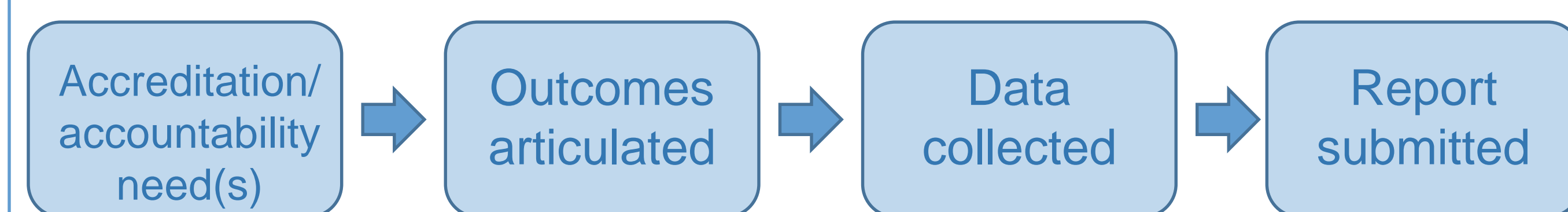
With this model, there was little to no time or cause for reflection, no intrinsic drive to delve into programs' effectiveness, no space for discussion or improvements…and any focus on students was completely lost in the process.

A Different Approach

To shift existing negative connotations surrounding assessment, faculty and staff needed to see the value in adopting a continual improvement process, one that honored their areas of expertise, leveraged the good work they were already doing, and kept students front and center.


Plan for Intentional Improvements → Articulate Intended Outcomes → Work Toward Outcomes → Gather Evidence → Determine Extent to Which Outcomes Were Met → (cycle) STUDENTS

Strategies to Repair and Rebuild

Honor Expertise
- Expertise of faculty and staff considered mission-critical to all work
- Institutional Effectiveness Associate *not* an expert in the various fields, but rather there to support program design, articulation, and assessment

Scaffold, Support, and Empower
- Wherever folks are is absolutely ok.
- Role as supporter of program design and assessment learning, not as enforcer of assessment "rules"
- Translate assessment basics into relatable terms programs can apply on their own

Flexibility
- No one-size-fits-all method or format
- Different programs have different needs…and that's perfectly alright
- Non-prescriptive approach to assessment activities, forms, and reports

Intentional Program Design
- Encourage the experts (i.e., faculty and staff) to begin with the end in mind
- Facilitate departmental conversations centered around hopes and expectations for students' learning
- Respect faculty/staff

Active Listening
- Necessary for collaboration
- Builds trust and openness
- Must be willing to tease out, hear, and honor what colleagues hope to accomplish with their programs, what they value, what they deem important, etc.

Tangible Workshop Takeaways
- No office/department leaves a workshop without *something* completed (or well on its way)
- Bulk of workshop time set aside for actual program design and assessment work
- Less talking head/lecturer, more facilitator

New Bridges

The approaches highlighted here—along with a strong desire to empower offices and departments to take charge of their own assessment efforts for the betterment of their own programs—has enabled campus to move forward in terms of establishing a culture of assessment. More faculty and student support services professionals are engaging in thoughtful reflection and conversation, building their *own* bridges for continual improvement.

Intentionality & Assessment

Program Design Processes that Honor Expertise — Continual Improvement for Student Success
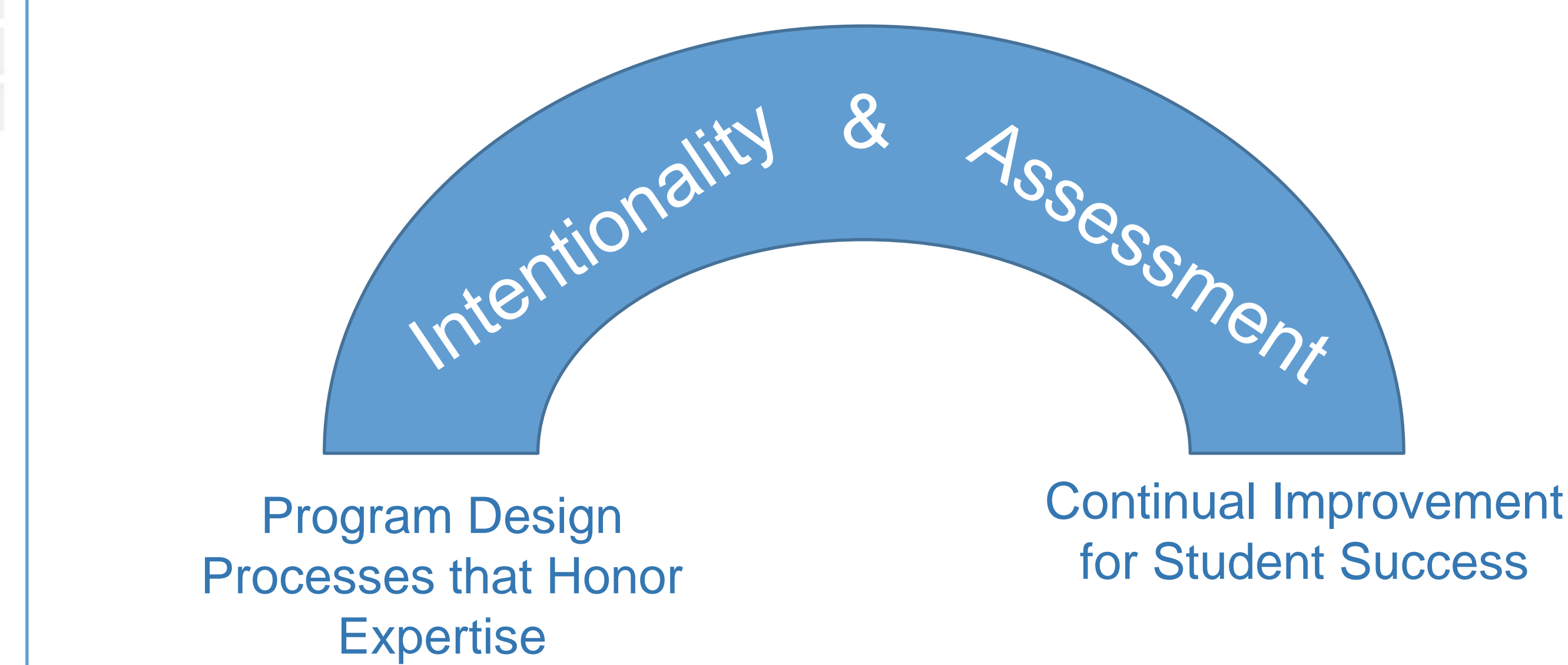
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Keywords:
program design
assessment
continual improvement
building assessment capacity