THE LIVED FACULTY EXPERIENCE WITH FORMALIZED ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A thesis presented

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Abstract

Institutions of higher education both value and need student assessment data. Faculty, as seen in numerous studies, however, have generally negatively received the formalization and reporting of student assessments to gather this assessment data. If we could better understand faculty experiences and perceptions of student assessment data within institutions of higher education, we might then be better able to serve the students enrolled. Therefore, the purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis was to understand faculty experiences with and perceptions of student assessment data for the betterment of student learning. Using Brown’s (2004, 2008) Conception of Assessment (CoA) theory, this study sought to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of faculty interacting with formalized assessment practices? Interviews with faculty working within higher education found four key beliefs: first, they perceived formalized assessment as accountability in the classroom as ineffective; second, they perceived formalized assessment as accountability to accreditors as positive in theory; third, they positive perceived the potential of formalized assessment to improve the education experience; and fourth, they perceived that formalized assessment must be faculty-driven, purposeful, and scholarly. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: student learning, outcomes-based assessment, faculty experience
Dedication

This study is dedicated to my wife, Ann Leary, and my daughter, Greer Leary. For my wife, I couldn’t have done this without your loving and unwavering support. For my daughter, I hope this is an influence on what will hopefully be a journey into lifelong learning.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The ultimate goal of higher education is to promote learning. Whether this learning comes about in research laboratories, libraries, or classrooms, those in higher education seek to impart knowledge onto their communities and the world. In the classroom, this learning takes place specifically between the professor and the students. Traditionally, the measurement of student learning was solely under the purview of the professor. However, as data regarding student learning becomes more important at an institutional level, this tradition is changing. Student learning data, garnered from assessments, has become critical in many efforts of higher education institutions—and this change has brought with it a brand new set of challenges (Ewell, 2009; Kuh & Ewell, 2010; Lazerson, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008; Wehlburg, 2010).

The topic. This study is interested in the intersection of assessment, its function in the classroom, its resulting data, and the perception of faculty members. The term “assessment” can mean many things, so a definition for this research context is needed. In this study, assessment refers specifically to summative assessments, a term used for the assessments that officially measure student learning. The study is not concerned with formative assessments, which are less formal assessments used to help students practice and learn (for the benefit of their performance in summative assessments).

Further, this study is also focused on the continued formalization of assessment through outcomes-based learning. In brief, outcomes-based learning is the process by which student learning goals are distilled into outcomes; then, all assignments and assessments in the coursework are aligned to help meet these outcomes. The data from these assessments are then used to determine how well students have met those outcomes. According to Lazerson (2010), no
state had requirements for institutions to assess learning in any specific way in the early 1980s. By the end of the decade, however, more than 40 states had taken action to assess students based on established learning outcomes (Lazerson, 2010, p. 154). As this use of assessment increased, scholars such as Guskin (1994) and Barr and Tagg (1995), seized the opportunity to call for an increased focus on student learning. This focus, they claimed, should utilize learning outcomes at all levels of an institution to systematically assess learning (Barr and Tagg, 1995; Guskin, 1994). Today, evidence of student learning is required for accreditation in every area of the country (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014). An activity once primarily focused on at the classroom-level has become a significant administrative concern for institutions.

Not surprisingly, the implications of this change are still being fully understood. Assessment of student learning is primarily a curricular activity entrusted to faculty members. However, as assessment initiatives have become institutional in nature, this function of curriculum has become increasingly subject to administrative influence. In turn, this has presented challenges for many faculty members, as noted by numerous scholars (Lazerson, 2010; Ryan, 1993; Wehlburg, 2008). This study aims to better understand those challenges and untangle the lingering implications of this shift.

**The research problem.** Institutions of higher education both value and need student assessment data. This data is valued because of its importance to the student-centered learning movement that has slowly taken hold in higher education over the past 20 years. Started by scholars such as Barr and Tagg (1995), the approach emphasizes the significance of what students actually learn in the classroom, known as the Learning Paradigm. A key component of this paradigm is the actual measurement of student learning through assessments, so that institutions can understand how well their students are learning. Beyond this value, institutions
are now required to collect this data, as it has become central to accreditation: all accrediting bodies now require evidence of student learning as part of their process (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014).

Higher Education faculty expressed their displeasure in the collection of summative data, which is the product of the formalization and reporting of student assessments. (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003; Lazerson, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008; Welsh and Metcalf, 2003a; Young, Cartwright, & Rudy, 2014). This is not to say that faculty members do not care about learning in the classroom. In fact, this challenge comes from quite the opposite angle. Assessment of student learning, however, touches on areas of higher education that faculty generally consider important to their work, namely academic freedom and curriculum management (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003a). As the value and need of student assessment data has grown, however, institutional initiatives have become more formalized, involving committees and administrative staff. Because these areas of academic work are considered sacrosanct, many faculty members have interpreted this formalization as potentially threatening to their autonomy. This, in turn, can significantly reduce faculty participation and motivation in assessment efforts (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Wehlburg, 2010; Young, Cartwright, & Rudy, 2014).

If faculty experiences and perceptions of student assessment data within institutions of higher education were better understood, then enrolled students might be better served. As indicated by Kuh and Ewell (2010) and Webber (2012), while assessment practices exist, there is little evidence that the resulting data is used to improve teaching and learning. Because of their place in academia, faculty members are key stakeholders to enact this change. Their central role in curriculum development, assessment implementation, and classroom teaching are all areas in which student learning data would provide critical insights (Wehlburg, 2008). However, research
also indicates that faculty motivation to participate in such efforts is deeply affected by what they perceive as the ultimate purpose (Brown, 2004, 2008). Further understanding the nature of this connection of faculty and formalized student learning assessment efforts, then, can help institutions of higher education on two fronts. First, it will provide them with insight to help frame and implement their assessment initiatives for a practical purpose, seeking and/or keeping accreditation. More importantly, it will also allow them to capitalize on the noted benefits of assessment to best serve the learning needs of students. Second, it will help bridge the gap between administrative efforts and the faculty body, helping institutions to retain faculty members who value their autonomy, academic freedom, and curriculum management.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand faculty experiences with and perceptions of student assessment data for the betterment of student learning. Research in this area reveals that faculty can have a positive view of assessment, provided that the ultimate purpose is for improving academic quality of student learning (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, & Rees, 2012; Welsh and Metcalf, 2003b). Accreditation, ostensibly, does this; it ensures that institutions are providing quality education to students. However, it can also be seen as accountability, and faculty members have generally negative perceptions of assessment when accountability is involved (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). This study, then, aims to understand the nuances of faculty perception and motivation regarding the collection and use of assessment data.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** A number of key studies help highlight the need for this investigation. As already noted, a number of scholars have made the connection between assessment purpose and perception. Beyond purpose affecting perception, however, the assessment culture of the school can affect how faculty members embrace formalized
assessment. Peterson and Augustine’s (2000) large-scale quantitative study about the connection of accountability, improvement, and faculty perception revealed that institutional dynamics actually played the most significant role in perception. If there was a generally “positive” culture of assessment—meaning that faculty trusted the use of assessment data by administration—a generally positive perception by faculty flowed from it (Peterson & Augustine, 2000).

This work was continued in Grunwald and Peterson’s (2003) quantitative study about factors that promote faculty involvement and satisfaction with formalized assessment initiatives. This study showed that faculty members felt most strongly about aspect of formalized assessment that affected them directly. For example, if an initiative dictated their classroom instruction, it negatively impacted their satisfaction (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Faculty leadership in such initiatives was also important, as faculty members showed more satisfaction with their peers regarding such responsibilities (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Their study also found that overall, faculty satisfaction with formalized assessment initiatives in their sample was low (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003).

Beyond the quantitative work, some qualitative studies have revealed aspects of faculty perception. Studies by Schlitz, O’Connor, Pang, Stryker, Markell, Krupp, and Redfern (2009) and Emil and Cress (2014) both reveal critical ways of changing faculty members’ perceptions about formalized assessment: an academic community, such a committee or working group. In both qualitative studies, faculty members expressed that engaging in a community of peers improved their perception (Emil & Cress, 2014; Schlitz et al., 2009) and each study brought a distinct, further understanding with this detail. The study by Schlitz et al. indicated that this strategy helped improve faculty perceptions across disciplines. This is significant, as it is potentially a universal way of creating a positive culture of assessment. Alternatively, Emil and
Cress, showed that when an institution invests resources in such an academic community, it helps engender faculty trust in an initiative. These aspects of faculty perception are critical in understanding how to engender a positive culture of assessment.

Despite these studies, however, the nuances of the individual experience of faculty members as it relates to many areas of formalized assessment remain relatively unknown. Faculty perception of assessment data related to accreditation is a particularly critical area to understand, given the importance of accreditation in the higher education system. Formalized assessment data used in accreditation could be considered for the purpose of accountability or student learning improvement. Some studies indicate that faculty members negatively associate accreditation with accountability in terms of assessment data use (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). The process of accreditation, however, is multi-faceted. Do faculty members only associate negative feelings with assessment data use and accreditation? What do they feel might be potential student learning benefits? Is their “culture of assessment” relevant to their feelings on this subject? How would an academic working group shape their experience with assessment data use and accreditation? An in-depth qualitative study is needed to answer questions such as these.

**Relating the discussion to audiences.** The answers to such questions will benefit a number of audiences in higher education. It will help guide any members of an institution involved in assessment and accreditation efforts. Generally, it will help instruction designers, institutional research professionals, and other support staff who play tactical roles in these efforts by giving them valuable context about faculty experience. Specifically, however, this study is meant to benefit those at the strategic levels who deal with formalized assessment and accreditation: administrative leadership and faculty members. Understanding the nuances of
faculty perspective will inform administrative leadership as they work with faculty members to implement assessment efforts and plan for accreditation visits. It will provide them insight into what specific aspects of these efforts might cause positive or negative perception among faculty members. Due to the fact that faculty members are critical in these processes, administrative leadership must be able to partner with them effectively. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the overall perception of assessment data use in accreditation and to use that data meaningfully to positively impact student learning.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

This goal is significant, as higher education has been faced with a number of internal and external questions about cost and quality that related to student learning. Externally, the conversation around the value of a college degree continues, and many openly question the worth of a degree against the value of the learning gained (Rose, 2013). Internally, students may actually be putting in less effort to get better grades (Kuh, 1999). Together, these two trends threaten to undermine the establishment of higher education. With this reputation at stake, colleges need to be able to provide demonstrable proof that students are learning. When done right, assessment performance data is this demonstrable proof. With data, colleges will be able to show externally what, exactly, a student learns from a given program when they obtain their degree (Kuh & Ewell, 2010; Tam, 2014). Internally, assessment data focused on student learning will help colleges ensure that their curricula are effective in helping improve student learning (Kuh & Ewell, 2010; Wehlburg, 2010).

The decades-long questions about quality in higher education are well documented in the literature. After a number of national educational reports in the mid-1980s, accreditation began to focus much more intently on student learning and performance data (Alstete, 2004; Lazerson,
2010). This shift was backed by Kuh’s (1999) troubling study of student achievement from the 1960s to the 1990s. His analysis revealed that though students had done better in some areas since 1960, they had declined notably in the key areas of sciences, the arts, and values (Kuh, 1999). Further, and perhaps more disturbing, his data showed that students were actually putting in less effort into their education but receiving better grades (Kuh, 1999). These questions of classroom performance, coupled with the calls for student-centered learning approaches by scholars such as Ryan (1993), Barr and Tagg (1995), Guskin (1994), assisted in the growth of the formalized assessment movement with a focus on student learning. All accreditors now also look for information about the relevance of student learning outcomes to institutional mission and the process around setting outcomes and gathering assessment data (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014). In short, formalized assessment initiatives are being used to ensure educational quality.

Given the studies mentioned thus far regarding faculty perception of formalized assessment initiatives, however, distinct trends are apparent. These studies agree, almost universally, that faculty members have negative associations with formalized assessment initiatives, especially when they feel the purpose is accountability (Fletcher et al., 2012; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). Alternatively, there have been some indications that faculty approve of formalized assessment provided that the end result is truly help improve student learning (Fletcher et al., 2012). Further, Peterson and Augustine (2000) have emphasized the importance of a “culture of assessment” in faculty perception. Schiltz et al. (2009) and Emil and Cress (2014) continued this work by connecting the importance of resources and faculty working groups in affecting perception. Despite the presence of negative perception, there are strategies for improving this perception.
The significance of this study, then, is that it will further inform successful ways for administrators and faculty members to partner on formalized assessment initiatives. With its established presence in accreditation, formalized assessment of student learning remains a critical component in university operation. Given many of the challenges noted by scholars with faculty relationship to these initiatives, it is clear more research is needed to help address this problem. Despite the complex relationships already uncovered in research, a key question remains unanswered: What strategies for implementing formalized assessment initiatives can improve faculty perception of assessment data use in accreditation? To answer this question, an in-depth exploration of faculty experience with formalized assessment initiatives must be undertaken.

**Research Question**

What are the lived experiences of faculty interacting with formalized student assessment practices?

**Positionality Statement**

Personally, assessment has played a key role in my academic career, and this role has manifested itself in a number of ways. As an instructor, I have a considerable understanding of the importance of assessing student learning to ensure that they left my classroom better than when they entered. As an assistant dean, it was my duty (among other things) to ensure the quality of the courses and programs under my purview. In this position, I was afforded exposure to assessment at the programmatic and institutional levels. A key part of my role was to work with the institutional quality team to ensure students were meeting learning outcomes at various levels. As a result of these experiences, I have a distinct positionality regarding student learning
assessment. To ensure the efficacy of this study, that positionality and its implications must be explored.

**Previous experience and biases with assessment.** I first realized the importance of assessment when I was an adjunct faculty member at an online institution. This environment lacked the face-to-face connection to help gauge my perception of how the students understood the material. I quickly realized that valid and reliable assessments were necessary. To do this properly, I had to identify key concepts and skills that students needed to acquire by the end of the course. Then, the assessments had to be crafted in such a way that students would be demonstrating these pieces of knowledge, skills, and abilities. It was a logical approach for me and helped me streamline my courses, thereby providing students with a quality learning experience. For me, assessment was a valuable tool.

My time in academic administration afforded me experience with institutional-level efforts in student learning assessment. This is different from classroom-level assessment, because it is usually much more formalized and involves multiple stakeholders beyond the faculty member. As an assistant dean at a college that utilized a significant number of contingent or adjunct faculty, this more formal approach was necessary for me. Since contingent/adjunct faculty members deal with multiple commitments, low wages, and departmental marginalization, academic quality is at a higher risk (Townsend, 2003). Therefore, a formalized, institutional approach to assessment allowed us to ensure that the correct aspects of each course (determined by a committee) were being measured. Again, I found assessment to be critical in my goal to provide quality education.

In brief, I have an almost totally positive perspective on the value of assessment in the classroom. At both the classroom and institutional levels, assessment was not the only
component needed to ensure a quality experience for students. It was also critical in continuously evaluating and improving curriculum and practices under my control as well. Wehlburg (2008) referred to this dual use as transformative assessment—a process to consistently measure and improve education. In this way, I believe that we can truly contribute to the national conversation regarding the “value” of a college degree. This belief, however, is also a distinct bias.

**Addressing positionality in this study.** Understanding these concerns regarding institutional assessment initiatives for full-time or tenured faculty is critical as I undertake this study. To date, the sum of my experiences have given me a positive perspective on assessment, both at the classroom and institutional levels. Because I have only ever observed that assessment improves education, I believe that it is the best way to do so. This perspective should be viewed as a strength, as it gives me the ability to be a passionate champion for assessment. However, it also underscores the need for me to fully explore the potential negatives that exist in the minds of full-time/tenured faculty. All of my experience with assessment has come through the role of adjunct faculty or academic administration. Hence, I do not have the experience of a full-time/tenured faculty member who might feel differently about the implications of formalized assessment.

Therefore, it is critical that the perspectives of full-time or tenured faculty are incorporated into this research environment. This incorporation will help provide valuable insight that I currently do not have. And, it is even more critical that an intentional and careful analysis of any data from full-time or tenured faculty members is performed. Their experiences are valuable, and intentional data gathering and analysis, guided by a theoretical framework, is critical to this process. The next section explores the importance of this theoretical framework and how it will inform this study.
Theoretical Framework

To frame this study, Brown’s (2004, 2008) Conception of Assessment (CoA) theory is applied. Despite the obvious nominal connection with my topic, this theory deals with a central idea I wish to explore: how purpose of assessment affects perception. This section explores the theory itself, justify its use, and investigate specifically how it will shape my study.

**Description of the theoretical framework.** This theory is relatively young, having only first appeared in 2004. It started as a research study published by Brown (2004). This study’s focus was the perceptions of assessment by primary school teachers in New Zealand. Brown’s quantitative approach showed a large-scale alignment of teacher perception of assessment as related to the assessment’s purpose. Using this alignment, Brown argued that teacher perceptions of assessment could change based on its purpose, and that this face should be considered when implementing policy.

Four years later, Brown’s (2008) theory became more articulated. In this longer work, Brown fleshed out the four major ways in which assessment could be used: for learning (used to inform teaching practices), as learning (used to hold students accountable), of learning (used for holding faculty and institutions accountable), and irrelevant to learning (not significant). Correlating with these purposes are positive and negative feelings from faculty. For example, teachers generally feel positive about assessment when the purpose is for learning and of learning. Conversely, they harbor negative feelings about assessment of learning. As the purpose of assessment changes, so too does the teacher’s perspective (Brown, 2008).

As of Brown’s (2008) study, however, this theory had only been tested within the primary and secondary levels. Its relevance to higher education was not known until Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, and Rees (2012). In their study, the researchers applied Brown’s
theory to their study of faculty members’ and students’ conceptions of assessment. Using a
quantitative methodology, a total of 877 faculty members and 1,224 students from four different
New Zealand institutions were surveyed. The questions were aimed at drawing out their
prevailing attitude towards assessment in different context.

This study reinforced Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory for its use in a higher education
setting. Faculty members reported feeling that assessment was useful for measuring student
learning and improving curriculum (Fletcher et al., 2012). They did not feel that assessment was
useful, however, for holding institutions accountable or judging faculty performance (Fletcher et
al., 2012). As with the original context of Brown’s (2004) initial study, the use of assessment for
the benefit of learning was positively received, while its use for accountability was seen
negatively.

The results of Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, and Rees’ (2012) work are therefore
significant. Their direct application of Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA to higher education helps
validate its use for further our scholarly understanding of the complex relationship of faculty and
assessment. Other studies, too, provide support for the use of this theory in such a context,
though indirectly. Grunwald and Peterson’s (2003) study of faculty satisfaction of assessment in
the classroom showed that external accountability played a significant factor in their satisfaction
with assessment. Similarly, Welsh and Metcalf (2003) argue that internal motivators (learning
improvement, etc.) are more likely to elicit a positive faculty reaction.

**Justification of the theoretical framework.** Though Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA is a
strong theory to use in the context of my study, there are other possibilities. Numerous
organizational change theories have been used with some success to examine to what extent
assessment has been accepted in colleges. Webber (2012), for example, uses Meyer and Rowan’s
(1977) Institutional theory to frame her study of the acceptance of learner-centered assessment. This theory states that institutional rules act as myths within organizations, which eventually become formal structure (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Webber used the results of two National Study of Postsecondary Faculty survey, one in 1993 and one in 2004, as her main points of data. Upon analysis of this comparison, Webber uses Institutional theory to show that these assessment practices have become part of organizational structure and expectations in many colleges across the United States. Since her study was large-scale and concerned the systemic use of assessment, this theory was a logical choice to frame the data and results.

Personal-level change theories have also been utilized to explore this topic. A good example of this is Feldman’s (2000) practical conceptual change model. In this model, Feldman posits that organizational change will happen if participants are discontent with their current structure and see practical value in a new structure. Offerdhal and Tomanek (2011) use this theory to focus their case study of assessment to formatively determine student learning in a formative way. In this case study, three college science professors used different assessment strategies through two terms to measure student understanding of complex concepts (Offerdhal & Tomanek, 2011). As dictated by the theory, the professors began to conceptualize a different use for assessment than previously implemented in their classroom (Offerdhal & Tomanek, 2011). Though this theory was focused more on the individual than the larger system, it as effective for framing a study on assessment practices.

Finally, there are a number of behavior models implemented to explain the use of assessment in higher education. Prominent among these is the faculty decision-making and behavior model by Blackburn and Lawrence (1995). This theory dictates that faculty productivity and their behavior/decision-making are governed by a combination of intrinsic
person) and extrinsic (organizational) factors (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995). This theory was key in Emil and Cress’s (2014) study about faculty motivation to participate in assessment initiatives. Using this theory, the authors were able to connect positive faculty engagement in assessment practices to being provided proper resources from school administration. Additionally, when the goal of the assessment is for learning improvement and faculty members are part of a community of peers, engagement was higher.

While all of these theories have advanced understanding of the topic of assessment in higher education, Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA still remains the strongest choice. While the other models all have relevance with regards to organizational influences and personal motivation, CoA relates wholly to the topic of assessment. It has been tested for its relevance directly to how teachers interact and react to assessment in different contexts. The other theories are more broad-spectrum regarding organizational change or decision-making. While no less important than CoA, they are not as well matched.

**Impact of the theoretical framework.** The alignment is even more profound when CoA is considered in the context of the problem of practice. As has been discussed, Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA examines faculty perception and use of assessment given four different major scenarios (for learning, as learning, of learning, and irrelevant to learning). As part of this theory, faculty’s perception of assessment can shift, given the purposes defined (Brown, 2008). One of the purposes is assessment of learning; by definition, the function for assessment in this scenario is related to using assessment data to evaluate instructor or institutional effectiveness. This directly relates to my current problem of practice, which cites the potential issue with faculty perception and the growing use of assessment data in accreditation. Framed by Brown’s theory,
this problem deepens, as faculty members have negative perceptions of assessment of learning (for accountability, such as accreditation).

The alignment and influence of the framework has had a clear impact on the rest of the study. First, it has guided the formulation of the following research question: What are the lived experiences of faculty interacting with formalized assessment practices? As explained, per Brown’s (2004, 2008) theory, faculty members’ perception of assessment is deeply connected to purpose; understanding their experience will help determine their perception. This research question, then, is influenced by Brown’s theory and seeks to understand how faculty perception aligns with experience, given the stated purposes. Specific to my problem, for example, faculty members in this study could be asked about their experience with assessment as related to accreditation purposes. Their answers would then either fall within the framework CoA theory (if they were negative) or even perhaps beyond (if they were positive).

In addition, Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory facilitated the framing of my research design and data collection. As of the use of perception and experience, this study is well suited to a qualitative paradigm, using an interpretive phenomenological methodology. This research methodology seeks to understand the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon and drawing meaningful conclusions (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). In this case, the phenomenon is faculty members participating in a formalized student learning assessment initiative. The relevant information about their assessment practices and processes, relating to areas such as accreditation, would be surveyed. And, of utmost importance, the perspective of the faculty members about these practices and processes would be captured for analysis, to be able to draw meaningful conclusion about the connection of perception and purpose.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over twenty years ago, Barr and Tagg (1995) declared that a shift must happen in higher education, one that placed the emphasis on learning rather than teaching. Decrying the instructor-centered paradigm, they argued that students and higher education itself would benefit from an emphasis on what students actually learn (Barr & Tagg, 1995). This, combined with the increasing public discourse about the true value of a college education, has given rise to the assessment movement in higher education (Babcock & Marks, 2011; Beaver, 2014; Lazerson 2010; Wehlburg, 2008). Assessment, however, can mean different things to different people. Moreover, its implementation has consequences in terms of faculty governance, university resources, and logistical oversight (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a).

The purpose of this literature review is to determine the state of outcomes-based assessment, its relationship with faculty, and its connection to accreditation. To do this, the research question guiding this literature review is: What are the implications of faculty perceptions about outcomes-based assessment for institutions in seeking/keeping accreditation? The way in which faculty members interact with assessment can vary between institutions; however, they ultimately are the ones most closely associated with student assessment at the day-to-day, classroom level (Brown, 2004, 2008; Wehlburg, 2008, 2010). They are, therefore, a critical factor in implementation. Without their participation, outcomes-based assessments are less likely to garner useful and/or accurate information (Emil & Cress, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2012). Since all accreditation bodies require some sort of measure of student learning, this potential for compromised assessments is a significant issue (Gratch-Lindauer, 2002; Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014).
To explore this issue, three main literature streams will be reviewed. First, the literature about outcomes-based assessment will be analyzed. Beginning in the 1990s, this paradigm was a way focus on student learning. Over the last 20 years, this subject has evolved. This section explores the ways that scholars currently understand this practice. Outcomes-based assessment now exists in various forms, and how it is implemented can play a significant role in its success or failure (Emil & Cress, 2014; Ewell, 2009; Tam, 2014; Wehlburg, 2008).

Second, the relationship of faculty to assessment will be discussed. Faculty members play a key role in the successful implementation of assessment (Brown, 2004, 2008; Wehlburg, 2008, 2010). However, faculty perspectives of assessment affect their motivation to participate in such initiatives (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Fletcher et al., 2012; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). The factors influencing this motivation are explored.

Third, the relationship of outcomes-based assessment to accreditation will be explored. The formalization of higher education during the 20th century has linked accreditation and assessment (Gratch-Lindauer, 2002; Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014; Kuh & Ewell, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008). The various pressures that have influenced this link are examined, as well as the implications of current research on accreditation and assessment today.

Outcomes-Based Assessment

The formalized measurement of student learning against outcomes is fairly new to the field of higher education. The 1980s saw a public conversation about the quality of higher education. Some scholars responded thoughtfully, supporting a move to measure and track what a student was actually learning rather than just grades. These general calls for a shift in focus formalized into to what is known today as outcomes-based assessment.
The paradigm shift. Educational professionals began to call for a closer focus on student learning in the 1990s. Barr and Tagg (1995) led this charge with their advocacy for a paradigm shift in higher education. They claimed that the current paradigm was centered too much on the instructor, which they traced to higher costs in education and declining student performance (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Universities, Barr and Tagg argued, had become too focused on just “delivering instruction” (p. 12) and not worried enough about this impact on learning. They echoed Guskin (1994), who posited that the instructor paradigm gave way to many conventions (namely the lecture-listen structure) that was, “contrary to almost every principle of optimal settings for student learning” (p. 16).

These advocates for student learning had valid evidence to support their claims. Despite decades of public concern over education, increased accreditation standards, and state/federal policy implementation, scholars found that the efficiency of education was not improving (Bauerlein, 2008; Beaver, 2014; Kuh, 1999). Kuh’s (1999) work first revealed this problem, as he traced the quality of the undergraduate student experience across three decades and found some shocking trends. His analysis showed that though students had improved in some areas since 1960, they had declined notably in the key areas of sciences, the arts, and values (Kuh, 1999). Further, and perhaps more disturbing, his data showed students were actually putting in less effort into their education but receiving better grades (Kuh, 1999). Since this revelation, other scholars have used this trend to show that the quality of education is potentially undergoing a negative shift (Bauerlein, 2008; Beaver, 2014).

The scholars advocating for a focus on student learning found a home for their cause in the growing need for assessment in the 1980s (explored later). Though policy makers and accreditors began requiring more assessment data for accountability purposes, these scholars
advocated for the use of assessment to focus on what students were actually learning (Lazerson, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008). Ryan (1993) stated clearly to the scholarly community that even though assessments and outcomes are important for accreditation, their use must be extended beyond that effort. Similar to Ryan, Barr and Tagg’s (1995) argument advocating for the use of assessment to measure student learning, Guskin (1994) contended for much the same when rethinking the role of the faculty member in the classroom; he claimed that faculty should focus assessing students on their knowledge after larger lessons. Even Chickering and Gamson (1999) updated their popular “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” to include the need for assessment of student learning. In brief, advocates for improving learning felt that outcomes-based assessment was crucial in shifting away from an instructor-centered model to a student-centered one: “The Learning Paradigm necessarily incorporates the perspectives of the assessment movement” (Barr and Tagg, 1995, p. 12).

This shift was not as extreme as some might have thought. Institutions had done well overall at assessing classroom-related outcomes (Wehlburg, 2008, 2010). However, there was rarely an assessment approach that was consistent with a student’s experience at an institution while also aligned with its mission (Lazerson, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008, 2010). This holistic approach was an important part of the paradigm shift. Scholars had asserted that assessment needed not only the classroom-level approach, but there needed to be a concerted effort on it from an institutional standpoint (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Guskin, 1994; Ryan 1993). This would include assessment of the student’s learning beyond each course and classroom. Banta and Kuh (1998) asserted, “assessment programs that focus exclusively on classroom-related goals and performance cannot capture all that students learn” (p. 46). For an honest focus on the student experience, there would need to be an institutional effort.
Outcomes at varying levels. Scholars have identified that institutions currently utilize outcomes on three general levels in response to this movement. The first is the course or classroom level. At the course level, outcomes are usually cognitive in nature. These cognitive outcomes are designed to help students understand or analyze content in the courses (Biggs, 1996; Tam, 2014; Wehlburg, 2008). These outcomes can be ability based, designed to teach students important skills such as problem solving or critical thinking (Biggs, 1996; Tam, 2014). These outcomes can also be affective in nature, which means that they are designed to change student attitudes or develop values (Tam, 2014). Outcomes at this level are focused on building the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities for students to be deemed successful in the course. It is critical, too, that they are aligned with the teaching and learning activities so that they can be measured (Cohen, 1987; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Tam, 2014).

Above the course level of outcomes are the program-level outcomes. In many ways, these outcomes resemble those in the classroom. They can be cognitive or affective, designed to impart students with a distinct set of knowledge and/or attitudes (Tam, 2014). These outcomes are broader, however, and the assessments associated with them measure a student for their experience across the whole program (Biggs, 1996; Ewell, 2007; Mazouz & Crane, 2013). Logistically, they must also be strategically aligned with the course outcomes; in this way, meaningful conclusions about student learning across a program can be drawn from the assessment data in the requisite courses (Biggs, 1996; Hafeez and Mazouz, 2011). A practical application of this can be seen in Mazouz and Crane (2013). They propose the use of a workflow matrix that feeds the data of course outcomes–aligned assessment data to a dashboard that associates that data with a corresponding program outcome. Thus, in the right system, program outcomes can play an important role in determining the quality of the program (Ewell, 2009).
Above the course and program levels is that of the institutional level. Not surprisingly, these are the broadest level of outcomes, aimed at setting goals for a student at the institutional level. To be most effective, these outcomes should be aligned with the mission of the institution (Wehlburg, 2008). These outcomes are not usually cognitive or affective; instead, they are aimed at measuring student experience. Tam (2014) identifies goals such as “enhanced income, changes in career, or even increased student satisfaction and motivation” (p. 3) as examples of institutional-level outcomes. Given their nature, institutional-level outcomes are associated as measures of institutional quality and effectiveness (Ewell, 2009; Tam, 2014).

**Factors affecting outcomes-based assessment.** Institutional context plays a significant role in higher education, and this variable can impact outcomes-based assessment (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Peterson & Augustine, 2000). Institutions vary in size, type, and mission. Not surprisingly, these factors can affect the varied aspects of outcomes-based assessment (Webber, 2012). This context can influence areas such as the level at which outcomes are employed, the types of skills they assess, and consistency of implementation across the institution (Peterson & Augustine, 2000; Webber 2012). For example, institutions generally measure more about the student experience after they graduate than they do about the cognitive/affective performance of a current student (Peterson & Augustine, 2000, p. 471).

Different types of institutions vary within this generality. Baccalaureate institutions tend to measure cognitive and affective outcomes, while graduate research institutions measure mostly affective student outcomes (Peterson & Augustine, 2000). Conversely, associate of arts institutions measure neither of these well and focus more on post-graduation assessment. This reflects their vocational nature, or perhaps that they have less resources available to them than the other institution types. Further studies also indicate that academic subject may also play a
role in outcomes-based assessment, at least in the case of political science (Young, Cartwright, & Rudy, 2014).

Analysis of the literature reveals examples of how these implementations can vary depending on the institution and/or the purpose. Burnett and Williams (2009) explored this theme in their study of two different outcomes-based assessment strategies at two different colleges. Both utilized e-portfolios in their assessment for student learning against outcomes. Spelman College utilized e-portfolios to test a defined group of students and their ability to meet a single outcome (Burnett & Williams, 2009). Conversely, the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology employed the use of e-portfolios to assess student learning at the programmatic level (Burnett & Williams, 2009). The work of Dolinsky, Matthews, Greenfield, Curtis-Tweed, and Scott (2007), also illustrates this point. The authors worked with various campuses to implement the use of outcomes-based assessment for the purpose of improving the experience and performance of first year college students. The colleges that the authors worked with utilized a “variety of approaches” including “new administrative or academic units” and “coordinating committees” (Dolinsky, Matthews, Greenfield, Curtis-Tweed, & Scott, 2007, p. 10). The important aspect of the successful initiatives was that purpose and culture directed the specifics of how the efforts appeared. This alignment of form helped bring the benefits of outcomes-based assessment to multiple locations.

These studies demonstrate how the institutional type, mission and vision, and other contextual factors impact outcomes-based assessment implementations. While they all share the basic aspects of outcomes-based assessment (as outlined by Biggs (1996), Cohen (1987), Martone & Sireci (2009), Tam (2014), and others), the context and goals of the specific
institution must be considered (Webber, 2012; Wehlburg, 2008). This can result in superficially different implementations, which remain as measurement of student learning.

**Conclusion.** Outcomes-based assessment can vary in level and application. This variance has much to do with institutional context and the ultimate goal guiding the assessment initiative. One of the most fundamental areas of variance for institutions, however, is the faculty. Given their importance to higher education, their participation in such efforts is critical. The next section examines the connection between faculty perspective and participation in outcomes-based assessment.

**Faculty Adoption of Outcomes-based Assessment**

For all intents and purposes, faculty members play the most important role in assessing student learning. They do so through the administration of exams, the correcting of papers, and the facilitation of classroom discussions. In all of these ways, they are ensuring that students have learned enough about the topic at hand. For many, this is why they initially entered this profession: to impart knowledge of their beloved subject to a new generation of potential practitioners. Considering this, it would be assumed, then, that faculty embracement of holistic student assessment would come naturally. Yet, this is not the case. The section to follow will explore this complex relationship as it has been established in the research literature.

**Faculty perceptions of assessment.** Research has revealed a number of key details about faculty involvement with outcomes-based assessment. Perhaps the most important is the definitive purpose of any institutional assessment initiative, which has been shown to be a critical motivating factor in faculty members’ participation (Brown, 2004, 2008; Fletcher et al., 2012; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). Additionally, how the faculty members are involved in the process has also been shown to affect their motivation (Pope, 2004;
Welsh & Metcalf, 2003b). When exploring the literature about faculty and assessment, some distinct patterns emerge.

As stated, the ultimate purpose for the use of outcomes-based assessment data is critical for faculty. It should not be surprising to learn that when faculty members feel that assessment is done for the purpose of accountability, their motivation remains low (Brown, 2004, 2008; Fletcher et al., 2012; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). This accountability could be internal or external, but the reluctance will still exist. Internally, faculty members fear that administrators are trying to attack tenure or implement business models (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008). Externally, faculty members resent the intrusion of public and governmental agencies into their purview (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Lazerson, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). In both cases, faculty members lack confidence that internal administrators or external organizations understand the complex world of academia (Hoppes & Holley, 2014; Lazerson, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008).

**Importance of the academic tradition.** Considerations of academic freedom and curriculum control are at the center of these concerns. Welsh and Metcalf (2003a) perhaps best sum this up: “Faculty work is undergirded by a commitment to academic freedom, their academic disciplines, and a sense of autonomy, all of which mitigate enthusiasm for introducing accountability systems into their academic work” (p. 448). Faculty members see themselves as champions of a centuries-old tradition and as the purveyors of their academic discipline. They may perceive that assessment initiatives are not respectful of that culture or, worse, are being implemented to disrupt that culture. This will destroy their motivation and significantly reduce their rate of participation (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003).
This protection of the academic culture as resistance can be seen beyond the United States. While enhanced by the specific context of America’s governmental connection with accreditation, it is a relatively universal concern for faculty. Anderson’s (2006) study of 30 faculty members from different Australian universities had little positive to say about the ability of formalized assessment to ensure quality. Central to their perspective was that they did not believe that they administrators had an appropriate definition of “quality” around academics (Anderson, 2006, p. 171). Instead, they viewed participation in such initiatives as “games to be played” out of necessity, with little “validity or usefulness” (Anderson, 2006, p. 171).

Beyond questions of academic integrity, there are also considerations of workload for faculty members. When assessment initiatives are associated with accountability, faculty members will perceive the work involved as simply more piled on to their already robust responsibilities (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008). Most faculty members are not only expected to teach, but design curriculum, participate in committees/governance, and continue their scholarly research projects. Outcomes-based assessment involves time-consuming tasks such as data collection, analysis, and administrative duties. In Hernández’s (2012) study of assessment practices in seven higher education institutions across Ireland, results indicated that faculty members exerted significant amounts of effort above their regular duties. While it showed that assessment did improve learning (Hernández, 2012, p. 499), faculty members identified concerns about the amount of time spent with assessment feedback (p. 498).

**Positive perceptions.** Research has shown, however, that faculty members can have a positive perception of assessment (Brown, Harris, & Harnett, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2012; Welsh and Metcalf, 2003b). The major unifying theme from these studies is that the reason(s) behind an
institutional assessment initiative affect faculty perception. Welsh and Metcalf’s (2003b) survey of involving 700 faculty members showed that they positively associated assessment with improvement of academic quality and student experience. They argued that faculty members were more likely to support administrative efforts around assessment if they were truly focused on the good of the institution and not external “mandates” (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003b, p. 40). This also included faculty support for outcomes-based learning as the “preferred view of quality,” which was prevalent in the assessment for learning movement (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003b, p. 41).

Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston, and Rees’ (2012) analysis displayed similar results but from a different angle. They found that faculty members felt that assessment played a crucial role for improving student learning (Fletcher et al., 2012, p. 129). Conversely, supporting Welsh and Metcalf’s (2003b) findings, accountability to internal or external stakeholders was not considered an important end for assessment (Fletcher et al., 2012). It follows logically from this conclusion that if the assessment initiatives of an institution work towards benefitting student learning, faculty will be more motivated to participate. Offerdahl and Tomanek’s (2010) and Kitiashvili’s (2014) findings regarding assessment practices support this idea: As the professors in their study realized formative assessments help gauge and improve student learning, they became more positive towards it.

This revelation, of course, echoes the calls of Barr and Tagg (1995) and Guskin (1994). When faculty members understand that true, educational improvement is the goal, studies have shown that faculty perception and involvement in institutional assessment dramatically increase (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Wehlburg, 2008). This is assuming, though, that faculty members know that the overall goal of any assessment initiative is the improvement of student learning.
Even if the initiative is well meaning, there are a number of reasons why faculty members may not be motivated to participate.

**Trust, resources, and faculty participation.** Trust in the administration is one of the most critical factors. Pope’s (2004) research about faculty trust and participation in governance reveals that at institutions where trust levels are low, there will be an unwillingness to participate (p. 80). This is supported by Wehlburg (2008), who asserts that “less collaborative and collegial work is done in areas that require faculty and administrators to work together” when trust is lacking (p. 62). Any institutional assessment effort will be part of a school’s governance process and will require that administrators and faculty members work together, making transparency and cooperation a key to building trust (Hoppes & Holley, 2014). Thus, for an institutional assessment effort to be successful, there must be a culture of trust to foster the necessary collaboration.

Returning to Welsh and Metcalf’s (2003b) survey of faculty helps connect Pope’s (2004) study about trust to assessment. As part of the survey, faculty members were asked about their perspective of personal involvement in assessment initiatives. Not surprisingly, the respondents identified that they were much more likely to participate in an initiative in which faculty members were involved with heavily (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003b, p. 40). As stated by Welsh and Metcalf (2003b), administrators would be well advised to optimize faculty involvement “design, development and implementation of institutional effectiveness activities” (p. 40). This involvement is a practical way of engendering the trust advocated by Pope (2004).

Visible investment from a resources standpoint has shown to significantly impact faculty perception and participation with assessment initiatives as well (Andrade, 2011; Gilbert, 2010; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008). Even with the
groundwork of trust to facilitate faculty members’ collaboration with the administration, there are still reasons why a well-meaning institutional assessment effort might falter. Administrative resource investment can help mitigate this risk. Notably, education regarding outcomes-based assessment must be integrated into faculty development opportunities. As established, a holistic institutional assessment effort can add a significant amount of work for faculty members. This is compounded by the fact that many faculty members have not ever been formally trained on the topic of assessment and outcomes (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 65). Without guidance, faculty members may become frustrated at having to invest time and effort into a task for which they have not been properly prepared.

The benefits for providing training resources are not just logistical. An investment in resources such as this sends an important message to faculty members (Andrade, 2011; Gilbert, 2010). Andrade (2011) found that not only did training resources educate faculty on how to implement outcomes-based assessment, but it gave them an understanding of why it was needed (p. 223). Further, from an administrative standpoint, it tangibly “demonstrated their commitment to both assessment endeavors and to the faculty” (Andrade, 2011, p. 223). The more faculty members understood that it was an earnest, holistic effort and were given access to the tools needed to be successful, the more willing they were to participate in the initiative.

A final way that faculty can positively perceive assessment is when it is framed as a scholarly activity, relevant to their practice. Schlitz, O’Connor, Pang, Stryker, Markell, Krupp, and Redfern (2009) investigated the use of a faculty learning community (FLC) to create a culture of assessment. At the research site, faculty members from six different academic areas participated in workshops and reflective discussions about their classroom assessment strategies. Analysis of journals kept by these faculty members revealed that a community of fellow
academics, combined with a visible resource investment, resulted in creating a positive assessment culture (Schlitz et al., 2012). These findings were further echoed by the studies of Emil and Cress (2014) and Xueli and Hurley (2014). In both studies, the researchers realized faculty members had positive perceptions of assessment when it was approached as a scholarly activity (Emil & Cress, 2014; Xueli & Hurley, 2014). Critical aspects of this approach include trainings and workshops for faculty and faculty leaders. Contributions to assessment knowledge (through sharing and discussions), made by faculty members, and the ability for faculty to be able to experiment with different assessment methods may lead to continuous improvement (Emil & Cress, 2014; Xueli & Hurley, 2014). All three of these studies indicate that a key factor to improving faculty perception of assessment lies not just in fostering trust; rather, institutions must work to include student learning assessment activities into the scope of the academic tradition that faculty members value so much.

**Conclusion.** Though assessment is something that is of obvious importance to faculty, their adoption of outcomes-based assessment is affected by numerous factors. While many positively associate assessment with the improvement of the student experience, making this fact apparent to faculty is easier said than done. While a culture of trust and an investment of resources can help to prove this fact, the specter of accountability may linger. Accreditation is the most prevalent way that schools use data gathered by outcomes-based assessment initiatives for accountability purposes. The final section of this paper explores the use of assessment data in accreditation and the implications of that relationship.

**Accreditation and Outcomes-Based Assessment**

Accreditation is critical for the survival of a college institution. In today’s higher education landscape, part of this process is the definition and explanation of student learning
assessment data. There have been some distinct events that have led to this association. Further, scholars have identified that this association continues to strengthen today. This section explores those understandings of the relationship between accreditation and assessment.

**Growth of assessment as accountability.** The concept of accountability in higher education plays an important role in the history of accreditation and outcomes-based assessment (Kuh & Ewell, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008). The advancement and formalization of higher education in the 20th century brought with it this element of accountability. The World War II era is a prominent example of the expansion of this accountability. An increased number of colleges and universities, coupled with economic prosperity, allowed for mass access to higher education (Thelin, 2013). The introduction of the GI Bill and federal money for institutions facilitated this mass access. The consequence, however, of this additional federal money was the need for increased scrutiny as to where the money was going. Regional accreditation bodies were created as a form of peer oversight and to keep away this external regulation (Finkin, 1994). Rather than being subject to government oversight, higher education professionals (at the time) preferred to be their own judges.

However, the separation of accreditors and government oversight did not last forever. As they became increasingly linked, there was an increase in the need for outcomes-based assessment. According to Finkin (1994), early accrediting bodies were formed to standardize a four-year approach to baccalaureate programs and other functions of the university system. At first, the regional accrediting bodies set uniform quantitative measures on what institutions should accomplish. By the mid-20th century, however, they had changed their approach, allowing institutions to be assessed on the goals that they had set for themselves (Finkin, 1994).
While accreditation focused on general standards for higher education, it emphasized contextual processes and procedures (Wehlburg, 2008).

This changing relationship affected the way that assessment processes and data were used. The measurement of student assessment had existed in accreditation in some way since the beginning, mostly in the form of graduation rates (Finkin, 1994). However, in the mid-1980s, accreditation began to shift its focus much more intently on student learning outcomes and actual performance data (Alstete, 2004). A number of policy reports were issued in this period regarding the state of education; this led to a growing concern about quality (Lazerson, 2010). The most influential of these reports was one published in 1986 by the Governors’ Association Task Force on Collegiate Quality. The goal of this task force was to analyze the status of higher education and recommend public action based on the results. The resulting report placed a specific emphasis on assessment and how it should be used to prove student learning and the effectiveness of academic programs. Then-Governor of Tennessee Lamar Alexander, one of the members of this task force, summarized these findings: “States should insist that colleges assess what students learn while in college” (Alexander, 1986, p. 202).

**Accreditation and assessment today.** The result of this public conversation was a rapid expansion of expectations regarding assessment for institutions of higher education. The expansion can be seen in changes to accreditation standards and public policy during this time. According to Lazerson (2010), in the early 1980s, no state had requirements for institutions to assess learning in any specific manner. By the end of the decade, however, more than 40 states had taken action to assess students based on established learning outcomes (Lazerson, 2010). Federal funds were also set aside to help fund assessment efforts (Lazerson, 2010).
This result of this shift can be seen in accreditation standards today. Currently, all regional accrediting bodies require institutions to “define their learning goals and assess the learning of their students” (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014, p. 67). Further, these goals can be far-reaching in scope. Gratch-Lindauer’s (2002) review of accreditation standards reveals that institutions are not only expected to measure learning in specific content areas. All accrediting bodies want large, interdisciplinary measures of student learning in areas such as information literacy (Gratch-Lindauer, 2002). These types of holistic measures require collaboration and efforts from multiple departments. The need for cooperative effort increases the pressure on institutions to be able to organize and report such concerted assessment efforts.

Beyond the broad scope of the outcomes that institutions are expected to assess is the issue of transparency. Scholarly research indicates that institutions are increasingly expected to make information regarding the development of outcomes and the results of assessments towards those outcomes plainly available. Kryzykowski and Kinser (2014) cite a number of reasons for this policy change. Most importantly, transparency policies about outcomes-based assessment practices and results are a valuable for numerous levels of stakeholders (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014, pp. 68-69). Parents and prospective students can see this information for institutions in which they have interest. Internally, faculty and staff will be able to see the results of their labor, and where they can improve.

The expectations of this transparency vary, and scholars indicate that these expectations are connected to the assessment practices of a school. Kryzykowski and Kinser (2014) examined schools under North Central Association of Colleges and Schools’ Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC). Where HLC was more specific about transparency requirements,
NEASC was less so. Not surprisingly, assessment practices of the institutions in HLC tended to be more public and part of the culture (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014). Conversely, this was not the case in NEASC.

Though it is not a stunning revelation to see that colleges tend to do what their accreditors ask of them, assessment culture itself may also be affected by these policies. Kryzykowski and Kinser (2014) assert that HLC institutions were better at “creating a culture where assessment is understood in the context of teaching and learning” (p. 72). Ironically, the increased requirements that schools are held accountable to may actually affect the assessment culture positively. Because of this, Kryzykowski and Kinser argue that accreditors should actually be more specific when requiring transparency of outcomes-based assessment efforts.

**Conclusion.** Events of the 20th century have had an undeniable influence in shaping the role of outcomes-based assessment in accreditation. Currently, all regional accreditors not only require information about institutional assessment practices, but they have steadily required increased information about it. Where outcomes and results were once sufficient, now there is information regarding process, holistic/interdisciplinary outcomes, and transparency. This has no doubt increased the association of outcomes-based assessment to accountability in the minds of many, especially faculty.

**Summation**

When analyzed as a whole, these three literature streams provide a clear answer to the research question at hand: Institutions must utilize the flexibility of outcomes-based assessment applications to meet faculty members’ needs so that accreditation standards can be acquired/kept. The first stream revealed that application of outcomes-based assessment could vary in level and scope. Cultural context of the institution is important regarding how assessment initiatives are
applied. This context is also important when considering faculty members’ participation. The second stream revealed that faculty members’ perception of the purpose for the assessment initiative plays a critical role in their participation. Combining these two streams, it is clear that the flexibility of application for outcomes-based assessment should be utilized to ensure faculty members are at the core of any initiative. This focus will soften concerns about trust. Further, it will allow them to protect the academic traditions that are central to higher education in the best way while still fitting their cultural context.

The third stream provides critical context as to why this careful application is significant. Outcomes-based assessment has played an increasingly important role in accreditation, especially in the last 20 years. Today, institutions must report not only on assessment results, but they must disclose detailed process information about how outcomes are established and the manner of assessment used to measure them. Additionally, though accreditors vary in requiring specifics, institutions must also ensure transparency in how assessment-related information is conveyed to both internal and external audiences. This is a potential threat to faculty involvement, as it highlights the aspects of assessment for accountability that have proven in research to be negative motivators.

The public conversation about quality and value in education will not likely disappear any time soon. And, given the increasing presence of outcomes-based assessment in accreditation, it is important that institutions are focused on holistic and strategic initiatives. When planning for these initiatives, institutions must carefully consider culture and the importance of faculty involvement. Using those two factors as a guide, they will be better able to capitalize on the flexible nature of outcomes-based assessment to devise an implementation that suits their needs. With strategic initiatives like this in place, higher education will be able to
prove that it is “outstanding, responsive to changing needs, and a precious commodity to be treasured” (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 165).
Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

Institutions of higher education both value and need student assessment data. This data is valued because of its importance to the student-centered learning movement that has slowly taken hold in higher education over the past 20 years. Started by scholars such as Barr and Tagg (1995), the approach emphasizes the significance of what students actually learn in the classroom, known as the Learning Paradigm. A key component of this paradigm is the actual measurement of student learning through assessments, so that institutions can understand how well their students are learning. Beyond this value, institutions now need this data, as it has become central to accreditation: all accrediting bodies now require evidence of student learning as part of their process (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014).

The formalization of both collecting (through assessment) and reporting student learning data, however, elicits both skepticism and even negativity from many faculty members (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003; Lazerson, 2010; Wehlburg, 2008; Welsh and Metcalf, 2003a). Faculty members have been shown, however, to positively perceive assessment and the collection of student learning data, provided that it does indeed help improve the academic experience for students (Fletcher et al., 2012; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003b). The issue is with formalization and the involvement of administration. This is because assessment involves aspects of higher education that are generally considered areas of purview for faculty, such as academic freedom and curriculum management (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003a). As the need for the collection of student assessment data has grown, however, institutional initiatives have become more formalized, involving committees and administrative staff. Since faculty members view themselves as champions of their disciplines and value academic freedom, this increased
formalization can be troubling (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003a). In turn, faculty participation and motivation in such efforts can be reduced (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003).

In order to reconcile the negative perceptions of formalized student learning data collection to highlight its positives, the faculty experience with this process must be better understood. Ultimately, the use of student learning data gathered through assessment has the potential to improve the quality of the educational experience for students. Faculty members, being key stakeholders in this process, must be fully engaged and motivated to truly capitalize on this improvement, however. Thus, having greater insight into the faculty experience in this area can help higher education on two fronts. It can guide institutions as they implement formalized student learning assessment initiatives; this will help them both in areas of seeking/keeping accreditation and in the benefit of the student experience. Further, it could potentially bridge the gap between administrative efforts and the faculty body, helping institutions to retain faculty members who value their autonomy, academic freedom, and curriculum management.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand faculty experiences with and perceptions of student assessment data for the betterment of student learning. Research indicates faculty can have a positive perception of assessment—as long as the ultimate purpose is for improving academic quality of student learning (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003b; Fletcher et al., 2012). Accreditation ostensibly ensures that institutions are providing quality education to students. However, it is also a system of accountability, and faculty members have generally negative perceptions of assessment when accountability is involved (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). This study, then, aims to understand the nuances of faculty perception and motivation regarding assessment data collection and use.
To understand these nuances, the following research question guided this research: What are the lived experiences of faculty interacting with formalized assessment practices?

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis was to understand the lived experiences of interacting with formalized assessment practices for faculty in higher education. At this stage in the research, “formalized assessment” refers specifically to summative assessments that contribute data to a larger institutional initiative that tracks student learning.

**Research Design**

Due the nature of this inquiry, a qualitative research approach is best fit to guide this study. Qualitative research can be loosely defined as a collection of methodologies aimed at understanding a social or human issue (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). The purpose of this study, as stated, is to understand the experiences of individuals (faculty) participating in a certain phenomenon (assessment data collection and use). This question, at its heart, is concerned with the intersection of individual experience and social context. It is not concerned with statistical correlations and regressions, but rather the essence of experience. This purpose, therefore, is in tight alignment with the basic tenets of qualitative research.

**Constructivist paradigm.** This study is situated in a constructivist paradigm. Philosophically, constructivism believes any claims of an objective reality cannot be separated from the interpretations of the people experiencing it (Ponterotto, 2005). As a paradigm guiding a qualitative study such as this, constructivism dictates that individuals “seek understanding of the world” and “develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed towards certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). These meanings have evolved over time and have been shaped by the social, cultural, and historical norms of the participants (Creswell, 2013,
In this study, alignment with this paradigm can be seen in the research question: determining lived experiences of faculty interacting with formalized assessment. The experiences of the faculty are central, and these experiences shape their understanding of assessment data gathering and use.

As explored in the previous chapter, the meanings of faulty members are also shaped by a number of historical factors, including conceptions of faculty autonomy and academic freedom. Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA, too, states that faculty perception of assessment is shaped by its use in the faculty member’s social context. Given these aspects of this study, the constructivist paradigm is well suited for exploring how a multitude of factors converge and impact the meaning making of faculty members when they experience formalized assessment.

Role of the researcher. The design of this study holds a specific role for the researcher. In any qualitative study, this position is a critical component. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) posit that qualitative researchers hold a specific view of their research topic, guided by their knowledge of its history, relevance, and general context. This background guides their inquiry and research and gives them strength in the process. This strength becomes more defined when considering the constructivist paradigm. Also referred to as the interpretivist paradigm, the research plays a central role by partaking in a dialogue with the participants (Creswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). Through data collection strategies such as open-ended questioning, the researcher engages with the participants in a process of jointly creating findings (Ponterotto, 2005). Following, these findings are interpreted by the researcher, “shaped by their own experiences and background” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). This process is thus a double hermeneutic; as the participants interpret their experiences for meaning, so too does the researcher interpret the experiences and meaning from the participants for greater meaning.
Research Tradition

Understanding this study’s approach to research design and role of the researcher becomes even more critical when considering the research tradition: interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This approach seeks to understand the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon studied and draw meaningful conclusions (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). This section will explore the relevant context of IPA and its alignment to this study’s purpose.

Phenomenology and IPA. IPA derives from the larger research tradition of phenomenology. Phenomenology, simply defined, is the study of individuals participating in a certain event/context (Creswell, 2013). The event/context is known as the “phenomenon,” and a phenomenological study gathers data in the form of lived experiences by those involved in the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then distills an overarching essence or meaning about the phenomenon and/or its participants from this data (Creswell, 2013). Procedurally, there is a focus on the “what” and “how” of the participants’ experiences to help drive distillation of this essence (Moustakas, 1994).

The research tradition of phenomenology flows from a distinct philosophical perspective. Foremost in influencing this perspective was Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher who valued experience as the center of knowledge and sought to discover how this could be captured (Creswell, 2013; Dowling, 2007). In the decades that followed, Husserl’s research was continued by philosophers and researchers, including Heidegger and Gadamer (Creswell, 2013; Dowling, 2007). Though varying schools have arisen from these subsequent additions, three commonalities underpin them all: a focus on the study of the experience of an individual involved with the phenomenon; belief that the experiences of the individuals in the phenomenon
are conscious; and the description of these experiences contain its essence (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

As a research method, there are two leading schools of style in phenomenology: transcendental and hermeneutical. Transcendental phenomenology flows more closely from the original writings of Husserl. This is to say that it focuses on a description of the experiences themselves rather than interpretation (Creswell, 2013). Researchers set aside their experiences for a clean take at a phenomenon, and data analysis involves reducing down data to obtain the essence of experience (Creswell, 2013; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). On the other hand, hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences and the interpretation of what those experiences mean (Creswell, 2013). Researchers use their previous experiences to help interpret the meaning of lived experiences, and data analysis involves reflecting on data capture themes from lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). Heidegger, one of Husserl’s original students, was instrumental in establishing this approach as his work was built upon by van Manen, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer (Creswell, 2013; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011).

It is from hermeneutical phenomenology from which the approach of IPA is derived. Larkin, Eatough, and Osborn (2011) loosely define the goal IPA as to “understand how people make sense of events, relationships, and processes in the context of their particular lifeworlds” (p. 330). IPA’s derivation from hermeneutical phenomenology can be seen on this focus of subjective experience. Gadamer, a hermeneutical phenomenologist, asserted that a critical piece of hermeneutic interpretation takes place within the dialogical interactions of the researcher and participants to determine experience (Dowling, 2007). Further, the hermeneutical concept of intersubjectivity, a concept that dictates that a person and their social context and inextricably
linked, remains critical to any study guided by IPA (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). Rather than a focus on the phenomenon itself, however, IPA seeks to understand how a person experiences and interprets their phenomenon (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011).

IPA alignment with this study. The goal of IPA aligns well with the purpose of this study. Built upon the deep tradition of phenomenology, IPA is concerned chiefly with experience of individual for the purpose of exploring how they perceive a phenomenon. According to Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (2009), as stated in their defining work about IPA as a research method, this approach is well suited for investigations of relevant themes and meanings shared between individuals and a phenomenon. In the case of faculty and their relationship with assessment data, it is necessary to understand the individual interactions and how perceptions of formalized assessment practices develop. This will lead to enhanced understanding of faculty relationship to assessment data and, ultimately, its use for the betterment of student learning.

The deeper advantage of utilizing IPA in this study can be seen in the subject of meaning making. Larkin, Eatough, and Osborn (2011) argue that the IPA approach can be valuable in advancing the field of embodied active situated cognition because of its focus on meaning-making. The challenges cited in the literature regarding faculty adoption of assessment generally involve an implication that they have ascribed to the experience. Faculty often feel the formalized assessment practices disregard the academic tradition and will be used to hold them accountable to unfair standards (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). This is meaning that they have ascribed based on cultural and experiential norms. Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory reflects this, saying that a faculty member’s perception of assessment follows from its purpose. The connection between how these meanings of assessment are created and shift, therefore, are critical to this study and highlight perhaps the most advantageous aspect of IPA for
its application here. Table 1, below, succinctly highlights the alignment of IPA to the purpose of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of IPA Method</th>
<th>Aligned Aspect of this Study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An IPA study focuses on the participant’s experience within a phenomenon (Larkin, Eatough, &amp; Osborn, 2011; Smith, Larkin, &amp; Flowers, 2009)</td>
<td>This study’s research question seeks to understand the faculty members’ lived experiences with formalized student assessment; thus, there will be a distinct focus on this specific phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An IPA study seeks to understand the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon and drawing meaningful conclusions (Larkin, Eatough, &amp; Osborn, 2011; Smith, Larkin, &amp; Flowers, 2009)</td>
<td>This study gathered experiential data of faculty members with formalized student learning assessment. The question emphasizes their experience of the phenomenon (meaning making) for the purpose of illuminating understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An IPA study recognizes the role of researcher’s worldview in interpretation/data analysis (Larkin, Eatough, &amp; Osborn, 2011; Smith, Larkin, &amp; Flowers, 2009)</td>
<td>Student learning assessment is both a passion of and a professional responsibility for the researcher. This experience is a critical component in the process of analysis and interpretation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Table 1: IPA Alignment to Study**

**Research Method**

**Participants.** This study utilized a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure the validity and reliability of the results it will produce. Creswell (2013) notes that there are three important aspects to this strategy. First, the researcher must decide who the participants are—what are the specific criteria that participants must meet to be included? Second, there must be a specific sampling strategy that helps provide further understanding of the phenomenon. Third, the researcher must decide the size of the participant pool.

The first part of purpose sample strategy dictates the need for a unifying identity for all participants. For this study, participants were faculty members whose current or past institution had a formalized assessment initiative. “Formalized assessment” refers to any initiative that
gathers and reports student-learning data via summative assessments. It is not concerned with formative assessments, which are less formal assessments used to help students practice and learn. When describing sampling for a phenomenological study, Creswell (2013) states that the key factor is that all participants have experience with the phenomenon to be studied. Faculty members recruited for this study, then, will need to have present or past engagement with the gathering of this data in formal way so that they will be able to speak to their lived experience with it.

Beyond their experience with the phenomenon, however, this study seeks to discover the experience of various types of faculty members. To do this, the researcher utilized a maximum variation strategy when recruiting participants. Maximum variation strategy requires the researcher to determine criteria that differentiates the participants, for the purpose of reflecting different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). In this study, there are three distinctive ways that participants varied. First, the type of faculty appointment is significant. Faculty can be tenured, full-time, or adjunct, for example. As indicated by the literature, these diverse populations may have different experiences with assessment (Webber, 2012; Welsh & Metcalf 2003b). Second, the discipline of the faculty member varied. As with type of faculty appointment, the literature indicates that discipline of faculty might be a factor in their experience with assessment (Young, Cartwright, & Rudy, 2014). Third, the medium of the faculty member varied as well. In today’s world of higher education, there are three main media for faculty to teach: traditional (face-to-face), hybrid (a combination of online and traditional), and online.

The final aspect of this purposeful sampling strategy is size. The nature of IPA dictates that the lived experiences of individuals in relation to their shared phenomenon holds valuable data. As such, multiple participants are generally needed for a study such as this. Due to the in-
depth nature of the data collection and analysis, however, there should not be too many. Dukes (1984) recommends three to 10, though the upper limit is dictated by the procedures of the research. Given this recommendation and the strategy of maximum variance to be employed, the researcher recruited nine participants. This number allowed for diversity in areas such as faculty assignment, discipline, and medium, but limited the amount of data gathered to ensure a thorough and thoughtful analysis.

**Recruitment and access.** To recruit and access participants for this study, the researcher followed a defined protocol. First, the researcher followed the appropriate procedure to obtain permission to conduct this study through the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This study requires the interaction with and use of human participants, therefore, IRB approval was needed to ensure ethical practices are utilized.

After IRB approval, the researcher began active recruitment. In the first stage, the researcher used an IRB-approved recruitment sheet (see Appendix A) to convey the overarching aspects of this study and generate interest. A $10 gift card to Amazon.com was offered to those who are chosen and participate to completion. This gift card served both as a way of driving potential candidates to join and as a small token of the researcher’s gratitude. This recruitment sheet was disseminated in two ways: through social media and through snowball sampling. The researcher posted this sheet to social media. According to Broughton, Foley, Ledermaier, and Cox (2013), social media can be an important way of accessing candidates otherwise unavailable. It provided the ability to target more specifically, based on need (Broughton, Foley, Ledermaier, & Cox, 2013). For the researcher’s personal contacts in higher education and to enhance the use of social media recruiting, snowball sampling was be employed. Sadler, Lee, Lim, and Fullerton (2010) recommend the use of snowball strategy, where interested candidates
utilize their social networks to help the researcher find candidates, in social science studies to help refine and optimize the participant pool.

As part of the second stage of recruitment, the potential participants were screened. Those who responded to the recruitment sheet and contacted the researcher underwent a brief (15 to 30 minutes) screening. In this screening, the researcher further described the study to the candidate and answered any questions the candidate had. Additionally, this call provided the opportunity for the researcher to ensure that the candidate had the appropriate criteria to fit the study. This ensured participant pool validity and provided the opportunity to optimize maximum variance. This call was not considered part of the study, and no questions relevant to the study were asked. Candidates who did not meet the appropriate criteria were eliminated from the pool, and qualified candidates were invited to participate.

Protection of human subjects. As previously mentioned, this study ensured ethical protection for its participants. As a general note, no activities related to the research phase of this study were undertaken until there was IRB approval. The goal of the IRB is to protect the rights of human participants, and until that approval was received, research did not commence. To gain this approval, the researcher demonstrated that the three ethical concerns relevant to a study such as this, noted by Creswell (2013), were addressed: informed consent procedures, potentially deceptive practices, and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in this study. They were presented with a comprehensive form (see Appendix B) that explicitly outlined the general nature of a research study and the purpose and procedure of this specific study. All phases of data gathering were outlined, as was their status as a voluntary participant (which means they can withdraw at any time). This form also helped prevent potentially deceptive practices, as participant had proof of the approved steps in this study. Additionally, the
data and themes garnered from the data collection interview were presented to the participants for verification (described in more detail in the next section). This prevented the inclusion of data and themes not actually present in the interviews. Finally, all information about the participants and the data collected from them has been, and will continue to be, held confidential and protected. Participant identities are protected via pseudonyms in the study, data collection documents, and interview notes. The data gathered from these interviews has been, and will continue to be, kept in external storage that is password protected and secured. Combined, these strategies helped to secure IRB approval and protect the rights of the participants involved.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began when the researcher found nine participants that volunteered and met the specified criteria. The data collection method for this study was in-depth interviews, which are the primary way for phenomenological and IPA studies to gather data (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Interviews allow for the researcher to explore the phenomenological topic and gather rich detail from the participants who have experienced it (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For this study, these interviews allowed the researcher to capture the nuanced experiences of faculty experiencing formalized assessment.

To best serve the IPA research tradition, these interviews followed a specific process and protocol. Process-wise, multiple interviews were utilized, as specified by Rubin & Rubin (2012). After recruitment, the researcher worked with each participant to schedule interviews; it was important that their schedule considerations were respected. All interviews were conducted via the Internet for consistency of medium and data collection.

Additionally, all interviews followed a predetermined interview protocol, which was critical for ensuring consistency of structure and interview integrity (Creswell, 2013; Kvale &
Brinkmann, 2009). The protocol, which contains a guiding script and interview questions, can be found in Appendix C. The first interview was used as an introduction and was short, generally around 15 to 30 minutes. The role of the researcher and the purpose of the research were addressed, and basic demographic data was captured to contribute to the detailed participant descriptions. Additionally, the researcher discussed logistics, such as informed consent, and scheduled the next interview.

This second interview was the principal data collection session for capturing the participants’ lived experiences. These interviews were semi-structured in nature. Rubin and Rubin (2012) define semi-structured interviews as interviews are driven by a specific topic, with questions prepared beforehand. However, these questions are open-ended—they allow the interviewee the ability to “respond any way he or she chooses, elaborating upon questions, disagreeing with the question, or raising new issues” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 29). The researcher began with a brief opening statement and then proceeded with the interview questions (both the script and the questions can be found in Appendix C). These questions were guided by Brown’s CoA theory and prompted participants to discuss their experience with formalized assessment in the context of different purposes. Where appropriate, the researcher asked follow-up questions to investigate emergent themes and clarify relevant details. Depending on the length of participant answers and the number of follow-up questions asked, these interviews averaged 60 to 90 minutes in length.

The third step in this process occurred after the researcher had spent some time analyzing the transcribed interviews and played an important role in verifying the data gathered. The researcher wrote a summary of what was heard in the first two interviews and sent this document, along with the two interview transcripts to the participants. Each participant was
asked to verify that the document and transcripts were accurate. If they were accurate, the participant indicated this fact, and their participation was ended. If not, the researcher and participant met via the Internet or phone to clarify inaccurate information.

This third step serves two purposes. First, it allows the participant to gain critical insight and transparency into the beginning stages of analysis. This step helps ensure protection against the ethical issue of covert or hidden events within the process that could compromise the study’s integrity (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, this plays a significant check in the positionality of the researcher. When participants were asked to verify the data, they were able to correct any unintentional misinterpretation that occurred in the process of the interview or analysis.

The data from these interviews needed to be captured accurately in order to ensure an analysis that is valid and reliable. All interviews were conducted via the Internet, and the researcher utilized GoToMeeting to hold these virtual meetings. Each interview was captured using the audio recording functionality of GoToMeeting. In both data recording sessions, the researcher took detailed interview notes, which captured tone, potential emergent themes, and prompted potential probe questions. Once recorded, the audio files were transcribed for analysis.

**Data Storage**

Protecting the confidentiality of the participants would not mean much if proper steps were not taken to secure the data collected. Aldridge, Medina, and Ralphs (2005) and Creswell (2013) agree the data storage security in the digital age is a foremost concern for qualitative studies. All audio files, results transcript files, and electronic interview notes have been named appropriately (using pseudonym and interview number) and filed in the appropriate folder. These written files have been kept secure; audio recordings containing non-anonymized information will be deleted as soon as possible. Until then, these files will be password protected and kept on
an external hard drive or USB drive. These precautions fulfill the recommendations of Aldridge, Medina, and Ralphs (2005) that information should be digitized whenever possible, anonymized immediately, and protected via password.

Beyond the digital considerations for security are physical ones. These files have not and will not be kept on a shared computer; the computer was used only to access and analyze the data, not for storage. The separate file storage drive that contains the data is stored in the researcher’s home, in a lock box. After completion of the study, the data will remain secure for a period of three years. Once the three years has passed, all data will be deleted, permanently.

**Data Analysis**

With the data gathered and secured, the research then began the lengthy and involved process of data analysis. The transcriptions of the first and second interviews and the researcher’s interview notes comprised the majority of the data to be analyzed. As has been discussed, IPA, and the larger tradition of phenomenology in general, is concerned analyzing this data for its relevance to the personal experiences of the participants’ relationship with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Specifically for IPA, Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (2009) advocate a procedural approach to data analysis that focuses experiences and perceptions, with an emphasis of understanding the perspective of the participants.

To clarify this understanding, the data was analyzed for themes and coded appropriately. This procedure seems simple, but requires a specific, systematic process advocated by Creswell (2013) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Distilling themes from the body of qualitative data and capturing them with codes helps to “winnow” data that is not relevant to the research problem (Creswell, 2012). The coded themes can then be analyzed for significance in relation to
the research question. The process of coding is considered by some to be merely procedural, but in a qualitative study such as this “coding is deep reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data’s meanings” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 72).

This deep analysis was achieved through a three-step process: initial reading, first cycle coding, and second cycle coding. Before any official coding begins, the researcher read the transcriptions and the accompanying interview notes. This initial reading assisted the researcher in gaining a full understanding of the content in each interview. It should be noted that this step itself was analysis; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) advocate for such early analysis as it can facilitate deeper analysis in subsequent steps. Further, this initial analysis helped focus the subsequent readings on coding, and themes began to emerge during this reading.

The first cycle coding began a more focused and intentional phase of analysis. In this step, the researcher assigned portions of the data with descriptive codes. These codes were “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information” in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 71). These codes became a central part of the analysis, allowing for discernment of the unique or shared descriptions from the participants. As an IPA, this analysis needed to attend to the participants’ experiences and perceptions (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). This focus was achieved through the use of affective methods of coding, which could include emotion, values, and evaluation coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Of particular interest is emotion coding, which is used for analyzing perspectives and worldview of participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Coding with this method was best to capture and categorize the nuances of faculty experience with formalized assessment. These codes were created inductively, as they emerged during the researcher’s time during the initial reading and the first cycle coding. To create and preserve these codes in the data, the researcher used
MAXQDA software. This software is specifically designed for qualitative analysis and provided all needed functionality for organization and analysis.

Use of this software continued into the next phase, second cycle coding. The first cycle generally summarized and clustered data with codes relevant to describing the experiences of the participants; this second cycle took that multitude of codes and discerned larger patterns among them. This process allowed the researcher to identify larger themes emergent from the shared experiences of faculty experiencing formalized assessment. Conversely, it also highlighted areas of divergence. To do this, codes from the first cycle were grouped into larger pattern codes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) identify four general categories of pattern codes: categories/themes, causes/explanations, interpersonal relationships, and theoretical constructs. Creation of the specific pattern codes for this data was a dynamic process; the research must ensure that patterns organically emerge (are induced) from the data. While the theoretical framework for this study, Brown’s (2008) CoA, helped to provide a guideline for potential patterns, the researcher made certain that any patterns that fell outside of the framework were noted. This is critical for a valid and reliable analysis.

The final stage of this process was, of course, writing the analysis itself. While second cycle coding resulted in a number of patterns, the analysis drew larger conclusions about what these patterns actually mean. For this study, that will mean that the participants’ experiences were properly captured, with a particular emphasis on meaning making (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). As explored by Larkin, Eatough, and Osborn (2011), the nature of an IPA study makes it particularly well suited to explore how people interact with phenomena and assign value and meaning to it. Further, this study is framed by Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory, which states that purpose primarily of assessment dictates faculty perception. The emphasis of this
analysis, then, was on what aspects of their experience with formalized assessment causes faculty to assign a certain meaning or emotion. Is purpose of assessment a significant factor? If so, do the perceptions and purposes align with those stated by CoA? Are there any other significant factors that affect perception of formalized student learning assessment? This approach to analysis revealed the nuances of participants’ experiences for the purposes of improving the use of student learning assessment at institutions of higher education.

**Trustworthiness**

To reveal experience and drive meaning forward, however, the researcher understands that trustworthiness of method is a crucial issue. Shenton (2004) identifies methods for ensuring credibility of a qualitative study, and the researcher has employed a number of them. The first of these started before data collection even began: consideration of positionality (Shenton, 2004). The researcher is explicit about the beliefs, values, and experiences that may have affected interpretation of the data. Thoughtful consideration of these beliefs during the research design phase allowed for proper planning by the researcher to build in critical steps in the process to mitigate any impact of positionality.

The next steps for guaranteeing trustworthiness include examination of previous research and tactics for ensuring honesty of participants (Shenton, 2004). First, examination of previous research helps to address the positionality of the researcher. By understanding the relevant literature to the topic at hand, the researcher’s assumptions were be challenged by existing empirical studies. This previous research helps provide insight as well, guiding the researcher as the study was designed and conducted. Second, the researcher must employ safeguards to ensure that participants are honest. While this can never be fully guaranteed, participants should not be
offered large incentives and must be acutely aware of their ability to leave the study at any time (Shenton, 2004). These tactics were intended to drastically decrease the likelihood of dishonesty.

Finally, there were three steps used during data collection that helped ensure trustworthiness: iterative questioning, researcher’s reflective commentary, and member checking (Shenton, 2004). As evidenced by Appendix C, the interview questions to be employed by the researcher were open-ended and left room for follow-up questions and probes. This process, argues Shenton (2004), helps flush out falsehoods or clarify potentially contradictory data provided by participants. Accompanying this process of questioning was reflective commentary by the researcher. As described in the preceding discussion of data collection, notes kept during interviews helped contextualize the transcribed interview data. This technique not only served as early analysis but also provided that valuable data not captured in the transcript is included in the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Shenton, 2004). And to verify that these notes captured the correct tone and inferences, member checking was used. The third step in the interview process with the participants served as this member check. The researcher presented the overall impression of the data collected, including any early analysis, and the transcripts. The goal of this check was to confirm that the experiences conveyed to the researcher aligned with the participant’s intent (Shenton, 2004).

**Summation**

The purpose of this study necessitated a specific approach to research design and data collection and analysis. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of interacting with formalized assessment practices for faculty in higher education. To explore this question, the researcher employed a methodology that is phenomenological in nature. It followed the specific tradition of an IPA, which focuses on the lived experiences of
participants as they interact with a shared phenomenon. These experiences were captured through in-depth interviews, designed specifically to allow participants to convey their perceptions in an open-ended fashion. Analysis of the data gathered involved a thoughtful process of coding, which allowed larger themes to emerge from the data and patterns to be discerned. The researcher included aspects of the research design, such as reflective commentary and member checking, to ensure trustworthiness.
Chapter Four: Research Findings and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the lived experience of faculty members with formalized assessment initiatives. Participants in this study were selected on the basis that they had past or present experience as faculty with a formalized effort to gather student-learning data via assessments at the departmental or institutional level. Over the course of two interviews, the participants provided a description of their context and answered questions that roughly aligned with Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory. The interview protocol was designed to draw out relevant perspective and rich experiential data regarding their participation in formalized assessment initiatives.

The emergent themes from that data collection are discussed in this chapter. Analysis of this data revealed three superordinate themes, each containing a number of subthemes. This chapter is organized by these superordinate themes, and each will be described for its relevance to the faculty experience with formalized assessment initiatives. Additionally, the subthemes for each superordinate theme, which provide further specificity about the nuance of faculty experience, will also be discussed. These superordinate and subthemes are 1) Internal and External Accountability, including a) student accountability, b) faculty accountability, and c) institutional accountability; 2) Improvement and Support, including a) student experience and b) faculty experience; and 3) Factors for Implementation, including a) the role of faculty and b) the role of administration. After these superordinate and subthemes are discussed, this chapter will conclude with a brief summary.
Participants

There were nine individuals that participated in this study. As described in Chapter 3, a maximum variance strategy was utilized to garner a variety of perspectives across education. The participants were varied in three ways: faculty type (adjunct, full-time, etc.), discipline, and learning modality (online, face-to-face, etc.). This participant pool also had varied experience in the area of administration; some had past or present experience as full-time, higher education administrators. Others had part-time duties as administrators, and some had none. To articulate all of these variances, the nine participants are described in this section.

Bill. Bill is a full-time faculty member. He works teaching history at within the online division of his institution. Bill noted that he had served in previous adjunct faculty roles at a number of institutions before being hired to his current position. This position, which he had served in for almost two years, had actually changed over time. While he was still classified as a faculty member, he had a number of administrative duties in the way of committee work, program reviews, and faculty development (of adjunct faculty). Bill’s position included involvement in an assessment initiative that actually standardized whole courses. This standardization included the student learning assessments (final or summative assessments only), for the purposes of data collection.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth is a full-time faculty member in the education department. She teaches in a face-to-face classroom. In the education department, she taught classes about assessment. Like Bill, Elizabeth identifies herself as a faculty member but also has a fair amount of administrative responsibility. At the time of the interview, she taught half time, as she was also the director for her institution’s center for teaching and learning. Prior to the director role, she had been the chair of her institution’s assessment committee. Her institution was active in
utilizing formalized assessment, especially in the area of general education. Previously, at another institution, she has also been involved with an assessment initiative; this role served as important an influence on her answers as her current role.

**Georgia.** Georgia is an adjunct faculty member who teaches face-to-face. At her institution, she teaches in the IT and business departments. It should be noted that her assessment experience came when she was teaching in IT. Full-time, Georgia has administrative role at the online portion of her school, serving as an academic advisor. While she was pursuing her PhD, Georgia did not actually consider a faculty role to be something to which she would ultimately aspire. The assessment initiative that she had experiences was a term-to-term evaluation of student learning against outcomes based on their performance on classwork. She had no relevant previous work or committee experience with assessment.

**Jen.** Jen is an adjunct faculty member, teaching online at the same university as Bill. Full-time, Jen serves an administrator at her institution, working with adjunct faculty to help guide performance and development. Jen has taught English and literature online for this institution. Since she works as the same institution as Bill, the assessment initiative that she participated in is the same: curated courses are delivered to faculty, with standardized assessments. The institution gathers, catalogs, and analyzes the student learning assessment data. She had previous face-to-face experience teaching as an adjunct faculty member in English at a community college.

**Jessica.** Jessica is a history faculty member with both administrative and faculty experience as part of a formalized assessment initiative. In her current role, she serves as a faculty program director for online programs. In this role, she is classified as faculty, but rarely teaches. Her institution, similar to Jen and Bill’s (though different), curates content and gathers
the ensuing assessment data. Previous to this role, she was a visiting professor, teaching face-to-face at a different institution. This institution also had a formalized assessment initiative, though slightly different—faculty had to ensure that their curricula were meeting learning outcomes, but could design assessments as they saw fit. Like Elizabeth, both of the experience contributed to her understanding about this topic.

**Patty.** Patty has a multitude of experience, teaching both face-to-face and online in a variety of disciplines. Patty identified that she had served as an adjunct at no less than four universities, teaching in disciplines such as IT, business, accounting, and organizational leadership. Because of this breadth of experience, Patty also had participated in a number of formalized assessment initiatives. Though they varied, they all utilized standardized outcomes and tools to gather student learning assessment data.

**Emily.** Emily is a full-time professor of English. She has only taught in a face-to-face classroom, believing that the nature of this environment is critical to learning. While she is dedicated full-time to her role as a faculty member, Emily also helps to run an initiative to improve writing through assessment. She explained, too, that she had been involved with a variety of other assessment initiatives. While these all sought to improve learning in the classroom through standardized assessment, there were a number of variables among them. This variance contributed to her experiences and answers in the interviews.

**Tammy.** As with Patty, Tammy had served at a variety of institutions as an adjunct. Tammy teaches primarily in the field of healthcare, in areas such as medical coding. While she teaches primarily in the online space, she had face-to-face experience. This experience came when she was hired to be a program director for a medical assistance program out of graduate school. Though she left this role to work in the private sector, its impact was apparent on her
answers. Tammy’s experience to various online institutions had exposed her to an array of formalized assessment initiatives. Tammy noted that while some online institutions that she taught for only required her to use standardized assessment and rubrics, others delivered entire curated courses. It is significant to note that Tammy is the only participant whose full-time job is outside of education.

**Todd.** Todd is a full-time faculty member, teaching the Arabic language in a face-to-face classroom. It should be noted that Todd works at a private institution, not open to the general public for enrollment. Todd’s institution focuses solely on the study of language, granting associate degrees to student who are required, as part of their job, to learn a language. The curriculum at Todd’s institution is standardized, with each language having specific standards that students must hit in the areas of speaking, listening, and writing. Achievement of these standards is evaluated through assessment. Todd had served as curriculum and test developer, helping to design the tests and the content that supports them. Todd had no relevant administrative experience.

**Internal and External Accountability**

The first superordinate theme revealed from analysis of the data is that of Internal and External Accountability. As established in the literature, there are three major ways in which assessment can be used in accountability in an institution of higher education: at the student level, at the faculty level, and at the institutional level. Their experiences were varied, of course, because of their different roles as faculty and their embedded context. Generally, however, all participants had positive perceptions regarding the use of assessment data in the areas of student and institutional accountability. Conversely, in the area of faculty accountability, participants generally responded negatively. The specifics of these perspectives are explored in this section.
Student accountability. Overwhelmingly, participants were positive about the potential benefits of using formalized assessment to hold students accountable for their learning. All participants answered that articulating learning outcomes, as evaluated through formalized assessment, was a necessary strategy for the classroom (both online and face-to-face). Perhaps the strongest endorsements of this strategy came from the two participants who were the most embedded in their assessment initiatives: Elizabeth and Emily. Elizabeth was enthusiastic about the potential benefits, asserting that students could use the approach to identify “gaps in their education” and “work to improve their learning.” Emily was even more emphatic as she responded to the question: “I’m the world’s biggest fan. I think it’s incredibly important. I want to put students’ learning outcomes 100% in their hands.”

One of the primary threads woven throughout participant answers about the benefits of student accountability through formalized assessment was clarity. All participants, whether adjuncts, full-time faculty, or administrators that have been faculty, expressed that their experience demonstrated the benefits of clarified student expectations provided by formalized assessment. For the participants, the clarity provided by specific assessment tools and approaches placed critical emphasis on student accountability for meaningfully engaging with the course materials.

Rubrics (associated with the assessments) were the most referenced of these tools. Bill felt that rubrics laid out expectations for students and gave them guidelines to get the most out of their efforts. Tammy echoed this sentiment; she said that:

By tethering those course objectives to them (assessment), you say, “The goal of this assignment is you’re gonna learn X, Y and Z, here’s how I’m going to assess you, and
turn in this, and this is how you’re going to be evaluated.” Yes, I think of that as effective and appropriate.

Further, some participants expressed that this accountability on the student’s part facilitated conversations about the learning that could happen. Jen was thoughtful in her response and summed up her perspective with a clear statement: “I think there are ways in which assessments in that more formalized, structured manner are actually quite useful for communication with the student.” Georgia relayed a story about how a student she encountered used feedback from assessment results to improve her work. The assessment process gave the student explicit feedback that was actionable. Georgia stated that the process gave the student:

A sense of responsibility, one, to collect this information from each faculty member that has the opportunity to do so and, two, for her also to see how she’s doing that maybe she could take action on because this was earlier in the semester or maybe halfway through the semester.

For Emily, the process of holding students accountable for their own learning through assessment led to an even more important conversation. She asserted that the accountability students felt for their learning ultimately allowed her to connect with their “desire to learn.” More than just acquiring grade, the assessment of their learning led to discussions about how they could develop specific skill sets. As a teacher of English, and specifically college composition, the ability to express oneself through writing is key in her classrooms. She relayed an experience regarding a recent discussion that had turned toward the students’ views on education. When stating her negative perspective, she “passionately” said:

Yet you all have your hands up, and you all want to talk. You have the urge to communicate. You always have since you were a baby. You grasped the language. You
want to make sense of the world through language.” Everybody wants to communicate.

It’s just the setting in which you do that. We started to talk about that a bit, and connect it
back to the basic function of language and how language could be empowering beyond
just getting a grade.

For Emily, holding students accountable for their own learning allowed her to demonstrate
greater meaning for the assessments in which they had engaged or would engage.

All participants, however, noted one serious drawback to this approach: a lack of
understanding about the measurement of learning through assessment on the part of students.
The experiences of the participants led to a general consensus that students did not fully
conceptualize the concept of learning assessment. Due to this lack of understanding, it was hard
to reap the benefits of this process consistently. Todd asserted that, in his experience, his students
could not quite conceptualize how meaningfully engaging assessment might be able to benefit
their learning. Elizabeth, too, noted that the issue was systemic: “We don’t seem to value or
show them we value the learning.”

A major component of this lack of understanding is the focus on grades by students, as
identified by six of the eight participants. Jessica was pensive as she considered her encounters
with students about their learning. Jessica stated, “It’s probably just students kind of trying to get
through the classes as expeditiously as possible and just getting to the grade.” Bill’s experiences
provided him much the same sentiment when asked the same question: “To most students, that
type of stuff is boilerplate to most students that are here for a grade, and so a lot of students I
don’t think really even pay any attention to that whatsoever.” Since grades are still the major
construct in the mind of a student to measure success in a class, it leads to disinterest over
measures of learning (such as assessment).
One participant, Emily, noted also that this lack of understanding could be attributed to skepticism from previous experiences with assessments that were not effective:

I think there’s skepticism that they have that they’re going to improve when they come into the class and a bit of a lack of buy-in… Some of the student opened up about how they felt profoundly depressed and demoralized by the kind of assessment they had had in the past by always being told that they were good, or not good, as students.

Rather than simply not having been introduced to the concept of learning measurement (through assessment), these students had actually been soured on the concept through previous experiences. Emily described that it took effort engage in dialog with her classes about it to undue damage already done. That way, students could truly benefit from their participation in the learning and assessment process.

**Faculty accountability.** The second major subtheme is accountability of faculty for the results of formalized student learning assessment in the classroom. Not surprisingly, and in line virtually all of the literature on the subject, participants expressed a negative reaction about this topic. The strongest response on this topic came from Elizabeth; her previous role as a primary/secondary teacher gave her distinct experience with this practice. She stated, “When I was a K-12 teacher, we used to get really upset about this issue and we would say that it’s like assessing dentists for the number of cavities that a patient has in their mouth.” This anecdote effectively summarizes the various perspectives of the participants: the nature of the classroom is too complex to hold just faculty accountable for learning assessment results.

Student motivation was one of the key points repeated by a number of participants. Patty had encountered consistent issues with motivation in her career:
Over the course of 20 years of teaching, I’ve come to the conclusion that sometimes a student just is not interested. They’re not invested. There are multiple reasons why a student doesn’t pass. It could have nothing to do with the instructor what so ever. Similarly, Todd acknowledged that faculty being held totally accountable was ignoring the motivation of some students. Todd’s institution focuses on the study of language, granting associate degrees to student who are required, as part of their job, to learn a language. Because of this, he ends up with students in his classes that may have no intrinsic motivation to be there. Reflecting on this, he said, “We cannot blame the teachers for everything… I don’t think that to just point the fingers to the teachers and blame him for everything is not fair at all.”

Tied into this concept of student motivation is student preparedness. Tammy, who teaches mostly online as an adjunct, specifically focused on this issue. She relayed multiple experiences with underprepared students: “We have people that don’t have computers, we have people that have not been in school for 50 years, we have people who maybe have English as a second language.” While Tammy asserted that she always tried her best with every student, she felt that issues such as these were barriers to student success in the area of learning assessment. And, since she had no control over who was placed in her classroom, she felt that it was too simplistic to just hold faculty accountable for the results of learning assessment.

Another aspect of faculty accountability cited by multiple participants is that some institutions follow a process wherein assessments, or even whole courses, are curated and delivered to faculty with little leeway for change. For the participants who taught mainly in the online space, such as Bill, Patty, Jen, and Tammy, this was a central aspect to their conversations. Bill’s institution uses this standardized design approach, and it had led to some experiences that gave him a distinct perspective:
At my institution where all of the courses are pre-manufactured and all of the assignments are pre-manufactured, it’s not completely fair to make the faculty completely responsible for it… it would not be fair because faculty, we only have a certain amount of stuff we can do to change because we can’t go in and change the rubrics.

Jen relayed a similar belief, stating that in her first experience teaching with her current institution, she did not feel that the standardized assessments and rubrics resulted in accurate results. Tammy was perhaps the most emphatic about this, stating, “so they have the course master, and they’re just pounding them out to different sections so everyone has the same content… I don’t think an instructor should be responsible for it (results of student learning assessment).” Much like student motivation and preparedness, the faculty felt that circumstances beyond their control made full accountability for their classroom learning an unfair approach.

It is interesting to note, however that a few of the participants did feel that faculty were accountable to some extent for student learning assessment results in the classroom. The variable was the extent of students doing poorly. Patty, having taught a multiple institutions as both a face-to-face and online adjunct, was the most passionate about this concept.

I think it’s a 50/50. I don’t think I’d be completely comfortable if I was held 100% accountable for students that… If 90% of your class is failing, obviously that’s an instructor problem. That’s obvious. Or even if 50% or 40% of your class is failing. Obviously that’s an instructor issue. Because that demonstrates a significant problem.

Todd agreed. While acknowledging the role a student plays in their learning, he also felt that it was not accurate to say that the faculty held zero accountability for what happened in the classroom. To Todd, Patty, and Jen, faculty were accountable for effort in the classroom—but student-learning assessment cannot measure faculty effort.
The final thread of this subtheme regarding faculty accountability is perhaps the most positive. All of the participants, save one, noted that they had never themselves experienced being held accountable for student learning assessment results in the classroom, nor had they ever heard of it being done. Only Tammy responded that she felt increasing pressure about the learning results in the classroom:

If I’m reaching back into my experience, when I first started, yes, students were more accountable, they had to more… review the assignments, making sure that they understand the rubrics themselves, making sure that if they get a bad grade they reach out to us with questions, rather than us approaching them with our findings, but it’s really shifted in my experience, where students really I do not find are accountable any more. Though she had not ever faced any consequences herself, she felt strongly that the pressure was there.

Despite the lack of holding faculty accountable in practice, the fear of this being done permeated student learning assessment efforts for one of the participants. In her experience as a faculty champion for an assessment initiative about writing at her institution, Emily noted that many faculty members were hesitant and skeptical. She noted:

A lot of faculty members become very anxious if they feel like they’re themselves being assessed for their teaching and their ability to teach… They’re not even being held that accountable. They’re just being given support, and they’re still scared, so that’s interesting.

This fear is potentially disruptive to any meaningful effort at student learning assessment, as Emily noted that previous initiatives had stalled when faculty were afraid of this accountability.
Institutional accountability. The final subtheme under this superordinate theme is that of institutional accountability. For most in higher education, this accountability specifically takes the form of accreditation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, all regional accreditors check institutions of higher education for their efforts to promote student learning (Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014). The standards vary: some accrediting bodies ask only that institutions have outcome and attempt to measure students. Others, however, more involved data points and results.

Generally, the participants all believed that holding institutions accountable to accreditors for student learning assessment results was a valid approach. Their beliefs regarding this centered on the quality of education being provided; the participants all felt that institutions had implicit responsibility to be able to measurably improve the learning of students. Patty was the quickest and held the most conviction in her defense of the practice: “I think it’s essential. You’re working with an oversight governing body that’s dedicated to education… they want to make sure that the mission of the institution is meeting what they set out to do for the students.” Tammy stated clearly that the practice was “appropriate” based on her experience. Jen’s previous experience in another profession where accreditation was important gave her, too, a distinct appreciation for the process:

I’ve seen how organizations who are not able to qualify for accreditation are places with some problems. They may not be doing things ethically. They may have their priorities in the wrong place, and standards of care might not be where they should be, or staff … Staff salaries was actually part of it, the accreditation before where salaries needed to be at a certain minimum level, or you’re not treating your staff appropriately. It’s all of these things that go together to add value to what you’re getting.
It is critical to note that the purpose of this institutional accountability, according to the participants, is more for targeting help than leveraging punishment. Todd noted that using assessment in the accreditation process was valuable because it could reveal points of struggle in the area of student learning. Then, plans for addressing those struggles could be developed. Patty noted that in her experience, “if they (the accrediting bodies) see that there’s some problem, from what I understand, they’re gonna make those recommendations to the institution to make those changes.” Elizabeth had a positive perception of this practice, simply because “holding us a little bit more accountable will raise all the sails, so to speak.”

Despite these strong feelings, only two of the candidates had direct experience in actually helping with the accreditation process, and this impacted their perspective. Tammy, Patty, Jen, and Georgia did not have this experience—they typically served as adjunct faculty and were not involved in any accreditation efforts. Neither had Bill, Todd, and Jessica; they all work at institutions where accreditation is handled by specific person or team. Only Emily and Elizabeth had direct experience in actually using the student learning assessment data in the accreditation process. While they agreed with the process in theory, both indicated that they felt accreditation efforts to hold institutions accountable for student learning assessment results were superficial. Emily provided a lengthy description of her efforts in coordinating data collection and helping to prepare reports. When asked if she thought it was a worthwhile and valid effort, she assertively answered: “Not at all. No. I think it’s a rubber stamp… I don’t think it does anything. I would get rid of it.” Emily’s use of the term “rubber stamp” belied her feeling that no real, meaningful results flowed from the process.

Elizabeth’s response to a similar line of questions mirrored this belief. She had been involved in helping to coordinate the accreditation efforts regarding student-learning assessment.
In her experience, she had seen colleges within an institution with the “poorest” approach to student learning assessment come off as the best. This was simply because they could write a better essay about how they approach assessment. To her, the actual substance of a system could be by-passed via rhetoric—meaning that the process was not comprehensive enough to be of much value. For both Emily and Elizabeth, this practice was worthwhile in theory, provided that there was value, specifically in the form of improvement. This sentiment was echoed throughout the participants’ answers. In fact, improvement is key to the second superordinate theme, discussed in the next section.

**Improvement and Support**

The use of student learning assessment data for improvement and support was a constant and recurring superordinate theme with all candidates. In virtually all areas where faculty members were positive about the use of formalized student learning assessment, there was some aspect of improvement or support for the educational process. This theme cut across all participants and their various demographics, including type of faculty (adjunct vs. full-time), classroom type (online vs. face-to-face), experience with administration, and so on. Additionally, it is consistent with the literature about student learning assessment. While there were a variety of answers about how their experiences supported this perspective, their answers fell into two subthemes: improvement for the student experience or improvement for the faculty experience.

**Student experience.** Participants all relayed positive perceptions about how student-learning assessment had helped them improve the experience for students in the classroom. These beliefs often took the form of basic statements about how student-learning assessment could help ensure that demonstrable improvement at the end of the course. Georgia said, “I think it’s definitely a useful tool for the institution and for bettering the outcome of the course…”
Because at the end of the day, you do want those students to get out of same learning experience.” Patty noted that the use of student learning assessment was important because one could measure their needs better and meet those needs. Elizabeth felt that it was an important strategy for the field of education, in general, to make sure that students are getting tangible benefits out of the classroom.

For some participants, these benefits could take the form of simple adjustments to the class experience. Bill, who teaches online, noted that he used the results of formalized assessment to help inform how he would help future students with the same work. He mentioned that after seeing poor student learning performance on assessments that “I’ll make a note so that next time when I teach this class I can make a note and add something to my announcements explaining something about a particular assignment.” Tammy articulated a similar strategy; having knowledge on prior student learning assessments helped her identify “additional study resources” at the beginning of a course that could be passed on to the students. Patty discussed how she used knowledge of typical student performance on assessments to help coordinate efforts with other student support services such as academic advisors.

Beyond just identification of supporting resources, participants felt that using standardized assessments resulted in fairer grading for students. This aspect of formalized assessment seemed particularly important for the adjunct participants. Jen, Tammy, and Patty all served as adjuncts at different institutions, likely with different approaches and expectations for grading (discussed in the next subtheme). For all three of these participants, formalized assessment initiatives, specifically those accompanied by rubrics, helped to remove subjectivity from the grading process. Jen and Tammy both specifically used the term “subjectivity”; in their experience, they felt they had been giving more accurate assessment results. Jessica, an
administrator and faculty member, stated that the clarified expectations of formalized assessment helped to assure her that she was grading fairly “across the board.”

While grades and support resources are important, the participants all cited how the individual learning experience could be improved through substantive feedback. The language used by the participants displayed a distinct focus on how assessment could help them where students could improve on an individual level. Bill discussed that guiding substantive feedback to students was one of the clear purposes for student learning assessment. Elizabeth guaranteed that her students received consistent feedback “on the progress that they’re making without it impacting their grade and to make sure they’re “getting four or five opportunities to demonstrate their learning.” Todd decisively asserted that from his experience, assessment was the best way for him to help students develop language proficiency. He believed that formalized assessment was a way to better detect and address “students’ defects, students’ difficulties in listening, especially listening and reading.” For these participants, the students were afforded increased guidance about how to perform, thus benefiting the learning process.

In discussing this improved feedback, the participants largely referred to the level of specificity provided by formalized assessment. Rubrics, for example, act as both a type of scorecard for faculty and a guide for students. Jen noted that she particularly liked rubrics because they help students “know what to expect and can work towards that”; then, she attunes her feedback to the guideline. Emily strongly asserted that she is a “big believer and promoter of using rubrics of every sort”:

I’m going to give every student in the class generic rubric for how I’m going to teach them or how I’m going to grade them and assess them. That is really meant to get them thinking like me and understanding what the expectations are going to be… The next step
would be that when I present a particular assignment prompt, it will have a specific rubric attached to it with learning outcomes.

Even beyond the scope of the formalized initiative in which she participates, Emily uses tools of assessment to clarify expectations and strengthen the learning process. Essentially, this connects to the clarity of expectations discussed as a part of the student accountability subtheme: as students are given specific expectations through assessment, faculty can align feedback to those expectations to help facilitate the learning process.

Formalized assessment initiatives offered more strategic improvements to the student experience for the participants, though. The benefits of additional resources, fairer grading, and meaningful feedback are significant. However, just one instructor using a concerted assessment approach in their classroom can capitalize on these benefits. Participants here all had partaken in a formalized assessment initiative that standardized either specific assessments or entire curricula across classrooms. In turn, all participants cited specifically that trends about student performance could be discerned about student learning. Then, solutions to better serve student needs across the board could be implemented. For Bill, this was the area of most benefit for students:

I think the benefit that they get out of it is all going to be behind the scenes. It’s going to be where instructors will tweak assignments, or they will revise a course or something to make it so that students meet the outcomes more successfully.

Likewise, in Emily’s discussion about her initiative, she emphasized how the data garnered from the assessments helped inform how classrooms could help students improve their writing skills. Three of the adjunct participants, namely Georgia, Tammy, Patty, did not have insight into if
their institutions did this or not. They did, however, all identify this strategy as significant benefit and that they would be an active participant in the process if the chance ever arose.

Two of the participants also noted that this strategic benefit could happen at a greater level as well. Rather than just measuring across a specific classroom experience, Elizabeth and Jessica noted that this was significant through a programmatic or institutional experience of a student. Jessica explained her institution’s approach to tracking the learning progress for students in certain programs. She relayed how the insight provided by students at the end of the history program (which she teaches in and is an administrator for) through a capstone assessment has allowed her institution to make improvements to the curriculum. Similarly, Elizabeth explained that 2017 is the first year that her institution would be using assessment to evaluate seniors on their critical thinking and writing skills. While only a small group of students would be assessed, they were the same students that had been tested four years prior, as freshman. Elizabeth’s excitement as she conveyed this story was indicative of her passion for making sure that the students at her institution were actually learning—something that could only be done through this formalized assessment approach.

To summarize, it is important to note one additional thread from the data analysis. At one point in the interview, all participants were asked to describe the ideal formalized assessment initiative. All of them, in some form, indicated that ensuring a quality student learning experience and driving that learning forward should be a driving goal. These goals also indicated improvement of the faculty experience, which is the next subtheme.

**Faculty experience.** In many ways, this subtheme and the previous subtheme achieve the same end: improving learning in the classroom. As faculty members are supported, so too will learning outcomes in the classroom improve (ideally). For the participants, it was clear that both
the faculty and student experience were integral to the wellbeing of the classroom as whole. It is critical to discuss, however, how participants had experienced the specific ways in which formalized assessment could improve their role in the classroom.

Most of the benefits noted by participants in this area are mirror images of the ways that the student experience could be improved. Jen noted that she felt expectations, from a faculty perspective, were more efficiently communicated with formalized assessment. This fact appealed specifically to her because of her adjunct status. She stated that, “I feel like I’m a better teacher when I have them,” and that courses with formalized assessments “felt more clear and more fair. It took all the guesswork out.” Other adjunct participants reflected this statement. Tammy simply asserted that the experience was made “easier” both faculty and students when assessments were formalized. Patty felt that it keyed faculty into vital pieces of the curriculum and helped direct faculty efforts better. This was especially important for her, as an adjunct at multiple institutions. For her, formalized assessment served as a compass to help her perform more efficiently in those multiple contexts.

For Jessica, her experience as a faculty member had improved because of the metacognitive thinking she did when part of a formalized assessment initiative. She referenced this specifically in relation to a previous job she had: a visiting professor at a public research university. There, she was part of an assessment initiative to measure student experience with plurality in the classroom. Due to her status as a visiting professor, she was not privy to many of the details. However, she spoke positively about how the process itself forced her to reflect on her practice:

I think it forced me to kind of do some thinking about my own teaching experience and how the course had gone in general… in essence, it really did affect my teaching. I think
part of it was the actual assessment process, and part of it was just being asked to reflect back on my teaching in general.

While Jessica was the only participant to mention this metacognitive component, the idea of using student learning assessment to help develop faculty was another recurring thread in this subtheme. When prompted about their perception of using student-learning assessment to help drive faculty development efforts, all participants responded positively. Patty spoke positively regarding assessment-driven development workshops at one of the institutions for which she worked, via a center for teaching excellence. Though she had never had the chance to partake, she claimed passionately that she hoped she could at some point. Similarly, Tammy optimistically noted efforts by one of her institutions to help adjunct faculty improve information literacy in the classroom (based on assessment results).

One participant was actually involved with driving efforts to use formalized student learning assessments to guide faculty development. Besides being a faculty member, Elizabeth is also the director for the center for teaching and learning at her institution. As a member of the education department, assessment is important to her. Elizabeth spoke ardently about how she could create a center that was “evidence-based” and could benefit faculty as much as it could benefit students. She discussed that she was currently in the middle of administering various standardized assessments (such as the CLA, the Collegiate Learning Assessment) to gain insight about the status of teaching and learning at her institution. Then, she would align the efforts of her center to develop faculty around the results: “My plan is to take the results of those findings to see what we’re doing well, what we’re not doing well, and then try to build professional development opportunities that will help meet the needs of the student.” Elizabeth noted that she believed that this type of work was an integral part of a “sustainable initiative.”
It is clear from the data that the participants perceived the benefits of student learning assessment to the faculty experience as central to any effort. During the interviews, all participants were asked to describe their ideal student learning assessment initiative. Emily and Todd best represented this feeling. Emily, when asked about what her ideal initiative would look like, simply stated, “I think I would just try to create something that provided tools to teach teachers how to teach writing.” Todd replied similarly, saying that he would “put a real effective educational personal development, PD, for my staff” and use assessment results to “see what kind of development they need.” For the participants, their experiences had shown them that there was a potential to capitalize on student learning assessment results to make faculty better in the classroom. And, when faculty are better in the classroom, the students generally benefit as well. The challenge for the participants, however, was actually getting to experience this benefit. The way in which a student learning assessment initiative was implemented was central to this challenge—and this question of implementation is the subject of the final section of this analysis.

Factors for Implementation

The final superordinate theme stands in contrast to the preceding two. Accountability and improvement are important in any discussion of formalized student learning assessment. Much of the resulting analysis in those two themes affirms the larger points of the literature: from a faculty perspective, the true benefit of assessment is for help and support and not faculty accountability. In those themes, the larger purpose for the student learning assessment initiative is connected to their perception. This third theme, however, denotes another consideration that plays as essential a role in affecting perception: factors for implementation. In all cases, participants were just as quick to describe how a student learning initiative was implemented as
they were to discuss why. To explore this question of how formalized assessment initiatives are implemented, two subthemes will be explored: the role of faculty and the role of administration.

**The role of faculty.** Not surprisingly, analysis of the data revealed that the role of faculty in a formalized assessment initiative was critical to the participants. From their perspectives, the role that the faculty should play versus the role that administrators should play (discussed in the next subtheme) was distinct. To the participants, faculty members were central in the ground-level implementation, directing efforts in the way of content creation, classroom execution, and general initiative operations. All participants, despite a variety differences in demographics, expressed this perspective. Emily summed up this perspective, stating confidently that a successful student learning assessment initiative will be “supportive from the bottom” (faculty to faculty), rather than “top-down” (run primarily by administrators). Likewise, Elizabeth used the term “faculty to faculty” to describe how any initiative should ideally be run.

This understanding about the role of faculty in a formalized assessment initiative was grounded in their perception of faculty as autonomous subject matter experts in the classroom. Specifically, this was important to a faculty member’s ability to dictate and control classroom curriculum, due to their deep subject matter expertise. And, because student-learning assessments are part of that curriculum, participants felt that faculty members were the best fit to create and implement them.

Bill most clearly articulated this sentiment. When reflecting about the nature of the assessment initiative at his institution, Bill discussed that he had to give assessments that were created for him. This transition, he said, was “tough,” as he had previously had to full control of his classroom curriculum. His initial impression was that faculty members were “micromanaged” and “frustrated” when a non–faculty member disregarded their input in assessments. In contrast,
Jessica positively relayed the autonomy she was allowed within a previous institution’s assessment initiative. She had little visibility into the purpose and use for the initiative. She was, however, allowed autonomy in the classroom to create her assessment, provided that it aligned with a specific outcome.

In addition to faculty tradition, many of the participants cited the importance of faculty intuition. Because of their experiences teaching, they believed faculty were the most appropriate agents to truly assess a student on their learning. Patty, from her experiences, felt that some formalized assessment efforts could not accurately capture student learning without faculty input; she asserted that she had a “better idea in terms of the outcome of students” when it comes to the assessment results in the classroom. Jessica agreed and mentioned that faculty played a key role in assessing the performance of students at the individual level. Todd spoke of the “expertise” faculty had in being able to address student-learning needs.

Some participants noted the importance of this faculty intuition through experiencing environments that restricted their classroom agency. Tammy, Bill, and Jen had all worked at institutions that utilized pre-designed, curated curriculum that is delivered to faculty. There was no freedom to change the assessments when the courses were delivered. These participants identified two main issues with this approach: the process for creating these standardized assessments and the inability to adjust where needed. Bill and Jen both spoke in-depth about the process concerns that they had experienced. Bill outlined the process at his institution, which did involve using faculty to create assessments. However, the involvement of other administrative team members often clouded the ability of the faculty to apply their experience to create an effective assessment; he even mentioned that faculty may feel “alienated.” Jen noted a similar
feeling and further explained her dissatisfaction. In her perspective, the process left some of the control in the hands of “a great many people” that did not have proper faculty insight:

> It ends up not being intuitive because they haven’t put themselves in the shoes as someone who might actually be instructing that class, and dealing with the questions that students might bring up. Instructors will have that experience to the point where they can almost intuitively tell you what might be functional and what might not be in a course design.

From Jen and Bill’s experiences, process had deemphasized critical insight that only faculty could provide—a lack of insight that had led to formalized assessments that were not effective in the classroom.

The second issue with this curated model experience for some of the participants was their inability to address issues as needed in the classroom. If a faulty process led to an ineffective assessment in this curated model, faculty had no freedom to leverage their intuition to fix it. Tammy frustratingly relayed that she had experienced instances where there were curated rubrics that did not align with the assessments, and she had no recourse. Bill had experienced this limitation as well; he said that the inability to make changes based on intuition lead to “a lot of frustration on the part of instructors.” After reflecting on these frustrations, all three were asked about the ideal roles of faculty in a formalized student learning assessment initiative. And all three answered clearly that faculty must be heavily involved with the creation and have the autonomy to change assessments on the fly. In this way, the essential component of faculty intuition could be leveraged to better meet the students’ needs.

Some participants also experienced a lack of context about an initiative that prevented them from fully performing their role in assessing student learning at the classroom level. The
participants who were adjunct faculty, namely Georgia, Jen, Patty, and Tammy, particularly highlighted this issue. All four expressed that their adjunct status had a distinct effect on the level of inclusion in the assessment initiative in which they had been involved. Jen described the feeling of being in a “vacuum,” having little assignment about the ultimate purpose for the assessments she was administering in class. Patty noted that at two of institutions she taught at, adjuncts were simply “not included” in the assessment creation process. Thus, she could not give feedback about the difficulties she had encountered assessing student learning. Tammy said that she was never given insight into the specifics of the assessment initiatives at her institutions. The absence of context experienced by these three participants translated to a lack of confidence that they were doing all they could to truly capture student learning in the classroom.

Georgia’s experiences about the status of adjuncts stood out the most. She discussed that she had been involved in an initiative wherein a form was sent to her at the end of term. This form asked her to assess levels of student learning against outcomes for her students based on their performance. Due to her status as an adjunct faculty member, however, she had not been introduced to this initiative before the form arrived during her first term teaching. She frustratingly recounted how her isolation was a barrier for her being able to successfully perform. “Being new” to teaching and the institution, she said, “it would have been helpful if I had a little bit of background about it.” Because faculty are central to assessing student learning, according to Georgia, the lack of context prevented her from doing her best in the classroom.

Though varied in specifics, all participants expressed the need for faculty to guide and operate autonomously in classroom as part of a formalized assessment initiative. For those that had experiences contrary to this recommendation, there were significant challenges. Without the guidance of faculty experience and freedom to meet the student learning needs, assessments and
the data returned could be degraded or invalid. This reduced experience ultimately defeats the purpose of measuring learning in the first place. If faculty were properly involved, however, this could be avoided, provided that administration did their part. This perspective about administrative role is discussed in the next subtheme.

The role of administration. The role of administration in the life of a faculty member is a near ubiquitous question. This is especially true of an aspect of higher education such as student learning assessment. As discussed in the previous subtheme, student-learning assessment largely falls under curriculum, which is the traditional purview of faculty. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the participants mostly felt as if assessment should be controlled by faculty (as noted in the previous subtheme).

What is interesting, however, is the administrative makeup of this study’s participant pool. Save Patty and Todd, all participants had some form of administrative experience in higher education. Emily, Elizabeth, and Bill all identified themselves as full-time faculty, but took on assorted administrative duties at their institutions. Georgia, Jen, Jessica, and Tammy all had experience as full-time administrators, but also had relevant experience as faculty. Despite the varied experience with administration, though, participants still largely agreed: the role of administrators in an assessment initiative should be mainly to provide support, ensuring faculty have what they need to be successful.

Before exploring the role of administrative support described by the participants, it is necessary to note that experiencing the opposite in many cases shaped this perspective. The majority of the participants (eight of nine) noted that they had faced instances where they felt, in fact, that administration was not involved properly in an assessment initiative. In many ways, this mirrors some of the issues already discussed in the previous subtheme; the participants
believed that faculty were the best agents to guide and implement an assessment initiative in the classroom. Thus, it follows logically that participants did not feel that administrators should be involving themselves too deeply in those matters.

This perspective was indeed expressed by the participants, and a few of them had experienced an imbalance of administrative influence. As previously cited, Bill had experienced administrative overreach in his institution that had caused “frustration” and “alienation.” In one instance, administration was pushing for a change in course assessments. This insistence was upsetting to him, because those pushing for the change did not “have experience with the actual classroom,” asserting that faculty needed to direct that change (if needed). Patty indicated that she felt that administration was too focused on “the numbers,” such as revenue/profit. In her mind, their focus on those aspects of higher education led to questionable decisions with an assessment initiative. Emily frankly stated that she had experienced previous administrations that were “pretty awful” and hindered assessment efforts outright.

The most common problem noted by the participants stemming from this administrative imbalance was lack of visibility in an initiative. Eight of the nine participants indicated that they had experienced this lack of visibility in some form or another. For these participants, this lack of visibility often had to do with what was done with the assessment results after the classroom by administrative member of the initiative. Bill and Todd discussed that there were whole separate teams that worked with that data and that most faculty members, adjunct and otherwise, had no idea what was done with the data. Jessica, in a previous experience as a visiting assistant professor, was likewise isolated from her institution’s initiative. She was asked to provide an “audit” of student learning, how the student had met a certain outcome in the classroom through assessment:
I guess I didn’t really understand the background of how the audit process works, or who was making these kinds of determinations. I don’t even think I know the person who emailed me, so in that sense it was very vague, and just something being dictated from above that seemed like it was very not optional.

For the adjunct participants, a lack of visibility demonstrably impacted their perception of the assessment initiative. Georgia, Jen, Patty, and Tammy all mentioned that they, too, had no visibility into what was done administratively with the assessment results from their classroom. When describing their experiences, all four mentioned that their perspective of the initiative suffered because of it. Patty was positive, wishing for more involvement in the process. Tammy, however, was more frustrated, noting that her “poor viewpoint” of one institution’s initiative was because of her total lack of visibility. With more information about what was being done behind the scenes administratively, the four participants each indicated that they likely would have had a more positive impression.

The most descriptive story about the impact of this lack of visibility into administrative efforts in an assessment initiative came from Elizabeth. She thoughtfully recounted a previous institution, where faculty spent long hours compiling program reviews, a central piece of which was data from an assessment initiative. Unfortunately, after completion, they did not hear what was done with the information, until:

They cut a whole bunch of programs claiming that they used the data and the numbers that they used didn’t come from any of the program reviews anyway… that institution cut 25% of its academic programs based on data that they ran from a different office and it has nothing to do with the program review so faculty thought they did all of this work to
demonstrate why their program was essential and to position themselves for what they
needed… at the end of the day cuts were made regardless.

What started as a lack of visibility turned into a (poorly disguised) reason to eliminate programs.

Needless to say, Elizabeth relayed that this experience completely damaged the trust that the
faculty had in the administration. Without knowing what administrators would do with the
assessment results, Elizabeth said, it would difficult for faculty to earnestly participate in the
initiative.

This instance described by Elizabeth also relates to another important administrative
concern expressed by the participants: impact on workload. Formalized assessment initiatives
often necessitate extra time spent in designing curriculum, recording and analyzing assessment
data, and even writing reports. As faculty members are asked to shoulder more and more
responsibilities, this assessment work can seem like an additional burden. Returning to
Elizabeth’s example above, she noted that the misuse of the assessment data especially stung
because “faculty put hours and hours in to writing these dozens, if not hundred page report.” In
general, Elizabeth noted that she believe that “faculty perceive themselves as being very busy
and pulled in lots of directions,” which made it hard to meaningfully engage in assessment work.

Other participants reflected this sentiment. Tammy noted that from an adjunct
perspective, she had been asked to do an “extraordinary amount of work” and was resentful
because of it. Similarly, Jessica discussed that faculty could be “overtaxed” if asked to do too
much in the way of assessment. Emily relayed a story that was illustrative of this impact on
workload. Helping to coordinate this initiative, Emily had run a training event for faculty:

At the very first, we found a lot of people were daunted by the prospect of teaching
writing… I did see a little bit of continued fear, I think, and uncertainty about how do I
teach writing, how do I do this. The real fear there is grading work, invariably, that they’re going to have to do a lot of work… They’re really freaked out by that.

These fears of administrative imbalance, lack of visibility, and workload represented the opposite of what the participants valued from administration in an assessment initiative. As previously discussed, the participants expressed that they believed the role of administration was one of support. The form that this support took manifested itself in various ways amongst the participants and necessitated various levels of involvement from the administration. Despite these variances, however, the perspective from all participants was clear: administration needed to provide faculty with the tools and skills to be able to execute the assessment initiative properly.

Most often, the support discussed by the participants was that of resources, notably money or time. When describing her current assessment initiative, Emily said that the role of administration was correctly balanced. In fact, they had been essential in helping to the make the case to the state to help secure funding for the initiative. Essentially, she said, administration should provide “financial resources” and perhaps “administrative intervention” if there was significant operational issues. Elizabeth noted, too, that not only should administration provide “money,” helping facilitate the financial support to make sure the assessment initiative is worthwhile. In addition to the money, Elizabeth and Emily both cited time support in the form of course releases. Elizabeth specifically noted that course releases had been helpful to her in past experiences.

A few participants noted the administration could actually help support faculty time and workload through shouldering some of the work themselves. As previously discussed, all advocated for faculty playing a central role in classroom operations. Bill, Jen, Jessica, Georgia,
Patty, and Tammy all indicated that they felt administration had specific strategic insight. This insight, from their perspectives, could be leveraged to provide assessment initiatives support and guidance, thus saving faculty time. Bill, who is a full-time faculty member with administrative responsibilities, felt that administration should be coalescing the data from the assessment initiative to provide guidance for faculty. Bill stated that administrators should “maintain the data, interpret the data, try to develop trends” and then “share those trends and interpretations” with faculty. For Bill, this was a way of saving faculty time and providing them with usable, contextualized information. Jessica agreed, saying that it was “really important that that’s an administrative job and not a faculty member’s job to crunch the numbers and then make sense of it.” As an administrator herself, Jessica felt strongly that a critical part of her role was providing this useful information to help improve the experience of the faculty.

Jen, Georgia, Patty, and Tammy, the adjunct participants, also expressed clear belief that the administration was best suited to provide logistic guidance in an assessment initiative. Jen mentioned the administrative understanding of the “big picture” was helpful for adjuncts. Georgia echoed this, noting that administrators had a “better picture of what’s going on” across the board. Similarly, Patty found their “higher level perspective” valuable. Tammy spoke at length about how she felt administration should be “collating and figuring out” trends from the assessment data. Then, they should provide helpful suggestions to faculty to serve as guidance. For all of the adjunct participants, a crucial link to their institution, because of their status, was the administration; only they could connect the dots of an assessment initiative behind the scenes and help ensure that it was truly improving the classroom.

The final, major component of the role of administrators was to provide training or development opportunities to faculty about assessment. At some point, all participants mentioned
this was an important piece of any formalized assessment initiative. This training could be procedural or treated as development; either way, it was important that it was present. Four participants noted a lack of procedural training about assessment from their experience. Georgia had little conception about the presence of the assessment initiative, much less training about how to properly implement assessment. Patty and Jen openly discussed their lack of knowledge about specialized assessment methods at their institutions. Bill said that ideally his institution would need to provide “a lot” of training to help support adjuncts about assessment at his institution.

Conversely, Elizabeth and Emily positively conversed about their initiatives’ efforts to train and develop faculty in assessment. Both participants, who have important roles in their respective assessment initiatives, indicated that training faculty about assessment was part of their initiative. Emily indicated that there was a positive impact on faculty morale with this training: when faculty members are approached in a “human way” with training and development opportunities, they responded better.

Todd was the most impassioned advocate for the provision of training and development. Over the course of the two interviews, Todd mentioned the need for administration to provide training and professional development no less than 16 times. At his institution, the faculty were comprised of subject matter experts (languages) who were not necessarily trained in pedagogy or assessment strategies. For Todd, this caused struggles in the classroom. To remedy these he asserted:

Resources, professional development is very important. Bringing in knowledge [sic] people. Appointing and hiring knowledgeable people. It could be even you can send it to
one or two weeks to local universities or whatever with a good reputation is good to focus on development.

When how he would structure an ideal assessment initiative, Todd answered quickly and insistently: “Number one, doing real professional development for my teachers, my staff.” To truly be able to assess and improve learning in the classroom, Todd saw training and professional development as central pieces.

When adding the importance of training/professional development to both the other perceived roles for administrators and faculty, a clear guideline for formalized assessment initiatives emerges. Based on their experiences, the participants believed that an assessment initiative should be faculty driven and supported (not dictated) by administration. When faculty driven, students and faculty are better off in the classroom: faculty have the appropriate context to be able to utilize their experience and intuition to truly measure learning in the classroom. To facilitate this faculty-driven initiative, administrators must be mindful of balance and workload. Administration supports this by allowing faculty to perform within the confines of their tradition and providing them a safe, academic environment to grow into an assessment initiative.

**Summation**

The analysis uncovered three superordinate themes and seven subthemes from the nine participants about their experiences as faculty members in a formalized assessment initiative. Distillation of these themes reveals four findings. First, faculty did not, based on their experiences, believe in the effectiveness of using formalized assessment as accountability in the classroom, either for faculty or students. Second, in terms of accountability through accreditation, faculty members were positive, though there was experiential evidence that it does not lead to meaningful improvement. Third, faculty believed in the ability for formalized
assessment to improve both the student and faculty experience in the classroom, though they had not consistently experienced it. Fourth, and perhaps most critical, faculty strongly believed that formalized assessment must be faculty-driven, purposeful, and scholarly, with administration playing a critical role in support. These findings are discussed in the context of the literature and CoA in the next chapter.
Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived experiences of faculty in formalized assessment initiatives. Through a qualitative design, this research attempted to gain a better understanding about the phenomena of faculty perception and motivation in a formalized assessment initiative that measures student learning in the classroom. This study sought to fully understand how the different possible purposes of such an initiative impacted the perception, in a positive or negative way, of faculty participating in it. The ultimate purpose of this study was to better understand faculty experiences with and perceptions of student assessment data for the betterment of student learning. This research was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of faculty interacting with formalized student assessment practices?

Through the three superordinate themes and the seven subthemes that emerged from data analysis, there is a clear answer to this question. This answer comes in the form of four findings. First, the experiences of the participants led to the belief that using formalized assessment as accountability in the classroom, either for faculty or students, was not ultimately effective. Second, members of the faculty were positive about accountability through assessment to accreditors, though the participants deeply involved in this process noted it to be superficial in practice. Third, participants believed in the ability for formalized assessment to improve both the student and faculty experience in the classroom, though they had not consistently experienced it. Fourth, the experiences of the participants led to the critical belief that formalized assessment must be faculty-driven, purposeful, and scholarly, with administration playing the role of support.
This chapter contextualizes these findings in scholarship. The findings will be first discussed in the context of CoA to determine points of alignment and divergence from that theory. Next, the findings will be discussed in terms of the literature. Then, the implications for practitioners will be explored, for the purpose of better serving all involved in higher education. Finally, this chapter, and the study at large, will end with an articulation of areas for future research, limitations, and a conclusion.

**Findings in the Context of CoA**

As the theoretical framework for this study, it is necessary to compare Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA to the findings articulated here. CoA dictates that the ultimate purpose of assessment impacts faculty perception. In this theory, there are four conceptions of assessment: for learning (used to inform teaching practices), as learning (used to hold students accountable), of learning (used for holding faculty and institutions accountable), and irrelevant to learning (not significant). The findings of this study reveal a distinct alignment with the participants’ perspectives and CoA. It should be noted that the fourth conception, assessment as irrelevant to learning, is not discussed at length here. In Brown’s (2004, 2008) theory, the conception that assessment is irrelevant to learning is largely not held by faculty. That contention held true in this study, as all participants felt that assessment held some relevance to learning.

Participants in this study agreed with CoA’s assertions about the conception of assessment for learning, which relates to the third finding. In Brown’s (2004) initial study, faculty held a positive perception of assessment when used to improve teaching practices. At some point, every participant spoke optimistically about the ability of assessment to help faculty get better in the classroom. Some participants, such as Elizabeth and Emily, had experienced this and could speak to the benefits of this approach. Others described only missed opportunities with
it. All, however, genuinely held the belief, based on their experiences, that formalized student learning assessment could not only help individual efforts—it could also help identify larger areas of faculty development across the board. This fact, too, is in direct alignment with the third finding of this study.

Assessment as learning is the conception from CoA that assessment holds students accountable for their learning and represents one half of the first finding: classroom accountability. In Brown’s (2004) original study, this conception was mixed, but still demonstrated an overall positive correlation. There was no mixed perception in this study from the participants about assessment and student accountability: All believed that it was an effective strategy in theory. Every participant noted some benefit in holding students accountable for achieving specific learning outcomes. This positive viewpoint is not reflected in the first finding, however, for a distinct reason: The participants felt, based on experiences, that students largely did not have a conceptual understanding of learning measurement. This lack of understanding generally prevented it from being an effective strategy. As with using assessment for faculty accountability, participants believed that the practical limitations were too much of an impediment.

The conception of assessment of learning holds two distinct parts, split between the first and second finding. First, it states that assessment is used to hold individual faculty accountable for learning in the classroom. Second, it holds that institutions can be held accountable for learning results. As part of Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory, faculty have a negative perception of being held accountable individual for classroom learning but a positive perception of institutions being held accountable. These perspectives are largely reflected in this study. Participants, on the whole, rejected the idea of a connection between faculty accountability and
student learning. While there was some implicit responsibility for faculty, their experiences taught them that the classroom was too complex of an environment for a simplistic accountability. Though many agreed with the idea of holding institutions accountable through accrediting bodies, two of the participants expressed issues with this practice. Emily and Elizabeth, who had deep, embedded experience with using formalized assessment results in accreditation, noted that the process was too superficial to hold any genuine value.

Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory, however, does not significantly address the role of implementation in the perception of a formalized assessment initiative, as articulated by the fourth finding. Brown posits that conception is shaped by purpose; analysis of data from this study noted that implementation plays a critical role in faculty perception of a formalized assessment initiative. In fact, for the participants of this study, implementation was as significant, if not more so, than the ultimate purpose. The role of implementation and faculty experience in an assessment initiative does play a major role, however, in the literature. The findings are discussed in relation to this literature in the next section.

Findings in the Context of the Literature

**Finding 1: Formalized assessment and classroom accountability.** The first finding in this study generally confirms themes from the literature in the areas of student and faculty accountability. This finding asserts that participants have little confidence that formalized assessment is an accurate method for holding faculty and students accountable. Student learning assessment shifts the focus from the knowledge of the faculty member to the learning of the student (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Guskin, 1994). Further, this approach necessitates that assessments measure learning against outcomes and are aligned with classroom activities (Cohen, 1987; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Tam, 2014). In a formalized assessment initiative, like the ones that the
participants for this study had been active in, these measurements are catalogued and analyzed. Thus, data points are created, from which accountability can possibly be assumed.

The faculty perception of using assessment for holding students accountable has spotty representation in the literature. Much of the literature discusses this end for assessment, such as holding students to standards for generalized skills at the course and institutional level (Cohen, 1987; Biggs, 1996; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Tam, 2014). These studies, however, only investigate the function of holding students accountable, rather than exploring faculty perception of it. For Brown’s (2004) study, which would become the basis for his CoA theory, he did note a positive correlation by faculty with student accountability. In this study, Brown defines student accountability as “on determining whether students have met various curriculum objectives.” Fletcher et al. (2012), who built on Brown’s work through a similar quantitative study focused solely in higher education. Fletcher et al.’s study demonstrated that faculty did not favor using assessment for student accountability so much as they did for understanding/improving student learning; their perception of the latter was more positive than the former. For participants in that study, discerning the learning endpoint was not as important as the process of learning itself. In the literature reviewed, this aspect of student accountability does not appear to be a significant thread. Thus, there is insufficient understanding of this concept beyond Brown’s theory and Fletcher et al.’s contributions to understanding it in comparison to improvement.

In this study, the participants did speak positively about using formalized assessment initiatives for student accountability. Emily, an English faculty member passionate about using assessment to build writing skills, wanted to put “learning outcomes 100% in their hands.” This language belies her view of the level of student accountability in the process. Further, many of the participants noted the clarity provided by formalized assessment: clarity that allowed the
student to better understand the intended learning outcomes of the course. With this clarity, students were implicitly more responsible for their learning.

It is significant to note, however, that all participants, when speaking about student accountability, did not separate it from the concept of improvement—these two concepts were intertwined. Georgia, Jen, and Emily specifically all discussed positively that holding student accountable could lead to a better understanding and improvement of their learning. In light of the Fletcher et al. (2012) study, this merging of the two concepts makes sense: Faculty positively perceived formalized assessment for student accountability because it precedes student improvement (discussed more in the next section).

The final significant piece of this study regarding student accountability is the overall lack of effectiveness of this approach noted by the participants. Every participant in this study discussed, in some form, how students do not fully conceptualize being assessed for learning. Most of the participants’ experiences led them to believe that students still focused on grades. The literature surveyed for this study about learner-center, outcomes-based assessment did not discuss student understanding of the concept. Biggs (1996), Gratch-Lindauer (2002), and Tam (2014) discussed the various types of outcomes that assessments might measure in students, such as affective or cognitive, but did not articulate student understandings of this process. Only Fletcher et al. (2012) provides insight into this thread. Their study, which also surveyed students for their perspective on assessment, revealed that felt it was most useful for holding institutions/faculty accountable or that it was irrelevant. Students in Fletcher et al.’s study did not exhibit the belief that it was important to hold them accountable to meet learning outcomes. It is possible that this belief stemmed from the lack of understanding noted by this study’s
participants. This is a critical piece of information that bears further discussion in the implications section of this chapter.

Though student accountability had inconsistent representation in the literature, faculty accountability did not, and this study’s findings largely align with that representation. The participants in this study overwhelmingly expressed negative perceptions of the use of formalized assessment results for faculty accountability. Elizabeth’s analogy about evaluating a dentist’s performance for the number of cavities in a patient’s mouth succinctly sums up the perspective of the literature: for a myriad of reasons, faculty cannot and should not be held accountable through assessment results. There was no evidence in any of the literature that indicated otherwise, save student beliefs noted in Fletcher et al. (2012). Many of the major studies regarding formalized assessment and faculty note this as a major tension, including Fletcher et al., Grunwald & Peterson, (2003), Welsh & Metcalf, (2003a), and Wehlburg, (2008). If faculty members perceive that an assessment initiative is going to be as a measure of accountability for faculty individually, their motivation to participate was significantly reduced. As in the literature, participants in this study expressed a negative perception of assessment to account for faculty performance.

As with the literature, participants in this study cited the academic tradition and the role of faculty as critical reasons why this approach was invalid. Welsh & Metcalf (2003a) and Grunwald & Peterson (2003) both assert the implication of this type of accountability on the traditional role of faculty in the classroom. The autonomy historically given to faculty as purveyors of their academic discipline was potentially disrupted by this approach. Participants in this study, notably Bill, Elizabeth, and Emily, expressed a consistent understanding of that traditional role as it impacted their experiences with assessment. Further, most participants used
language throughout the course of the interviews that signified their understanding of the traditional faculty role and how it related to assessment.

Besides the philosophical, participants in this study articulated operational reasons as to why they felt so negatively about this association: Formalized assessment cannot account for variables in the classroom that might be out of a faculty member’s control. Some of the literature, such as Anderson (2006), Grunwald & Peterson (2003), and Welsh and Metcalf (2003b) asserted that faculty believed assessment for failed to encapsulate quality and accurate pictures of learning in the classroom. Participants in this study, however, focused on factors out of their control. They felt that student motivation and preparedness, for example, could also have a significant influence on formalized assessment results. This impacted both full-time and adjunct faculty, those in the online space and the face-to-face arena: Bill, Patty, Jen, Tammy, Todd each discussed how they had personally experienced these factors in the classroom. The online participants also relayed instances where they were unable to change class curriculum or assessments even when they knew something was wrong. This added further to the list of factors out of the control of faculty in some classroom settings and thus why faculty accountability through assessment was a negative construct.

**Finding 2: Formalized assessment and institutional accountability.** The literature conveyed that faculty had a largely negative conception of institutional accountability. To a certain degree, the second finding aligns with the literature: while participants were overall positive about including student learning assessment process and results information in accreditation, the two participants most embedded in this experience negatively expressed that it was a useless superficiality. Several studies revealed that faculty members are skeptical of public and governmental agencies speaking to the operations of higher education (Grunwald &
Peterson, 2003; Lazerson, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). Specifically, faculty lacked the confidence that external organizations could understand the complex world of academia (Hoppes & Holley, 2014; Lazerson, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008). This perception extended to accreditation, which, because of an increase in scope in the 20th century, began to measure student learning in all regions of the country (Aleste, 2004; Finkin, 1994; Kryzykowski & Kinser, 2014; Lazerson, 2010).

The participants in this study, however, did not describe an issue with accreditation requiring evidence of student learning through assessment. All nine participants said specifically that they felt, in theory, that it was a valid approach. The language utilized by the most of the participants included no hesitation and confident assertions. Bill, Jen, Patty, Tammy, and Todd especially were positive about the process, commenting that it was an “appropriate” practice. They felt that it was beneficial for the field as a whole to be held to standards, and learning was one of these necessary standards.

This perspective is encouraging when considering the problem statement for this study. The idea of accountability (as previously discussed) is generally established in the literature to be perceived negatively by faculty and impact their motivation. As accrediting bodies increasingly lean on student learning data for their processes, this emphasis presents an issue. The participants in this study did not express that negative outlook about the process, which is contrary to the literature. This finding also indicates that some faculty members, at least, may not be discouraged to participate in formalized assessment initiatives if they are linked to accreditation.

More in-line with the literature, however, was the perspective shared by Elizabeth and Emily. While both agreed with the others that the theory of requiring learning evidence through assessment was sound, their experiences led them to believe differently about the practice. Both
specifically cited the superficial nature of the requirements. Elizabeth felt that any deficiencies could be skirted with strategic rhetoric; likewise, Emily referred to the requirement as a “rubber stamp” that ultimately had little meaning. The work required on their end was meaningless and did not accurately capture the complexity of student learning in the classroom. This revelation aligns with the prevalent faculty perception that this type of oversight fails to truly capture academia’s nuances is reflected in the literature (Hoppes & Holley, 2014; Lazerson, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008).

Nevertheless, there is a deeper revelation in their experiences: The process failed to actually improve the quality of education. For both Emily and Elizabeth, it was a requirement that did not affect any meaningful change in the classroom. Emily elaborated passionately on this subject: “Nobody’s teaching changed at all because of this… I would have liked it to have been purposeful... Just because they’re told they’re not doing a good job, it doesn’t really help them to know how to teach writing better.” This idea of educational improvement was a vital thread in the literature and all participant answers; it is also crucial to the third finding, discussed in the next section.

**Finding 3: Formalized assessment and classroom improvement.** The third finding of this study is perhaps the closest aligned to the literature. This finding affirms that faculty believed that formalized assessment could improve both the student and faculty experience in the classroom (though they had not consistently encountered it). In the literature, any study that denoted a positive perception of faculty with formalized assessment included some aspect of educational improvement. Studies such as Brown, Harris, and Harnett (2012), Fletcher et al. (2012), Grunwald and Peterson (2003), and Welsh and Metcalf (2003b) revealed that when formalized assessment was used as true, meaningful vehicle to drive improvement to the
education offered, faculty felt positively about it. Some studies, such as Grunwald and Peterson, focused on this perspective institutionally, noting how, faculty perceived the facilitation and use of formalized assessment from an organizational perspective. Others, such as Offerdahl and Tomanek’s (2010) and Kitiashvili’s (2014), took a more granular look at this assessment from the classroom perspective. In all cases, though, faculty were positive when formalized assessment initiatives were used to help better understand the state of learning at their institution and aligning that understanding with improvements.

Participants in this study reflected this belief. Further, they framed the improvements in two major ways: student experience and faculty experience. For the student experience, participants felt that they could better meet the learning needs of students in the classroom with formalized assessment data. Understanding prevalent deficiencies helped Bill, Patty, and Tammy identify resources and support structures to better serve students. Bill, Elizabeth, Jen, Jessica, and Tammy also felt that formalized assessment helped provide critical specificity about expectations on work, guaranteeing better feedback and fairer grades. From a strategic perspective, curricula could be evaluated across the board to make sure that students were being properly exposed to the content they needed to meet formalized assessment goals.

Participants expressed, too, that use of formalized assessment to improve the faculty experience was an important use. Emily and Todd both enthusiastically expressed that they felt formalized assessment should be used to help faculty get better at teaching. Emily, whose initiative deals with improving the teaching of writing across the institution, said that she hoped faculty would simply get better at teaching writing. Todd, who teaches language, remarked multiple times that he felt formalized assessments were key in helping faculty at his institution. He advocated that a more concerted approach to assessment could better help them understand
the process of learning as it related to “students’ difficulties in listening, especially listening and reading.” For Todd, faculty could better comprehend the nuances of student learning about language with assessment and get better at the process of teaching it. Both Emily and Todd’s perspectives reflect Offerdahl and Tomanek’s (2010) and Kitiashvili’s (2014) studies: when formalized assessment helps faculty understand the process of teaching and learning, for the end of improving their performance, they feel positively about it.

It should be noted, too, that this finding carries an important implication given one of the parameters of this study. While this study focused mainly on summative assessment of student learning assessment, the nature of assessment described by this finding largely aligns with formative assessment. As mentioned previously, the studies Offerdahl and Tomanek (2010) and Kitiashvili (2014) offer insight into how faculty members develop positive perceptions of assessment: through further understanding the process of teaching and learning. In both studies, this development happened through the process of formative assessment as opposed to summative assessment. Further, the results of this study reinforce this result: all participants indicated that formative uses for assessment carried the most positive associations.

**Finding 4: Implementation of formalized assessment initiatives.** The final finding expands in some areas what is already apparent in the literature: The experiences of the faculty led to the critical belief that formalized assessment must be faculty-driven, purposeful, and scholarly, with administration playing the role of support. The purpose of formalized assessment clearly impacts faculty perspective, as established by both Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA and the literature. However, just as prevalent in the literature is the relationship of implementation to formalized assessment. Hoppes and Holley’s (2014) and Pope’s (2004) studies about faculty trust and governance revealed that transparency and faculty participation are significant factors
for engendering trust. These assertions are backed by studies related to formalized assessment, such as Welsh and Metcalf (2003b): Members of the faculty are more inclined to trust in a formalized assessment initiative if they control the “design, development, and implementation” of said initiative.

A critical piece of this faculty-driven assessment means that it is framed in a scholarly, academic manner. Schlitz et al. (2009) posited that the use of a faculty learning community (FLC) helped improve perception of assessment. This FLC, which involved six faculty members from across disciplines, allowed faculty to gather, share best practices, and explore conceptual understandings of assessment. This approach is an obvious reflection of academic collegiality. Similarly, Emil and Cress (2014) and Xueli and Hurley (2014) demonstrated that faculty perception of assessment was improved when it was framed as scholarly activity. In both studies, faculty champions of assessment facilitated workshops and the sharing of best practices in a safe, academic way for the purpose of faculty development. When formalized assessment is contextualized in the academic tradition, faculty perception benefitted.

Resource allocation from administration is the last piece of implementation. The faculty-driven, scholarly approach to formalized assessment described here is functional only with support. First, to be faculty-driven, faculty must have the time available to devote to the multitude of responsibilities that come along with running such an initiative. Not surprisingly, several studies indicate that without help in terms of workload, they will negatively perceive assessment responsibilities (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008). Conversely, these studies (and others) also note that a visible investment of resources in a formalized assessment initiative improves perception and participation by faculty (Andrade, 2011; Gilbert, 2010; Grunwald & Peterson, 2003; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a; Wehlburg, 2008).
All of the participants cited one or more of the operational aspects of faculty-driven, scholarly, and supported formalized assessment that are described here. The participants, notably Bill, Jen, Patty, and Tammy, asserted numerous times that faculty intuition is a crucial component when assessing student learning. Without their perspective guiding a formalized assessment initiative, faculty could be put into a place where they could not leverage this intuition properly. If classroom agency to change assessments was restricted, less-than-ideal assessments could not be addressed and cause issues for students and faculty (this was noted by multiple participants). In a thread beyond the literature, the adjunct participants (Jen, Georgia, Patty, and Tammy) also stated that their experiences had led them to believe that adjuncts were all-too-often left in the dark about these initiatives. Faculty-driven assessment, to them, also meant including the ever-increasing population of adjunct faculty.

Participants also repeatedly demonstrated their belief for the scholarly and supported nature needed for formalized assessment. As noted by Wehlburg (2008), many faculty members have never been formally trained on assessment practices. Participants in this study also observed this fact, and it was a driving motivator for their answers. In fact, these two concepts were often intertwined. Todd was one of the most vocal about the need for administration to support collegial development, advocating for faculty mentors (with assessment experience) to observe and coach other faculty. Two aspects of this scenario stand out: the need for administration to support such a system and the need for academic mentoring. Similarly, Elizabeth’s and Emily’s answers displayed this interconnected nature. Elizabeth described her center for teaching and learning as a scholarly effort, supported by administration, to use “evidence-based practices” to benefit faculty development (and indirectly students in the classroom). This center would not exist if not for administrative support to drive the effort.
Emily, too, noted this; when discussing her formalized assessment effort for improving writing, she mentioned that administration was critical in securing the funding that made it possible. Otherwise, they had no involvement, allowing Emily to facilitate a collegial, scholarly initiative aimed at truly improving faculty members’ understanding about how to teach writing.

**Summation.** Overall, the majority of the findings of this study align with both Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA and the literature reviewed. The second finding, about formalized assessment use for institutional accountability, diverges somewhat, as participants in this study did not have an issue with it in theory. Otherwise, though, there was clear alignment: formalized assessment is best used for improving education and not for classroom accountability. This formalized assessment must also be faculty-driven, with a scholarly framework, and supported by administration. These findings, however, mean little if not applied to practice in the field to improve education. These implications for practice are discussed in the next section.

**Implications for Practitioners**

As stated in the purpose, the ultimate goal of this study is to improve the use of student learning assessment data in institutions of higher education. To do this, the findings necessitate three key implications. First, students must be educated about why it is significant to measure their learning through assessment and against goals or outcomes. Second, academic approaches to formalized assessment, such as communities of practice or working groups, which include all faculty members (including adjuncts), must be implemented. Finally, institutions must focus assessment data use as true, meaningful improvement for both students and faculty. Together, these three implications should motivate faculty, garner valid data, and thoughtfully use this data for improvement.
**Educate students about their learning.** It is clear from the data in this study that students must be taught why measurement of learning is important. All participants here believed that the use of formalized assessment was an effective strategy for holding students accountable. Only Emily, however, felt that she was able to reach students and educate them on this strategy. The focus on learning, advocated for by scholars such as Barr and Tagg (1995) and Guskin (1994), signifies an important shift in the field of education. The learner focus is largely realized through outcomes-based assessment approaches, as outlined in studies such as Biggs (1996), Cohen (1987), Martone and Sireci (2009), and Tam (2014). Students, however, are largely unaware of this shift and still focus on grades (noted by Elizabeth and Jessica). And with little to no information about what this focus on learning even means, students will continue to do so.

Thus, it is important to explain the concepts of learning outcomes and assessment to students and emphasize it throughout their experience. An institution’s commitment to learning should be articulated to students in an introductory events or orientations. This articulation should include the reasons behind any existing institutional outcomes and how students could expect program and/or course outcomes to be present. Key to this articulation would be the idea that education provides value by imparting students with knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions—and these are encapsulated by those outcomes. Then, students would be introduced to the idea that they are evaluated for completion of these outcomes through assessment.

Though important, this articulation would mean nothing without a concerted effort at embedding this in the culture of the school. The most impactful way to embed this culture is with faculty support. As indicated by the participants and the literature, faculty assessment efforts need to be supported with resources. This support should take the form of a concerted effort by administration to devote resources to train faculty about assessment and provide an environment
for faculty champions to facilitate an academic, scholarly initiative (discussed in the second implication). Administrative support also might take a more logistical form, such as the provision of and training in technologies such as curriculum management systems or portfolio tools. The form and function of these tools should largely be decided by institutional context, but they should at least do two things: help catalog and present learning progress to students and expedite faculty efforts within the formalized initiative.

**Implement scholarly assessment, involving all faculty members.** As touched upon previously, to truly emphasize learning and benefit students, faculty must direct and engage in a scholarly assessment initiative. The literature and the participants in this study all express that faculty involvement is a central component for positive perception. Additionally, key studies, such as Emil and Cress (2014), Schlitz et al. (2009), and Xueli and Hurley (2014), reveal that scholarly, collegial approaches to formalized assessment are effective in garnering positive faculty perspective. The goal, then, is for a faculty-run initiative that is transparent, respects faculty traditions, and engages faculty in a scholarly way.

To guide these implementations, it is important to follow the examples set by Elizabeth and Emily. It is also important to note that institutional context must have some influence in directing the exact form of this initiative. However, the framework remains the same; in both of these cases, participants were involved in an initiative that fit the needed parameters. Elizabeth’s center for teaching and learning was an “evidence-based” initiative that approached assessment as an academic topic for the purpose of meaningful engagement. Despite an entirely different institutional context and function, Emily’s initiative followed a similar framework. She used formalized assessment to engage faculty as colleagues on the scholarly topic of teaching writing. Both participants described an initiative that followed the best practices noted in the literature.
and by other participants—and, more importantly, these initiatives were positively perceived within their respective institutions.

**Focus on meaningful improvement.** The final implication for practices draws on the foundation built by the previous two: focusing on improvement. Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA, the literature, and all participants were clearly aligned: improvement must be the true aim of any assessment initiative, formalized or otherwise. One of the strongest advocates for this approach is Wehlburg (2008). She argues for what she refers to as transformative assessment: faculty-driven assessment of learning that is part of a continuous feedback loop aimed at improvement. As she states, formalized assessment must be, “appropriate, meaningful, sustainable, flexible, and ongoing,” and the data must be used for “improvement with the potential for substantive change.” Yet, despite the specific recommendations of Wehlburg (2008) and others, this improvement was not experienced by most of the participants. Some knew for sure it was not happening (such as Todd) or had no idea if it was or not (Georgia, Jessica, and Tammy). Others, such as Bill, Jen, and Patty, had experienced this improvement in some form, but it was limited by process or inconsistently implemented.

For recommendations to implement this type meaningful and transformative assessment in practice, two of the participants stand out: Elizabeth and Emily. Again, their experiences provide some practical insight. Both are not only faculty champions of assessment among their peers, but they actively utilize assessment data to help inform faculty development opportunities and classroom/institutional functions. Elizabeth does so through her center for teaching and learning; she spoke about how recently, she had coordinated a series of training opportunities to help improve writing and critical thinking outcomes in the classroom (which was a need indicated by assessments). Emily emphasized that the efforts of her initiative was to gather valid
assessment data about writing, analyze that data, and target support resources for help. Emily had a succinct statement that summed up her perspective: “I’m not even worried about assessments. I’m worried about the teaching of writing.” For Emily, assessment was a means to end, and that end was the meaningful improvement of classroom learning about writing. And both Elizabeth and Emily utilized faculty-driven, resource-focused formalized assessment as a transparent, active, and support agent for change within their institution.

**Areas for Future Research**

Given these implications for practice, a number of areas for further research are apparent. The first area is regarding efficient systems for resourcing and managing a formalized assessment initiative. This is an age of ever-shrinking resources in higher education— institutions are often asked to do more with less. Further, this study did not reveal prescriptive parameters for implementing faculty-driven, scholarly, and purposeful formalized assessment. Only rough general guidelines, which could serve as a framework for doing so, were illuminated. And this framework requires a resource-heavy involvement from the administration. The approach to formalized assessment outlined here is important and would serve any institution well; not every institution, though, would be easily able to invest the amount of resources suggested in this study. Thus, it stands to reason that research should be done on how institutions might be able to achieve these ends while maximizing resources. Insight into specifics around resources allocation and amount of administrative oversight would be a significant boon to the field.

The second major area for further research is the question of adjunct participation. As noted by the adjunct participants in this study, adjuncts are an oft-marginalized and ignored segment of the faculty population at institutions. While their status would likely preclude them from making major strategic directions about a formalized assessment initiative, they still play a
key tactical role in implementing assessment in the classroom. The data gathered from Georgia, Jen, Patty, and Tammy indicated that their marginalization from the initiative prevented them from being able to best serve its needs. It is therefore recommended that research be done focusing on the relationship of adjunct faculty to formalized assessment initiatives. Does their perception align largely with that of full-time faculty? What is their perspective about their role in such an initiative? How might adjuncts be best utilized to achieve the ends of meaningful improvement? Studies answering questions such as these would help guide operations around the incorporation of this important faculty population.

The last area for further research is the aforementioned distinction between formative and summative assessment practice. As discussed as part of the third finding, both the literature and the results of this study indicate that faculty members more positively associate formative uses for assessment rather than summative ones. Thus, further research should be done to extrapolate the significance of this distinction in the area of faculty perception. If summative assessments are used in more of a formative fashion, will this mitigate any potential threats to faculty motivation? What are some of the specific strategies that can be used to demonstrate to faculty that assessment data are being used in this fashion? Given the stated purpose of this study, to help institutions better utilize student-learning data, it is critical to research the implications of this distinction further.

**Limitations**

Despite all attempts to guarantee trustworthiness and accuracy of this study, there remained limitations. Though maximum variance within the participant pool was intended, this does not mean that larger inferences about the experiences of all faculty members can be made. The goal of this study is to attempt to understand the nuances that might be present with regard to
faculty experience with assessment. Faculty members from this study were mostly from different sites and fit different demographic requirements helped in the process of generalization (transferability). Ultimately, however, the results of a study such as this one cannot speak to all faculty members (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Further, the theoretical framework and research tradition limit the findings of this study. Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA states that purpose of assessment dictates faculty perception. Thus, this dictum guided data collection and analysis; purpose was tightly linked to perception as part of the faculty experience. Other factors, such as intrinsic values, and their impact on assessment perception, were not be fully explored. Contextual factors to a faculty’s specific site were not be fully considered either. IPA is concerned chiefly with experience and meaning-making and not larger issues of process as a case study might be (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). For example, some of the literature, such as Schlitz et al. (2009), indicated that communities of practice can help affect faculty perception of assessment. This study does not comprehensively speak to these issues of process and impact on faculty perception of assessment.

The final limitation of this study also related to research tradition. IPA, as mentioned, emphasizes the experience of the individual. Within a group of participants interacting with a certain phenomenon, there will be commonalities but also difference. The analysis of this study focused mainly on the commonalities among the participants and used these commonalities to draw larger conclusions. The divergent experiences of the individual also likely hold some revelations about the meaning making of the various participants, but these divergences were not considered here.
**Summation**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of faculty members within formalized assessment initiatives. This study was framed by Brown’s (2004, 2008) CoA theory, which states that ultimate purpose of an assessment initiative affect faculty perception. Because the research question was experiential in nature, IPA was chosen as the research tradition. IPA is an offshoot of phenomenology, emphasizing the drawing of meaningful conclusions from the experience of participants (faculty members) with a phenomenon (participation in an assessment initiative). This framework and research tradition guided the creation of questions designed to garner experiential data from a pool of faculty participants in a series of open-ended interviews.

Analysis of the ensuing data revealed three superordinate themes and seven sub-themes that represented faculty perspective about formalized assessment, given specific purposes and implementations. Distilled, these themes support four major findings that answer the research question. First, participants expressed that formalized assessment used as accountability in the classroom, either for faculty or students, was not ultimately effective. Second, while faculty members were generally positive about the process of using formalized assessment data in accreditation, there was evidence that the use was ultimately meaningless. Third, faculty believed in the ability for formalized assessment to improve both the student and faculty experience in the classroom (though for most participants, it had not happened). Fourth, the experiences of the faculty overwhelmingly revealed that, from their perspective, formalized assessment must be faculty-driven, purposeful, scholarly, and administratively supported. These findings largely align to the literature especially in the way of classroom accountability,
assessment use for improvement, and the need for faculty-driven, scholarly, and purposeful assessment.

Additionally, these findings build on current scholarship in this subject and provide some recommendations for improving practical applications of formalized assessment. First, students must be educated about the process of their learning and how institutions measure this learning through assessment. Doing so requires an investment from the administration that emphasizes the positive nature of assessment in the culture of the institution. This investment overlaps with the second recommendation, which is the need for administration to support faculty-driven and scholarly assessment initiatives. While administrative involvement might be required for some functions, the assessment efforts need to be guided by the educational agents in the classroom and with respect to the academic tradition. Finally, resourced, purposeful, and transparent formalized assessment initiatives must be meaningfully incorporated into a culture of continuous improvement. The true power of assessment lies in its ability to provide key insights into the learning in the classroom. These insights, therefore, need to be translated into purposeful improvements that benefit the experience of faculty and students alike—when teaching and learning are better served, so too will the field of higher education.

Barr and Tagg’s (1995) 20-year-old call for a focus on student learning has made a lot of headway. As evidenced by this study, however, there is still work to be done. Higher education is a complex world, full of traditions and varied contexts. As such change can be difficult—especially with a topic such as formalized assessment, which touches on so many of these complexities. The potential for assessment articulated by all of the participants, however, symbolize why changes like this are so important. With a more strategic use of student learning data, higher education will be better able to meet the needs of students and faculty. With these
two audiences being better served, it logically follows that quality of education will also improve. And this improvement helps not only those involved but also society at large, by producing an educated population that values not only the ends of learning, but the process of learning itself.
References


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Appendix A: Recruitment Sheet

The Lived Faculty Experience with Formalized Assessment Initiatives

The purpose of this qualitative research investigation is to explore the lived experience of faculty members involved with formalized assessment Initiatives. Participants must faculty members (tenured, full-time, or adjunct) and involved with the formalized gathering of student learning data through summative assessments. “Formalized” means that your institution (or one of your institutions if you’re an adjunct) uses this data to improve curriculum and/or report to an institutional effectiveness group or accreditors.

The researcher will conduct three interview sessions. Two of these interviews, the introductory session and the concluding session, will be short, 15-30 minutes. The data collection interview will be 60-90 minutes long. All sessions will take place face to face or via internet communication technology (such as Skype). All data collected will be strictly confidential, and participant names will be protected in this study through use of a pseudonym.

To learn more about this volunteer research investigation, please contact Thomas Leary, student investigator, as 414-367-6294 or leary.th@husky.neu.edu. This research is conducted under the direction of Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Education Department. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Kelly Conn, k.conn@neu.edu
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Kelly Conn, Principal Investigator; Thomas Leary, Doctoral Student Investigator

Title of Project: The Lived Faculty Experience with Formalized Assessment Initiatives

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because you are a faculty member in higher education and have experience with formalized assessment of student learning.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences for faculty interacting with formalized assessment practices in higher education.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to interview with the researcher. The researcher is interested in learning about specific perceptions and experiences about formalized assessment of student learning in institutions of higher education.

You are required to meet with the researcher via Internet conference technology. The first session is a question and answer session to inform you about the project; some background and demographic data will be recorded for transcription. The second session is a 1-hour recorded interview with the researcher. This data collection session Internet conference technology. It will be recorded for transcription. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be allowed to read it and provide feedback for discussion. This will require a brief 15-minute debriefing with the researcher to review the data collected.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

This study will consist of three interviews. You will be interviewed at a time that is convenient for you, via the Internet. The purpose and length of interviews will vary, as seen below:

Interview 1: This interview will take 15 to 30 minutes, and there will be some data collection. It will consist of:

- Discuss the study and respond to questions
- Check to see if consent form was signed appropriately
- Basic demographic and background questions asked; these will be recorded
• Schedule the next interview

Interview 2: This is the main data collection interview and will take 60 to 90 minutes. It will consist of:
  • Review any questions from the previous interview
  • Conduct the formal interview either in person or via the Internet

Interview 3: This is a member checking session and will take 15 to 30 minutes. It will consist of:
  • Each participant will receive a copy of their transcript via email
  • The participant will review provide feedback on the transcript

The total time involved with this project will be around 2 hours.

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<th>Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?</th>
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<td>There will be no personal or physical risk to you. All the data collected will be strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym, and your identity, location, and school(s) discussed with be kept confidential. Should you mention persons in your life, they will also be assigned a pseudonym. All of the data collected will be managed and stored safely; the data collected will be destroyed after a period of seven years. You will be allowed to read the transcript interview once it has been transcribed and coded to check it for validity. You are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.</td>
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<th>Will I benefit by being in this research?</th>
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<td>There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help improve the accuracy of student learning data and the effectiveness of its use.</td>
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<th>Who will see the information about me?</th>
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<td>Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.</td>
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The data collected in the interview notes, audiotapes, and transcript will be provided a pseudonym. Your real name will not be used at all in this study. The data will be stored securely on two external storage devices and locked. No data will be kept on a desktop or laptop. No unauthorized persons will be allowed to read the data collected or materials affiliated with it. (We would only permit people who are authorized such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board) to see this information if required.

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<th>Can I stop my participation in this study?</th>
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<td>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have [as a student, employee, etc].</td>
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<td><strong>Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?</strong></td>
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<td>If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Leary (414-367-6294, <a href="mailto:leary.th@husky.neu.edu">leary.th@husky.neu.edu</a>), the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Kelly Conn (<a href="mailto:k.conn@neu.edu">k.conn@neu.edu</a>), the Principal Investigator.</td>
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<th><strong>Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: <a href="mailto:n.regina@neu.edu">n.regina@neu.edu</a>. You may call anonymously if you wish.</td>
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<th><strong>Will I be paid for my participation?</strong></th>
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<td>You will be given a $10 gift certificate to Amazon as soon as you complete the study.</td>
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<th><strong>Will it cost me anything to participate?</strong></th>
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<td>No.</td>
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<th><strong>Is there anything else I need to know?</strong></th>
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<td>You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission. You must be a faculty member in higher education, with current or past experience with a formalized assessment initiative.</td>
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<th><strong>I agree to take part in this research.</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent</td>
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<td>Printed name of person above</td>
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Depending upon the nature of your research, you may also be required to provide information about one or more of the following if it is applicable:

1. A statement that the particular treatment or procedure may involve risks to the subject (or to the embryo or fetus, if the subject is or may become pregnant) which are currently unforeseeable.
2. Anticipated circumstances under which the subject’s participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to the subject’s consent.
3. Any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
4. The consequences of a subject’s decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.
5. A statement that significant new finding(s) developed during the course of the research which may be related to the subject’s willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.
6. The approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
Appendix C: Research Protocol and Questions

Interviewee (Pseudonym): __________________

Interviewer: Thomas Leary

Location of Interview 1: _________________
Date of Interview 1: _________________
Location of Interview 2: _________________
Date of Interview 2: _________________
Location of Interview 3: _________________
Date of Interview 3: _________________

Interview 1

First, I want to thank you for your time and your willingness to participate in this project. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University and this interview is part of a research project, to which you have already been introduced. In short, my research seeks to understand better the lived experience of faculty members interacting with formalized assessment initiatives in higher education. It is my hope that this study will help enable administrators and faculty to better partner and effectively utilize student learning data within their institutions.

The purpose of this first interview is to allow me to describe the purpose of the study in further detail, allow you to ask any questions that you may have. We will also discuss some logistics, such as the informed consent form and interview schedule. If you don’t have any questions at this time, we can proceed. [At this point, give brief overview of project; problem, purpose, background of this project. Go over informed consent form and get verbal consent.]

To capture some data, I’d like to record this conversation. Do I have your permission do I begin the recording? [If yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording equipment.]

1) Tell me your story; how long have you been a faculty member and what drew you to the work? What is your current institutional context, such as department, committee work, etc.?

2) Describe the formalized assessment initiative that you participate in. What are some of the general successes that you feel this initiative has achieved? What are some of its general challenges?

[Stop recording; schedule next interview. Thanks the participant for their time.]
Notes:

Interview 2

Hello! Thanks so much for sending the signed consent form along and for agreeing to spend an hour talking with me today. As we discussed in our previous meeting, this will be a formal data collection session. To that end, I will be recording this conversation. Do I have your permission do I begin the recording? [if yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording equipment].

Before we begin, I would like to reiterate that (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts in the final draft. My primary investigator and I will be the only one privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. We have planned this interview to last about 45 to 60 minutes. If, at any time, you’re uncomfortable with a question or need me to re-phrase, please feel free to let me know. Do you have any questions at this time? [answer any questions the participant may have, then briefly reaffirm what was talked about last time]

Let’s begin.

Perspectives of Assessment

1) Consider the formalized assessment initiative at your institution. How involved are faculty in that initiative as opposed to administrators? From your perspective, what is an appropriate balance for a successful initiative?
   a. Potential probe: Think about the transparency and visibility of this initiative. How has that affected your perception of it?
   b. Potential probe: Talk about some specific instances that have affect this perception.

2) Talk about your experiences using assessment to help inform teaching practices. Do you, your department, or your institution regularly use student learning assessment data to help inform the way that you teach?
   a. Potential probe: Do you have specific experience with a formal process that incorporates student learning assessment data to inform practices? How effective do your feel that is? If you don’t have this experience, what is your belief about a formalized process for this?

3) What is your perspective on using assessment to hold students accountable for their own learning, such as for the achievement of learning outcomes? Describe some experiences that come to mind when thinking about this topic.
   a. Potential probe: What is your perception of the impact of such practices on students and their learning? Do you feel it is effective or ineffective?
   b. Potential probe: Talk about a specific instance that affected this perception.
4) Tell me about your experience with student learning assessment data and faculty performance. Consider, if this has not happened to you, that you are held partially accountable for student learning in your classes. What is your reaction to this?
   a. *Potential probe:* What is your perspective on formally using student learning assessment data to drive faculty development efforts?
   b. *Potential probe:* Talk about a specific instance that affected this perspective.

5) Describe any experience that you have regarding the use of student learning assessment data and accreditation. What is your perception of the use of student learning assessment data in the process of regional accreditation?
   a. *Potential probe:* Different accrediting bodies handle the use of student learning assessment data in the process in different ways (though all require it). What is your impression of the most effective way to use this data based on your experience?
   b. *Potential Probe:* Do you have any specific stories that have contributed to this impression?

6) The national conversation about the value of a college degree is one that all of us in higher education are acutely aware. Considering your experiences with formalized assessment, what role do you feel, if any, student learning data might play in helping inform that conversation?

7) Reflect, for a moment, on all that we have discussed. Drawing on all of your experiences and thoughts, what do you see as the ideal goals of a formalized assessment initiative at an institution of higher education? What should two or three driving goals be to give purpose to the initiative? What should the role of faculty be? What should the role of administrators be?

Notes:

**Interview 3**

*Thanks for your patience as I have gone through the process of transcribing our previous interview and reviewing the notes. Last week I emailed you the transcript, and the purpose of this final interview is member checking. Member checking is a critical step in the research process, as it allows us to make sure that the data that I have captured accurately reflect your experiences. This will ensure the trustworthiness of this study. I’ll start by reviewing my notes and any emergent themes I’m beginning to see. Then, you’ll be able to provide your feedback on the transcript and my notes. Additionally, you’ll be able to ask me any final questions.*

1) Review notes and any emergent themes
2) Discuss participant feedback

Notes: