EXPLORING STRATEGIES THAT ENHANCE ASSESSMENT IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

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Abstract

As the educational accountability movement has swept the nation, higher educational professionals have sought to effectively respond to demands to provide evidence of the outcomes of their efforts. Student affairs professionals, in an attempt to capture the essence of their contribution to the college experience, have relied on satisfaction and participation data as measures of success. With a recent emphasis on measuring learning, as well as on measuring the impact of educational efforts on student outcomes, student affairs professionals have struggled to successfully navigate the complex environment of assessment, and specifically on using assessment for the purpose of continuous improvement. This qualitative case study examined the role of assessment committees in creating a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs, where the practice of using assessment for continuous improvement is created or sustained. The researcher interviewed participants using semi-structured questions, observed meetings and reviewed documents. Through the lens of Eckel and Kezar’s (2003) mobile model for transformational change, findings revealed that assessment committees are influential in engaging student affairs professionals in assessment activities, help them to think differently about their work and the role of assessment in their professional activities, create an opportunity for a “champion” of assessment to emerge and allow for various mechanisms to develop that support and change the culture of assessment.

*Keywords*: assessment in student affairs, culture of evidence, culture of assessment, assessment committees, assessment in higher education
Dedication

This work is dedicated to Frederick and Marjorie Smits, my most loving and encouraging parents, who instilled in me, and in all of their children, a love of learning, and a profound respect for the value of education. Their hard work and sacrifice, sense of adventure, and commitment to our family, provided us with so many opportunities to experience the world, and to view life as a world of possibilities. It was the greatest gift of all...
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Table of Contents .......................................................................................................................... 5

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................... 8

Chapter I: Introduction ................................................................................................................... 10

Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................................. 10

Significance of Research Problem .............................................................................................. 11

Positionality Statement ................................................................................................................. 12

Purpose of Study ............................................................................................................................ 14

Research Question and Goals ........................................................................................................ 14

Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 14

Definition of Key Terms ............................................................................................................... 20

Organization of the Thesis ............................................................................................................. 22

Chapter II: Literature Review ........................................................................................................ 23

Assessment Movement in Higher Education .............................................................................. 23

Evolution of Assessment in Student Affairs ............................................................................... 29

Future of Assessment in Student Affairs: A Culture of Evidence ............................................... 37

Need for Further Study .................................................................................................................. 42

Literature Review Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 43

Chapter III: Methodology .............................................................................................................. 46

Research Design ............................................................................................................................ 46
Appendix B: Individual Participant Recruitment Letter.................................................................112

Appendix C: Interview Protocol ........................................................................................................113

Appendix D: Signed Consent Document..........................................................................................114
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Henning’s 3x5 Plan for Cultivating Assessment in Student Affairs</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Years in Profession, Gender, and Professional Area</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Themes Emerging from the Research Question</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Documents Reviewed by Date of Document</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1  The Mobile Model for Transformational Change............................................................. 19
Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Postsecondary education is under assault – from politicians who are demanding accountability, from employers who are questioning outcomes, and from citizens who are scrutinizing expenditures (Blimling, 2013; Ewell, 2002; Halpern, 1987; Resnick & Goulden, 1987; Scott, 1996). Although K-12 educators have faced intense scrutiny for decades, colleges and universities entered the fray more recently, criticized for failing to adequately prepare students for the demands of the 21st century workforce (Banta, 2007; U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2006), admonished for needing to improve the effectiveness in higher education (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education[NCPPHE], 2006), and lambasted for dramatic increases in costs (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010; Mumper & Freeman, 2005). External stakeholders, including public policy analysts, scholars, legislators, and parents, are demanding that colleges and universities report on the impact of the college experience on learning, retention, persistence, and graduation (Carey, 2007; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; White House, 2013).

Within higher education institutions, student affairs professionals have also been directed to measure the contributions of their programs and services to student learning, development, and overall student success (Barham & Scott, 2006; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Given that student affairs has historically focused on “providing services to support student achievement and institutional missions and creating programs and environments outside the classroom to complement students’ experiences in the curriculum” (Porterfield, Roper, & Whitt, 2011, p. 2), the pressure to measure the effectiveness of these efforts resulted in a need for supporting the retraining of student affairs professionals (Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Recognizing that student affairs
practitioners possess a wide variation of skills and levels of expertise related to assessment, student affairs leaders began to seek methods to support the professional development and enhancement of the skills, ability, and knowledge necessary to be competent in this area. Scholars are now suggesting the adoption of a “culture of evidence” or a “culture of assessment” as a strategy for not only developing the professional expertise of student affairs practitioners, but also to create an environment where these practitioners can develop appropriate strategies to integrate assessment activities into their work (Blimling, 2013; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010; Oburn, 2005; Schuh, 2013).

Although many components of student affairs assessment have been explored by scholars, including the competencies of new professionals and middle managers (Hoffman, 2010; Timm, 2006), the importance of leadership (Bresciani, 2006; Julian, 2013), as well as the challenges, barriers, and related strategies to incorporating assessment into the profession (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, 2013; Bresciani, Moore Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009), recent studies have recommended the need for establishing stronger assessment cultures within student affairs (Timm, 2006). As the task of creating or sustaining a culture of assessment is typically assigned to individuals (assessment coordinators) or working groups (assessment committees), what is needed is an in-depth exploration of how the assignment of assessment responsibility to these individuals or groups enhances the use of assessment in student affairs, specifically whether or not assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Not only are institutions being held accountable by state coordinating boards and regional accreditors to provide evidence of student learning, but they are also expected to provide evidence that they use assessment results for continuous improvement (Eaton, 2007; Ewell, 2002). As
assessment efforts increase at colleges and universities across the country, student affairs professionals have struggled with providing evidence of student learning and instead provided evidence of student participation in their programs and activities (Oburn, 2005). Student affairs divisions, wrestling with numerous challenges to assessment, such as lack of time, resources and collaboration with academic affairs, as well as issues of trust, lag behind in institutional assessment efforts (Bresciani et al., 2009; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). Given the intense scrutiny education is facing, the student affairs profession must heed to the calls for measuring student outcomes and to become regular contributors to campus dialogues on assessment and improvement. Not only do chief student affairs officers need to identify specific ways to develop the assessment skills of student affairs practitioners, but they must also strategically create an environment where professionals use assessment results to improve programs and services.

Exploring the value of assessment committees within student affairs will help chief student affairs officers understand the effectiveness of assessment committees as a specific strategy for creating a culture of assessment in their division. Additionally, once cultures of assessment are established in student affairs, institutional researchers and university presidents will be better equipped to respond to external requests from stakeholders who are demanding evidence of continuous improvement.

**Positionality Statement**

Although I am a senior student affairs professional with a Master’s Degree in Higher Education, I had limited training in or exposure to assessment as an emerging practitioner. Like many of my colleagues, I have struggled with the identification of student learning and development outcomes, and even more with designing and implementing assessment plans that would effectively measure whether or not intended outcomes were achieved that might lead to
programmatic improvements. I have served on a variety of assessment committees that have been charged with responding to calls for evidence of learning and program effectiveness. Most recently, I serve as chairperson of our divisional assessment committee, where I lead our divisional efforts to integrate assessment in our professional work in order to respond to calls for evidence of effectiveness and continuous improvement. Over several decades as a higher education professional, I have been a participating member on numerous committees and task forces, some that have produced positive results, and others that have been ineffective or unsuccessful at accomplishing their intended goals/outcomes, therefore I am not predisposed to the value of committees in accomplishing divisional or institutional initiatives.

Despite my recent exposure to the area of student affairs assessment, over the course of my career within student affairs I have supervised many different areas within student affairs, including career services, orientation, academic advisement, community service, student involvement, Greek life, campus recreation, counseling services, and health services. Given this comprehensive experience in student affairs, my recent work within the specific area of assessment is situated within a framework of the overall profession, therefore limiting any potential bias in my approach to this study.

Given my involvement with the assessment committee on my own campus, this study was not conducted at my own institution. My experience, however, working within a division of student affairs and with a divisional assessment committee, allowed me to better listen to and explore the experiences of student affairs professionals at another college who have worked through the process of integrating assessment into their work.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate how one specific approach towards assessment in student affairs contributes to a transformational change in the ways in which professionals use and approach assessment in their work. Although transformational change has been attributed to leaders and leadership (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Eckel, Hill, Green, & Mallon, 1999), exploring whether assessment committees contribute to transformational change and subsequently influence organizational culture will help chief student affairs professionals to consider the value of this approach.

Research Question and Goals

The primary question of this research study is: *In what ways do assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of evidence within a division of Student Affairs?* The goal of this research was to explore whether or not assessment committees are a viable strategy for chief student affairs officers to utilize in order to create an environment where assessment is a routine part of professional practice. I was interested in understanding how medium- and small-sized institutions, those that typically do not have sufficient resources to hire assessment coordinators within their division of student affairs, can effectively respond to the calls for integrating the task of assessment on top of the demands already placed upon student affairs professionals. Exploring the value of assessment committees within student affairs will help divisional leaders to know whether or not the use of this strategy is a viable approach to creating a culture of assessment in their division.

Theoretical Framework

The mobile model for transformational change, a change process model, provides the lens for this investigation. Developed specifically to portray the complexity of change in higher education, this model describes various components of the transformation process that are
interdependent, working much like a mobile where “tipping any one part can upset the dynamic” (Eckel & Kezar, 2003, p. 148). Elements within the model include (1) core and secondary strategies that enhance change, (2) thinking differently by individuals within the organization about their role in the change process as well as regarding the future of the institution, (3) balance within the process and among the change strategies, and (4) the role of culture, not only to indicate that transformation is underway, but also to its role in facilitating or hindering the change process (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

**Transformational change.** In recent years, higher education has faced significant forces that are prompting change, including technology, changing demographics, new approaches to teaching and learning as well as pressures for accountability and assessment (Kezar, 2001). Various change models exist that can be examined in order to better understand more about how, why and when higher education institutions change. Recently differentiated from other types of organizational change, not only in intensity but in the ability to radically affect the outcomes of the change process, transformational change is that which “(a) alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes and products; (b) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (c) is intentional; and (d) occurs over time” (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998, p. 8). Within the context of change within higher education, the mobile model for transformational change describes what elements are necessary in the change process, the conditions related to change, and the processes that will facilitate change. This model can be used as a framework to examine the process of a change in the way assessment committees help student affairs professionals to integrate assessment into their work.

**Core strategies.** According to Eckel and Kezar (2003), five core change strategies need to exist in order for transformation to occur: (a) senior administrative support, (b) collaborative
leadership, (c) flexible vision, (d) staff development, and (e) visible action. Senior administrative support is defined as “individuals in positional leadership (who) provide support in terms of value statements, resources, or new administrative structures” (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 322). Collaborative leadership is defined as “the positional and non-positional individuals throughout the campus (who) are involved in the change initiative from conception to implementation” (p. 322). Flexible vision is “a vision that is consistent and has a targeted direction, and yet is opportunistic and does not foreclose important opportunities” (Kezar & Eckel, 2003, p. 93). Staff development includes “a set programmatic efforts to offer opportunities for individuals to learn certain skills or knowledge related to issues associated with the change effort” (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 323). Visible action refers to “steps in the change process that are noticeable,” or where activities are “visible and promoted so that individuals can see that the change is still important and is continuing” (p. 323). An important component in the model, the core strategies are also approaches that make people think differently (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

**Secondary strategies.** Transformational change will not occur with core strategies alone. Adding to the complexity of the transformational change process, there are 15 secondary strategies that occur less frequently, but when present also contribute to transformational change. The secondary strategies are:

- Putting issues in a broad context
- Setting expectations and holding people accountable
- Persuasive and effective communication
- Invited participation
- Opportunities to influence results
- New interactions
• Changes in administrative and governance processes
• Moderated momentum
• Supportive structures
• Financial resources
• Incentives
• Long-term orientation
• Connections and synergy
• External factors
• Outside perspectives (Eckel & Kezar, 2003, p. 110).

Secondary strategies can be linked to one or more core strategies, varying depending on approach taken at individual institutions. The secondary strategies and interrelated approaches provide a sense of balance to the mobile model, connecting in ways that provide strength and support to the transformation process.

**Balance.** A crucial element in the transformation process is a sense of balance in the change efforts. Very specific to an institution, balance may be necessary in the pace of change or in managing representative participation, in handling both internal and external pressure and feedback, or in balancing old ways of knowing with new ways of doing.

**Thinking differently.** The key element of the transformation process is to get people to think differently which leads to a change in their behaviors and priorities. During the course of transformation, people “develop new beliefs and interpretations and adopt new ways of thinking and perceiving that help create the foundation of significant change” (Eckel & Kezar, 2003, p. 49). Two types of new understandings develop, (a) where new meanings are attached to familiar concepts, and (b) where new languages emerge along with new ways of referring to the changed
institution. Several strategies were found to help organizations to think differently including numerous continuous and widespread conversations, cross-departmental committees, faculty and staff training, outsiders and their ideas, creating defining documents, public presentations, and making the case for change (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

**Culture.** Culture is a concept or abstraction that is used to describe a pattern of behaviors found within a group, which are driven by a powerful, yet often invisible force (Schein, 2010). Drawing upon anthropological models, Schein (2010) posited that included in a group’s culture are ways of interacting (behaviors, language, customs, rituals), standards and norms, values, rules, ways of thinking/knowing, shared meanings, symbols, and celebrations. Although culture is not easily identified in the transformation process, the relationship between culture and transformation cannot be underestimated (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). The elements of culture can be represented in three layers, (a) key artifacts such as organizational structures, planning documents, and institutional policies, (b) values and beliefs, and (d) underlying assumptions that are deeply ingrained in the institution (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

The relationship between the transformation and the culture is important. Given the deep and pervasive nature of transformational change, the process changes not only the culture, but the culture is a key factor in the transformation process. Change agents must seek to understand the existing culture, not only to prepare for its influence on the transformation process, but to also be able to interpret the subsequent effects of the change on the culture (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

Eckel and Kezar’s (2003) model is illustrated in Figure 1.
The mobile model for transformational change can be used to more deeply explore the work of an assessment committee within a division of student affairs, in order to determine the significance of the role of the committee in creating change. This model provides a lens for examining the change process that has occurred within a division of student affairs, in order to
specifically examine what role an assessment committee played in creating or sustaining culture of evidence within a division of student affairs within a college or university.

Using this theoretical framework through a case study method, both the process and outcomes of a specific student affairs assessment committee was examined to determine whether or not the committee contributed to a culture of assessment at the institution. This study explores the role of assessment committees in creating or sustaining a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs.

**Summary.** Higher educational professionals, including student affairs professionals, must respond to the internal and external demands to provide evidence of the effectiveness of their educational efforts. Although most student affairs professionals have little direct training in assessment, they must incorporate assessment activities into their work and use results to improve programs and services. Chief student affairs officers frequently either appoint an assessment coordinator or establish an assessment committee with oversight to coordinate assessment activities for the division. Through the lens of a theory of transformational change, the purpose of this study was to determine what role assessment committees have in creating a culture of assessment in a division of student affairs.

**Definition of Key Terms**

This section defines the terms frequently used throughout this study. The definitions for the terms are from the higher education and student affairs literature.

*Assessment:* “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional effectiveness” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18).

*Assessment coordinator:* a professional with designated responsibilities for managing assessment efforts within a division of student affairs.
**Assessment committee:** a group of professionals selected to oversee activities related to assessment.

**Continuous improvement:** regularly using assessment results to improve programs and services.

**Culture:** a concept or abstraction that is used to describe a pattern of behaviors found within a group, which are driven by a powerful, yet often invisible force (Schein, 2010).

**Culture of assessment:** a “set of pervasive actions and behaviors by staff across an organization (e.g., unit, division, etc.), focusing on the use of data in decision making regarding the accountability and improvement of programs and services” (Henning, 2015, pp. 11-12). Culture of assessment and culture of evidence are used interchangeably throughout this document.

**Student affairs:** Describes the administrative unit within a college or university that provides programs and services in the out-of-class environment. Often includes areas such as housing, career services, health services, counseling services, orientation, student activities or student life, and sometimes includes areas such as advisement, admissions, financial aid, registration, and athletics.

**Student affairs profession:** A “discipline practiced by of those who work in the general field and its numerous specialties. It is a body of knowledge, a professional literature, a long established professional philosophy, a theoretical base, and a set of commonly recognized jobs and functions” (Helfgot, 2005, p. 7).

**Transformational change:** one type of organizational change characterized by the pervasiveness, severity, intensity, and longevity of the change (Eckel et al., 1998).
This section provides definitions for commonly used terms throughout this study. The next section (Chapter II) introduces the body of literature on the topic of assessment in student affairs and introduces the theoretical framework that will provide a lens for the study.

**Organization of the Thesis**

After this introduction, the next chapter of this study (Chapter II) includes a comprehensive review on the topic of assessment in higher education and student affairs. Chapter III provides an overview of the research design for the study. Using a case study methodology, this qualitative study allowed for an in-depth exploration of the role of assessment committees in creating a culture of evidence in a division of student affairs. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. And Chapter V provides a discussion of the key findings, along with a discussion of the findings in relationship to the theoretical framework and literature review, as well as the chapter presents recommendations and implications for practice.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The accountability movement has placed significant pressure on educators to articulate not only their effectiveness, but also to show evidence that they are using assessment data to improve their programs and services. Student affairs professionals have long been proficient at conducting program assessment via participation and customer satisfaction, but have struggled with the evolution into outcomes assessment. This literature review places this study within the larger context of assessment in higher education, through a historical review of the evolution of assessment in higher education in general, as well as an in-depth review of the evolution of assessment in the specific area of student affairs within higher education, followed by a discussion of the future of assessment in student affairs. Finally, the theoretical framework that provides the lens for the study will be presented. This section provides an overall context for the specificity of this study.

Assessment Movement in Higher Education

The contemporary educational assessment movement began in the early 1980s when two external forces collided—national economic instability as well as intrusion into education oversight by the federal government. Despite the historic federal position that the administration of education was to be managed by the states, the U.S. Department of Education was created during the Carter administration in 1979 out of concerns for increased accountability and the need for closer regulation of programs previously funded by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Hawley & Sheekey, 1979). Additional negative attention, raising concerns on the outcomes of education, was presented in A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which shined
a spotlight on the failures of the country’s educational systems, and in *A Time for Action* (1986), a report from the National Governors’ Association, that recommended that states should determine what students are learning while in college. While these two national reports focused primarily on reforms in K-12 education, a results-oriented approach to education, including postsecondary education, was launched.

The calls for educational reform were resounding and captured the attention of those who cared most about higher education, including state politicians, parents, community members, business leaders, accrediting agencies and students, who began “to demand evidence that the large and growing amount of public money being spent on higher education (was) producing educated adults” (Halpern, 1987, p. 5). As a result of a “crisis in confidence in higher education,” stakeholders were demanding that colleges and universities be accountable for producing measurable results of learning (Resnick & Goulden, 1987, p. 83).

Concurrently, colleges were struggling internally with both fiscal pressures, due to the convergence of rapidly decline state support and rising costs, as well as demands for curricular reform, particularly in general education (Ewell, 2002). Additionally, the effectiveness of programs and services provided by colleges and universities was being challenged, with requests for evidence that these programs and services contributed positively to student outcomes (Blimling, 2013; Scott, 1996).

**Assessing student learning.** In 1984, another seminal report, *Involvement in Learning* (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education), urged institutions to move from measuring the quality of their inputs, that is, the credentials of those they enroll, to measuring the outputs of their efforts, that is, to measuring the learning
of their graduates (Resnick & Goulden, 1987). The report made three specific recommendations to promote higher levels of student achievement: (a) that high expectation be established for students; (b) that students be involved in active learning environments; and (c) that students be provided with prompt and useful feedback (Astin, 1991; Ewell, 2002; Keeling, 2006). The report also suggested that colleges should use available tools to gather feedback on their own performance (Ewell, 2002). In the fall of 1985, National Institute of Education (NIE) and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) co-sponsored the First National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education, prompted in part by a report of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education. This first national assessment conference provided an opportunity for higher educational professionals to explore ways to gather information to both improve teaching and learning and to provide evidence of institutional effectiveness (Ewell, 2002). The two converging interests, institutional accountability versus institutional improvement, were evident in the early higher education assessment movement (Ewell, 2002).

Early institutional assessment pioneers developed an institutional specific approach to measuring the educational outcomes at their institution. For example, Alverno College created an “abilities-based curriculum” along with individual student performance assessments; Northeast Missouri State utilized nationally normed examinations to judge the quality of their graduates; and the University of Tennessee developed a comprehensive multi-method of program assessment (Ewell, 2002). Subsequent institutional forerunners, such as Ball State University, Kean College, James Madison University and Miami-Dade Community College, helped to suggest ways to establish campus-level assessment programs (Ewell, 2002). States were mandating assessment, and college and universities were eager to adopt best-practices from peer institutions.
As institutions continued to evolve their assessment efforts, Alexander Astin (1991) reported in the introduction of *Assessment for Excellence* that assessment in American higher education is in a generally wretched state . . . in part because we are not really very clear about what we are trying to accomplish, and in part because we perpetuate questionable practices out of sheer habit, for convenience, or to fulfill purposes that are unrelated or at best tangential to the basic mission of our colleges and universities. (Astin, 1991, p. 1)

Shortly thereafter, AAHE published the *Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning* (1992), providing philosophical and foundational guidance for emerging institutional assessment efforts:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly state purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. (AAHE, 1992, p. 2-3)

The response to the calls for an emphasis on assessment was immediate and deliberate in both academic affairs and student affairs, where both professions began to reconsider their approach to student learning and outcomes-based assessments.

**Emerging learning paradigm.** Shortly after the publication of *The Principles of Good Practice*, a new paradigm began to emerge in the instructional milieu of higher education. Educators were challenged to move away from an Instructional Paradigm, where the goal is to teach, to a Learning Paradigm where the goal is on demonstrating learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). In an Instructional Paradigm, the focus is on the structures that support teaching—50-minute lectures, where the goal is to provide quality instruction. In a learning paradigm, the emphasis is on student learning. Assessment focuses on institutional performance as measured by retention, transfer, and graduation rates, as well as on evidence of student learning, and the measurement of the “value-added” of the students’ experience at college (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

For the next decade, institutions continued to develop their ability to measure the outcomes of the educational experience with a primary emphasis on the impact of general education and the learning outcomes of academic programs. Many institutions adopted a similar approach to implementing assessment, forming an assessment committee with faculty from various academic disciplines charged with developing an assessment plan for the institution. Most plans included a statement of principles, learning goals for general education and for each discipline, a request for departments develop an assessment method(s), as well as schedule for data collection and reporting.
(Ewell, 2002). Professional literature continued to provide support to academic professionals seeking to develop or enhance assessment activities, including books reporting on the wide variety of assessment activity occurring at institutions of higher education, to guides to various approaches to reports of campus-based practices (Banta & Associates, 1993; Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Palomba & Banta, 1999). A new skill set was in demand within the academy, professionals were being charged with assessment responsibilities, and scholarly publications and professional conferences developed to support the emerging profession (Ewell, 2002).

At the start of the 21st century, although firmly established in the mainstream as a movement, assessment had not created the cultural shift early proponents had predicted (Ewell, 2002). In 2002, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) published *Greater Expectations* which “called for improvement in the quality of student learning and challenged higher education to provide a practical liberal education that would prepare students for life, work, and civic participation in an increasingly complex world” (Keeling, 2006, p. 1). Scholars responded with practical guides on how to conduct assessment for learning, still primarily focused on institutional, academic disciplines and general education (Maki, 2004; Suskie, 2009; Walvoord, 2004).

**Using assessment to improve learning.** Although the initial impetus for assessment was driven by external demands for accountability, college and universities began to realize that assessment could guide improvement, and assessment practitioners began to question whether or not assessment could respond to the demands for both accountability and improvement (Banta, 2007). Articulating the specific, intended learning expected within academic disciplines allowed for the development of student learning outcomes that could be measured in order to identify what students were learning as well as areas for improvement in teaching and learning (Banta, 2007;
Maki, 2004). Shortly after a report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (DOE, 2006) called for a national comparison of student learning across public higher education institutions, accreditation agencies responded by acknowledging the need for institutionally-based learning outcomes, the assessment of the achievement of those outcomes, along with a determination of whether improvement was needed (Eaton, 2007). The emphasis on improvement prevailed, and accreditors began seeking evidence that institutions were “closing the loop,” using assessment results for to improve student learning (Middaugh, 2010).

**Evolution of Assessment in Student Affairs**

The concept of measuring the value of student affairs professional activities is evident in the seminal publications marking the emergence of the profession, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Shutt, Garrett, Lynch, & Dean, 2012). The first professional paradigm in student affairs emphasized the coordination of services to students and suggested an emphasis on the education of the whole student, all in support of the academic mission of the academy (Barham & Scott, 2006; Shutt et al., 2012). For decades, this included services such as orientation, student health services, mental health and psychological services, housing, and financial aid (Nuss, 2003). Amid the civil and social unrest of the 1960s a second paradigm for the profession emerged, where the profession directed attention to “student development” (Barham & Scott, 2006; Rhatigan, 2000;). During these periods, assessment efforts were focused on identifying student needs, tracking student participation in programs and activities, measuring student satisfaction, understanding campus environments and to benchmark services and outcomes at different institutions (Bloland, Stamatakos, & Rogers, 1994; Scott, 1996; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).
Emergence of professional standards. As the student affairs profession continued to evolve and expand, the need for comprehensive norms for professional practice emerged (Dean, 2013). Two national associations, American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) joined forces with affiliated professional organizations and established the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Student Services/Development Programs (CAS) with 11 charter members (Dean, 2013; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Student Services/Development Programs [CAS], 2012). CAS standards provide a context for comparing local, institutional efforts against professionally developed criteria, a standard to measure the quality of local efforts (Dean, 2013). Several different functional areas are represented in the CAS standards, including academic advising programs, career services, undergraduate admissions programs and services, and orientation programs, and were developed by the professional associations that CAS represents (CAS, 2012). Containing both standards, including essential elements required for good practice, and guidelines to assist in achieving best practices, the use of this resource exponentially enhances the overall achievement of the profession (Dean, 2013). Although the CAS standards originated to serve as a tool for program review, through a self-study process, they now also include strategies for measuring program effectiveness through the achievement of learning and development outcomes and encourage campuses to customize the use of the tools provided to meet their own assessment needs and challenges. Summarizing the benefits, Dean describes CAS as “a philosophy grounded in self-regulation, in understanding for the purpose of improvement, and in the belief that the ultimate goal of our work is enhanced student learning and development” (Dean, 2013, p. 32). Credible professional standards, such as CAS, will help higher education professionals substantiate their achievements (Cooper & Saunders, 2000a).
Developing assessment skills. In 1996, as the assessment movement was well underway in higher education, *Assessment in Student Affairs* provided the first assessment resource specifically designed to assist student affairs practitioners in the assessment of student needs, student satisfaction, campus environments, campus culture, and student outcomes (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Beyond providing the rationale, justification and urgency for the critical need of assessing student affairs work, the book offered a practical, comprehensive model for assessment that included: tracking usage of student services, programs, and facilities; student and other clientele need assessment; clientele satisfaction; assessing campus environments and student cultures; assessing outcomes; comparable institutions assessment; and using nationally accepted standards to assess (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; Schuh, 2009). A practical, how-to manual for assessment, this book, along with the follow up *Assessment Practice in Student Affairs: An Applications Manual* provided specific strategies for student affairs practitioners to design, conduct, analyze, and report critical assessment activities (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001).

A new focus on student learning in student affairs. A new paradigm for the student affairs profession emerged within the context of the education accountability movement, where stakeholders, including legislators, parents, and the public, begin to demand evidence of how student affairs programs and services contribute to a student’s education (Blimling, 2013; Smith & Mather, 2000). In a scathing critique of the profession, Bloland et al. (1994) called for a “reconsideration of the dominant student development paradigm” (p. 112). Their recommendations included that:

1. the field cease its identification with the student development model as the core of the profession;
2. student affairs return to the principles of the Student Personnel Point of View, placing academic and intellectual development at the center of its role;

3. the field re-emphasize learning as a cardinal value, using learning theory and student development theory as important tools to be employed in the facilitation of learning;

4. the student affairs division clearly identify with the institutional educational mission, particularly the philosophy and curriculum of general education; and

5. student affairs staff seek to participate more fully in the academic and intellectual life of the parent institution. (Bloland et al., 1994, p. 112-113)

As the paradigm shift from teaching to learning occurred in the academy (Barr & Tagg, 1995), a similar shift occurred in student affairs, where critiques of student development abound as the philosophical framework of the profession, and demands for institutional effectiveness resulted in a “clarion call to re-examine the philosophical tenets that guide the professional practice of student affairs and to form partnerships with students, faculty, academic administrators, and others to help all students attain high levels of learning and personal development” (ACPA, 1996). The Student Learning Imperative introduced the concept of learning as an integral expected outcome of the efforts of the profession, along with the traditional notion of personal development (ACPA, 1996). As a profession, student affairs continued to articulate the importance of an emphasis on student learning in Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 1997); specifically articulating that “student affairs educators who are skilled in using assessment methods acquire high-quality information; effective application of this information to practice results in programs and change strategies which improve institutional and student achievement (ACPA & NASPA, 1997, p. 4). In Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning, scholars called upon higher education professionals, especially those in academic affairs and student affairs,
to work collaboratively to enhance learning within the academy (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998). At the same time academic affairs professionals were exploring the assessment of student learning, student affairs professional organizations also actively engaged in the discourse. The ACPA and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) published *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004), which reinforced the role of the out-of-class experience in overall student learning, called for campus-wide dialogues, concerning the development of institution-wide student learning outcomes. This seminal document called for including student affairs professionals as partners in the broader campus curriculum concerning the development of institution-wide student learning outcomes (Keeling, 2006). *Learning Reconsidered 2* provided student affairs educators with practical strategies to articulate and measure the learning outcomes of programs, services, and activities (Keeling, 2006).

**Focusing on outcomes assessment.** The outcomes assessment movement began to impact chief student affairs officers when demands presented for evidence that their programs were achieving their intended outcomes (Bresciani, 2002). Although the focus of assessment had been on the academic program, accreditation standards began requiring assessment of all institutional programs, including student affairs, and the assessment of student affairs was considered less important than the assessment of academic programs (Pickering & Sharpe, 2000). Struggling with the emphasis on the assessment of student learning outcomes, student affairs professionals, focused instead on evaluating the effectiveness of the programs and services provided, not on the learning that was occurring. Further compounding the confusion for student affairs professionals was the notion of a “program” in the profession, which can refer to a comprehensive series of activities and services from a unit or department (i.e., orientation program), to a coordinates series of events (i.e.,...
leadership program), to a one-time educational workshop or activity (i.e., resume workshop) (Cooper & Saunders, 2000b).

Shifting the dialogue to include student affairs in the broader institutional discussions on learning, Bresciani (2006) provided a definition of outcomes-based assessment that specifies the intentionality necessary in the development and assessment of the co-curricular experience. In outcomes-based assessment, student affairs articulate what their programs intends to accomplish, specifically related to service and learning, then

- purposefully plan the program so that the intended results (i.e., outcomes) can be achieved;
- implement methods to systematically – over time – identify whether the end results have been achieved; and finally, use the results to plan improvements or make recommendations for policy consideration, recruitment, retention, resource allocation, or new resource requests. This systematic process of evaluation is then repeated at a later date to determine whether the program improvements contributed to the intended outcomes. (Keeling, 2004, p. 14)

Given the significant role of the co-curricular environment in the overall student learning equation, student affairs professionals began to realize the importance of articulating the intended outcomes of their programs, and in determining whether the outcomes were achieved as a result of participation in the program.

For student affairs professionals, this confusing arena of outcomes and outcomes-based assessment shifted their emphasis from traditional types of assessment (including participation, satisfaction, needs assessments and benchmarking) to assessment of student learning and development (Bresciani, 2006; Timm, Barham, McKinney, & Knerr, 2013) a clear area of importance for the profession, but an unchartered area for most student affairs practitioners.
Responding to the need to develop professional competencies in the area of assessment, ACPA published assessment skills and knowledge standards (ASK Standards) that described the “knowledge, skill and dispositions that student affairs professionals need in order to perform as practitioner-scholars to assess the degree to which students are mastering the learning and development outcomes we intend as professionals” (ACPA, 2006, p. 3), followed by Assessment in Practice: A Companion Guide to the ASK Standards (Timm et al., 2013). At the same time, ACPA and NASPA partnered to create Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators (2009, revised 2014) that included an area for Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER). Included in each competency area were foundational, intermediate, and advanced outcomes that can be used to assess levels of proficiency and to develop appropriate professional development opportunities. Student affairs practitioners began to have access to tools to assess and develop their professional capacities related to assessment.

**Comprehensive approach to student affairs assessment.** Given that service, learning, and development are all important philosophies of the student affairs profession, a comprehensive assessment model that recognizes the value of the contributions within each philosophy helps student affairs practitioners to develop assessment plans that respond to each component. Barham and Scott’s (2006) comprehensive model of assessment incorporates the foundation of professional standards and guidelines (e.g., CAS standards), institutional strategic goals and divisional mission statements and strategic plans. Objectives and outcomes can be developed within each philosophy, allowing for assessment efforts to be appropriately framed and evaluated. Within the area of service, student needs, opinions, satisfaction, participation, and usage of facilities can be considered, while in the area of development, student growth in areas such as psychosocial, ethical, and spiritual development can be determined (Barham & Scott, 2006). Within the area of learning,
what students learn as a result of participation in student affairs functions or programs can be determined. Suggesting that all three paradigms deserve the focus of planning and assessment activities provides a framework for student affairs professionals to integrate assessment into their work. Beyond data gathering, however, the use of the findings to enhance programs or services is critical and is considered the iterative element of the assessment cycle that “closes the loop” (Barham & Scott, 2006). Student affairs professionals can look for validation of their activities beyond their local efforts through by seeking out external peer review through professional venues, presentations at professional conferences and through journal publications (Shutt et al., 2012).

**Challenges and barriers to student affairs assessment.** Since the beginning of the assessment movement in student affairs, scholars have been reporting on the challenges professionals face in designing, implementing, analyzing, and utilizing assessment (Blimling, 2013; Bresciani, 2002, 2006; Bresciani, Zelna & Anderson, 2004; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Barriers include the lack of research and assessment expertise among student affairs professionals, a tendency for a lack of cooperation between student affairs and institutional research, a lack of priority from instructional computer services for data requests and reports from student affairs, as well as a lack of understanding of how to apply assessment results for continuous improvement (Moxley, 1999; Pickering & Sharpe, 2000). Distilling decades of scholarly reflection on challenges in student affairs assessment, Bresciani et al. (2009) identified eight common barriers including the lack of time, resources, knowledge, and skills, coordination of process, conceptual framework for assessment, collaboration with faculty, trust, and managing expectations. Although the lack of time, resources and knowledge and skills had been identified in previous studies (Bresciani, 2006; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), the identification of additional barriers that student affairs professionals face illuminates the scope of the problem, as well as the need for
strategies to overcome these barriers. Specific strategies were identified to address and overcome these barriers to assessment and include efforts to educate, clarify, collaborate, coordinate, celebrate, be flexible, and keep it simple; each with simple and clear approaches to combat assessment barriers and engage student affairs professional actively in outcomes-based assessment (Bresciani et al., 2009).

**Future of Assessment in Student Affairs: A Culture of Evidence**

As student affairs professionals continue to struggle with the integration of meaningful assessment in their work, scholars began to articulate the need for a cultural change in the profession, from the perspective of considering assessment activities as an additional responsibility, to a culture where outcomes assessment is the norm and using meaningful data for continuous improvement is substantially rewarded and professionally encouraged (Blimling, 2013; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Keeling et al., 2008; Love & Estanek, 2004; Oburn, 2005). Defined as a “set of pervasive actions and behaviors by staff across an organization (e.g., unit, division, etc.), focusing on the use of data in decision making regarding the accountability and improvement of programs and services” (Henning, 2015, pp. 11-12), a culture of assessment “reflects an orientation toward organizational functioning that is open to discovery, growth, and advancement” (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 102). Changing the practice of student affairs professionals, from one of program delivery and service orientation, to one marked by the integration of assessment into daily activities, takes patience, leadership, and flexibility (Bresciani et al., 2009; Porterfield et al., 2011).

As the emphasis on documenting student outcomes began to permeate institutions across the nation, the important role of campus leaders in cultivating a culture of assessment was evident (Maki, 2004; Suskie, 2009). In order to foster a culture of assessment, campus leaders were encouraged to value campus culture and history, to respect and empower people, to value
innovation and risk taking and to value assessment efforts, primarily directed at faculty and teaching activities (Suskie, 2009). A commitment to continuous improvement, through an ongoing cycle of assessment, was recommended as an integral part of an institution's planning and evaluation process (Maki, 2004).

**Strategies to create a culture of assessment.** Within student affairs, strategies for developing a culture of assessment abound and include involving stakeholders, developing a common language, building the assessment capacity of professionals, establishing clear and consistent expectations for assessment, rewarding the use of data for program improvement, and encouraging transparency with data (Banta, Pike & Hansen, 2009; Bentrim & Henning, 2015; Culp & Dungy, 2013; Duncan & Holmes, 2015; Suskie, 2009). Seagraves and Dean (2010) identified four conditions that create a culture of assessment in student affairs, including support from the chief student affairs officer, informal expectations, belief that assessment leads to improvement, and collegial work environment. Providing more specificity and direction, Barham et al. (2013) offered 10 specific strategies to build a culture of assessment:

1. cultivate support from upper-level administration
2. infuse assessment responsibilities into job descriptions
3. build common language among staff
4. provide ongoing educational opportunities for staff
5. orient new staff to assessment expectations
6. build confidence among staff
7. infuse assessment into existing institutionalized processes
8. build relationships across campus to increase support for assessment practice
9. celebrate staff contributions to assessment priorities in ceremonies and rituals
10. use assessment results in decision-making opportunities. (p. 75-79)

Other strategies identified by scholars include building infrastructure or processes, building trust and relationships, and regularly sharing assessment results (Christakis & Demeter, 2015; Christakis & Bureau, 2015; Woods & Schafer, 2015).

**Cultivating a culture of evidence.** Other scholars have examined the importance of the leadership of chief student affairs officers related to assessment, as well as the assessment skills and competencies of new professionals and middle managers, concluding with a need for establishing stronger assessment environments within student affairs (Bingham et al., 2015; Bresciani, 2006; Hoffman, 2010; Julian, 2013; Ridgeway, 2014; Timm, 2006). Most recently, Henning (2015) suggested a plan for cultivating assessment in student affairs to include three main domains of building a culture of assessment—foundation, implementation and support, that each have five components. Henning’s plan is represented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Henning’s 3x5 Plan for Cultivating Assessment in Student Affairs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission-Centered</td>
<td>Accountability &amp; Improvement</td>
<td>Vocal &amp; Unyielding Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Grounded</td>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Championed Across the Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome Directed</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Strong Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Specific</td>
<td>Transparent</td>
<td>Continual Skill and Knowledge Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Based</td>
<td>Ongoing and Never Ending</td>
<td>Robust Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first domain, foundation, suggests that specific elements are essential in order to support the development of an assessment culture. Elements include the need to be mission-centered, suggesting that a mission is critical within a division of student affairs as it provides
“guide(s) the overall work of the division,” and “provide(s) direction for assessment activities” (Henning, 2015, p. 15). Goals help to provide direction, suggest what work needs to be done, and articulate what the end result(s) should be, while outcomes are more specific and measureable. Framing divisional assessment within the larger institutional culture is essential, and consideration of a centralized or decentralized approach is warranted. Finally, assessment practices should be based on existing theory and research of the profession (Henning, 2015).

In the second domain, implementation, Henning (2015) recommended that assessment coordinators find a balance between external demands for accountability and internal pressures for improvement. Henning posited that assessment should be embedded into both learning and service activities, that all student affairs practitioners should be involved and engaged in assessment activities, and that “good, bad or ugly data” should be shared in order to tell the whole story (2015, p. 25). Finally, assessment must be considered never ending, not just a single activity. Henning’s philosophy is that “assessment cannot just be an activity. It has to be a state of mind” (2015, p. 26).

In the third domain, supporting, Henning (2015) indicated that strong divisional leadership in support of assessment is essential, along with an additional “champion” of assessment. The champion is a “person who motivates people when assessment gets difficult,” who “keeps an eye on the ‘big picture’ of assessment in the division, sees how all the parts fit together, and campaigns for resources to continue to develop the culture of assessment” (Henning, 2015, p. 27). A strong infrastructure, including processes and policies that support assessment activities are considered the most important elements of building a culture of assessment (Henning, 2015). Finally, an intentional plan to build the assessment capacity of staff, along with resources, such as training support and release time, are essential to creating a culture of assessment (Henning, 2015).
Coordinating assessment. The responsibility for coordinating division-wide assessment activities varies among student affairs divisions, frequently assigned to an assessment coordinator at larger institutions, or to a divisional assessment committee (Duncan & Holmes, 2015; Livingston & Zerulik, 2013; Roberts, 2015). Although a decentralized approach, where assessment activities are developed and implemented within student affairs departments contributes to a sense of ownership and commitment to the process, an assessment coordinator or assessment committee within student affairs can provide encouragement, direction and support to professionals, or build capacity within departments that are implementing assessment activities (Bentrim & Henning, 2015; Green, Jones, & Aloï, 2008). Assessment teams can include “early adopters or interested staff who can influence cultural change” (Roberts, 2015, p. 91).

Although college-wide assessment committees were commonly established to support academic program assessment (Brill, 2008; D’Allegro, 2003), most did not focus on student affairs assessment. Student affairs assessment committees (also referred to as assessment “teams”) emerged to not only monitor and track divisional assessment projects, but also to set the divisional assessment agenda and to develop the professional capacities of student affairs professionals (Barham et al., 2013; Henning, 2010). The typical roles and responsibilities of student affairs assessment teams include:

- Guiding assessment for the division by setting the assessment agenda
- Monitoring, tracking, and reporting on divisional assessment projects
- Monitoring the division’s strategic plan or other planning efforts
- Assisting individual departments with assessment projects
- Fostering collaborative assessment across departments
- Providing assessment skills and knowledge
• Sharing assessment successes and challenges across departments

• Serving as an advisory or approval board for assessment projects (Henning, 2010, p. 1).

As student affairs divisions across the country began to develop assessment committees, many struggled with the purpose, structure and goals of the committee.

**Need for Further Study**

Accountability demands, calling for evidence of the effectiveness of institutional efforts, have significantly altered the expectations for higher education professionals (Bresciani, 2006; Bresciani et al., 2009; Ewell, 2002; Maki, 2004; Suskie, 2009). As the postsecondary educational paradigm shifted from an instructional paradigm, with the goal of teaching, to a learning paradigm, where learning must be demonstrated, efforts to establish and measure student learning and to measure outcomes began in earnest (Banta, 1993; Banta et al., 1996; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Palomba & Banta, 1999). Although tensions developed as the core motivations of improvement vs. accountability were exposed, academic professionals realigned their work and developed multiple strategies to measure student learning (Banta, 2007; Ewell, 2002; Suskie, 2009).

Student affairs professionals, however, continue to struggle with the integration of assessment in their work, partly due to a lack of professional preparation and general assessment skill (Bresciani, 2006; Hoffman, 2010; Timm, 2006), but also due to the focus of the profession on the delivery of programs and services rather than on curricular offerings (where learning is the predominate outcome) (Bresciani, 2006; Bresciani et al., 2004; Bresciani et al., 2009). A comprehensive model of student affairs assessment that incorporates the areas of service, learning and development provides student affairs professionals with a framework for their assessment work, and values the assessment data that allows for improvement in student outcomes as well as in program outcomes (Barham & Scott, 2006). As the profession continues to evolve tactics and
approaches to assessment, it is still necessary to develop mechanisms, structures or strategies that promote the use of assessment for continuous improvement (Bresciani, et al., 2009; Timm, 2006).

In order to integrate assessment into the milieu of the student affairs profession, research suggests that a culture of evidence must be established where practitioners rely on data to inform the development and delivery of their programs and services, and provide evidence of learning in the co-curriculum that supplements institutional learning priorities. Scholars have explored the need for developing assessment competencies, have identified necessary conditions and strategies for creating a culture of assessment in student affairs, and have offered specific tenets on how to coordinate or lead assessment in student affairs (Banta et al., 2009; Bresciani, 2006; Culp & Dungy, 2013; Hoffman, 2010; Julian, 2013; Roberts, 2015; Seagraves & Dean, 2010; Suskie, 2009; Timm, 2006, 2013; Woods & Schafer, 2015). Scholars have also published books that provide guidance and support to practitioners and student affairs leaders, specifically related to coordinating and overseeing student affairs assessment efforts (Bingham, Bureau, & Duncan, 2015; Yousey-Elsener, Bentrim, & Henning, 2015).

As chief student affairs officers develop assessment committees and assign responsibility for assessment to specific individuals, it is necessary to explore how these strategies help to create or sustain a culture of evidence within student affairs, and specifically how assessment committees contribute to creating or sustaining a culture of assessment.

**Literature Review Conclusion**

In the third decade of the assessment movement in higher education, although institutions continue to wrestle with providing evidence of the effectiveness of the educational experience, there is clarity in the need to measure outcomes (versus inputs) and to use data to improve programs and services (Banta, 2007; DOE, 2006). The student affairs profession, once focused primarily on
student service and student development, shifted emphasis to include an emphasis on student
learning (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998; ACPA & NASPA, 1997; Bresciani, 2002; Keeling,
2004, 2006). The development of a comprehensive model of assessment, that integrated the three
paradigms of service, learning and development, provided a framework for a new assessment
approach (Barham & Scott, 2006). As the challenges and barriers to student affairs assessment
became evident (Bresciani, 2002, 2006; Bresciani et al., 2004; Bresciani et al., 2009), the need for
developing a culture of evidence in student affairs prevailed, where outcomes assessment is the
norm and data is gathered and used for to make improvements in the educational experience (Banta,
2005; Blimling 2013; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Love & Estanek, 2004). Scholars have articulated the
need to specifically cultivate a culture of assessment in the profession (Henning, 2015).

Chief student affairs officers are under pressure to provide evidence that the professional
practices within their divisions are contributing to student outcomes and overall institutional
effectiveness. As divisional leaders seek to increase the professional practice of conducting
assessment and using the results for continuous improvement, a recent approach common at
medium to small sized universities is to create a divisional assessment committee or assign
assessment responsibilities to an individual within the division (Duncan & Holmes, 2015;
Livingston & Zerulik, 2013; Roberts, 2015). These committees or individuals, with specific
responsibility for coordinating divisional assessment activities, may play an integral role in
changing evidence-based culture of a student affairs division, though there is little evidence of the
contributions of this approach.

Given that there are no indications that the internal and external assessment demands will
ever abate, chief student affairs officers must continue to document how their divisions use data to
improve their programs and services, as well as contribute to measures of institutional
effectiveness. Understanding how assessment committees and assessment coordinators directly contribute to the development of a culture of evidence will help chief student affairs officers as they create divisional approaches to assessment and continuous improvement.

Organizational change models provide a context for change at higher education institutions. Transformational change, that which significantly alters the culture of the institution, has gained recent attention by organizational change theorists. The mobile model for transformational change (Eckel & Kezar, 2003) describes what elements are necessary in the change process, the conditions related to change, and the processes that will facilitate change, providing a context for exploring the kind of change necessary to create a culture of assessment within student affairs.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one specific approach toward assessment in student affairs contributes to a change in the way that professionals use and approach assessment in their work, through an in-depth exploration of the influence of an assessment committee that has guided and supported student affairs professionals in the integration of assessment into their professional work. The specific research question for this study is:

In what ways do assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of evidence within a division of Student Affairs?

Research Design

To explore this research question, qualitative research was appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of a problem or issue and allowed for a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). In the constructivist-interpretivist tradition, interactive dialogue between the researcher and participants led to a greater understanding of the experiences of the participants, such that hidden meanings were uncovered through deep reflection, the intensity of which allowed for a joint construction of the findings, as well as an extensive exploration of variety of experiences of the participants (Ponterotto, 2005).

Research Tradition

A single-site case study allowed for an exploration of both the change process as well as the culture of assessment within a student affairs division of a college. Case study methods allow a researcher to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). A case study allowed for a detailed exploration of the role of an assessment
committee in creating or sustaining a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs that has attempted to integrated assessment into its professional practice by conducting assessment and using findings to improve programs and services.

A case study “is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Given that there are various strategies student affairs leaders can adopt in order to infuse assessment into the professional culture on campus, exploring this research question through a case study illuminated the ways in which assessment committees contribute to a change in the way student affairs professionals approach assessment in their professional practice.

Although the key theorists of this approach agree that a case study involves a unit of study within a bounded system, each proposes a unique set of characteristics for case study research and offer a particular approach to data analysis (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For the purposes of this study, Merriam’s approach (2009) provided for a blend of Stake’s simplistic inductive approach (1995) with Yin’s complex structured analytic approach (2009) and offered a systematic framework for the case study method. Situating case study research within the discipline of education, Merriam (2009) suggested three data collection techniques, conducting interviews and observations, and document analysis, along with strategies to manage and analyze data, specifically the constant comparative method, which was a meaningful approach for this study.

**Participants**

Purposeful sampling techniques were used to select a site using the following specific criteria:
• A student affairs division/unit that did not have a professional with more than 50% of their professional time designated for coordinating divisional assessment activities.
• A student affairs division that had an assessment committee responsible for coordinating assessment activities for the unit.
• A student affairs division where there was evidence that assessment results were regularly used for the purpose of continuous improvement.

Once the site was identified, participants were identified using maximum variation sampling techniques to identify both mid-level and senior student affairs professionals that were required to design, conduct or report on assessment as a part of their professional expectations. Given that the site was expected to be representative or typical of many student affairs division nationally, it was appropriate to use single site for this study as the lessons learned from this case are informative about the experiences of the average student affairs division (Yin, 2009).

Recruitment and access. Institutions were solicited for participation through regional student affairs professional organizations, through state-wide chief student affairs officers organizations, and through student affairs assessment listservs, and those that met the criteria for the study (using assessment committees, using results for continuous improvement and no single professional with more than 50% dedicated professional time on assessment) were invited to participate in the study via a general institutional participant recruitment letter (Appendix A). Institutions that expressed interest in participating in the study were asked to respond to a series of questions by telephone to verify they met the criteria for the study. Priority was given to those institutions where an assessment committee had been established for at least 3 years, but no more than 8 years, in order to allow for an examination of the role of the committee in the change
process. The institution selected met the criteria for the study and was in geographical proximity to the researcher. Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured for the selected case study site and access to student affairs professionals within the site was secured through the chief student affairs officer. Mid-level and senior student affairs professionals were invited via email to participate in the study via an individual participant recruitment letter (Appendix B).

Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality. The names of participants (and associated institution) were changed at the point of transcription and the researcher’s data files were password protected. Only the researcher and her adviser had access to the files. There were no benefits of participating in the study to research participants, other than the opportunity to share their experience for the benefit of the profession. No known risks (psychological, physical, economic, social, or legal) were associated with this study.

**Data collection.** Data was collected by the researcher through interviews, direct observations, and document review, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Creswell, 2012). Document analysis of divisional planning and assessment materials was conducted prior to a site visit. On-site observations of divisional meetings related to assessment were conducted prior to conducting interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with mid-level and entry-level professionals (e.g., Directors, Associate Directors, Assistant Directors) who engaged in assessment activities, in order to better understand how these professionals perceived their work environment related to assessment expectations and support, along with senior student affairs professionals (e.g., Vice Presidents or Associate/Assistant Vice Presidents) who provided leadership in the assessment process for the division. Interviews were conducted either in-person or by telephone according to the interview protocol (Appendix C), using
responsive interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Permission to audio record interviews was secured prior to the start of each interview.

**Data storage.** Site and participant names were removed from field notes and transcribed interviews and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure participant confidentiality. All research materials (field notes, transcribed interviews and electronic recordings) were encrypted and downloaded to a password-protected computer and external hard drive. Only the researcher (and advisor) had access to these files. Research materials containing interviewee information will be destroyed when this research study is published. Five years after the completion of the study, all remaining data files will be destroyed.

**Data analysis.** Transcribed notes from the document analysis, participant observation and direct interviews were analyzed, using Stake’s approach where the data is coded in two ways, through direct interpretation of specific information in a given instance, as well as categorical aggregation where the researcher creates codes on the basis of a collection of instances (Stake, 1995). This approach is appropriate in instrumental case studies where the emphasis is on understanding the phenomena and the relationships within it (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

Data was coded using attribute and in-vivo coding during first cycle coding, followed by pattern coding in the second coding cycle to develop major categories and themes from the data (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2013). Coding was done electronically, using MAXQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software assisted the researcher in managing emerging data, while also allowed for the analysis of the similarities and differences among the data (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2009). Throughout the entire process, data was observed, categorized and patterns identified, with a careful application of the constant comparative method.
of analysis through the lens of the mobile model for transformational change referenced at the outset of the study (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

**Trustworthiness.** In order to improve trustworthiness and credibility, this study was validated in order to assess the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Given the direct relational nature of qualitative research, the validity of this study was enhanced through triangulation, member checking and through a detailed written description of the case.

Using data gathered from direct interviews, participant observation and document analysis, evidence was triangulated to support findings. Member checking helped to ensure credibility of the study by sharing the emerging descriptions and themes with research participants for feedback and critique. Findings from participant observations were used to check the accuracy of the findings from direct interviews. Credibility was also achieved through the provision of a comprehensive description of the details of the case, including the setting and nuances of the interactions with the research participants.

Although I am a student affairs professional with assessment responsibilities, the study was not conducted on my campus. I did not have influence over the participants in the study nor did I have a vested interest in the particular outcomes of the study.

**Protection of human subjects.** This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles and with the approval of the IRB. Prior to conducting interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Signed Consent to Participate, Appendix D), which described the purpose of the study and gave contact information for questions about the study. Participation was voluntary and research participants were informed they could decline to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable, and also could withdraw from the study at any time. Interviews were recorded, with participant consent, and were conducted according to an approved interview
protocol. Research participants, who were professional staff members at colleges and universities, were not from a vulnerable or high-risk population.

**Conclusion**

This research project, which investigated the role of a student affairs assessment committee, responded to the problem of practice and helped to continue to explore ways to create an environment where a culture of assessment can be established.

The problem of creating professional environments where student affairs practitioners regularly conduct assessment and use the results to improve programs and services plagues chief student affair officers. New and deliberate approaches are necessary that will pave the way for the emergence of culture of assessment where data is collected, analyzed, and used for the purpose of continuous improvement.

Eckel and Kezar’s (2003) mobile model for transformational change provided a lens for examining the process of change. This model, which incorporates aspects of specific change strategies, institutional culture and the notion of balance, allowed for a comprehensive examination of the role of an assessment committee in the process of change, and provided not only depth to the investigation, but a framework for analyzing and interpreting results.

The case study methodology used for this study provided the structure for an investigation of the role of assessment committees in the process of creating a culture of evidence in a division of student affairs. Interviews of professionals who conduct assessment, along with observations of assessment committee meetings and a review of related assessment materials served the practical goal of documenting the role of the assessment committee in the process. Coding the emerging themes enhanced the richness of the description and provided the basis for the comprehensive analysis of the data. Examining the role of the assessment committee in the divisional assessment
work through the lens of the transformational change model served the goal of identifying how this particular strategy enhances assessment within the professional practice of student affairs. The findings from this study benefit senior and chief student affairs officers, as well as student affairs practitioners who are committed to creating cultures of assessment and in using assessment for the purpose of continuous improvement.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this research was to investigate how one specific approach towards assessment in student affairs contributes to a transformational change in the ways in which student affairs professionals use and approach assessment in their work. Specifically, the goal of this research was to explore whether or not assessment committees are a viable strategy for chief student affairs officers to utilize in order to create an environment where assessment is a routine part of work that student affairs professionals do on a regular basis. Using a qualitative inquiry approach, along with the theoretical lens of transformational change in higher education, the research question for this study was:

• In what ways do assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of evidence within a division of Student Affairs?

This chapter provides a summary of a single-site case study including data collected through interviews, observation of committee meetings, and document review, followed by a thematic analysis of the themes that emerged in response to the research question.

Summary of Study Site, Participants, and Data Collected

The campus chosen for this case study was a medium sized (~17,000) public research university in the northeast. Within the division of student affairs, seven professional staff members were interviewed with a wide range of professional service and assessment experience. Six interviews were conducted in person in a neutral location at the case study site; one interview was conducted by telephone. Interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time arranged by the researcher.
The median years in the profession was 12 years, with the most experienced professional with 25 years of experience and the least experience professional with 2 years of experience. Two interviewees were current members of the committee (one of whom was also a former member of the committee who returned after a 2-year gap in service); three were former members (one of whom was the former chair of the committee); one interview was a member of a subcommittee (only); one interviewee was a non-member of the assessment committee. Interviewees with a wide range of experience with the assessment committee were essential to the study, as the views of committee members and non-committee members are considered. Table 2 provides a representation of the demographics of the individuals interviewed for the study.

Table 2

*Years in Profession, Gender and Professional Area*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Member</th>
<th># Years in profession</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Relationship to assessment committee</th>
<th>Professional Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff 1</td>
<td>12+</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Former member</td>
<td>Student Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Current member</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Former chair</td>
<td>Student Affairs leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Former &amp; current member</td>
<td>Student Health Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non-member</td>
<td>Student Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Former member</td>
<td>Counseling Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-member; member of subcommittee</td>
<td>Campus Life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, using questions developed to address the research question. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask participants open-ended questions that related to the participants’ experience with assessment within the division and within their work. As the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by a professional transcriber and returned to the researcher, the transcribed files were then returned to the participant (electronically) to verify the content of the interview. Once confirmed by the participant, files were uploaded into a computer assisted qualitative software analysis program (MAXQDA).

The second set of data consisted of observations of two assessment committee meetings, along with one assessment subcommittee. Following the observation of each meeting, the researcher recorded notes that included content of each meeting as well as reflections on the non-verbal aspects and non-content based observations.

The third data consisted of a review of divisional assessment documents including minutes of assessment committee meetings for the preceding year, as well as minutes from 3 consecutive years in the early years of the formation of the committee (other minutes not available). Other documents reviewed included annual divisional reports, annual authorized assessment activities, materials that characterized staff training opportunities, and documents that articulate the divisional learning objectives and strategic priorities. The availability of these documents varied, with more available from the preceding year, with some available back to 2008-2009.

**Themes**

Interviews were initially coded using attribute codes to include participant demographics in order to provide context for analysis and interpretation (Saldana, 2013). Interviews were subsequently coded using in vivo codes in order to allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of what was significant to the participants, and as a foundation to the subsequent
coding identification of categories and themes. After the researcher became comfortable with the data, categories were created from initial codes that emerged from the data. Second-cycle coding began using pattern coding in order to develop major themes (Table 3) from the data (Saldana, 2013).

Table 3

*Themes Emerging from the Research Question: In what ways do assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of evidence?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>In addition to the leadership provided by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (SSAO), the committee provides leadership to the division on assessment initiatives, through the work of the committee chair and the general work of the committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Clear expectations are established for committee members (part of performance program, liaison to department); for assessment (that it will be done, that results will be used and shared); and as professionals (developing skills; integrating it into professional activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Members of the assessment committee work together toward shared goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Professionals</td>
<td>Through the work of the committee, professional development is provided to divisional members interested in developing their assessment skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with Challenges</td>
<td>Frustrations and challenges arise as professionals develop a new approach to measuring the success of their programs and services. Individuals, as members of the committee, dealt with these challenges in order to meet the goals of the committee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leadership.** Although the initial expectations for assessment were established by the then Vice-President, in anticipation of Middle States Accreditation, the details and logistics associated with implementing assessment within the division were established by the specific professional assigned to carry out those expectations (then Assistant to the Vice President). With the support of
the Vice-President, he established the Assessment Council, inviting one representative from every department to participate, as a means to create buy-in and move the assessment initiative forward. He served as chair of the committee for 7 years, until his professional responsibilities necessitated identifying another person to take over responsibility as Chair of the Assessment Council. Here he described why he established the divisional assessment committee:

I was very overwhelmed by it (the assignment of divisional assessment responsibilities), because here I had 17 units that, you know, two were on my team and were into assessment, Res Life and Counseling Center, the others didn’t. And it was a rift. It was a huge rift.

You know the remedy to that, frankly, was basically establishing the Assessment Council. Under the leadership of the Assistant to the Vice President (as chair), the Assessment Council engaged the individual units in assessment by providing a structure, setting expectations and recognizing success. He described his vision for assessment within the division: “So I like to think that assessment, and I might say rather frequently, that assessment should sort of touch every corner of what we do.” He goes on to say, “What I sought to do was make it sort of an item that was business as usual.”

Another member of the Assessment Council described how the leader of the committee was integral to their success, here describing efforts to recognize individual success:

And I think you know it wasn’t all work either. We would do an assessment retreat, as we liked to call it, at the end of the year and we would sit and talk, you know, about everything that we had done, and (the chair) created sort of a little awards ceremony you know to give out awards for you know great things. So there was that recognition.

Across the division, the Assessment Council was perceived as the driving force behind divisional assessment initiatives. Both members and non-members of the Assessment Council articulated the
important role the Council plays in establishing and disseminating the expectations for assessment. Here a non-member of the Assessment Council articulates his perspective on the leadership provided by the committee:

The divisional assessment committee, in my view, is coordinating all of the assessment that is going on across the division so they’re the ones that are looking at those learning demands and figuring out which assessments. One of the things that they are trying to do also is making sure that we don’t over survey and that we have priorities in what we’re looking at each year. So they sort of provide that sort of divisional vision I guess in terms of what we are doing.

Another member of the committee explains how the Assessment Council leads assessment efforts: (Referring to role Assessment Council plays in assessment across the division): “Yeah, I mean it basically drives it….. And it also gives the marching orders.”

**Expectations.** The expectations for assessment within the division were established by the Assessment Council, within the framework that was provided by the senior leadership of the Division, including divisional strategic goals and divisional learning priorities. The Assessment Council played an essential role in setting expectations for members of the Council, for divisional-level and unit-level assessments, and for professionals within the Division.

**Expectations for committee members.** The Assessment Council established expectations for its members who were expected to regularly participate in Council meetings, to coordinate departmental assessment activities and to continually develop their own professional assessment skills. These expectations were clearly articulated in advance and were written into each Council member’s job description. Here the chair of the committee explains how these expectations were implemented at the departmental/ unit level:
So we deliberately . . . built in assessment language into people’s performance programs, their job descriptions, . . . So I think there were three or four bullets that we sent to unit heads to build into their assessment person’s job description.

Another member of the committee reinforced the role the committee played in articulating expectations for committee members:

Basically I think it’s one of the things that they did, that the Council came up with these bullet points that go in your performance program.

**Expectations for unit-level assessments.** The Assessment Council established expectations for unit-level assessments, specifically that each unit would be expected to not only conduct annual assessments, but to use the results to improve programs and services. The importance of these assessments was addressed by the Assessment Council chair, who described how the expectations are delivered and reinforced:

a very clear set of expectations and, for lack of a better word, guiding documents that deal with sort of how we do different kinds of assessment activities. And this is what I mean by that— we (referring to the committee) annually hand out our student learning outcomes in a pocket guide that literally is small enough to fit in your pocket. And it basically details what the division’s learning domains and learning dimensions are, and how to write learning outcomes. So people are very, very clear about what we are articulating at a divisional level and how we believe the unit can plug into that through their programs and activities. We do that annually.

A former member of the committee described her realization of assessment expectations for her area:
You know, again, I think for a lot of us we were also realizing, and obviously it’s true, this was the wave that we were going to have to get on, whether or not you were going to be an actual official member, you know on the Assessment Council team.

A current member described how she comes to understand the expectations for assessment:

It is clearly communicated what we need to do. The work that I need to do for the Assessment Council is clearly stated repeatedly at the beginning of each year with justification as to why we’re doing it this way.

A former member described the expectations for assessment within her area:

we don’t do anything unless we have data. Data always informs us. We actually pride ourselves on when we write goals, objectives, when we actually do our work on a daily basis, we pride ourselves in doing work that’s evidence based. If it’s not evidence based, we don’t do it or what we do-do is we make sure if it’s something new we evaluate it because we don’t want to be doing anything that won’t work.

Timelines and deadlines were established at the beginning of each year, and a former member of the committee stressed that the Assessment Council chair “stays on top of it.”

**Expectations for professionals.** Through the work of the Assessment Council, all professionals within the division were expected to integrate assessment into their work activities, to assess programs and services they deliver and to use the results for continuous improvement. Even non-members of the Assessment Council were aware of the priority for assessment in the Division: “So that as a division I think you would have to be blind to not know that that’s something that is important to us.” This same (non-member of the Council) responded to a question about whether the expectations have changed in the short time she has been at the university: “Oh yeah,
dramatically. And you can see it . . . it’s just so much more of our daily you know operations, our daily responsibilities.”

Another non-member was aware of the professional expectations, and offered two specific examples of how professionals are expected to use assessment data: “Clearly you had to have your data collected and analyzed as part of your annual report.” “I think that we’re always asked to at least for me we’re asked to rationalize with data.”

This same non-member provided his interpretation of the divisional expectations:

So to me the expectations are now that we’re going to have a divisional plan, we’re going to fit into that plan, collect your data. We also do a lot more I think larger data studies than we did when we first started so whether that’s our student experience surveys, and we are doing a lot of fast five’s now.

The chair of the Assessment Council described how the professional expectations grew and developed:

And then that took some cultivation as things like that often do, but once you had people that were buying it, you know people who were drinking the Kool-Aid, and it took some of them a couple of years to sort of fully germinate, it sort of just clicked you know.

A long-standing member of the Assessment Council described the professional expectations for assessment: “As far as the overall some of the expectations on professionalism, that’s just kind of in the water here because that’s our expectation, overall, in everything that we do.” Later in the interview, this same committee member shared: “When we do a new program we have to assess whether a new program is working why that’s part of that bigger plan.”

**Teamwork.** Members of the Assessment Council developed a sense of teamwork as they worked through the process of integrating assessment into their individual units and into their
professional expectations. While some had a high level of individual commitment to assessment, others described a shared commitment to the work of the Assessment Council. Several committee members described needing to figure it out, and a sense of persistence developed as a result of their commitment to the team.

**Individual commitment.** In some cases, the individual’s commitment to assessment is what cemented their relationship with the Assessment Council or within their department related to assessment activities. On former member shared her enthusiasm for assessment work: “I love it as you can probably tell from my answers” and later in the same interview: “I don’t know if I’m giving you too much but I get excited.” Another non-member shares her passion for and interest in assessment, which explains her sense of commitment to the work of the committee: “Oh I love it. I’m like a little assessment nerd. I never thought I would but, oh, my God, I can’t get enough. It’s actually what I plan to do my dissertation on.”

**Shared commitment.** In many cases, individuals described their shared commitment to the work of the team, or the sense of support and encouragement they received from fellow team members. The committee became a sort of support group for its members, a place where they could turn for support and assistance as they struggle with integrating assessment into their work. The chair of the assessment committee reflected on the nature of the committee:

I mean, again, my sort of running joke is that the Assessment Council turned into a kind of AA. You know, it was “assessors anonymous.” People loved getting together and when we started getting together it really was to talk about divisional level assessment.

In separate questions, one former member twice mentioned the collegial relationship between committee members:
so a lot of us, you know, really, we were dealing with it so if we had, you know, an up or down day, you knew that you had somebody to go to. And I think, you know, it wasn’t all work either. You know, if I was struggling with an assessment project I knew that I could call a colleague, you know, my colleague in another unit, and say, I don’t know how we’re supposed to do this, so help me out here.

The committee work was difficult, at times, and the members of the committee took their work seriously and worked together in order to be successful. One former member described the members shared commitment to the work of the committee:

So it was a little bit of a foreign concept and especially for you know other folks who may not even have had you know, the assessment background. So we realized we had to develop the culture of assessment, you know, I mean to a certain extent, you know, get the buy-in and support from the appropriate folks and then come up with a plan.

In the early years, committee meetings were never cancelled, and members were committed to staying on task, as evidenced by this reflection from the former chair:

I mean, we did it seriously enough, that we always connected, we never cancelled an Assessment Council meeting in the years that I was chairing it. My wife gave birth to two of my three daughters while I was chair, so I wasn’t there. I was at the birth of my daughters but somebody else ran the meeting. You know, you always had to sort of continue to meet because it was important enough. I felt it was important enough that if you started to cancel it, folks just wouldn’t take it seriously anymore. But it was a collective push.

**Persistence.** Beyond the individual and shared commitment of committee members, there was also a sense of persistence among committee members. In the early years, members had to
work through challenges and uncertainty as they developed their assessment skills and knowledge and established a process and structure for divisional assessment. One former member (now current) described early challenges the committee faced: “You know, I mean, the first few years, I think it was a struggle just to figure out what we were doing and what we were doing that mattered.” The former chair described the early challenges: “We would start going down the road on something and we would be like, ‘What are we doing?’ and we would stop, pivot, start again.”

A former member of the committee described how, through the work of the committee, the process and expectations have become more apparent: “We’re clearer on the . . . , and I’m talking about as a division now, we’re clearer on the learning outcomes, we’re clearer on the rubrics that we’re working with. So we’re clearer on a lot of things.”

The culture of the committee, from the early years to present, was one of continuous improvement as reflected in this quote from a former member:

I am very proud of the work that our division has done with assessment, you know, first and foremost . . . I hope that we can continue that, you know, that momentum and keep moving it forward and just keep learning. Things will always change, you know, in this environment, so we just have to keep up with it.

Persistence with assessment was evidenced within the departments, as well, where they struggled with the expectations of the assessment committee. Assessment committee members served as intermediaries between their units and the assessment committee. A non-member of the committee (and department director) described the give and take between the departments and the committee:

So they’d go to the Council (referring to departmental liaisons) and would come back and say, “This is what I want and we’re gathering this data,” and I would be like, “Why do you want that data?” Like, how is that helping us move our program forward? And I think
we’ve really gotten there. Do you know what I mean? But it took a while to actually get there, so it almost became a trial and error with this, until we eventually got there.

**Support for professionals.** The assessment committee was instrumental in providing training and professional development opportunities to committee members as well as to all other staff in the division and in creating a supportive environment related to assessment for all professionals. As the assessment committee evolved and began producing results, the division provided additional technical software support to support and enhance assessment efforts. One former committee member refers to the overall support provided as “people, things, tools, and infrastructures.”

**Training opportunities.** Members of the assessment committee, as well as all members of the division, were provided various types and forms of training and development related to assessment, in order to develop and enhance their assessment skills, knowledge and competencies. A current member of the committee shared her perspective on training opportunities provided:

If you’re on the Council, there’s a lot of opportunity in the Council meetings and when we do assessment camps in the summer to do training on new things. But for folks that are not part of the Council we’re really conscious of people wanting to learn about it, wanting to build up their resume, you know, because this is an important thing to have . . . . One thing that has been successful is brown bag lunches. We do three a semester. And they’re on all kinds of different topics, and anybody can go to them. So if you’re interested as a staff member, you want to know more about assessment, that’s a great opportunity. We also have the (regional) conference, which used to be called a symposium, I think, is now a conference. So that is also available to everybody. We do it during semester break so if you want to shut down your office and send everybody, don’t be like, “No, someone has to work
and they can’t go.” So the support of us closing our offices whenever we have divisional trainings that we can shut down our office, we can send everybody, including our grad students, to these things. So that’s very much supported.

A non-member of the committee explained how professionals were encouraged to develop assessment expertise:

We also have a bunch of folks, it’s up to me, but we’ve gone on some of the conferences and have been encouraged to present at those conferences and those kinds of things.

A flexible response. As professionals struggled to produce meaningful assessment results, the committee and the chair were flexible and supportive of any attempts at assessment. One former member described how the committee and the chair responded to her fledgling assessment efforts:

We’re struggling with analyzing this data. We’re going to need some more time to be able to do this. (Referring to the response received), “No problem, that’s fine.” So, I mean, you know, it’s little things like that, too, the flexibility and just, you know, I think the overall support that we got help.

This same professional shares another example of how a flexible response from the committee was supportive as she developed her assessment skills:

Give it a try, if you fail miserably, alright, you move on to the next or you fix it. You only got 25 respondents for that . . . great, you got 25 people that actually responded. That’s more than zero. So he (referring to former committee chair) took out, I think, some of the fear and the uncomfortableness of assessment.

Strategies to enhance professional development. Beyond the initial expectations that committee members participate in professional development, the committee developed specific
strategies to encourage professionals to actively engage in the process of developing their assessment competencies. In addition to the brown bag lunches and webinars offered regularly each semester, a curriculum was developed, and incentives were provided to encourage participation. One current member of the committee described how the incentives motivated her to actively participate in the curriculum:

There’s a new education program that was developed but I don’t know the details of it yet because we have a working group doing that . . . it’s where you can earn . . . there’s three levels of it. You either get like a sticker, or a water bottle, or you get a cardigan I guess, which is the highest level. Basically I don’t know what the low levels are because as I’m on the Council, I’m pretty much at the high level anyways, and I’m like, a cardigan, that’s kind of interesting. Not a sweatshirt. It’s got to be purple or gold. I hope it’s purple because I want one. I haven’t seen them, but I want one. And basically you attend these webinars, you attend brown bag lunch, you go to the conference. It’s like a curriculum we have for the students like you do this many things and you earn your prize and you get this level. It was just introduced and I haven’t got the details of it. I just want to know when I’m getting my cardigan. If I’m not at the highest level, I’m like okay.

Technical support. Six out of the seven professionals interviewed refer to the technical support provided through the software product (Baseline) offered by Campus Labs. The former chair of the assessment committee referred to this investment as a pivotal moment:

A game changing opportunity for our people because they had it at their fingertips quite literally in the departments to do at that particular moment had surveys. It’s since has grown to certain to KPI’s, to rubrics, things like that. So there’s an infrastructure element there that exists and we’ve continued to do that through the Campus Labs Baseline platform
as well as the Compliance Assist platform. And we’ve furthered that with Collegiate Link, you know there’s sort of an involvement platform that’s very student based. So, that’s the infrastructure part of it.

There was a general sense from the professionals interviewed (including non-members, current and former members), that there was support provided for professionals wanting to learn more about assessment:

What is also good about this environment is we’re expected to do our best and if something doesn’t work it’s okay. In other words, take a change, try something unique. If it fails, you’re not . . . , it’s not a problem, it’s a learning experience.

Dealing with challenges. Integrating assessment into professional activities was frustrating for all those interviewed, and each of the professionals interviewed articulated some challenging element of their work related to assessment. Both assessment committee members and non-members expressed periods of frustration related to their work on assessment. Some committee members reported resistance from their departmental colleagues as they attempted to integrate assessment into departmental priorities.

One former member of the assessment committee articulated the frustrations she faced as the assessment liaison to her department:

I think that it can be frustrating sometimes too. You know, I mean coming up with the instruments and then having actually sit and look at the data and being able to make sure that you are evaluating it accurately and correctly. And that takes resources and that takes manpower. And, of course, you know, without it, without having the time and the resources sometimes it can be a challenge. So it definitely has its pros and cons.
A current member shared her frustrations with the changing framework for assessment and related expectations: “And, even for this year, you know, I’m not sure what that is” (referring to new specific assessment requirements). A non-member of the Assessment Council articulated his frustrations with interpreting data: “But you know you have to interpret the data, figure it out, and sometimes that data has nose, sometimes the question wasn’t asked necessarily the right way” and in using the data: “So in the beginning we had a lot of conversations about okay that’s great data but what does that mean and how does it impact future practice.” A current (and former) member of the committee shared the frustrations she faced within her department regarding assessment: “It would be easy but instead we struggle, okay, what are we going to do, because we don’t have programs that we have on campus because we need our staff here.”

Some of those interviewed (both current and non-members of the committee) reported that they experienced resistance from their departmental colleagues when they relayed the divisional assessment expectations. A current member of the committee described how her departmental colleagues were less than enthusiastic and what they would say about assessment: “She nags us about it, and we know it’s important, and I want to be helpful, but we kind of rely on her to remember everything.” Resistance to training was evident as well, particularly in departments that provide direct service to students:

Nobody in the health center, a nurse isn’t going to be worrying (about assessment training opportunities) and we won’t be able to let her go, you know. I don’t know, I don’t think there’s a lot of people that are just like, “Oh, that’s a great brown bag” (topic for assessment training).

A non-member of the committee described his early skepticism toward assessment:
I think I have a good vantage point in the sense of when we first started this . . . I was a little skeptical. Not that I was skeptical, but in the beginning definitely felt like we were doing assessment just to do assessment.

Summary

Integrating assessment as a routine and regular part of professional work takes direction, time, a commitment to develop new skills, and persistence, as the process is developed and articulated for the institution and/or division in which the individual works. Clear and flexible expectations are a critical component of bringing about a change in the way professionals think about and approach assessment. Expectations come in multiple layers—the general expectation to integrate assessment into professional activities, to do unit-level assessment, and, for committee members, to coordinate departmental assessment and to develop and enhance their own assessment skills. Leadership for the divisional assessment initiative came from the assessment committee, specifically the chair as well as from the committee as an entity. The chair provided the direction to the committee, whose members delivered the assessment expectations to the individual departments/units. Professionals, including committee members and other staff members were provided support to develop their professional skills include training, technical support, incentives to participate in training, and resources for professional development (workshops, conferences, and webinars.)

At times a frustrating challenge, professionals reported on the difficulties they faced in the process of integrating assessment, including their own skepticism, frustration and confusion, as well as resistance from their own departments.
Different Perspectives Presented

Two people interviewed described how their departments struggled to fit into the divisional assessment framework, each characterized as units that provide direct one-on-one service to students. While the resistance seemed to be coming from the overall divisional emphasis on measuring “learning” (and their perceived inability to do so), the representatives from these areas described not “fitting into the mold” and an on-going lack of buy-in to the overall divisional assessment expectations. A current member of the assessment committee described how her department does not fit the assessment mold like other departments do:

You know, it is very hard to do that (referring to assessing learning) in our department because we see sick students and there’s not always a lot of learning that goes on in those visits. You know, you’re just trying to get them better a lot of times. We don’t have a health educator. If we had a health educator it would be a no brainer. It would be an easy assessment. A lot of times we’re kind of forcing the issue to “check” that we have done something, instead of it being more meaningful.

She reiterated this throughout her interview, and, unlike any other professional interview, referred to her colleagues on the assessment committee as “they” (versus “we”): “And, so, you know, they’re focused on student learning and I understand that, you know we understand that, but we don’t have the resources necessarily to focus on that.” When asked how she felt about assessment, this same professional reiterated her struggles with the focus on assessing learning:

It’s a necessary evil. The UPD, university police used to be in student affairs, so they were on the assessment committee and they, you know, struggled like we did because, you know, what are students learning when they’re pulled over for going fast or something. I mean,
theirs was a little different, you know, but they don’t have programs. They were very similar where they struggled like we did.

Another former committee member, also from a health-related area, described how her area struggles with the expectations to assess learning outcomes:

But with us, we’re working with clients who have very serious psychiatric conditions. And so the learning outcome map, in terms of percentages of people at point A to point B . . . you’re not going to see the improvement. The measurement doesn’t match.

She summarized her departmental frustrations with assessing learning succinctly: “So, when you’re working with measurement with counseling centers and health centers in the student affairs division, the learning outcome model that’s espoused by NASPA and that kind of thing doesn’t really work.”

**Observations**

Two assessment committee meetings were observed as well as one assessment subcommittee. Each of the meetings were conducted semi-formally, starting promptly at the scheduled time and beginning with distribution and approval of agenda. All members were on-time and professional, though somewhat reserved. Agenda was consistent at each meeting, starting with updates from the chair, followed by a report on a major initiative (either the development of the Student Experience Questionnaire, or a discussion on the Student Learning Outcome Mapping project). Subcommittee reports followed (seven) with each report succinct and less than 5 minutes each, focused on the progress of the group. The last portion of the assessment committee meeting was “Around the Room” where each departmental representative reported on the assessment activities planned or completed within their area. The subcommittee meeting was less formal but
focused on a research project they were working on. Both committee meetings and the
subcommittee meeting concluded promptly on the hour.

Three key points were noted: (a) the tone of the meetings were professional and highly
focused on the topic(s); (b) participants stayed on task, and the expectation was to come prepared to
report out on progress, either within their department or on their subcommittee; and (c) nearly all
participants were highly engaged, though within each meeting one or two professionals exhibited a
puzzled or disconnected affect.

The professional behavior of the committee and subcommittee members that was observed
by the researcher seemed to be set by either the expectations within the division, or by long-
standing expectations of the committee. Professionals greeted each other courteously, but there
were no casual greetings, and very limited pre-meeting personal “chit chat.” Individuals arrived
promptly, focused and prepared for the meeting. Throughout each meeting observed, participants
stayed on task and when not formally prepared to present on either their departmental or
subcommittee progress, they apologized for not have their report finalized and instead provided
either an explanation or a timeline for task completion. There were established rules that seemed to
dictate the behaviors of the participants in attendance. Committee and subcommittee members
generally appeared eager, engaged and enthusiastic regarding the conversation with one to two
participants occasionally exhibiting non-verbal facial expressions or body language that indicated
either befuddlement or disdain for the topic being discussed.

**Summary.** Observations of the assessment committee and one subcommittee provided
evidence that supported several of the main themes in the interviews, specifically that the
expectations for assessment came through the assessment committee to the committee members on
to the departments, that the committee provided leadership for assessment in the division, and that a
sense of teamwork was established through their shared goal of furthering assessment in the division.

**Document Analysis**

The Assessment Council documents, listed in Table 4, were reviewed back to the academic year 2008-2009:

Table 4

*Documents Reviewed by Date of Document*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Council minutes</th>
<th>Authorized Assessment Activities</th>
<th>Brown Bag flyers</th>
<th>Assessment Camp Agenda</th>
<th>Assessment Symposium materials</th>
<th>Briefing Book</th>
<th>Sharing Results materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
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<td>2011-2012</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>Sept/Oct</td>
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</table>

In reviewing the documents, the researcher was looking for evidence to confirm specifics that participants provided in individual interviews. The documents supported that there are clear expectations for assessment, there are structured mechanisms to provide support to the development
of professional assessment skills, and there has been consistency in the approach toward assessment for at least the last 5 years.

The Council minutes, the Authorized Assessment Activities document and the Briefing Book all illustrated the ongoing expectations for assessment within the division. The minutes indicated that planned, scheduled assessment activities have been discussed since the formation of the assessment committee with early discussions focused on specific expectations for departments to establish 5-year assessment plans. In addition, the minutes provided evidence that a regular, ongoing component of the assessment committee meeting has been an expectation that members provide a unit update upcoming or recent assessment projects. The Authorized Assessment Activities document, which lists all divisional and unit level assessments within a specific academic year, provided evidence that all unit are expected to annually conduct assessments. The Briefing Book, a divisional publication that documents each unit’s progress in meeting established strategic goals, further demonstrated the divisional expectations for assessment.

The Assessment Camp materials, the Assessment Symposium materials, and the Brown Bag flyers provided evidence of the different types of activities that were offered to develop the assessment skills and competencies of professionals within the Division. Although different in their approach and purpose, each of these activities offered opportunities for professionals to discuss assessment practices and helped to create an environment where continuing professional development was the norm.

The Council minutes and the Authorized Assessment Activities document provided evidence of consistency in the approach toward assessment over the last 6 years. Not only were assessment committee meetings held consistently and in the same manner, but the expectations for
unit level annual assessments continued as illustrated by the Authorized Assessment Activities document.

**Summary.** The various documents reviewed provided solid evidence of the ongoing and continuous expectations for the use of assessment in every unit in the division of student affairs.

**Other Observations**

Despite an ongoing membership on the assessment committee, one member interviewed lacked a connection to the work of the committee, maintained a belief that her unit didn’t fit into the model of assessment, and devalued the training opportunities available to her and members of her unit. Interestingly, however, two other professionals cited her area as an example of when data gathered was used to improve the quality of service provided to students. One committee member mentioned a student satisfaction survey that revealed dissatisfaction with the wait time for appointments, which resulted in a change in process and improved satisfaction. Another professional (non-member of committee but subcommittee member) shared her knowledge of data that was gathered that indicated dissatisfaction with the telephone wait time to secure an appointment in this particular unit. The subcommittee member was proud of the work her subcommittee did related to promoting the use of that negative data which resulted in positive changes and improved satisfaction. Although it is not clear that these examples are separate incidents, it was puzzling that the professional from this area repeatedly expressed that the divisional assessment efforts were not applicable to her area.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study were collected through a case study at a public research university in the Northeast, where the researcher interviewed seven professionals employed in student affairs, observed two assessment committee meetings and one assessment subcommittee meeting, and
reviewed assessment related documents. The analysis of the interviews revealed that the assessment committee, through a team approach, provided leadership in delivering the expectations for assessment within the division. The observations confirmed the major themes identified in the interviews with professionals, specifically that the expectations for assessment came through the assessment committee to the committee members on to the departments, that the committee provided leadership for assessment in the division, and that a sense of teamwork was established through their shared goal of furthering assessment in the division. The document analysis provided evidence of the ongoing and continuous expectations for the use of assessment in every unit in the division of student affairs. In summary, the structure and approach of the assessment committee provided the means to deliver the divisional expectations for assessment and for creating a culture where professionals integrate assessment into their daily activities.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

As the educational assessment movement sweeps the nation, higher education professionals are being called upon by politicians, policy makers, scholars and parents to report on the impact of the college experience on learning, retention, persistence and graduation (Bingham et al., 2015; Carey, 2007; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; White House, 2013; Yousey-Elsener et al., 2015). Within higher education institutions, student affairs professionals, those with responsibility to support learning and to provide services that support student success (Porterfield et al., 2011), are also required to measure the contributions of their programs and services to student learning, development and overall student success (Barham & Scott, 2006; Kuh et al., 2005). Leaders in the profession, who recognized the challenge that practitioners were facing, including the lack of time, resources and sufficient assessment skills, sought strategies to develop the skills and competencies of student affairs professionals. Scholars suggested the adoption of a “culture of evidence” or “culture of assessment” in order to develop the professional expertise of student affairs practitioners and to create an environment where these practitioners integrate assessment into their work (Blimling, 2013; Culp & Dungy, 2013; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010; Oburn, 2005; Schuh, 2013).

Chief student affairs officers responded to these challenges by identifying either an individual (assessment coordinator) or working group (assessment committee), not only to develop the assessment competencies of student affairs practitioners but also to create an environment where assessment is a regular part of professional practice. This research explores the effectiveness of assessment committees in creating or sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs.
This qualitative case study was designed to explore the assessment activities, experiences and perceptions of student affairs professionals in one particular institution in order to respond to the following research question:

• In what ways does an assessment committee help to create or sustain a culture of assessment in student affairs?

Document analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of the existence of a culture of assessment at the case study site, along with preparing the researcher to gain an understanding of the evolution of assessment. Observations provided an opportunity for the researcher to discern the role of the committee and the perceptions of members. Finally, the use of semi-structured, open-ended questions during interviews allowed the researcher to engage participants in a conversational dialogue that provided a rich, detailed narrative of administrator’s perspectives and practices in institutional assessment.

Notes were made immediately following observations in order to capture the researcher’s insights on the operation of and dynamics in response to the researcher’s observation of committee meetings. Audio files were transcribed half way through scheduled interviews to allow for a review of interview questions to determine the pertinence of the interview questions. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed for emergent themes at the conclusion of the site visits.

Chapter IV presents five themes that emerged from the data which included observations, a document review, and interviews, where participants described their perspectives on the role the assessment committee played in raising expectations, developing professional assessment competencies, and creating a culture of assessment in their division. The themes that arose were:

• Expectations: Clear expectation were established by the committee for assessment to be done; clear expectations were set for the members of the committee (related to
participation on the committee and related subcommittees; clear expectations were set for professionals in the division.

- **Leadership**: Both the committee chair and the assessment committee provided leadership to the assessment effort.

- **Teamwork**: The committee created a sense of teamwork related to assessment work. Committee members worked together to “figure it out” and there was a shared commitment to the mission of the committee.

- **Support for professionals**: The committee provided training and support to its members as well as to other staff members in the division. The committee also advocated for other necessary resources (including software and technical support).

- **Dealing with challenges**: The committee worked through issues that presented, including issues of resistance and animosity to assessment work.

This chapter presents the major findings of the study, a review of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, and a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the study, as well as limitations and possibilities for future research.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

Examining the data collected through document analysis, interviews, and observations, the themes discussed in Chapter IV provided the basis for the four major findings of this study:

1. The assessment committee diffused the directive for assessment from the senior leadership that allowed for a ‘champion’ of assessment to emerge.

2. The assessment committee engaged the division of student affairs in assessment through representative participation.
3. The assessment committee created the vehicle that allowed for mechanisms to develop
to support assessment and to change the culture.

4. The collective outputs of the assessment committee led professionals in the division of
student affairs to think differently about their work and the role of assessment in their
professional activities.

The assessment committee diffused the directive for assessment from the senior
leadership that allowed for a “champion” of assessment to emerge. Nearly a decade ago, with
an upcoming middle state accreditation visit looming, the newly established leadership within the
division of student affairs faced mounting pressure to provide not only evidence of effectiveness,
but evidence that assessment data was being used to improve programs and services. The Vice
President assigned responsibilities for assessment to an Assistant to the Vice President, who created
a divisional assessment committee with representatives from every department in the division. On
behalf of the division, the assessment committee provided direction, established expectations, and
developed the assessment competencies of members as well as other staff in the division. Once the
committee was well established, members of the division saw the committee as the driving force
behind the assessment directive, rather than a directive from the Vice President or the senior
leadership in the division. When asked how the committee impacts her work related to assessment,
one member of the committee responded:

Yeah I mean it basically drives it. . . . And it also gives the marching orders. You know as
in you’re going to do this kind of assessment, once I have that, that’s what I do. That’s the
work that I do. We have some additional things that we have sort of always done, . . . but
pretty much it (the committee) drives the work that I do.
The chair of assessment committee (Matt) emerged as a “champion” of assessment defined by Henning (2015) as “a person who motivates people when assessment gets difficult” and the “person who keeps an eye on the “big picture” of assessment, sees how all the parts fit together, and campaigns for resources to continue to develop the culture of assessment” (p. 27). For example, a former member of the committee discussed the directive from the senior leadership in the division, as well as the emergence of the “champion”:

(Former Vice President) slid in as the interim vice-president and then she pulled in Matt in as one of her assistants. And focus for Matt at the time was to build up our assessment portfolio. So that’s sort of I think where our journey begins . . . . He created an Assessment Council and wanted representatives from each unit to sit on the Council . . . . You know Matt came in and sort of gave us what his vision was of what he wanted you know to see happen with not only divisional assessment but unit based assessment as well.

A non-member of the committee shared her perspective on their assessment champion as follows:

I think we’re lucky here at (institution). Matt is a big advocate for assessment and from when he was an Assistant Vice-President to now the Vice-President has always been very vocal about his push for assessment. So that as a division I think you would have to be blind to not know that that’s something that is important to us.

Although the need to gather and use assessment data was a directive of the senior leadership of the division, the assessment committee became the driving force in coordinating, organizing, and supporting assessment efforts. Clearly the support of the Vice President was essential, but as the committee took ownership over the task, the responsibility for assessment was spread throughout the division. At the same time, the chair of the Assessment Council (originally the Assistant to the Vice President and subsequently Assistant Vice President) emerged as a “champion” of assessment.
The assessment committee engaged the division of student affairs in assessment through representative participation. From its conception, the divisional assessment committee had representatives from all departments within the division, each with explicit responsibility for assessment within their respective areas. Participants described the intensity of the commitment and most approached the work professionally and seriously. For the most part, committee members participated actively in committee meetings, as well as in at least one subcommittee. Referring to the specific language added to her performance program, one member of the committee described her motivation to develop her own assessment skills:

It’s my job. That’s the biggest factor. . . . It’s in my performance program.

Basically I think it’s one of the things that they did, that the Council came up with, these bullet points that go in your performance program.

Assessment committee meetings are held monthly and are never cancelled or postponed. When a department has additional staff interested in participating on the committee, they were offered an opportunity to join a subcommittee, but the assessment committee was restricted to one member per department. One participant, a young, new professional, was eager to develop her assessment skills and was disappointed that she was not able to join the assessment committee; instead she joined, and actively participated in three subcommittees.

Most members or former members of the committees were very proud of their work on the committee, spoke of the challenges they faced together as well as the sense of community that developed. One former member proudly referred to herself as a “founding member,” another describes being “one of the first members of the Assessment Council.” Within the last few years, there was a “reset” or “refresh” of the committee in order to bring new members on board which brought renewed enthusiasm and engaged more members of the division in assessment activities.
The assessment committee created the vehicle that allowed for mechanisms to develop to support assessment and to change the culture. Over several years, the assessment committee was responsible for guiding and directing the assessment work of the division and the departments within the division. Although the division set strategic and learning goals, the committee was responsible for the mechanisms that developed that created a culture of assessment within the division. These mechanisms included training and development opportunities that increased the assessment skills, knowledge and abilities of staff; the infrastructure including guiding documents, frameworks and processes; formal and informal feedback and support and; sharing the results.

Training and development opportunities. Several subcommittees of the committee were created to support the development of assessment capacities for members of the committee, and also for non-members of the committee interested in assessment. The subcommittees “Brown bag lunches” and “Webinars” each coordinated 2-3 sessions per semester on assessment topics, and scheduled and promoted the sessions broadly throughout the division. “Assessment Education” was a newer subcommittee that created a formal curriculum with several components, designed primarily for assessment committee members, but open to all staff in the division. Another subcommittee coordinated an annual assessment conference, which evolved over time and now draws student affairs professionals from all across the region. Several members of the assessment committee served on these subcommittees and without their attention and commitment, these activities would not take place in the division.

Infrastructure: Guiding documents, frameworks and processes. Although the foundation of the infrastructure, including the guiding documents, frameworks and processes, is initiated by the senior leadership of the division, the assessment committee is instrumental in vetting and distributing materials to the departments who are responsible for conducting assessment and
reporting out their results. The assessment committee is instrumental in clarifying the specifics, including clarifying the language and the associated expectations.

**Formal and informal support.** Members and non-members of the assessment committee referred to the collegial and collaborative relationships that exist, that provided opportunities to seek and receive support for departmental assessment projects. The committee provided both formal support for departmental assessments, and informal support, such as encouragement to take a risk, and try something new. A former member described the support she received from the committee chair:

Matt would always say just do it. Don’t worry about who is going to respond. Give it a try, if you fail miserably, all right you move on to the next or you fix it. You only got 25 respondents for that . . . great, you got 25 people that actually responded. That’s more than zero. So he took out, I think, some of the fear and the uncomfortableness of assessment.

**Sharing results.** Two subcommittees were created to support the development of materials specifically intended to share assessment results broadly across the campus. Posters and digital signs were created in order to disseminate results to faculty, students and staff, and data points can regularly be found on the divisional website. The committee was responsible for creating, developing and disseminating materials to share assessment data with key stakeholders on- and off-campus.

The collective outputs of the assessment committee led professionals in the division of student affairs to think differently about their work and the role of assessment in their professional activities. Nearly all those interviewed (member and non-members of the assessment committee) reported that they discuss assessment daily, frequently or regularly. Assessment is discussed in committee and subcommittee meetings, in department staff meetings, in a one-on-one
with supervisors, and at divisional meetings and gatherings. The inclusion of assessment responsibilities in committee members’ performance programs led professionals to take expectations for assessment seriously and to seek opportunities to develop skills and competence.

Participants reported using data to improve their programs and services, to get support for new projects by “rationalizing with data.” One non-member, for example, reflected on her initial concern regarding negative data as follows:

In my experience I see us using assessment in a way to learn how well we’re doing something. Learning from what we are doing, how it’s going, and what can we improve. And one thing that (the former chair) has always said to me which was a very, very good piece of advice was don’t be afraid of negative results.

Those professionals who value assessment data see the data as a necessary condition for getting additional resources. Others see the data as an effective basis for marketing or articulating accomplishments, especially those related to divisional and/or institutional goals and objectives.

**Summary.** The assessment committee played an important role in the transformation of the culture at the case study site. Not only did the committee engage members of the division in assessment activities, but it allowed for a champion of assessment to emerge. The committee allowed for the development of training and support in the area of assessment, for the development of an infrastructure that supported assessment, for the development of formal and informal support for assessment, and for the development of an expectation for members to share the results of their assessment activities. Finally, the work of the assessment committee led members of the division to think differently about their professional activities and specifically about the role of assessment in their work.
Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Eckel and Kezar’s (2003) mobile model of transformational change in higher education provided an excellent lens for this study as it identifies five core strategies that must exist in order for change to occur including senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, flexible vision, visible action, and staff development, along with 15 secondary strategies that enhance change. Along with several secondary strategies, additional elements within the model include thinking differently by individuals within the organization, balance within the process among the change strategies, and the role of culture, specifically its role in facilitating or hindering change was well as to indicate that transformation is underway.

Given that the case study site for this study was a division of students affairs within an institution of higher education that was highly regarded as having a culture of assessment in place, the following will review the role the assessment committee had in each of the components in Eckel and Kezar’s (2003) mobile theory of transformational change including the core strategies (senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, flexible vision, visible action and staff development), secondary strategies, thinking differently, balance and the role of culture.

**Senior administrative support.** Eckel and Kezar (2003) emphasized the importance of senior administrative support throughout the transformative process, which can be provided by framing the priority of important initiatives, financial resources, incentives, and invited collaboration. The support of senior leadership at the case study site began with the assignment of assessment responsibilities to the new Assistant to the Vice President, and continued with support for the assessment committee, that consisted of ongoing briefings and progress reports to the division, fiscal resources for technical support, and consistent expectations for departmental and divisional assessment reports.
The assessment committee accepted the directive from the senior leadership of the division, to gather data and use it to continually improve programs and services. The support of the senior leadership was critical and gave prominence and credibility to the work of the committee.

**Collaborative leadership.** Eckel and Kezar (2003) identified the components of collaborative leadership to be invited participation, opportunities to influence the results, support structures, new interactions, and communication, all of which were influences that existed around or within the assessment committee in this study. At times the assessment committee was the driving force in collaborative leadership, at other times they were participants in the collaborative leadership process.

The assessment committee contributed to the establishment of collaborative leadership – between the chair of the committee, the members of the committee and the directors of the departments within the division. All contributed to the assessment activities of the division.

**Flexible vision.** Described by Eckel and Kezar as a “vision that is consistent and has a target direction and yet is opportunistic and does not foreclose important opportunities” (2003, p. 93), flexible vision is adaptive to the situation. At the case study site, flexible vision was present from the beginning, primarily from the chair of the committee who was patient and adaptable throughout the change process, encouraging individual to take risks, try new things, and learn from positive and negative experiences.

**Visible action.** Although the content of action could vary, Eckel and Kezar (2003) suggested that the timing of visible action is critically important, as it provides legitimacy of the change process. At the case study site, the assessment expectations for departments evolved over time, to a structured framework that requires each to complete specific types of assessments on an
annual basis. The efforts of the assessment committee produced visible action – assessment reports from every department as annually prescribed by the committee.

**Staff development.** Eckel and Kezar (2003) emphasized the importance of helping individuals to develop new skills, and change behaviors. At the case study site, the assessment committee was responsible building the assessment capacity of members of the division, including both members and non-members of the assessment committee. This was accomplished through brown bag lunches, webinars, an assessment education curriculum, a regional assessment conference and an annual assessment retreat.

**Secondary strategies.** Essential to the change process, secondary strategies overlap, interconnect and support the core strategies in transformative change (Eckel and Kezar, 2003). Although all of the secondary strategies were present in the change process at the case study site, the assessment committee was essential in creating conditions that advanced four of the 15 secondary strategies: setting expectations and holding people accountable, invited participation, new interactions, and connections and synergy. As the assessment committee was established, specific members from each of the departments in the division were invited to participate. Members understood the expectations to regularly attend, and to be prepared to report on departmental assessment activities. Membership on the committee created new interactions, offering opportunities for professionals to interact with colleagues in different ways. Finally, membership on the committee created a new energy around the topic of assessment and professionals shared a sense of purpose and collaborative spirit.

**Thinking differently.** A crucial component of the transformation process, Eckel and Kezar (2003) expressed the importance of “changing mind-sets, which, in turn, alters behaviors, appreciations, commitments, and priorities” (p. 49). Nearly all individuals interviewed, both
assessment committee members and non-members, articulated that assessment was engrained into their daily, weekly, monthly and yearly professional activities. They viewed assessment as a necessary (and valued) part of their work, that helped to articulate their department’s value to the division and institution, helped to secure resources, and helped to identify areas where change is necessary and appropriate. They were not afraid of assessment, but saw it as an important, critical component of their work.

**Balance.** Striking a sense of balance throughout the transformational change process is critical, and varies by institution and includes balancing the pace of change, participation, and balancing new ideas with old approaches. Several components of the assessment process at the case study site led to a sense of balance regarding assessment work. Since the inception of the assessment committee, the approach toward assessment was collaborative and cooperative, with the understanding of the need to build capacity of professionals. Additionally, the frameworks provided to the units, from the committee, were consistent including the annual requirement to share findings and report on continuous improvement efforts. Departmental representation on the committee was carefully managed including a “reset” several years into the process to involve more professionals in the work of assessment.

**The role of culture.** Eckel and Kezar (2003) suggested that culture helps to shape the change process, rather than being modified as a result of the change. As the culture of assessment emerged at the case study site, the professional, goal-oriented culture within the division seemed to provide the momentum, or inertia, to keep the new processes moving and evolving. The emerging culture of assessment became the energy that drove the continuation of assessment. Unique language emerged through guiding documents (pocket guide), along with traditions (assessment camp, assessment symposium), symbols (logos on documents), and celebrations (awards, post-
assessment camp gatherings). The committee, and the “champion” were instrumental in creating and sustaining the culture of assessment at the case study site.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

As the educational assessment movement took hold in K-12 education, colleges and universities were also expected to provide evidence of their effectiveness. Early assessment efforts within student affairs included conducting needs assessments, tracking student participation and measuring satisfaction (Bloland et al., 1994; Scott, 1996; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). As demands to assess learning and other outcomes increased, student affairs practitioners faced numerous challenges and barriers to improved assessment practices including lack of time, resources, competency, coordination of process, trust and managing expectations (Bresciani et al., 2009). In order to create a culture of assessment, some large institutions hired a full-time assessment coordinator specifically for student affairs, while some smaller institutions assigned the responsibility for assessment to a professional with significant other responsibilities (Duncan & Holmes, 2015; Livingston & Zerulik, 2013; Roberts, 2015). Another strategy used in some student affairs division to create a culture of assessment was the establishment of an assessment committee to further enhance individual department assessment efforts (Duncan & Holmes, 2015; Roberts, 2015).

A comprehensive review of related literature is included in Chapter II, which explores the history of assessment in higher education, the evolution of assessment in student affairs, and a review of the future of assessment in student affairs. This section examines the findings of this study against items presented in the literature review in the second chapter, specifically related to the strategies necessary to create a culture of assessment, including specific methods to cultivate a culture of evidence.
Strategies to create a culture of assessment. Several authors have articulated strategies to create a culture of assessment in student affairs, including involving stakeholders, developing a common language, building the assessment capacity of professionals, establishing clear and consistent expectations for assessment, rewarding the use of data for program improvement, and encouraging transparency with data (Banta et al., 2009; Barham et al., 2013; Bentrim & Henning, 2015; Culp & Dungy, 2013; Duncan & Holmes, 2015; Seagraves & Dean, 2010; Suskie, 2009). Other strategies identified by scholars include building infrastructure or processes, building trust and relationships, and regularly sharing assessment results (Christakis & Bureau, 2015; Christakis & Demeter, 2015; Woods & Schafer, 2015). The findings of this study suggest that an effective way to foster a culture of assessment is through representative participation on a division-wide assessment committee. Departmental representatives with clear professional obligations related to assessment take assessment work seriously, regularly engage in activities to develop their assessment competencies, and produce assessment results from their respective areas. As a result of their participation on the divisional assessment committee, these professionals not only prioritize assessment work, but regard it as valued, highly regarded and critical to the success of the division. The shared community created by membership on the assessment committee enhanced the culture of assessment as it emerged.

Cultivating a culture of evidence. Most recently, scholars have proposed that intentional, strategic efforts are necessary to cultivate a culture of assessment. Henning’s (2015) 3x5 plan for cultivating assessment in student affairs offers a detailed approach that can be used as a practical guide for senior student affairs professionals, or for student affairs practitioners with assessment responsibilities. Although senior divisional leadership and an assessment coordinator can enhance the elements within Henning’s foundation domain, an assessment committee can play an integral
role in all of the elements within the implementation domain of Henning’s model. Specifically, the findings of this study suggest that the expectations for assessment were enhanced by the representative participation on the assessment committee, and that those expectations, along with the sense of teamwork and collaboration, created a shift in the culture, by helping members to think differently about their work, specifically realizing that assessment must be embedded in their professional activities.

The findings of this study also suggest that an assessment committee supports elements of Henning’s support domain, specifically that a “champion” of assessment can emerge as a result of shared responsibility for assessment, or more specifically, from the assignment of assessment to a committee rather than to full-time professional, or to a specific department. In addition, the findings indicate that the assessment committee was instrumental in supporting or creating the infrastructure, or processes and policies that support assessment and led to a change in the culture, and in creating opportunities that developed the assessment capacities of professionals within the division.

**Implications for Practice**

As external pressures mount on colleges and universities to provide evidence of their effectiveness, chief student affairs officers must be prepared to demonstrate the impact of their programs and services on student learning and student outcomes. Many student affairs practitioners, lacking professional training, are ill equipped in the area of assessment and often resistant to the process. Although scholars have recommended the adoption of a culture of assessment as a strategy, chief student affairs officers sought methods to effectively integrate assessment activities into the professional activities of student affairs staff. In examining the role of an assessment committee within a division of student affairs that has successfully created a culture
of evidence, this study finds that the committee was an integral part in creating and sustaining the culture of assessment.

The focal point of the study was to develop a better understanding of the ways in which an assessment committee might contribute to the creation of a culture of assessment in student affairs. Through interviews, observations and document analysis, this study has shown that assessment committees help a champion to emerge, help to engage members actively in assessment, help professionals within the division to think differently about the role of assessment in their work and help to create the conditions where support is developed and delivered to others as necessary to develop their competencies.

The results of this study support the need to create a culture of assessment in student affairs, by providing evidence that working collaboratively, in a committee structure, influences how professionals think about and integrate assessment in their work. Most importantly, the findings indicate a need to actively engage professionals with each other in the process, as their collective experience contributes to the creation of the culture.

The findings revealed in this study are important to chief student affairs officers, demonstrating that they must continue to support assessment efforts, by setting high expectations for assessment and by supporting mechanisms that help professionals to work collaboratively to achieve those expectations. Likewise, the findings indicate a need for chief student affairs officers to provide leadership on assessment by regularly discussing assessment practices and results, by encouraging professionals to develop their assessment competencies, and by providing resources for assessment, such as funds for technology support, training and development opportunities and for the development of marketing materials. Going forward, assessment committees should be considered a best practice in efforts to create or sustain a culture of assessment in student affairs.
Chief student affairs officers interested in launching divisional assessment committees should start by engaging staff in dialogues on the benefits of gathering and using data for continuous improvement, should articulate reasonable expectations for assessment, and should be prepared to provide immediate training and support to develop the assessment skills and competencies of staff. Members of the emerging committee should be encouraged to take risks, try new things and to work together as they delve into assessment activities. As staff competencies develop, expectations can become more refined or specific and individuals should be recognized or rewarded for improvements in assessment activities. Sharing assessment results, along with plans for using the data to improve programs and services will support the emerging culture of assessment.

Limitations

Although the use of a case study methodology allowed for an in-depth exploration of the role an assessment committee in creating or sustaining a culture of evidence in a division of student affairs, there are limitations to this study. While the findings do provide insight on how to create a culture of assessment, they should not be considered generalizable to all institutions. The intent of this qualitative case study was to better understand the role of an assessment committee at one institution, and involved interviews with seven professionals, along with observations of two committee meetings and an analysis of related documents. It does not reflect the full range of possible experiences on similar committees at other institutions, particularly institutions that are larger or smaller, or where there may be other issues or pressures associated with assessment.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research is still needed to explore strategies that enhance assessment in student affairs. Using the findings of this study, a multi-site case study could be conducted to further
substantiate the role of assessment committees in creating or sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. In addition, an exploration of the role of the “champion” of assessment would help to validate Henning’s (2015) 3x5 plan for cultivating assessment in student affairs. Finally, a survey of full-time assessment coordinators could provide detailed information on the roles, resources and challenges that these professionals face when creating or sustaining cultures of assessment.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to determine the ways in which assessment committees contribute to creating or sustaining of cultures of assessment in student affairs. Using a single-site case study research design, this qualitative study allowed for an in-depth exploration of the role of assessment committees in creating a culture of evidence in a division of student affairs to answer the following research question: *In what ways do assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of evidence within a division of Student Affairs?*

In order to answer this question, data was gathered through document analysis of divisional planning and assessment materials, on-site observations of divisional meetings and interviews of student affairs professionals, to include current members, former members, and non-members of the assessment committee. The data was coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

The results of this study show that the representative participation of assessment committees facilitated the engagement of the division of student affairs in assessment. In addition, the assessment committee provided a platform for a “champion” of assessment to emerge, a person who provided support and encouragement throughout the process, and created the vehicle that allowed for mechanisms to develop to support assessment and to change the culture. Finally, the accomplishments of the assessment committee, along with the assessment results that emerged from
the individual departments, led professionals in the division of student affairs to think differently about their work and the role of assessment in their professional activities.

As student affairs professionals will continue to be accountable to both internal and external stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of their work, and will be expected to show evidence that they are using assessment data to continually improve their programs and services, understanding where and how to apply their limited time, energy and resources is of significant value. As professionals, we must strive to expand our assessment competencies, to integrate assessment data into our decision-making, and to share our assessment results with our colleagues, students and other stakeholders. Working collaboratively on the shared goal of gathering, using and sharing assessment data will not only contribute to creating and sustaining cultures of assessment in student affairs, but will also validate the importance of our professional activities within the overall college experience.
References


Appendix A: General Institutional Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear (email to VP Student Affairs):

My name is Kathleen Evans, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University, in Boston, Massachusetts, and also an Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs at SUNY Oswego in Oswego, New York. My doctoral focus is in higher education administration with a particular interest in exploring ways to support and encourage assessment work in student affairs. Specifically, I am conducting a qualitative case study that explores how assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of assessment in a division of student affairs.

I am interested in conducting this study within a division of student affairs that meets the following criteria:

- A student affairs division/unit that does not have a professional with more than 50% of their professional time designated for coordinating divisional assessment activities.
- A student affairs division that has an assessment committee responsible for coordinating assessment activities for the unit.
- A student affairs division where there is evidence that assessment results are regularly used for the purpose of continuous improvement.

The study would entail interviewing individual members of the assessment committee and department heads to explore their perspective on the process of integrating assessment activities into their work as well as observing meetings where divisional assessment is discussed such as divisional or director’s meetings. In addition, I would like to review divisional documents that include references to assessment such as divisional and/or departmental annual reports, divisional strategic plans, briefing books, assessment committee support materials, and professional development materials.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I would secure consent from your campus Institutional Research office, and then work with you to secure participation from individual staff members within your division. Individual interviews should last between 45 minutes and one hour, and would be conducted using open-ended and semi-structured questions. With your permission, and the permission of individual participants, I would like to record all interviews and committee meetings. The information collected would remain strictly confidential and pseudonyms would be used to protect the identity of both the institution and the individuals who participate in the study. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you are interested in participating, and your campus meets the criteria indicated above, please email me by ________________.

If you have questions, please email or call me at 315-569-4351. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this study.

Kathleen Evans
Appendix B: Individual Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear ____________:

My name is Kathleen Evans, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University, in Boston, Massachusetts, and also an Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs at SUNY Oswego in Oswego, New York. My doctoral focus is in higher education administration with a particular interest in exploring ways to support and encourage assessment work in student affairs. Specifically, I am conducting a qualitative case study that explores how assessment committees help to create or sustain a culture of assessment in a division of student affairs.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study being conducted on your campus. The study will entail interviewing individual members of the student affairs division to explore their perspective on the process of integrating assessment activities into their work.

If you are interested in participating, interviews would be scheduled at a time and location convenient to you. Individual interviews should last between 45 minutes and one hour, and would be conducted using open-ended and semi-structured questions. With your permission, I would audio record the interview. The information collected would remain strictly confidential and pseudonyms would be used to protect your identity.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you are interested in participating, please email me by ________________.

If you have questions, please email or call me at 315-569-4351. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this study.

Kathleen Evans
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Introductory Question:

- Tell me about your journey as a student affairs practitioner. How long have you been here at ________________ and in what capacities?

Interview Questions:

IQ1: Can you tell me about your experience with assessment in the Division of (Student Affairs)?

IQ2: Can you please describe the professional expectations for assessment in the Division?

IQ3: How do you feel about assessment?

IQ4: How did you come to know what the expectations for assessment are? Have the expectations changed over time? If so, in what ways?

IQ5: Can you describe what kind of support or encouragement is provided to professionals related to assessment?

IQ6: Can you please describe, as detailed as possible, how assessment is used in your Division?

IQ7: Can you please describe how you went about developing your own assessment skills?

IQ8: Did any one factor have more of an influence in the development of your assessment skills?

IQ9: Can you please elaborate on how proficient your assessment skills are? (Basic, Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Expert)

IQ10: Can you describe any processes, structures, frameworks that exist in the Division related to assessment? How did you come to know about these processes/structures/frameworks?

IQ11: How often do you discuss assessment or assessment related activities in your work? Can you describe the settings where assessment is discussed (departmental meetings, committee meetings, 1:1 meetings, informal conversations, faculty governance meetings, divisional gatherings, campus-wide gatherings, etc.)

IQ12: Are you familiar with the work of the divisional assessment committee? What do they do? In what ways does the assessment committee impact your work related to assessment?

IQ13: Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion that we have not yet covered?

This interview protocol has been developed to support the exploration of strategies that enhance assessment in student affairs. Given the qualitative nature of this study, new questions may emerge that do not appear in this protocol.
Appendix D: Signed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Graduate Programs in Education

Name of Investigator(s):
Dr. Chris Unger, Ed.D., Principal Investigator,
Kathleen Evans, Candidate Ed.D., Northeastern University

Title of Project: Exploring Strategies that Enhance Assessment in Student Affairs

Request to Participate in Research

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to explore strategies that enhance assessment in student affairs.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study interview will take place at a time and location convenient for you and will take about 45-60 minutes. A follow-up interview of not more than 30 minutes will also take place after the initial interview, at a time and location convenient to you by web conference call, to review the transcript and clarify any of the responses, if necessary. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to reflect on your experiences as a professional within your division with assessment related activities.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about how various strategies help professionals integrate assessment activities into their work.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you as any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

45 CFR 46 117(c) In certain instances, an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects. In cases in which the documentation requirement is waived, the IRB may require the investigator to provide subjects with a written statement regarding the research.

Only the IRB can waive or modify the consent process. Researchers are not authorized to make this decision. When a signed informed consent is not required, this consent form may be given to participants to keep. Please modify the following information as necessary.
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Kathleen Evans at [redacted], the person mainly responsible for this research. You can also contact Dr. Chris Unger, the Principal Investigator at [redacted].

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: [redacted], email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

____________________________________________
Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

____________________________________________
Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above