**Sampling for Assessment**

It's important to your assessment work to get an accurate picture of your program. Collecting information selectively can satisfy that need and reduce your workload. The goal is to select samples that are *representative* of all your majors, masters students, doctoral students (or whichever other group you're concerned about) when you can't examine every student's work or when doing so isn't useful. Below, we've described some approaches:

If you have a very large set of student work to draw from (or you know that your students don't vary enormously):

**Random sampling**: If you have a large set of student work (say, the final paper in all the EP2 courses taught in 2010-2011), you can select some at random from the entire set. For example, if you had 600 EP2 final essays in a folder on My.Files and if you wanted to select 20 papers, you might start at some randomly selected file and then select every $30^{th}$ essay after that. (The final provision ensures that you pick up essays throughout the set.) If you had paper copies of the essays, shuffle them as best you can and select the same way. While it is possible that your selection will under-represent some levels of work and over-represent others, when you have a large initial set, you've got a pretty good chance of selecting a representative subset.

Most programs don't have very large groups of majors. You can still use this approach with smaller groups. To decide whether random sampling is appropriate for your program, consider how likely it is that a random sample of your students will contain one or more outliers. (If you could find yourself qualifying your analysis by saying "Yes, but this group includes Student B, who is unlike any other student we've had in 20 years," then random sampling is not the way to go.)

If you have a smaller set of student work:

Another way to ensure that your review of student work provides you representative information is to examine work until it is no longer informative as follows: Select 5-10 papers at random (see above). Read them and note general characteristics pertinent to the learning objectives you are examining. For example, if you're examining whether and how well students evaluated alternative perspectives on a problem, you might read 5-10 papers, characterize students' performance on those papers (using a rubric or checklist, if you like). Then randomly select another set of papers and examine the same information in those papers. If the results of your second set look the same (or nearly the same) as your first set (and hence provide no additional information) then you have pretty good reason to think the material you've looked at is representative.

If you have a very small set of student work (less than 5):

Use all of your student work. If you have just a few students in your program, you can reasonably use every student's work on a particular task (say, their theses). In fact, if anything, you may want to combine work across several years so that you have a minimum of 5 pieces of student work to examine.