Planning and resource allocation at Cerritos College comprise a wide range of activities at all levels of the institution. At the top is master planning, which looks at the big picture from a long-range perspective. Examples include the Cerritos College Educational Master Plan and the Information Technology Master Plan. At the opposite extreme are the informal planning and decision-making that everyone does every day: The To-Do list on your calendar, for example, or the discussion with your colleagues about which of Plato’s Dialogues or which welding project, based on their experience, is best suited to achieving a given learning outcome. In between are formal plans and assessments, such as Unit Plans and Program Reviews. All these activities—even the informal ones, if thoughtfully done—exemplify three components of a cyclical process: Assessment (or Evaluation), Planning, and Improvement (or Implementation)—API for short.

Assessment/Evaluation

Assessment, simply put, is figuring out how we are doing before we plan what to do next. As you prepare today’s To-Do list, for example, you have to check on whether any items remain undone from yesterday’s list. Colleagues’ opinions about the advantages of using Plato’s Apology or the virtues of Miller’s MIG welders will help inform your decisions about class assignments. Every Unit Plan, before it lists goals and activities, first reports on the Unit’s assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. At the strategic and master planning levels, too, the completion of goals and activities is evaluated periodically, and the conclusions help shape the next version of each plan. And in Program Review, instructional and non-instructional Units alike assess the extent to which their desired learning or administrative outcomes have been achieved, based on qualitative and/or quantitative evidence, before deciding what their next steps should be.

Planning

Assessment results are crucial to the planning that follows. If the Program Review, for example, shows that students have achieved the applicable learning outcomes at a prodigious rate, then it is possible that the program need consider no improvements. On the other hand, if students’ progress has not met expectations, or if other issues or weaknesses (e.g., outdated curriculum, broken equipment, inadequate supplies, deficient space, insufficient staff to meet demand) threaten to impede future students in their achievement of learning outcomes, then the program must develop plans for pedagogical, curricular, operational, or other improvements that promise to raise the rate of progress and/or minimize the impediments to success. As part of its planning, the program must also determine what additional resources, if any, will be necessary to implement those improvements, and document those resource needs on designated forms. The result is a Unit Plan, in which goals and resource requests are all listed in priority order. Sound planning based on Program Review and other assessment results occurs similarly in non-instructional Units.

Unit Plan goals that are sufficiently important, or that echo goals in other Unit Plans, are rolled up into Division and Area goals, and Unit resource requests are merged into Division and Area resource request lists, in structured discussions by Division and Area managers. The Area discussions take into consideration the College’s Educational Master Plan and applicable college-wide Master Plans as well. All Area managers then review all the Area Plans, to identify common themes and reconcile any issues that otherwise might have caused Areas to work at cross-purposes. With substantial input from the Planning and Budget Committee, the Executive Council evaluates Area resource requests in
light of the College’s Mission, Educational Master Plan, and college-wide Master Plans, and merges the Area resource priority lists into a single College-wide priority list. Then the resource requests enter the College budget development process, and are funded in priority order to the extent that actual revenues permit.

**Improvement/Implementation**

In the following fiscal year, Units begin implementing all the program or service improvements and goal-directed activities that do not require additional resources, as well as those improvements and goal-directed activities that do require additional resources to the extent that those resources are available. Program or service improvement and goal achievement are not the final steps, however. Instead, the whole process begins again: assessment of the extent to which desired learning or administrative outcomes have been achieved with the improvements in place, planning for further improvements and other goals, and implementation, in an annual cycle of continuous improvement.

Below is a diagram summarizing API at Cerritos: