ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND THE CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT IN STUDENT

AFFAIRS DIVISIONS AT SMALL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

by

ROBERT BURKE SEAGRAVES, JR.

(Under the Direction of Laura A. Dean)

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the types of assessment being conducted in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities (enrollment of fewer than 5000 students), (b) assess the perceptions of administrators in these environments about the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment identified in the literature review, (c) determine whether there is a difference in these perceptions between Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) and staff members within divisions of student affairs (non-SSAO staff), (d) determine which type or types of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, (e) determine which assessment skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, and (f) determine which assessment motivation factors best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

Members of NASPA Region III and/or SACSA who work at institutions with fewer than 5000 students were invited to participate in the study. The response rate for this study was 24.4%, with 94 of 385 potential participants responding to the online questionnaire. Results from the study indicated that over 90% of the participants reported assessing student satisfaction and tracking usage of programs, services, and facilities. The most prevalent elements of a

culture of assessment included support from upper-level administration and the use of assessment results in decision-making opportunities. SSAOs and non-SSAOs significantly differed in their perceptions of the presence of a common assessment language, inclusion of assessment expectations in new staff orientation, and use of assessment results in decision-making opportunities.

Outcomes assessment was the only type of assessment with significant explanatory value in predicting the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. A combination of four areas of assessment skills and knowledge—assessment ethics, benchmarking, effective reporting and use of results, and ability to articulate learning and development outcomes—best predicted the presence of a culture of assessment. Two motivations for assessment—support for the educational mission of the institution and expectations of the SSAO—best predicted the presence of a culture of assessment.

INDEX WORDS: Student Affairs, Assessment, Small colleges and universities, Motivation, Culture of assessment, ASK Standards

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to Hilary, Burke, and Abby. The support and motivation you provided helped me persevere through this process. I am a blessed man to have the three of you in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Assessment practice has become an important aspect of the work of faculty and

administrators on college and university campuses throughout the United States (Ewell, 2002;

Kuh, Gonyea, & Rodriguez, 2002; Pascarella & Whitt, 1999; Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

Accrediting bodies expect institutions of higher education to demonstrate that they are measuring

student learning outcomes (Maki, 2004). Governmental agencies have argued for greater

accountability to ensure the public is getting a return on its investment in higher education

(United States Department of Education, 2006). These trends have led to increased expectations

for the assessment of curricular and co-curricular programs and activities on college and

university campuses.

An institution's student affairs division is typically responsible for administering and

managing the co-curricular components of an educational program (Sandeen, 1991). The

programs and services offered through student affairs often include areas such as housing,

student activities, student conduct, health services, recreational sports, admissions, orientation,

multicultural programs, and career planning (Sandeen, 1991). Each of these functional units has

a different mission and set of goals that support the overall institutional mission and goals

(Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009). Thus, each unit may

take a different approach to and have a different motivation for assessing its effectiveness in

achieving its unique mission (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Furthermore, within the broader field of

student affairs, assessment experts have articulated specific skills and knowledge that

administrators must possess in order to conduct assessments effectively (ACPA-College Student Affairs International, 2007; NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2009). Regardless of how and why institutions, divisions, departments, and individual administrators choose to assess, the call for assessment throughout higher education is clear.

Organizations of all sizes and types have unique cultural elements that serve as symbols for how each particular organization operates (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Developing a culture of assessment, which is "an organizational culture whose values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors reflect a shared appreciation of assessment practice" (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press, p. 2), is often a goal for administrators seeking to foster support among faculty and administrators for conducting assessment throughout an organization. Elements of a culture of assessment in student affairs, such as support for assessment from the upper-level administration and incorporation of assessment into existing processes, promote assessment activity within the division and create an environment where regular assessment is expected and practiced (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Seagraves & Dean, 2010).

Institutional size impacts how faculty and administrators conduct their activities, including assessment, within a college or university (Birnbaum, 1988; Hirt, 2006). Some large research institutions may have specific offices and/or staff members within student affairs divisions designated to coordinate and manage the division's assessment efforts. Small colleges and universities often rely on limited resources and staffing when conducting assessments, yet some small institutions engage in significant and meaningful assessment activities in spite of these limitations (Seagraves & Dean, 2010). Research into the small college environment is limited, especially as it pertains to assessment activity (Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, & Vaughan, 1999; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). However, the fact that over 77% of institutions in the

United States enroll fewer than 5,000 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) highlights the importance of learning more about these small colleges and universities and their assessment practices.

Statement of Problem

Much of the recent literature related to assessment in higher education addresses the practical elements of designing and executing assessment plans (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009; Erwin & Sivo, 2001; Suskie, 2009). Other scholars (Love & Estanek, 2004; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004; Sandeen & Barr, 2006) have articulated the importance of assessment practice in student affairs divisions. However, researchers have gathered little empirical evidence regarding the types of assessment being conducted, the elements of a culture of assessment in student affairs divisions on college campuses, administrators' self-reported levels of assessment skills and knowledge, and administrators' motivations for conducting assessment.

Furthermore, a dearth of literature and research exists on small colleges in general and assessment in these environments in particular. Seagraves and Dean (2010), using a qualitative case study approach, examined the conditions that support assessment practice in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities at three institutions in the Southeastern United States. However, the findings of that study have not been tested or confirmed using empirical methods with a broad sample. This study expanded on this previous research and provided data for generalization to a greater number of small colleges and universities.

Significance of Study

The results of this study can have a significant impact on student affairs divisions in small colleges and universities seeking to develop or enhance a culture of assessment. First, the researcher articulated a comprehensive list of the elements of a culture of assessment within divisions of student affairs. Elements of a culture of assessment in student affairs promote assessment activity within the division and create an environment where regular assessment is expected and practiced. This list may prove beneficial for future researchers looking to use an existing framework for studying the culture of assessment within student affairs divisions.

Second, little empirical research exists regarding assessment in student affairs divisions, much less at small colleges and universities. Thus, this study established baseline information about the types of assessment being conducted and the prevalence of the elements of a culture of assessment in these environments. This information paints a clearer picture of assessment in the small college student affairs division.

Third, senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) have the opportunity to create an environment where their staff members value and support assessment. However, having differing perspectives from their staff on the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment may hamper SSAOs' ability to achieve their desired results. Results of this study indicated a difference between SSAO and non-SSAO staff perceptions on several elements of a culture of assessment, leading SSAOs to focus their primary efforts on developing a common understanding regarding the importance of assessment and how it should be carried out before expecting prolific assessment activity. Furthermore, SSAOs need to understand why staff members conduct assessment and their level of assessment skills and knowledge in order to better promote assessment within their divisions and provide useful training opportunities.

Capitalizing on this information gives SSAOs a clearer direction for connecting motivation, skills, and knowledge to the development of a culture of assessment.

Fourth, determining if a relationship exists between the types of assessment and the perceptions of the presence of a culture of assessment can impact the strategies administrators use when working to establish a culture of assessment. Administrators can enhance efficiency and effectiveness by implementing the specific types of assessment that are more closely related to the presence of a culture of assessment, rather than potentially wasting resources while seeking to develop this culture. By connecting the types of assessment to the perceptions of the presence of a culture of assessment, this study sought to connect Upcraft and Schuh's (1996) comprehensive model for assessment, which is among the foundational texts related to assessment in student affairs, to more recent literature related to the development of a culture of assessment within student affairs divisions (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press).

Fifth, student affairs graduate preparation program faculty may use these results to prepare new professionals more effectively for conducting assessment in different types of institutional contexts. Training graduate students for assessment at smaller institutions may require placing special attention on a particular subset of cultural elements or types of assessment. This study worked to fill a wide gap in the knowledge base related to the practice of assessment in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities.

Purpose of Study

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the types of assessment being conducted in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities, (b) assess the perceptions of administrators in these environments about the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment identified in the literature review, (c) determine whether there is a difference in these

perceptions between Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) and staff members within divisions of student affairs (non-SSAO staff), (d) determine which type or types of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, (e) determine which assessment skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, and (f) determine which assessment motivation factors best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

This study focused on administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities in the Southeastern region of the United States. This area is defined by the states incorporated in the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) and Region III of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Student affairs professionals who are members of one or both of these two organizations and who work at a small college or university were the subjects of this study.

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Operational Definitions

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The following definitions guided the research and were used throughout this study.

Administrators

This term is used to denote all professional staff within a student affairs organization, including the SSAO. This term does not refer to administrative support staff within the organization.

Assessment

Assessment can have a wide variety of meanings and connotations depending on the context in which it is used (Bresciani, 2006; Kuh, Gonyea, & Rodriguez, 2002; Tierney, 1990). For this study, assessment refers to "any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which

describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18).

Culture of Assessment

A culture of assessment is "an organizational culture whose values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors reflect a shared appreciation of assessment practice" (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press, p. 2).

Non-SSAO Staff

The term "non-SSAO staff" refers to any professional employee throughout the student affairs organization, except the SSAO. This term does not refer to administrative support staff within the organization.

Senior Student Affairs Officer

The Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) is the highest ranking individual within a student affairs division. The person in this role has primary responsibility for overseeing and administering the programs and services in the division (Sandeen, 1991). The working title of an institution's SSAO is often either Vice President for Student Affairs or Dean of Students. To avoid confusion regarding titles since some institutions have both a Vice President and Dean, the term Senior Student Affairs Officer is used throughout this study.

Small Colleges and Universities

This term refers to institutions with an enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students (NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2008; Seagraves & Dean, 2010).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What types of assessment do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities report are being conducted?

RQ2: To what extent do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

RQ3: Are there differences between how SSAOs and non-SSAOs in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

RQ4: Which type(s) of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

RQ5: Which self-reported skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

RQ6: Which motivations for assessment best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

Chapter Summary

Assessment in higher education is of paramount importance, with calls for accountability continuing to increase (United States Department of Education, 2006). Student affairs divisions are not immune from this pressure and often work to create a culture of assessment. Little empirical data exists regarding the types of assessment that administrators are conducting, the elements that comprise this culture of assessment, the self-reported assessment skills and knowledge of student affairs administrators, and the motivations for administrators to conduct

assessment. Furthermore, institutional size impacts how administrators conduct their work (Hirt, 2006). This study focused on small colleges and universities (those with fewer than 5,000 students) and expanded upon a previous qualitative study that examined the conditions that support assessment practice at three institutions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides the context needed for understanding assessment practice within

student affairs and how it relates to the culture of assessment within student affairs divisions at

small colleges and universities. The first section addresses the call for assessment within higher

education in general. The second section focuses on assessment practices within the context of

student affairs, including the reasons why administrators conduct assessment and the skills and

knowledge needed to conduct assessment. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) developed a

comprehensive model for assessment, which includes seven primary types of assessment that

student affairs divisions should conduct. The third section of the chapter further explains these

types of assessment and their distinct contributions to the comprehensive model for assessment.

The fourth section focuses on the concept of a culture of assessment and the specific elements of

this culture that this study addressed. Lastly, the fifth section of the chapter addresses the small

college environment and the importance of considering assessment practice within this context.

Throughout this chapter, the aim is to build the framework for understanding the importance of

expanding the limited research-based knowledge surrounding assessment practice within the

small college student affairs division.

Assessment in Higher Education

The focus on assessment in higher education emerged in the mid-1980s. Several

nationally-publicized reports, including the National Institute of Education's *Involvement in*

Learning (1984), the Association of American Colleges' *Integrity in the College Curriculum*

(1985), and the National Governors Association's *Time for Results* (1986), called attention to issues related to what college graduates were learning and their preparation for the workforce (Erwin & Sivo, 2001; Ewell, 2002). At that time, few college and university leaders could adequately respond to the questions raised in these reports (Palomba & Banta, 1999). However, by 1988, all federally approved accrediting agencies were required to use evidence of institutional outcomes when making their reports (United States Department of Education, 1988). This requirement prompted institutions to develop assessment practices (Ewell, 2002; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Early assessment literature (Astin, 1991; Halpern, 1987) focused on how academic majors and general education impacted student learning. Scholars devoted little attention to the influence that student affairs programs had on the learning process. For example, Jossey-Bass published a book entitled *Student Outcomes Assessment: What Institutions Stand to Gain* (Halpern, 1987) in its New Directions for Higher Education series. This publication highlighted approaches for how faculty can influence and measure student learning on their campuses and in their classes. This publication did not address how student affairs divisions or co-curricular components of the institution can impact student learning.

In recent years, accrediting bodies have been focusing more on institutional assessment practices when making their initial accreditation or reaffirmation decisions (Maki, 2004). The 2006 United States Department of Education report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (commonly referred to as "The Spellings Report"), called for American colleges and universities to be held to a higher level of accountability to the public. With this report appealing to institutions to "embrace and implement serious accountability measures" (p.21), accrediting agencies may be forced to examine more seriously learning

outcomes for academic programs (Bollag, 2006). Maki (2004) provided several examples of standards that accrediting agencies are using to determine whether or not institutions have developed systems to assess learning outcomes.

These external pressures, like government accountability and accrediting agencies, have not given student affairs administrators the explicit mandate to conduct outcomes-based assessment. However, student affairs administrators can still find themselves involved in supporting the institution's assessment efforts (Seagraves & Dean, 2010). For example, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' publication, *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* (2010), does not include assessment activities or learning outcomes specifically under the Student Affairs section (section 3.9) of the comprehensive standards. However, in practice, general expectations for outcomes assessment on the institutional level during accreditation require student affairs involvement. Section 3.3.1 of the SACS Principles, for example, requires institutions to demonstrate that they identify and assess outcomes in key areas of the institution, including educational support services (Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2010). Institutions can highlight the assessment that student affairs administrators conduct in support of the overall educational mission. Ultimately, seminal documents within the field of student affairs, recent philosophical changes, and a renewed attention from professional associations and accreditation bodies have brought to light the importance of assessing the effectiveness of student affairs programs and services.

Assessment in Student Affairs

Sandeen and Barr (2006) provided a comprehensive examination of the history of student affairs assessment. In 1937, *The Student Personnel Point of View* called upon student personnel

workers to "carry(ing) on studies designed to evaluate and improve these functions and services" (American Council on Education). *The Student Personnel Point of View* of 1949 expanded this concept and elevated the importance of assessment, asserting that "each worker must devote a large part of his time…to the continuous evaluation and improvement of current programs" (American Council on Education). Scholars in the early 1990s (Winston & Miller, 1994; Woodard, Hyman, von Destinon, & Jamison, 1991) articulated the need for student affairs to become more involved in assessment activities as the call for institutional assessment began to rise. However, not until the publication of *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (American College Personnel Association, 1996) did student affairs professionals begin to accept more widely the responsibility of outcomes based assessment.

Student learning became the focus of student affairs work in the 1990s when the field was called upon to demonstrate its commitment to the academic mission of higher education (American College Personnel Association, 1996; Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993). The call for accountability in higher education was increasing, and student affairs professionals could no longer be bystanders in the process. Failure to act and begin holding themselves more accountable for their commitment to the institution's academic mission could have led to a substantial loss in resources and a negative perception among colleagues in the post-secondary educational community.

Competition for institutional resources became more prevelant in the 1990s, with other institutional divisions that were more obviously connected to learning often taking priority over student affairs (Pascarella & Whitt, 1999; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). With tight budgets, senior administrators and budget managers expected student affairs divisions to prove their value to campus constituencies. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) articulated this issue as "a

matter of survival" (p. 7). When financial extingencies are being forced on institutions, student affairs divisions must be able to defend their programs and practices and show them as being vital to the educational mission, where learning can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience.

Beyond the need for "survival" articulated by Upcraft and Schuh (1996, p. 7), student affairs practitioners have a variety of additional motivations to conduct assessment. Student affairs divisions have expressed committment to improving their services and programs (American Council on Education, 1937; Erwin & Sivo, 2001; Sandeen, 1991; Seagraves & Dean, 2010; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). According to Kuh, Gonyea, and Rodriguez (2002), "left unattended, every curricular offering or student life program will decay over time" (p. 122). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) articulated this issue as "a matter of quality" (p.12). Student affairs professionals are expected to hold their programs to high standards of quality and have evidence to support their conclusions.

To that end, ACPA-College Student Affairs International (2007) and NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (2009) have articulated specific skills and knowledge that student affairs administrators should have in order to conduct assessment effectively. ACPA's (2007) Assessment Skills and Knowledge (ASK) Standards "identify necessary content areas and proficiencies in order to help practitioners in academic affairs and student affairs refine the specific professional skills and knowledge they need to develop, hone, or add to their current work in assessment" (Henning, Mitchell, & Maki, 2008, p. 12). NASPA's Assessment Education Framework (2009) was created to assist scholars and administrators with developing specific training options to promote assessment activity and knowledge within student affairs divisions. These international professional organizations have focused their

recent efforts regarding assessment on encouraging their members to develop the skills needed to conduct assessment.

Resources like the ASK Standards (ACPA, 2007) and the NASPA Asssessment Education Framework (2009) have addressed assessment compentencies for individuals working within student affairs. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2009) has focused on the programmatic elements of higher education by developing a comprehensive set of standards that can be used to gauge the effectiveness of various functional areas. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was created in 1979 to "promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development" (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2010, CAS Mission Statement, para. 1). Representatives from 40 higher education professional associations meet regularly to review and update existing CAS standards and propose new standards relevant to higher education and student affairs.

The historical context surrounding assessment practice within student affairs impacts how administrators conduct their work today. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) wrote a seminal book regarding assessment practice in student affairs at a time when the call for assessment within the field was becoming widespread. In this text, the authors made assessment more relevant to student affairs professionals through developing a clear definition for assessment, offering a comprehensive model for assessment, and articulating challenges associated with conducting assessment in student affairs. Upcraft and Schuh's (1996) comprehensive model for assessment provides the framework through which this study will explore the types of assessment being conducted at small colleges and universities.

Types of Assessment

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) developed a comprehensive model for assessment that includes seven primary components. These scholars argued that implementing all seven of these types of assessment would address the internal and external pressures for accountability that student affairs professionals experience, including questions about affordability, quality, and effectiveness of programs and services. Upcraft and Schuh's (1996) seven primary components of a comprehensive model for assessment that the researcher addressed in this study are:

- tracking usage of services, programs, and facilities;

- student needs assessment;

- student satisfaction assessment;

- campus environments and student cultures assessment;

- outcomes assessment;

- benchmarking: comparable institutions assessment; and

- using nationally-accepted standards to assess.

Each of these components constitutes a type of assessment that student affairs staff and administrators can employ to measure the effectiveness of their divisions' programs, services, and facilities.

Tracking Usage of Services, Programs, and Facilities

Clients, or students, must use services, programs, and facilities in order for these functions to achieve their intended purposes (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Therefore, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) argued that learning how many people are accessing particular services, programs, and facilities provides valuable data regarding their utilization. Furthermore, collecting the clientele's demographic information helps administrators get a clearer picture of their actual

audience and provides insight into potential clients not currently utilizing these functions. Administrators can use this data either to market existing programs, services, and facilities more effectively or to create new functions for groups underrepresented in current offerings.

Student Needs Assessment

Conducting a needs assessment allows for "determining the presence or absence of factors and conditions, resources, services, and learning opportunities that students need in order to meet their educational goals and objectives within the context of an institution's mission" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 128). Thus, administrators seek to design and implement programs that meet the needs of and are popular with students (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Kuh (1982) offered five reasons for conducting a needs assessment: monitor stakeholder perceptions; program-policy justification; satisfaction index; participative policy making; and measurable improvement. According to Kuh, "the goal of needs assessment is to inform and guide the planning of interventions or programs designed to bring about certain desirable changes" (p. 207). Needs assessment provides key information that helps administrators make decisions that benefit the intended audience.

Student Satisfaction Assessment

Assessing student satisfaction is an important element of an assessment plan even though the results do not measure the quality of educational programs and services (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Administrators should look to the institutional, divisional, and departmental mission and purpose statements to set appropriate measures of satisfaction. Administrators should examine student satisfaction in the areas most critical to the mission (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

To determine student satisfaction levels, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) articulated the need for static and active measures. Static measures, which involve examining existing data or information, include student persistence, student monetary spending patterns, membership recruitment and retention, program examination, student newspapers, institutional databases, and food services. Active measures, which typically involve conducting more extensive research, could include both seeking feedback from students on a series of ten dimensions of service quality (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990) and implementing secret shopper initiatives (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Administrators should use multiple measures and methods to garner a more accurate picture of student satisfaction (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Campus Environments and Student Cultures Assessment

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) acknowledged the importance of and challenges associated with environmental assessments. According to Upcraft and Schuh (1996), "environmental assessment determines and evaluates how the various elements and conditions of the college campus milieu affect student learning and growth" (p. 167). Administrators seek to use this information to create environments that facilitate student success and maximize learning opportunities (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Student culture is a vital element of the campus experience (Kuh, 1990). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) recognized its importance in shaping the student experience on campus by highlighting the work of Lewin (1936, as cited in Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), who argued that behavior is a function of the interaction between an individual and his or her environment. According to Kuh (1990), "student cultures shape all aspects of campus life and are the primary vehicles for socializing newcoming" (p. 57). Since environment is a key element of culture (Kuh

& Whitt, 1988), one can see how assessing various cultural elements is important for understanding student life both inside and outside the classroom.

Assessing campus environments and student cultures can take many forms (Kuh, 1990; Strange & Banning, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Kuh (1990) highlighted the importance of using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods methodologies for assessing campus environments. These multiple methods provide administrators with different types of results and information about the same student culture. For example, a standardized quantitative instrument may yield data that indicates a specific subpopulation on campus differs from the other subpopulations in its perceptions of the campus environment. Conducting in-depth interviews or focus groups with that subpopulation may enhance the administration's understanding of why the differences in perceptions exist. Strange and Banning (2001) created a campus design matrix to illustrate how administrators can assess environmental components, impacts, and purposes when beginning work on shaping a campus' design. Regardless of the methodology for assessment, the literature is clear regarding the importance of understanding how the campus environment and student culture shape external perceptions about the institution and internal experiences within the institution (Kuh, 1990; Strange & Banning, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Outcomes Assessment

Early research examining outcomes assessment indicated that student affairs administrators were instrumental in helping shape institutional assessment activities (Woodard, Hyman, von Destinon, & Jamison, 1991). These researchers further argued that student affairs professionals would need to "take a leadership role supporting institutional initiatives to determine the extent of the institution's impact on developing student knowledge, competence, values, and attitudes" (p. 22). Several assessment models (Astin, 1991; Winston & Miller, 1994)

that emerged in the early 1990s became the foundation upon which future administrators developed outcomes assessment plans.

Astin (1991) created an Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model for outcomes assessment that allowed individuals to determine the influence of the input and environment on the output. According to Upcraft and Schuh (1996), "the primary purpose for Astin's I-E-O model is to identify and estimate institutional effects on how students grow or change during the college years" (p. 219). For example, institutions interested in assessing the impact of a particular group of students' college experiences (Environment) on their graduation rates (Output) would also need to know the students' pre-collegiate preparation (Input) to determine if the institution itself was having an effect on the outcome or if some other factor related to the students' pre-collegiate experiences could have influenced the outcome. Unlike Astin's (1991) I-E-O model, which can be used to assess a variety of factors, Winston and Miller's (1994) model focused specifically on the assessment of student developmental outcomes. These models quickly became widely-used and widely-accepted within higher education and student affairs (Upcraft and Schuh, 1996).

Terenzini and Upcraft (1996) argued that "assessing the purported outcomes of our efforts with students is probably the most important assessment we [student affairs administrators] do" (p. 217). In recent years, outcomes assessment has become a popular topic in the field of student affairs as administrators become increasingly responsible for demonstrating whether or not programs and services meet their stated goals and measures of success (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009; Love & Estanek, 2004; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004; Schuh & Associates, 2009).

Benchmarking: Comparable Institutions Assessment

Benchmarking is a valuable tool that administrators use to compare their programs and services to those offered at similar institutions, with the goal of improving practice (Jackson & Lund, 2000; Love & Estanek, 2004; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) referred to Spendolini (1992) when describing several uses of benchmarking, including strategic planning, forecasting, generating new ideas, and determining affordability. Using information gathered from other institutions of similar size, mission, and structure can help generate ideas and make the case for supporting change and improvement within an organization.

Using Nationally-Accepted Standards to Assess

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) included the use of nationally-accepted standards in their comprehensive model for assessment. These standards are often the result of collaborative efforts among a wide range of contributors. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2009) develops standards that can be used for self-assessment practices within specific institutions and functional areas. The comprehensive nature of the CAS standards make them an important resource for student affairs professionals interested in conducting assessment on their campuses.

Elements of a Culture of Assessment

Upcraft and Schuh's (1996) comprehensive model for assessment provides a solid foundation for studying the types of assessment within student affairs. A similar framework regarding the culture of assessment within student affairs does not exist, even though scholars have written about institutional cultures of assessment (Suskie, 2009; Weiner, 2009) and academic departmental or institution-level cultures of assessment (Duff, 2008; Piascik & Bird, 2008). Scholars have discussed the culture of assessment within student affairs without clearly

articulating a comprehensive model (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2008). However, no data connects the various types of assessment being conducted to a culture of assessment. Thus, scholars have not determined whether simply conducting assessment leads to a culture of assessment.

Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves (in press) developed ten strategies for creating a culture of assessment within student affairs divisions. These strategies were designed to lead to specific outcomes, or elements, of a culture of assessment. The elements of a culture of assessment derived from Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves (in press) are:

- support from upper-level administration;

- assessment responsibilities as part of job descriptions;

- common language among administrators;

- ongoing educational opportunities for administrators;

- orientation for new administrators regarding assessment expectations;

- confidence among administrators regarding assessment practice;

- assessment activities are infused into existing institutional processes;

- strong relationships across campus that support assessment;

- celebrations of administrator contributions to assessment priorities through ceremonies and rituals; and

- use of assessment results in decision-making opportunities.

This section will provide the relevant context for each of these elements of a culture of assessment.

Support from Upper-level Administration

Developing a culture of assessment that permeates a division of student affairs often requires support from the upper-level administration (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Love & Estanek, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002). In the small college environment, the SSAO often provides this support (Seagraves & Dean, 2010). Sandeen (1991) argued that "the most effective student affairs leaders know that systematic and independent assessment of student attitudes and values are also essential to good management" (p. 113). Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves (in press) articulated several ways that upper-level administrators can demonstrate their support, including empowering staff to learn the skills needed to conduct assessment, establishing clear expectations for staff to conduct assessment, and supporting assessment through human and monetary resource allocation.

SSAOs have an important role in developing the culture of assessment within their divisions (Seagraves & Dean, 2010). However, scholars have not explored whether SSAOs and non-SSAO staff perceive the culture of assessment differently. Understanding these perceptions and their differences may elucidate a more focused direction on how the SSAOs can develop the culture of assessment within their divisions.

Assessment Responsibilities as Part of Job Descriptions

Job descriptions are a critical element for communicating employees' responsibilities and how they should allocate their time (Raetz, 2001). Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves (in press) argued that not clearly articulating assessment in a position description leaves employees believing that this work falls into the "Other Duties as Assigned" category, which may not demonstrate its importance when compared to other more well-defined activities. Furthermore, staff members who are expected to conduct assessment can dedicate the appropriate amount of

time they need to complete their responsibilities. Seagraves and Dean (2010) found that several

small colleges and universities do not incorporate assessment into job descriptions formally.

However, all participants in that study indicated that assessment was indeed part of their job

responsibilities.

Common Language among Administrators

Developing a culture that supports assessment requires the establishment of a common

language, so everyone within the organization can communicate clearly with one another

regarding the assessment activities they are conducting (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Weiner, 2009).

Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves (in press) addressed the fact that the language of

assessment has changed over the last twenty years. The meaning or connotation of certain terms

has changed as assessment practices have evolved, and some staff members may have differing

understandings of how to use particular terms. Organizations that embody a culture of

assessment have established clear and common definitions for assessment terminology. Staff

members in these organizations can articulate and use these terms with one another in ways that

promote understanding and lessen the possibility for confusion (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson,

2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Ongoing Educational Opportunities for Administrators

Training activities are designed to communicate to staff the elements of their jobs that

supervisors value most and to provide staff with the tools they need to do their jobs effectively

(Winston & Creamer, 1997). Saunders and Cooper (2001) argued that staff need to receive

updated training and access to new information through conferences, workshops, and on-campus

resources like faculty members or institutional research staff who regularly conduct studies.

Two national student affairs organizations, ACPA-College Student Affairs International (ACPA)

and NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), developed two different assessment frameworks focused on the unique skills and knowledge that administrators must develop in order to conduct assessment effectively. These models provide structure for professional development opportunities related to assessment.

ACPA (2007) developed the Assessment Skills and Knowledge (ASK) Standards as a series of 13 content standards that "provide a breakdown of the necessary skills or competencies that a student affairs educator should acquire to successfully integrate assessment into all aspects of practice" (Knerr & Henning, 2007, ¶ 6). Knerr and Henning (2007) suggested that the ASK Standards be incorporated into graduate preparation programs, individual professional development, and curriculum for staff. NASPA (2009) created the Assessment Framework as a curriculum for professional development opportunities for administrators charged with conducting assessment on their campuses. The common goals of the ASK Standards and the Assessment Framework are to highlight the importance of and provide an agenda for ongoing assessment education for student affairs administrators.

Orientation for New Administrators Regarding Assessment Expectations

Orientation activities often provide staff members with their first sense of what the organization values and how it operates (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Leaders can communicate cultural elements like the organization's history, mission, and stories that demonstrate the symbolic nature of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Orientation also allows leaders to communicate structural elements like the specific roles and responsibilities of individuals within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves (in press) argued that including assessment expectations in orientation activities highlights their relative importance to the other cultural and structural elements within the organization.

Confidence among Administrators Regarding Assessment Practice

An organization with a culture of assessment has administrators who are confident in their abilities to conduct assessment (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press). Conducting assessment with reasonable expectations and within reasonable parameters in the early stages is an important component of building confidence (Schuh & Associates, 2009). Building confidence is important for encouraging sustained assessment efforts. Duff (2008) outlined a process of developing confidence among faculty members who first created departmental assessment plans before beginning to address the larger, more complicated issue of assessing the general education curriculum. Administrators build confidence within their staff by starting with reasonable expectations (Schuh & Associates, 2009) and finding ways to support one another throughout the process (Duff, 2008).

Assessment Activities Are Infused into Existing Institutional Processes

Connecting assessment to existing institutional processes is important for the assessment activities to be successful (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Palomba and Banta (1999) articulated several internal processes that should connect with assessment, including program review, planning and budgeting, teaching and learning, and improving assessment. Schuh and Associates (2009) offered five ways in which student affairs practitioners can link assessment to existing activities, including measuring participation, needs assessment, satisfaction assessment, outcomes assessment, and cost effectiveness. Schuh and Associates (2009) argued that administrators are already doing these activities on a regular basis, yet they do not always intentionally link them within the framework of assessment. Finding ways to connect to existing institutional activities makes the concept of assessment more easily manageable and demystifies

the process for staff who may be hesitant to begin incorporating assessment into their current roles.

Strong Relationships across Campus that Support Assessment

Successful assessment activities involve individuals from across the entire campus (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves (in press) articulated the pitfalls associated with attempting to conduct assessment in isolation. These pitfalls include the perception of incongruence between assessment activities and institutional or departmental priorities. Working alone also promotes the misconception that assessment is not the responsibility of all student affairs staff. As Upcraft and Schuh (1996) wrote, "assessment is not a task for small groups of experts, but rather a collaborative activity; its aim is wiser, better-informed attention to organizational effectiveness by all parties who have a stake in the organization" (p. 24).

Celebrations of Administrator Contributions to Assessment Priorities through Ceremonies and Rituals

Bolman and Deal (2008) examined the importance of ceremonies and rituals in communicating an organization's cultural elements symbolically. These activities demonstrate the importance of assessment within the organization and promote future assessment initiatives among all staff members (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Suskie, 2009). Suskie (2009) offered several strategies for honoring and recognizing the assessment efforts for faculty and staff, including holding an annual event to celebrate assessment efforts and encouraging campus leaders to commend publicly those engaged in assessment. Recognition and celebration

for these individuals indicates to others on campus that assessment is valued and honored within the community and may encourage them to develop their own assessment agendas.

Use of Assessment Results in Decision-making Opportunities

Communicating assessment results to constituents, including other administrators, faculty, students, and governing bodies, indicates the importance of assessment in everyday practice within the organization (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press). These constituents see that the individuals conducting assessment are interested in using the results to make improvements. According to Palomba and Banta (1999), "assessment information is of little use if it is not shared with appropriate audiences and used in meaningful ways" (p. 297). Schuh and Associates (2009) offered specific recommendations for creating written reports and oral presentations that effectively communicate assessment results to important stakeholders. These recommendations included creating a readable report, emphasizing the findings, and preparing for presentations.

Practitioners who communicate assessment results demonstrate how important the results are in making improvements within the organization (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Bresciani, 2006; Palomba & Banta, 1999). Love and Estanek (2004) expanded upon Upcraft and Schuh's (1996) earlier definition of assessment to include a statement on how assessment can affect practice, noting assessment as "on-going efforts to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes individual, programmatic, and institutional effectiveness and using that evidence to improve practice" (p.85). Furthermore, using assessment results in decision-making processes is often a critical piece of a cycle of assessment (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Davis-Barham & Scott, 2006). Ultimately, failing to make improvements can

lead to frustration with the process and may cause some staff to abandon further assessment activities (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Small Colleges & Universities

Small colleges and universities have specific characteristics that may impact their staff members' ability to conduct assessment in student affairs divisions. Compared to other sizes of institutions, small colleges often have fewer staff members, and many professionals have multiple responsibilities (Oblander, 2006; Palm, 1984). In addition, institutions with an enrollment of under 5,000 students made up 77% of all institutions of higher education in the United States in Fall 2005 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The lack of previous research pertaining to small colleges and universities, their unique characteristics, and the relatively large number that exist are all factors necessitating further examination into this type of institution.

The Role of Institutional Context in Assessment

Institutional context impacts how faculty and staff on campuses conduct the many facets of their work (Birnbaum, 1988). Assessment practice is no different. Peterson and Einarson (2001) conducted a study that sought, among other things, to determine how institutional type influenced institutional assessment approaches, assessment support patterns, assessment management policies and practices, and assessment uses and impacts. These researchers defined institutional context by institutional type (associate of arts, baccalaureate, master's, doctoral, and research). To guide their research, Peterson and Einarson (2001) developed the following conceptual framework, which demonstrates the direct impact of institutional context on these other variables:
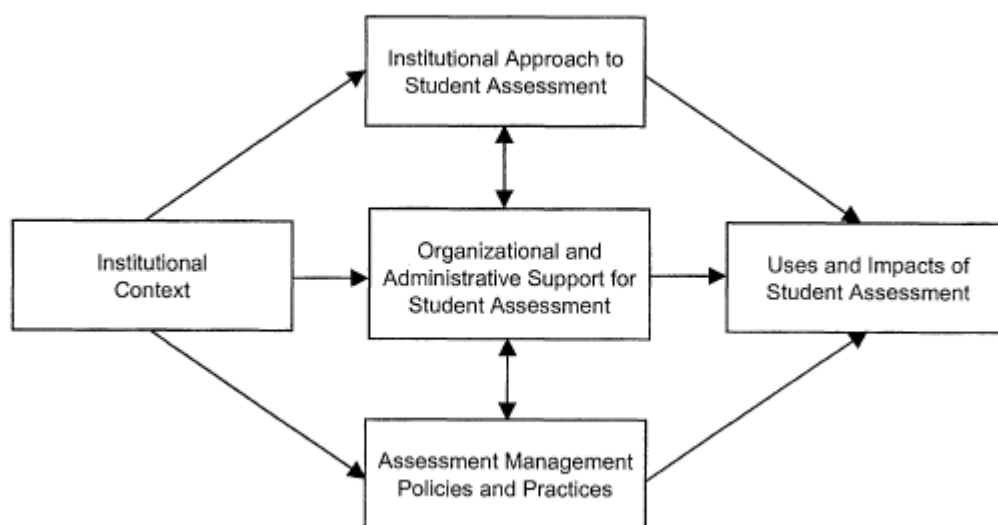
Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework of Institutional Support for Student Assessment

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Peterson and Einarson (2001) found statistically significant differences in how the various types of institutions measured on the stated variables. For example, research institutions reported significantly lower administrative and faculty support for assessment, when compared to associate of arts, baccalaureate, and master's institutions. Additionally, Peterson and Einarson (2001) found research institutions "provided significantly less professional development on student assessment for faculty and academic administrators than all other types of institution" (p. 647). The type of institution impacts how assessment is conducted on the institutional level. However, further research investigating how institutional context influences assessment practice is needed on the departmental or division level. The specific data for baccalaureate institutions, which most resemble the small college focus of this study, is discussed in the next section.

Previous Assessment Research at Small Colleges and Universities

While research examining program evaluation and outcomes assessment is becoming more available in professional literature (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Bresciani, 2006), little research that addresses assessment practices at small colleges and universities has been conducted. Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, and Vaughan (1999) examined student assessment practices at baccalaureate institutions but gave little attention to the role of student affairs divisions. Instead, their work focused on institutional assessment of student outcomes. This study provides limited but useful data specific to baccalaureate institutions and comparative data for all institutions in the larger study.

Peterson et al. (1999) concluded that baccalaureate institutions provide little training for student affairs staff and administrators, with only 49% of the baccalaureate institutions reporting having student assessment workshops for academic and student affairs administrators. Additionally, only 40% of baccalaureate institutions have student affairs administrators or staff who are involved in "an institution-wide group (committee, task force, etc.) that is primarily responsible for ongoing planning and policy setting for undergraduate student assessment" (Peterson et al., 1999, pp. 74-75). When compared to their faculty and academic affairs colleagues, student affairs staff and administrators at baccalaureate institutions also have less access to individual student assessment results and receive regular student assessment summary reports less often (Peterson et al., 1999).

Although Peterson et al. (1999) did not discuss assessment practices specifically within student affairs divisions, this research does provide a clear picture regarding the role of student affairs divisions in assessment practices on the institutional level at baccalaureate institutions. Little assessment training for student affairs professionals is being conducted, and the research

indicates a lower level of involvement in assessment practice overall (Peterson et al., 1999).

Finally, these researchers (Peterson et al., 1999) found student affairs professionals have less

access to assessment data than their colleagues. This data indicates that student affairs divisions

are not fully involved in or committed to institutional assessment practices at baccalaureate

institutions.

In a more recent qualitative study, Seagraves and Dean (2010) interviewed SSAOs and

other student affairs administrators at three small institutions to examine the conditions that

support assessment practice in these divisions. The researchers found the following conditions

that promote assessment in these environments:

- Support from the SSAO

- Informal, or lack of formal, expectations

- Belief in assessment as a means to improvement

- A collegial atmosphere

These researchers acknowledged the inability to generalize the findings of their study. However,

the conditions that promote assessment practice that Seagraves and Dean (2010) found did offer

some direction for approaching the unique characteristics of a culture of assessment in student

affairs divisions at small colleges and universities.

Small College Administrators

Many administrators at small colleges and universities are characterized as *generalists*,

meaning they do not specialize in one particular functional area, due to the wide range of

responsibilities they often shoulder (Goffingon, Lacey, Wright, & Kuh, 1986; Hirt, 2006;

Oblander, 2006; Palm, 1984). With relatively few staff members within a functional unit,

Oblander (2006) argued that administrators and staff must learn an institution's culture quickly

and be willing to adapt to change on a regular basis. They must also collaborate with other administrators and faculty across the campus to achieve institutional objectives and goals (Birnbaum, 1988; Hirt, 2006; Oblander, 2006; Palm, 1984).

The small college gives administrators the opportunity to work in a unique environment. Administrators, including new professionals, often experience high levels of autonomy and have the chance to interact with a wide variety of students, faculty, and other administrators (Oblander, 2006). Palm (1984) found that small college administrators "will spend more time dealing with personal relationships rather than with administrative and managerial duties" (p.52). These factors (the generalist nature of the work, the constant change in activity, and less focus on administrative responsibilities) impact the interest in and focus on assessment activities, as administrators find that their time is an increasingly scarce resource.

Chapter Summary

The review of the literature provides the context for the importance of studying assessment practices within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. The call for assessment throughout higher education continues to grow as accountability for student learning becomes an important issue that institutions must address (United States Department of Education, 2006). Student affairs administrators have experienced increasing expectations within the academy to develop specific assessment skills and knowledge to assess student learning and development (ACPA, 2007; Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; NASPA, 2009; Schuh & Associates, 2009). However, little research exists on the types of assessment activities and the cultures of assessment being fostered within student affairs divisions.

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) proposed a comprehensive model for assessment that encompasses seven types of assessment that student affairs administrators should conduct in their

everyday work. Existing literature (ACPA, 2007; Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; NASPA, 2009) provides important information about how to conduct the various types of assessment. However, researchers have not studied the extent to which current administrators are implementing this model.

Defining the culture of assessment for an institution can be challenging. Existing frameworks either focus on an institutional culture of assessment (Weiner, 2009) or are too limited in scope (Student Affairs Leadership Council, 2008). This study focused on ten elements that the researcher derived from Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves' (in press) work on strategies to develop a culture of assessment.

Institutional context often determines the extent to which an institution supports assessment activity (Peterson & Einarson, 2001). Narrowing the focus to small colleges and universities allowed the researcher to address a unique context that captures 77% of all institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) yet is often overlooked in existing literature. Furthermore, this study built upon the researcher's previous work (Seagraves & Dean, 2010), which addressed the conditions that support assessment practice in the small college student affairs division. The following chapter outlines the methodology the researcher followed in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with an overview of the process that the researcher used in this study. This chapter also provides a description of the participants, the data collection method, the instrumentation, data analysis techniques, and limitations of the study.

Process

The purpose of this study was to examine assessment practices and the culture of assessment within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. Specifically, what types of assessment were being conducted and what perceptions did staff members have about the elements of a culture of assessment within this type of environment? The researcher utilized the survey method to collect data from a sample in order to make inferences about the assessment practices of small college student affairs administrators, this study's population (Babbie, 1990). The researcher administered a questionnaire to student affairs staff at institutions throughout the Southeastern region of the United States.

This study was based upon an exploratory study (Seagraves & Dean, 2010) conducted using qualitative methodology at three small colleges in the Southeastern region of the United States. That study specifically explored the conditions that support assessment practice and the effects of the accreditation process on assessment practice. The findings of that study led the researcher to expand the population being studied and to use quantitative methods that allow for more generalizable results. Furthermore, the research questions for the current study were most appropriately addressed using quantitative methods.

Sample

The population that this study addressed was student affairs administrators at small colleges and universities within the United States. However, a subset of the population, or sample, was selected (Jaeger, 1993). The intent was to select a sample that was representative of the population so that the researcher could use inferential statistics to draw conclusions about the entire population using the data collected from the sample.

The participants the researcher included in this study were members of the Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA) and Region III of NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) who worked at institutions with fewer than 5,000 students. SACSA and NASPA Region III included members who worked in different functional areas and had a wide range of responsibilities. SACSA recognized members from the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia (Southern Association of College Student Affairs, 2010). NASPA Region III included members from the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (NASPA, 2010). NASPA Region III also included members from other countries. However, for the purpose of consistency, only members employed at institutions within the United States were included in this study.

SACSA and NASPA Region III provided a list of members who identified that they work at institutions with fewer than 5,000 students, the primary qualification for participation in this study. The researcher then created a composite sample list using the information from SACSA and NASPA Region III. This list included the members' email addresses and current

institutional affiliations. The researcher removed any duplicates from the composite list to avoid including a potential participant in the study more than one time. The researcher also re-checked the lists using the most current institutional data in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to ensure all potential participants worked at institutions with fewer than 5,000 students. After completing this verification, the composite list from SACSA and NASPA Region III included 403 potential participants.

Data Collection

Using an online questionnaire was the preferred method to collect data for this study. First, having direct access to the potential participants allowed the researcher to quickly disseminate and collect data. Furthermore, this access gave participants the opportunity to contact the researcher easily and efficiently should they have questions or concerns about their participation. Second, the online communication with participants gave the researcher greater opportunity for sending follow-up emails and reminders to the entire sample. This process helped increase response rate throughout the study, as evidenced by the marked increase in the number of responses after the follow-up email was sent. Third, the cost of using electronic communication was minimal when compared to mailing questionnaires to potential participants. Lastly, participants submitted their data directly into an electronic format that the researcher used to analyze the results in an efficient manner. This electronic data submission also minimized the potential for data entry errors and allowed for greater participant confidentiality, as the researcher did not know from where the responses came.

The researcher sent an initial personalized email through the Perseus Survey Solutions program to all 403 potential participants (Appendix A). This email included an introduction to the study, an invitation to participate in the study, a direct hyperlink to the questionnaire, and a

deadline to complete the questionnaire. This deadline was approximately two weeks from the date of the initial email. Participants who elected to click on the link to the online questionnaire had to give their informed consent by confirming they read the required text before responding to any additional items in the questionnaire (Appendix B). All responses were recorded and stored in a secure environment through the Perseus system. After sending the initial email to 403 potential participants, the researcher received 11 returned undeliverable email messages, which reduced the number of potential participants to 392.

The researcher sent one follow-up email to all 392 potential participants approximately ten days after the initial invitation was sent. No identifiable information was collected upon completion of the questionnaire. Thus, the researcher was unable to distinguish between those who completed the questionnaire and those who did not. Therefore, the researcher sent the follow-up email to everyone who received the initial invitation. Individuals who had already completed the questionnaire were asked to disregard the follow-up email.

Of the 392 potential participants, seven individuals sent follow-up emails directly to the researcher indicating that they did not work within a division of student affairs. Thus, the actual N for this study became 385 individuals. Of those 385 individuals, 98 responded to the questionnaire. However, of those 98 respondents, four indicated in the questionnaire that they work at institutions with 5000 or more students. Therefore, the researcher excluded them from data analysis, leaving n=94. The final response rate for this study was 24.4%, with 94 of 385 potential participants responding.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a questionnaire specifically for this study (Appendix C). No questionnaires existed to measure the types of assessment and elements of a culture of

assessment. Furthermore, this locally-developed instrument (LDI) was necessary because the specific types of assessment and elements of a culture of assessment articulated for this study were unique in that other scholars define them differently. This section addresses the reasons behind using an LDI, the steps taken to develop the questionnaire, and a description of the actual content of the questionnaire that the researcher used.

Locally-Developed Instrument

Several important considerations, including purpose and match, must be articulated when deciding between a commercially-developed instrument (CDI) and an LDI (Ory, 1994). Understanding the purpose of the study may lead the researcher to use a CDI, especially if the researcher intends to try to compare the results of the study with existing studies (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). Match is a concept that involves researchers exploring whether or not an existing CDI would address the purpose of the study (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the assessment activities and the assessment culture within a single type of institution. Thus, an LDI was the most appropriate option since researchers have not conducted studies similar to this one and the results were not compared with existing data.

Questionnaire Design

The researcher used the steps that Schuh and Upcraft (2001) articulated for developing an instrument. These steps included: (a) determine what information is needed, (b) decide the format of the questions, (c) decide the measurement scale, (d) determine the wording of the questions, (e) determine the sequencing of the questions, (f) format the instrument, (g) pilot test the instrument, and (h) conduct psychometric analysis of the instrument.

Needed information. Schuh and Upcraft (2001) argued that researchers should first determine the information they need to answer the questions posed in their studies before asking questions. Patton (1990) offered six types of information that can be gathered. For this study, the researcher gathered three of the six types, including (a) experience and behavior information, (b) opinion and values information, and (c) background and demographic information.

Question format. The questionnaire had closed-ended questions that required a response. One section included the opportunity for participants to list examples of the types of assessment they conduct. These examples were not analyzed for the purposes of this study. However, they were used to determine how the respondents interpreted the types of assessment.

Measurement scale. The questionnaire had both nominal and interval scales (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). The nominal scale was used in the demographics section of the questionnaire. The questionnaire had three interval scales, one for the types of assessment section, one for the culture of assessment and assessment motivations sections, and one for the ACPA ASK Standards Needs Assessment. The types of assessment scale allowed participants to choose one of three responses (Not Practiced, Occasionally Practiced, Routinely Practiced) about the extent to which their current student affairs divisions conducted the various types. The researcher chose to limit the selections to three so participants could clearly determine the difference between the choices. The interval scale for the culture of assessment and assessment motivations sections included four choices (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree). The nature of the questions, where the researcher asked participants to respond with their perceptions based on experiences, lent itself to requiring a decision of agreement or disagreement (Suskie, 1996). The ACPA ASK Standards Needs Assessment asked participants to indicate their own levels of

skill and knowledge as they related to 13 specific content areas, using four choices (No

Experience, Beginner, Intermediate, and Accomplished).

Wording of questions. The wording of the questions or statements within the

questionnaire adhered to most of the concerns that Schuh and Upcraft (2001) articulated,

including avoiding ambiguous or imprecise questions and avoiding emotional words and phrases.

Schuh and Upcraft (2001) also argued that researchers should avoid asking two questions in the

same item. However, the researcher chose not to deviate from the language used in Upcraft and

Schuh's (1996) comprehensive model for assessment when developing the questionnaire. Thus,

this questionnaire did include the item, *Campus Environments and Student Cultures Assessment*,

which is a type of assessment that has two parts within a single response. In theory, a participant

may conduct an environmental assessment of the campus without assessing the student culture,

or vice versa. However, the researcher believed the benefit of maintaining Upcraft and Schuh's

(1996) original verbiage outweighed the potential cost of having two parts within a single

response.

Sequencing of questions. The researcher followed the guidelines offered in Schuh and

Upcraft (2001) when sequencing questions. These guidelines included (a) posing related

questions together, (b) following a logical sequence of questions, and (c) asking demographic

questions last.

Format the instrument. The researcher used the Perseus Survey Solutions software for

administering the questionnaire. This software created the format, which was clear and easy to

follow for all participants (see Appendix C).

Pilot test the instrument. The questionnaire was not formally pilot tested to the fullest

extent articulated by Schuh and Upcraft (2001). However, the researcher consulted with several

experts in the field of assessment throughout the development phase. The researcher also asked several student affairs administrators and scholars at a variety of institutions to complete the survey and provide feedback for incorporation into the questionnaire prior to distribution to the participants.

Conduct psychometric analysis. The researcher was unable to conduct rigorous psychometric analysis of the questionnaire, given that this study did not meet the minimum threshold of 1000 participants that Schuh and Upcraft (2001) argued as being needed for conducting these tests. Furthermore, this study was considered exploratory in nature, with the goal of describing existing conditions within a given environment. The LDI used in this study was not designed for future use in a wide variety of institutional contexts.

Questionnaire Content

The literature review provided a foundation from which the researcher developed a questionnaire that addressed the research questions posed. The questionnaire had five sections: Types of Assessment, Culture of Assessment, ACPA ASK Standards Needs Assessment, Assessment Motivations, and Demographic Information. Upcraft and Schuh's (1996) comprehensive model for assessment formed the theoretical basis related to the types of assessment being conducted. The researcher previously conducted a qualitative study that examined the conditions that support a culture of assessment in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities (Seagraves & Dean, 2010). The findings of that study, along with Barham, Tschepikow, and Seagraves' (in press) strategies for creating a culture of assessment, defined the elements of a culture of assessment that this study will address. ACPA developed its own ASK Standards Needs Assessment to allow practitioners to rate their level of competence regarding the 13 content standards. The researcher used existing literature (Schuh & Associates,

2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996) to delineate the assessment motivations for this questionnaire. The demographic information the researcher collected included: (a) current job level; (b) highest degree earned; (c) lengths of time in current position, at current institution, and in the field of student affairs; (d) institution size; and (e) primary job function.

Data Analysis

The following statistical analysis procedures were used for their respective research questions and hypothesis statements.

The key research questions (RQ) and null hypotheses (H_0) of this study were:

RQ1: What types of assessment do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities report are being conducted?

Descriptive statistics were calculated in the initial phase of data analysis. Calculating the frequencies and percentages of the responses of all participants on items related to the types of assessment being conducted yielded greater understanding as to what assessment activities were indeed being conducted within student affairs divisions at the small colleges and universities studied.

RQ2: To what extent do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

The researcher calculated the means of the responses of all participants on items related to the elements of a culture of assessment. These means provided a picture of how staff in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceived the elements of a culture of assessment.

RQ3: Are there differences between how SSAOs and non-SSAOs in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

RQ3a: Is there a difference in how they perceive support from the upper-level administration?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of support from upper-level administration.

RQ3b: Is there a difference in how they perceive assessment responsibilities in job descriptions?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of assessment responsibilities in job descriptions.

RQ3c: Is there a difference in how they perceive a common language among administrators?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of a common language among administrators.

RQ3d: Is there a difference in how they perceive ongoing educational opportunities for administrators?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of ongoing educational opportunities for administrators.

RQ3e: Is there a difference in how they perceive an orientation for new administrators regarding assessment expectations?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of an orientation for new administrators regarding assessment expectations.

RQ3f: Is there a difference in how they perceive confidence among administrators regarding assessment practice?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of confidence among administrators regarding assessment practice.

RQ3g: Is there a difference in how they perceive assessment activities being infused into existing institutional processes?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of assessment activities being infused into existing institutional processes.

RQ3h: Is there a difference in how they perceive strong relationships across campus that support assessment?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of strong relationships across campus that support assessment.

RQ3i: Is there a difference in how they perceive celebrations of administrator contributions to assessment priorities in the forms of ceremonies and rituals?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of celebrations of administrator contributions to assessment priorities in the forms of ceremonies and rituals.

RQ3j: Is there a difference in how they perceive the use of assessment results in decision-making opportunities?

A t-test was used to examine the stated differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in perceptions of the use of assessment results in decision-making opportunities.

RQ4: Which type(s) of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

The backward stepwise regression method allowed the researcher to determine which combination of predictor variables (i.e. the types of assessment being conducted) best predicted the outcome variable (i.e. the participant's response to the item related to the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment) (Field, 2009). All predictor variables were initially included in the regression model. Predictor variables that did not make a significant difference in explaining the outcome variable were then removed one-by-one from the model. In the end, the remaining predictor variables, in combination with one other, explained the greatest amount of variation in the outcome variable. Field (2009) argued that the backward stepwise method is preferable to the forward method because "the forward method runs a higher risk of making a Type II error (i.e. missing a predictor that does in fact predict the outcome)" (p. 213).

RQ5: Which self-reported skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

The researcher used the backward stepwise regression method to determine which combination of self-reported skills and knowledge (the predictor variables) best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment (the outcome variable).

RQ6: Which motivations for assessment best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

The researcher used the backward stepwise regression method to determine which combination of motivations for assessment (the predictor variables) best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment (the outcome variable).

Limitations of Study Design

Several limitations emerged when studying assessment practices within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities.

First, establishing a common definition for assessment is challenging, as each student affairs practitioner conceptualizes assessment differently. Validity of the questionnaire may be compromised if participants interpret the term *assessment* differently when responding. These individual interpretations of the term and the impact they may have on responses is a limitation of this study.

Second, enrollment size is not the only distinguishing characteristic that impacts the types of assessment being conducted and the cultures of assessment on college campuses. Small colleges and universities vary in type and mission (e.g., liberal arts college, community college, technical college). This study did not explore the differences among small colleges and universities and the related impact on assessment practice.

Third, using professional organizations to solicit participation in a study about small colleges and universities may have led to some bias in responses. Some institutions choose not to support their staff members' involvement in professional organizations, and other institutions may not be financially able to support this level of involvement. Thus, the staff members at these types of small colleges and universities may have been excluded from this study. Also, the student affairs practitioners who are involved professionally may have been more likely to be engaged in assessment activity, given the focus on assessment practice within these organizations.

A fourth limitation of this study includes the fact that the researcher was not able to conduct psychometric analysis to determine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. A large number of participants must be included in the study in order for these items to be statistically determined.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the types of assessment being conducted in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities, (b) assess the perceptions of administrators in these environments about the elements of a culture of assessment identified in the literature review, (c) determine whether there is a difference in these perceptions between SSAOs and non-SSAOs within divisions of student affairs, (d) determine which type or types of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, (e) determine which assessment skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, and (f) determine which assessment motivation factors best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

This chapter includes an overview of participants' demographic information. This chapter also provides the results of the statistical analysis used to address each of the study's research questions:

RQ1: What types of assessment do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities report are being conducted?

RQ2: To what extent do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

RQ3: Are there differences between how SSAOs and non-SSAOs in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

RQ3a: Is there a difference in how they perceive support from the upper-level administration?

RQ3b: Is there a difference in how they perceive assessment responsibilities in job descriptions?

RQ3c: Is there a difference in how they perceive a common language among administrators?

RQ3d: Is there a difference in how they perceive ongoing educational opportunities for administrators?

RQ3e: Is there a difference in how they perceive an orientation for new administrators regarding assessment expectations?

RQ3f: Is there a difference in how they perceive confidence among administrators regarding assessment practice?

RQ3g: Is there a difference in how they perceive assessment activities being infused into existing institutional processes?

RQ3h: Is there a difference in how they perceive strong relationships across campus that support assessment?

RQ3i: Is there a difference in how they perceive celebrations of administrator contributions to assessment priorities in the forms of ceremonies and rituals?

RQ3j: Is there a difference in how they perceive the use of assessment results in decision-making opportunities?

RQ4: Which type(s) of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

RQ5: Which self-reported skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

RQ6: Which motivations for assessment best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

Demographics

The 94 participants in the study worked at institutions with fewer than 5000 students. However, they represented a variety of job levels, educational attainment, and experience levels. Table 4.1 provides the demographic characteristics of the participants. In summary, 31.9% of the participants were SSAOs, while 36.2% reported to the SSAO. The remaining 31.9% were neither the SSAO nor reported to the SSAO. A large percentage (94.7%) of the participants had earned at least a masters degree, with 28.7% having doctorates. Almost two-thirds (63.8%) of the participants reported being in their current positions for five or fewer years. Only 5.3% reported being in their current positions for more than 15 years. Over half (53.2%) of the participants reported working at their current institutions for five or fewer years. Seventeen percent reported working at their current institutions for more than 15 years. More than one-third (34.0%) of the participants reported working in student affairs for more than 15 years. Almost one-quarter (24.5%) of the participants reported working in student affairs for five or fewer years. Over eighty percent (80.8%) of the participants reported working at institutions with fewer than 3,000 students.

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	*n*	Percent
Current Job Level		
SSAO	30	31.9%
Report to SSAO	34	36.2%
Neither SSAO nor report to SSAO	30	31.9%
Highest Degree Earned		
Bachelors	5	5.3%
Masters	61	64.9%
Specialists	1	1.1%
Doctorate	27	28.7%
Length of Time in Current Position		
0-5 years	60	63.8%
6-10 years	18	19.1%
11-15 years	9	9.6%
More than 15 years	5	5.3%
Length of Time at Current Institution		
0-5 years	50	53.2%
6-10 years	19	20.2%
11-15 years	8	8.5%
More than 15 years	16	17.0%
Length of Time Working in Student Affairs		
0-5 years	23	24.5%
6-10 years	26	27.7%
11-15 years	13	13.8%
More than 15 years	32	34.0%

Table 4.1 continued

Variable	*n*	Percent
Current Institution Size (# of students)		
Fewer than 1,000	11	11.7%
1,000-1,999	35	37.2%
2,000-2,999	30	31.9%
3,000-3,999	12	12.8%
4,000-4,999	6	6.4%

Research Question One

What types of assessment do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities report are being conducted?

The researcher calculated frequencies and percentages for each of the seven types of assessment addressed in the questionnaire. Table 4.2 provides this information, with the types of assessment listed in descending order from most practiced to least practiced. Student satisfaction and tracking usage are the highest reported types of assessment being practiced, with 93.5% and 90.8% of respondents indicating that they occasionally or routinely practiced these types, respectively. Benchmarking and student needs assessment are the next two most frequently practiced types of assessment, with 84% and 82.8% of respondents reporting that they occasionally practiced or routinely practiced these types, respectively. The least most frequently conducted types of assessment are outcomes assessment, national standards assessment, and campus environments and student cultures assessment. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported conducting outcomes assessment occasionally or routinely, while 70.2 % and 65.2% of

respondents indicated they occasionally or routinely used national standards for assessment and

conducted campus environment or student culture assessments, respectively.

Table 4.2

Frequencies (and percentages) of Responses Regarding Types of Assessment Being Conducted

	N	Not Practiced	Occasionally Practiced	Routinely Practiced
Student Satisfaction	93	6 (6.5%)	32 (34.4%)	**55 (59.1%)**
Tracking Usage	94	8 (8.5%)	28 (29.8%)	**58 (61%)**
Benchmarking	94	15 (16.0%)	**50 (53.2%)**	29 (30.8%)
Student Needs Assessment	93	16 (17.2%)	**49 (52.7%)**	28 (30.1%)
Outcomes Assessment	92	23 (25.0%)	**35 (38.0%)**	34 (37.0%)
National Standards	94	28 (29.8%)	**39 (41.5%)**	27 (28.7%)
Campus Environments & Student Cultures	92	32 (34.8%)	**39 (42.4%)**	21 (22.8%)

More than 90% of the participants reported conducting student satisfaction and tracking

usage assessments. Twenty-five percent or more of the participants reported that they are not

practicing outcomes assessment, using national standards in assessment, or assessing campus

environments and student cultures.

Research Question Two

To what extent do administrators in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities

perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

The researcher calculated the means of the participants' responses to each of the items relating to their perceptions of the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment. Table 4.3 provides this data, in order of participant perception as being most present to least present. Participants perceived, with a mean of 3.28 on a scale of 1-4, that support from upper-level administration for assessment efforts had the greatest presence among all elements of a culture of assessment. This element was also the only element with an overall rating above 3.0.

The other nine elements of a culture of assessment all had means that ranged from 2.01 to 2.96. With a mean of 2.01, participants generally indicated that they did not perceive that their student affairs divisions celebrate administrator contributions to assessment priorities. The other element with a relatively low mean score of 2.16 was orientation for new administrators regarding assessment expectations.

Responses indicated general agreement about the presence of several of the elements of a culture of assessment. In addition to support from upper-level administration, participants also indicated a presence of the use of assessment results in decision-making ($\bar{x}$ =2.96), the inclusion of assessment as part of staff job descriptions ($\bar{x}$ =2.83), assessment being infused into existing institutional processes ($\bar{x}$ =2.79), and strong relationships across campus that support assessment ($\bar{x}$ =2.77). The other three elements—common assessment language among administrators ($\bar{x}$ =2.60), confidence among administrators regarding assessment practice ($\bar{x}$ =2.54), and ongoing assessment education for administrators ($\bar{x}$ =2.48)—indicated a more mixed reaction to their presence, with their means being approximately 2.50.

Table 4.3

Perceptions of the Presence of the Elements of a Culture of Assessment[1]

	N	Mean
Support from Upper-Level Administration	94	3.28
Use of Assessment Results in Decision-Making	94	2.96
Assessment as Part of Staff Job Descriptions	94	2.83
Infuse Assessment Into Existing Institutional Processes	92	2.79
Strong Relationships Across Campus	94	2.77
Common Language	92	2.60
Builds Confidence Among Staff	94	2.54
Ongoing Assessment Education	94	2.48
New Staff Orientation	93	2.16
Celebrates Staff Contributions	94	2.01

[1]Scale for responses: 1-Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Agree; 4-Strongly Agree

Participants indicated that support from upper-level administration for assessment activity was the element of a culture of assessment that was most present in their current divisions of student affairs. However, these same participants generally did not perceive that assessment expectations were part of new staff orientation activities or that celebrations of administrator contributions to assessment priorities occurred.

Research Question Three

Are there differences between how SSAOs and non-SSAOs in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities perceive the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment at their current institutions?

A series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether there was a difference in how SSAOs and non-SSAO participants perceived the presence of the various elements of a culture of assessment explored in this study. Prior to calculating the test statistics, the researcher used Levene's Test for Equality of Variances to determine that the population variances between the SSAOs and non-SSAOs were equal. At the $\alpha = .05$ level, none of the variances were significantly different. Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied.

The results for t-tests that addressed Research Question 3 are presented in Table 4.4. Several tests yielded significant results at the $\alpha = .05$ level. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis (RQ3c) that there would be no difference in how they perceive a common language among administrators, with $t(90)=1.203$, $p=.017$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis (RQ3e) that there would be no difference in how they perceive an orientation for new administrators regarding assessment expectations, with $t(91)=2.677$, $p=.009$. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis (RQ3j) that there will be no difference in how they perceive improvements that are directly related to assessment results, with $t(92)=2.247$, $p=.027$.

The data analysis yielded several additional results. The researcher was not able to reject any of the other null hypotheses for this research question, which indicated that SSAOs and non-SSAOs did not report significantly different responses regarding the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment in their student affairs divisions. The mean scores for each of the elements of a culture of assessment indicated that the SSAOs reported a greater presence of these elements in their student affairs divisions than non-SSAOs.

Table 4.4

Independent Samples T-tests Regarding the Differences in Perceptions in Elements of a Culture of Assessment between SSAOs and Non-SSAOs

	SSAOs			Non-SSAOs			T-Test Results		
	N	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Support from Upper-Level Administration	30	3.4	.675	64	3.22	.723	1.157	92	.250
Assessment as Part of Staff Job Descriptions	30	2.97	.809	64	2.77	.729	1.203	92	.232
Common Language	30	2.87	.860	62	2.47	.671	2.433	90	.017*
Ongoing Assessment Education	30	2.67	.802	64	2.39	.828	1.521	92	.132
New Staff Orientation	30	2.47	.776	63	2.02	.751	2.677	91	.009*
Strong Relationships Across Campus	30	2.90	.759	64	2.70	.706	1.231	92	.221
Builds Confidence Among Staff	30	2.73	.740	64	2.45	.711	1.758	92	.082
Infuse Assessment Into Existing Institutional Processes	30	2.93	.740	62	2.73	.705	1.302	90	.196
Celebrates Staff Contributions	30	2.23	.858	64	1.91	.750	1.881	92	.063
Use of Assessment Results in Decision-Making	30	3.20	.714	64	2.84	.718	2.247	92	.027*

* Statistically significant at p < .05.

SSAOs and non-SSAOs reported significantly different perceptions of the presence of three of the elements of a culture of assessment: a common assessment language among administrators; a new staff orientation that incorporates assessment; and the use of assessment results in decision-making processes. For each of these elements, SSAOs reported a stronger presence in their student affairs divisions than non-SSAOs.

Research Question Four

Which type(s) of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

The type of assessment activity that best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment was outcomes assessment. The researcher used the backward stepwise regression method to determine which of the independent variables, when removed from the full model, did not cause a significant change in R^2. Removing each of the other six independent variables from the model did not cause a significant change in R^2, meaning that outcomes assessment was the only variable with any statistically significant explanatory value. The researcher used regression coefficients and statistical tests to develop this result (see Table 4.5, Table 4.6, and Table 4.7). The reduced model, with the single independent variable (outcomes assessment), was found to explain 9.2% (R^2_{adj}=.092) of the variance in the dependent variable (perception of the overall presence of a culture of assessment).

This analysis also indicated that the full model that included all independent variables had relatively little explanatory or predictive value, with an R^2_{adj} of .072. Over 92% of the explanatory value in predicting the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment lay with factors other than the types of assessment that administrators conducted.

Table 4.5

Stepwise Model Summary

	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
Model 1	.382	.146	.072	.801
Model 2	.319	.102	.092	.793

1=Full Model (National Standards, Student Satisfaction, Campus Environments & Student Cultures, Tracking Usage, Outcomes Assessment, Benchmarking, Student Needs Assessment)
2=Reduced Model (Outcomes Assessment)

Table 4.6

ANOVA Table for Stepwise Regression

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Model 1					
Regression	8.899	7	1.271	1.981	.068
Residual	51.978	81	.642		
Total	60.876	88			
Model 2					
Regression	6.212	1	6.212	9.886	.002
Residual	54.664	87	.628		
Total	60.876	88			

1=Full Model (National Standards, Student Satisfaction, Campus Environments & Student Cultures, Tracking Usage, Outcomes Assessment, Benchmarking, Student Needs Assessment)
2=Reduced Model (Outcomes Assessment)

Table 4.7

Stepwise Regression Coefficients

	B	SE B	β	t	p
Model 1					
Constant	1.890	.477		3.959	.000
Tracking Usage	.195	.167	.155	1.167	.246
Student Needs Assessment	.059	.166	.047	.355	.724
Student Satisfaction	-.188	.165	-.136	-1.137	.259
Campus Environments & Student Cultures	-.076	.128	-.068	-.594	.554
Outcomes Assessment	.261	.133	.243	1.964	.053
Benchmarking	.226	.157	.187	1.440	.154
National Standards	-.019	.127	-.018	-.152	.880
Model 2					
Constant	2.164	.245		8.827	.000
Outcomes Assessment	.343	.109	.319	3.144	.002

Research Question Five

Which self-reported skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

The assessment skills and knowledge that best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment were Assessment Ethics, Benchmarking, Effective Reporting and Use of Results, and Articulate Learning and Development Outcomes. The researcher used the backward stepwise regression method to determine which of the independent variables, when removed from the full model, did not cause a significant change in R^2. Removing the other nine independent variables from the model did not cause a significant change in R^2. The researcher

used regression coefficients and statistical tests to develop this result (see Table 4.8, Table 4.9, and Table 4.10). The reduced model, with the four independent variables, was found to explain 11.6% (R^2_{adj}=.116) of the variance in the dependent variable (perception of the overall presence of a culture of assessment). This analysis also indicated that the full model that included all independent variables explained 8.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, with an R^2_{adj} of .081.

Table 4.8

Stepwise Model Summary

	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
Model 1	.458	.210	.081	.791
Model 2	.392	.154	.116	.776

1=Full Model (Interviews & Focus Groups Used for Assessment, Assessment Design, Assessment Ethics, Benchmarking, Politics of Assessment, Effective Reporting & Use of Results, Surveys Used for Assessment Purposes, Articulate Learning & Development Outcomes, Analysis, Program Review & Evaluation, Selection of Data Collection & Management Methods, Assessment Instruments)
2=Reduced Model (Assessment Ethics, Benchmarking, Effective Reporting and Use of Results, and Articulate Learning and Development Outcomes)

Table 4.9

ANOVA Table for Stepwise Regression

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Model 1					
Regression	13.266	13	1.020	1.631	.094
Residual	50.054	80	.626		
Total	63.319	83			

Table 4.9 continued

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Model 2					
Regression	9.741	4	2.435	4.045	.005
Residual	53.578	89	.602		
Total	63.319	93			

Table 4.10

Stepwise Regression Coefficients

	B	SE B	β	t	p
Model 1					
Constant	2.296	.311		7.390	.000
Assessment Design	-.125	.183	-.129	-.684	.496
Articulate Learning & Development Outcomes	.305	.174	.322	1.747	.084
Selection of Data Collection & Management Methods	.391	.229	.426	1.709	.091
Assessment Instruments	-.487	.270	-.470	-1.808	.074
Surveys Used for Assessment Purposes	.337	.218	.352	1.543	.127
Interviews & Focus Groups Used for Assessment	-.232	.168	-.267	-1.379	.172
Analysis	.212	.192	.230	1.102	.274
Benchmarking	-.285	.148	-.330	-1.929	.057
Program Review & Evaluation	.058	.195	.064	.295	.768
Assessment Ethics	-.173	.159	-.194	-1.090	.279
Effective Reporting & Use of Results	.257	.183	.281	1.406	.164
Politics of Assessment	-.043	.134	-.054	-.322	.748
Assessment Education	-.036	.171	-.041	-.213	.832

[Table 4.10 continues]

Table 4.10 continued

	B	SE B	β	t	p
Model 2					
Constant	2.273	.280		8.130	.000
Articulate Learning & Development Outcomes	.321	.155	.339	2.071	.041
Benchmarking	-.220	.125	-.255	-1.764	.081
Assessment Ethics	-.252	.142	-.282	-1.778	.079
Effective Reporting & Use of Results	.366	.141	.400	2.591	.011

Research Question Six

Which motivations for assessment best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment?

The motivations for assessment that best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment were Educational Mission and Expectations of SSAO. The researcher used the backward stepwise regression method to determine which of the independent variables, when removed from the full model, did not cause a significant change in R^2. Removing the other eight independent variables from the model did not cause a significant change in R^2. The researcher used regression coefficients and statistical tests to develop this result (see Table 4.11, Table 4.12, and Table 4.13). The reduced model, with the two independent variables, was found to explain 18.3% ($R^2_{adj}=.183$) of the variance in the dependent variable (perception of the overall presence of a culture of assessment). This analysis also indicated that the full model that included all independent variables explained 12.7% of the variance in the dependent variable, with an R^2_{adj} of .183.

Table 4.11

Stepwise Model Summary

	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
Model 1	.478	.229	.127	.778
Model 2	.450	.202	.183	.752

1=Full Model (Good Steward of Institutional Resources, Regional Accreditation Expectations, Expectations of Direct Supervisor, Professional Standards Outlined By CAS, Justification for Policy Development & Decision-making, Educational Mission, Program & Service Improvement, Expectations of SSAO, Professional Standards Outlined by Other Orgs, Justification for Existence of Certain Programs & Services)
2=Reduced Model (Educational Mission, Expectations of SSAO)

Table 4.12

ANOVA Table for Stepwise Regression

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Model 1					
Regression	13.631	10	1.363	2.253	.023
Residual	45.978	76	.605		
Total	59.609	86			
Model 2					
Regression	12.055	2	6.028	10.647	.000
Residual	47.554	84	.566		
Total	59.609	86			

1=Full Model (Good Steward of Institutional Resources, Regional Accreditation Expectations, Expectations of Direct Supervisor, Professional Standards Outlined By CAS, Justification for Policy Development & Decision-making, Educational Mission, Program & Service Improvement, Expectations of SSAO, Professional Standards Outlined by Other Orgs, Justification for Existence of Certain Programs & Services)
2=Reduced Model (Educational Mission, Expectations of SSAO)

Table 4.13

Stepwise Regression Coefficients

	B	SE B	β	T	p
Model 1					
Constant	1.228	.513		2.392	.019
Regional Accreditation Expectations	-.051	.120	-.051	-.424	.672
Professional Standards Outlined by CAS	.024	.162	.026	.150	.881
Professional Standards Outlined by Other Organizations	.016	.177	.015	.092	.927
Expectations of Direct Supervisor	.043	.152	.044	.284	.777
Expectations of SSAO	.198	.158	.209	1.258	.212
Program & Service Improvement	.249	.178	.218	1.396	.167
Educational Mission	.236	.143	.240	1.648	.103
Justification for Policy Development & Decision-Making	-.142	.195	-.129	-.729	.468
Justification for Existence of Certain Programs & Services	.020	.196	.019	.104	.917
Good Steward of Institutional Resources	-.065	.135	-.071	-.481	.632
Model 2					
Constant	1.371	.335		4.089	.000
Expectations of SSAO	.222	.109	.234	2.033	.045
Educational Mission	.274	.113	.279	2.425	.017

Summary of Results

The researcher collected data using an LDI that addressed four primary areas: the types of assessment being conducted, the elements of a culture of assessment, an individual's motivation for conducting assessment, and an individual's assessment skills and knowledge. The response

rate for this study was 24.4% (N=94). The researcher utilized descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and stepwise regression methods to address the six research questions. Analysis showed differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs in their perceptions of three elements of a culture of assessment: common language regarding assessment, inclusion of assessment in new staff orientation, and use of assessment results in decision-making. Also, outcomes assessment was the only type of assessment with significant explanatory value in predicting the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. A combination of four assessment skills and knowledge—assessment ethics, benchmarking, effective reporting and use of results, and articulate learning and development outcomes—best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Two motivations for assessment—support for the educational mission of the institution and expectations of the SSAO—best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a summary of the research study, additional limitations, discussion of the findings, and implications for practice. This chapter ends with a discussion on areas for future research and a conclusion.

Summary of Research Study

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the types of assessment being conducted in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities, (b) assess the perceptions of administrators in these environments about the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment identified in the literature review, (c) determine whether there is a difference in these perceptions between Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) and staff members within divisions of student affairs (non-SSAO staff), (d) determine which type or types of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, (e) determine which assessment skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, and (f) determine which assessment motivation factors best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. The researcher created a locally-designed instrument to address six research questions using quantitative methodology. The questionnaire included five distinct sections that participants responded to addressing the following: the types of assessment being conducted in their student affairs divisions, the culture of assessment in their student affairs divisions, their individual assessment skills and knowledge, their motivations for conducting assessment, and their demographic information.

The researcher solicited participation from 385 potential participants. These potential participants were members of SACSA and/or NASPA-Region III, two professional organizations within the field of student affairs, and worked at institutions with fewer than 5000 students. The researcher sent to potential participants an initial email inviting them to complete the questionnaire electronically. A follow-up email reminder was sent about 10 days after the initial email. The final response rate was 24.4% (N=94). Of the 94 individuals who completed the questionnaire, 30 were SSAOs.

The researcher conducted statistical analyses to address the study's six research questions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the first two research questions regarding the types of assessment being conducted and the perceptions of the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment. The researcher used t-tests to determine if there was a difference in how SSAOs and non-SSAOs perceived the elements of a culture of assessment. For the last three research questions, the researcher used the backward stepwise regression method to determine which variables explained the most variance in the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

Additional Limitations

The researcher became aware during data collection and analysis that limitations exist in addition to those addressed in Chapter 3. This study's sample size of 94 participants, including 30 SSAOs, is representative enough to draw conclusions based on the statistical analysis. However, in the future, researchers may seek to find alternative ways of attracting the participation of SSAOs. Having more SSAOs would provide more strength to the data and the results.

The focus of this study is specifically on assessment within divisions of student affairs. Some individuals who received the initial e-mail solicitation did not work in a division of student affairs, although they were members of student affairs professional organizations. The researcher chose not to include in the number of potential participants those individuals who self-identified as not working in student affairs divisions. Some potential participants who did not work in their institutions' division of student affairs may have decided not to respond to the questionnaire or inform the researcher; thus, they were included in the number of potential participants. The questionnaire in this study did not ask participants to indicate the administrative division in which they work. Doing so may have led to a more accurate determination of response rate.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study indicated major findings in the areas of types of assessment, outcomes assessment, the elements of a culture of assessment, assessment skills and knowledge content standards, and reward structures for conducting assessment.

Types of Assessment

The results of this study indicated that the types of assessment being conducted have little predictive value regarding the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Including all types of assessment as independent variables in the regression model only explained 7.2% of the variance in the dependent variable, the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Furthermore, the regression model that included all independent variables was not statistically significant at the $\alpha=.05$ level (p=.068). Merely conducting assessment does not lead to the perception that a culture of assessment is present. Administrators cannot operate under the assumption that doing more and different assessments will create an environment where staff

members incorporate assessment into the ethos of their organization and their work. Instead, they must look to employ the strategies for building a culture of assessment posited in the literature, such as infusing assessment into existing institutional processes, cultivating support for assessment from upper-level administration, and celebrating assessment-related successes (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press; Weiner, 2009).

Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessment is a major focus in accountability within the field of higher education (Maki, 2004; United States Department of Education, 2006). Accrediting agencies expect colleges and universities to demonstrate they are measuring curricular and co-curricular programs and services (Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2010; Maki, 2004). The field of student affairs has accepted its responsibility in contributing to the institution's efforts to conduct outcomes assessment (American College Personnel Association, 1996; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004; Terenzini & Upcraft, 1996; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). However, the results of this study indicated that 25% of administrators at small colleges and universities reported that they were not conducting outcomes assessment at all. The rhetoric supporting outcomes assessment has not fully translated into practice throughout this population.

This study examined the seven types of assessment that comprise a comprehensive assessment plan, as articulated by Upcraft and Schuh (1996). Participants indicated that outcomes assessment was ranked fifth out of seven in how prevalent its practice is. However, the participants connected conducting outcomes assessment with the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, as it was the only one of seven that explained the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. This finding suggests that the other types of assessment do

not weigh into participants' minds when considering what type of assessment is practiced in divisions of student affairs that have a culture of assessment.

Seagraves and Dean (2010) argued that student affairs practitioners need to broaden their definitions of assessment to include types of assessment other than outcomes assessment. Too often, administrators exclude the other six types of assessment that Upcraft and Schuh (1996) proposed. The disconnect between types of assessment other than outcomes assessment and the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment discovered in this study further supported the finding from the study conducted by Seagraves and Dean (2010).

Articulating Learning and Development Outcomes was one of four Assessment Skills and Knowledge (ASK) Standards that led to the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Outcomes assessment plays an important role in not only the types of assessment being conducted but also in the skills and knowledge that administrators possess. However, with 25% of the participants reporting that they do not conduct outcomes assessment, the researcher finds it interesting that there is such a strong connection between the ASK Standard, Articulating Learning and Development Outcomes, and the culture of assessment. Participants seemed to have the ability to articulate learning and development outcomes, yet many of them are not actually assessing the outcomes they can articulate.

One unresolved issue regarding outcomes assessment that emerged from this study was the extent to which the hyper-focus on outcomes assessment in professional literature and professional training leads administrators to associate it with a culture of assessment and to exclude other types of assessment when considering a culture of assessment. Essentially, does the focus on outcomes assessment lead to its association with a culture of assessment, or vice versa? The methodology used in this study did not lend itself to determining causation for a

particular phenomenon. Instead, the researcher can only ponder why such an exclusive relationship between outcomes assessment and the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment exists.

Elements of a Culture of Assessment

The results of this study yielded several interesting findings related to the elements of a culture of assessment within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. The elements of a culture of assessment that participants reported being the least present in their settings related to staff development or staffing practices. Four of the five most prevalent elements of a culture of assessment related to the connection of assessment within student affairs to other units within the institution. Additionally, the significant differences in perceptions of these elements between SSAOs and non-SSAOs highlighted inconsistencies that may impact assessment practice within a division of student affairs.

Staffing practices. The five elements of a culture of assessment that participants reported being least present in their current divisions of student affairs related to staffing practices. These elements included developing a common assessment language among staff, building confidence around assessment among staff, offering ongoing assessment education, including assessment in new staff orientation, and celebrating staff contributions related to assessment. The results of this study indicated that divisions of student affairs in small colleges and universities are not fully incorporating assessment into their staff development activities or programs.

Seagraves and Dean (2010) found that the three institutions in their study had SSAOs who provided assessment training opportunities for staff. However, the participants in the current study indicated ongoing assessment education was among the least present elements of a

culture of assessment in their divisions of student affairs. A culture of assessment requires that staff are trained to conduct assessment (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press). Failing to provide these opportunities leaves staff members relying on knowledge that they gained through other means, like graduate school preparation or conference participation. While these auxiliary experiences may be valuable tools for teaching assessment, they can lead to inconsistent understanding of assessment principles among staff members within the same organization. Providing ongoing training for student affairs staff breeds consistency and a common understanding of how staff members within a particular division conduct assessment.

Only one of the top five most present elements of a culture of assessment, including assessment as part of job descriptions, was related to staffing practices. With a mean of 2.83 on a scale of 1-4, this study's participants were more likely than not to have assessment in their job descriptions. This result was not consistent with the finding from Seagraves and Dean's 2010 study, where their participants did not report having assessment activities included in their job descriptions. Job descriptions demonstrate the relative importance of certain responsibilities (Raetz, 2001). Based on the data in this study, small college student affairs administrators do believe assessment is an important job activity.

Assessment as part of institutional activities. The remaining four of the top five elements of a culture of assessment—support from upper-level administration, use of assessment results in decision-making, infusion of assessment into existing institutional processes, and strong relationships across campus related to assessment—demonstrated the connection of student affairs assessment activities to other areas of the institution. Seagraves and Dean (2010) found that student affairs administrators in small colleges and universities took a collegial approach to conducting assessment. The results of this study confirmed this collegiality as it

related to student affairs administrators' relationships to other parts of campus. Assessment within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities did not happen alone. Instead, staff stated clearly that they found support for their work from upper-level administrators. They were also more likely than not to agree that they had strong relationships that support assessment across campus. Having these relationships is one example of collegiality present in the small college environment.

        Differences between SSAOs and non-SSAOs. Leaders have an important role in promoting assessment practice within their areas of responsibility (Love & Estanek, 2004; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). Finding differences in how SSAOs and non-SSAOs perceived the elements of a culture of assessment illustrated areas where SSAOs may need to strengthen staff training or investigate whether their perceptions of these elements actually translate into reality within their organizations.

        For all ten of the elements of a culture of assessment, SSAOs reported their presence at higher levels than their non-SSAO colleagues reported. One may attribute this perspective to the fact that the SSAOs have a broader understanding of how their entire division operates, which allows them to gauge their organizations' cultures of assessment in their entirety. Conversely, another explanation for this perspective may be that the SSAOs have unrealistic views of how the elements of a culture of assessment are operationalized in practice.

        Although the SSAOs perceived the elements of a culture of assessment to be more present than those individuals who work in subordinate roles, there were only three elements that indicated significant differences between SSAO and non-SSAO responses. New staff orientation is an integral part of educating staff about the important cultural elements of working in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Winston & Creamer, 1997). With a mean of 2.16 on a

scale of 1-4, results indicated that assessment practices were not routinely included in new staff

orientations in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. Yet, SSAOs and non-

SSAOs had significantly different perceptions about assessment orientations, with SSAOs

reporting their perceptions of this element at a higher rate than non-SSAOs. Non-SSAOs are

more likely to have experienced these orientation activities. Thus, the results demonstrated that

SSAOs have a misperception of exactly what is communicated to new staff regarding assessment

practice within their organizations during orientation.

SSAOs and non-SSAOs in general agreed (mean=2.96) that assessment results were used

in decision-making processes within their organizations. However, the two groups had a

statistically significant difference (p=.027) in the extent to which the assessment results were

used when making decisions, with the SSAO mean of 3.20 and the non-SSAO mean of 2.84.

Several possible reasons may account for this difference. SSAOs may be making more decisions

with assessment results in mind than their non-SSAO counterparts. SSAOs may have an inflated

perspective about the extent to which assessment is used in decision-making opportunities,

while, on the other hand, non-SSAOs may have under-estimated the extent to which this practice

occurs. Lastly, SSAOs may not communicate with non-SSAOs how often they actually use

assessment when making decisions. Regardless of the reason, the fact that a difference exists

leaves important lessons for administrators to learn regarding this practice.

Using assessment results to improve practice is an important element in the assessment

cycle (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Davis-Barham & Scott, 2006). Results in this study

indicated that Effective Reporting and Use of Results was one of four ASK Standards that led to

the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Furthermore, using assessment results

in decision-making opportunities provides motivation for continuing to conduct assessment

going forward (Barham, Tschepikow, & Seagraves, in press). Thus, SSAOs who are indeed

using assessment results when making decisions must communicate this information to

subordinate staff members. Non-SSAOs who are not using assessment results in decision-

making processes should be held accountable. Student affairs divisions with cultures of

assessment use results to improve the quality of programs and services for students (Seagraves &

Dean, 2010). Thus, administrators must continue to demonstrate how results can lead to

improvement. Having a difference in perception between SSAOs and non-SSAOs regarding the

extent to which assessment results are used in decision-making practices has the potential for

impacting assessment motivation, assessment productivity, and the quality of programs and

services that students experience.

Assessment Skills and Knowledge Content Standards

The ASK Standards were created to provide a framework for understanding the

assessment skills and knowledge needed to "successfully integrate assessment into all aspects of

practice" (Knerr & Henning, 2007, para. 6). This paradigm for understanding assessment

practice reflects the extent to which the field of student affairs has placed a great deal of

emphasis on how to conduct assessment. Utilizing a framework like the ASK Standards would

be challenging because this framework is so comprehensive that it may overwhelm student

affairs administrators and ultimately discourage some from beginning the process of conducting

assessment. For example, one may ask, "How can I begin conducting assessment if I have not

mastered these thirteen ASK Standards? Can I still conduct assessment if I only fully understand

a few of the content standards?" This perspective may certainly be an unintended outcome of the

implementation of the ASK Standards. However, the effect of discouraging assessment practice

has far-reaching negative implications, including the disconnect between student affairs and the

educational mission of the institution, the possibility of problems associated with accreditation standards that require assessment activity, and the inability to determine whether students affairs programs and services are meeting student needs and expectations.

The results of this study indicate that only four of the thirteen ASK Standards contribute, in combination with one other, to the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Future research should further explore which of the thirteen ASK Standards are indeed necessary to begin conducting assessment and to conduct it effectively at different levels of practice. The fact that assessment experts in higher education developed these standards already makes them a valuable resource. However, having additional empirical data that measure the effectiveness of the ASK Standards in promoting their own intended outcomes would benefit the field of student affairs. Instead of requiring a mastery of all thirteen standards, assessment education and professional development opportunities could be tailored to emphasize the standards that ultimately best support assessment practice and a culture of assessment within student affairs divisions.

Reward Structures for Conducting Assessment

Another interesting finding that emerged from the data in this study indicated that student affairs administrators at small colleges and universities are driven to conduct assessment by both extrinsic and intrinsic reward structures. The two primary motivations that led to the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment were expectations from the SSAO and support for the educational mission of the institution. Expectations from the SSAO is considered an extrinsic reward as subordinate staff seek to fulfill the responsibilities that the SSAO places upon them. Failure to meet these expectations may result in poor job performance ratings, which can jeopardize the staff member's ability to seek promotion and additional compensation. The fact

that expectations from the SSAO is a primary motivator for conducting assessment supported one of Seagraves and Dean's (2010) findings that SSAOs have expectations, albeit informal expectations, related to assessment.

Seagraves and Dean (2010) addressed the intrinsic motivation for conducting assessment as a means to improvement. The current study did not find that a means to improvement was a primary factor in perceiving the presence of a culture of assessment. However, participants did indicate that supporting the educational mission of the institution was one of two motivations that best predicted the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Supporting the educational mission of the institution leads to intrinsic rewards because staff members do not receive direct benefit for supporting the educational mission. Instead, they are better able to connect their work to the larger mission of the institution, which should lead to an educational experience for students that integrates the curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Implications for Practice

Assessment is a vital part of the work of college administrators (Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Thus, the researcher includes in this section several ways that the results of this study can influence assessment practice within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. These possible influences include a continued focus on outcomes assessment, further creation of staff development activities related to assessment, an appeal to both the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for conducting assessment, and the role of student affairs graduate preparation programs in training future administrators to conduct assessment in the small college setting.

Continued Focus on Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessment remains a focus within higher education, from both a curricular and co-curricular perspective. Administrators within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities must continue to explore how they can incorporate outcomes assessment into their ongoing assessment practices. Although one can speculate regarding the reasons why this occurs, conducting outcomes assessment is the only type of assessment that has predictive value in the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Furthermore, administrators within the academy and external constituents like accrediting agencies view outcomes assessment as an integral part of ensuring quality programs and services. Thus, ignoring the role that outcomes assessment can play at an institution and in its external accountability structure can erode the confidence placed in student affairs administrators to fulfill their job responsibilities most effectively.

Staff Development and Assessment

Finding ways to encourage staff development related to assessment enhances the culture of assessment within student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. Seagraves and Dean (2010) found that providing opportunities for learning how best to conduct assessment was an important condition that supported a culture of assessment. Furthermore, the five least practiced elements of a culture of assessment that this study addressed related to staff development.

The data indicated that administrators within student affairs divisions at small colleges have not capitalized on the opportunities to educate and celebrate staff regarding assessment activities. SSAOs who are interested in creating a culture of assessment can incorporate ongoing assessment education into existing staff development routines like staff meetings and in-services.

In the small college environment, where the number of staff members is relatively is low, administrators can involve the entire staff in assessment education efforts. Including everyone allows for a common understanding regarding assessment practice and assessment language within the division. Where funding permits, SSAOs can hire external consultants to assist staff with ongoing projects and resources. Having a culture of assessment includes having staff who are regularly learning about trends and practices in the field of assessment. Leaders within student affairs divisions must provide opportunities for this learning to occur among their staff members.

Beyond knowing how to conduct assessment, a culture of assessment involves developing a sense among staff that administrators value their assessment efforts. Data from this study showed that participants believe they have support for conducting assessment from the upper-level administration. However, they also reported that their assessment efforts were rarely celebrated. Establishing ceremonies or rituals for celebrating successes gives staff increased motivation for continuing their work. It also symbolizes that leaders in the organization value assessment. Recognizing and rewarding quality assessment activity is a clear implication for practice that emerged from the data in this study.

Appealing to Intrinsic and Extrinsic Rewards

Findings ways to motivate staff to conduct assessment remains an important responsibility of leadership within an organization. The motivations that best predicted the presence of a culture of assessment included support for the institution's educational mission and expectations from the SSAO. Administrators can use the results of this study to appeal to a combination of internal and external reward structures to motivate staff to conduct assessment. However, leaders must find out what motivates their staff before making decisions about moving

forward with new motivational techniques. SSAOs cannot assume, for example, that subordinate staff will conduct assessment if they are rewarded with increased salary. Some may find this technique to be a motivating factor alone, while other staff would rather have assessment also tied to an intrinsic reward like the improvement of programs and services for students. The ultimate point is that SSAOs, as they seek to develop a culture of assessment, should use motivational techniques that combine the intrinsic and extrinsic reward structures that participants in this study reported as being most closely tied to the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

Graduate Preparation Programs

Graduate preparation programs have the unique ability to reach a wide range of individuals pursuing careers in student affairs. Their responsibilities to their students and to the field of student affairs at large involve providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in their careers. The results of this study have great implications for how student affairs professionals working at small colleges and universities conduct assessment. Thus, graduate preparation programs can utilize the results to train students more effectively to work in these environments.

The results of this study give guidance to faculty in graduate preparation programs regarding the specific assessment skills and knowledge content areas they should emphasize in their curricula. Focusing on those ASK standards that connect to creating a culture of assessment (articulating learning and development outcomes; benchmarking; assessment ethics; and effective reporting and use of results) benefits the graduate students when they enter the workforce. Graduates will be more valuable employees, equipped to connect their work in assessment to the broader assessment context within the division of student affairs in which they

will work. This result, in turn, could ultimately enhance the prestige of the individual graduate

preparation programs that adopt this more focused approach to assessment education, as

professionals in the field will recognize the high quality of the graduates from programs that

provide a solid background in assessment education and a commitment to the practice of

assessment.

Graduate preparation programs need to ensure that students are exposed to the wide

variety of types of institutions that exist within higher education. Moreover, faculty should offer

further insight into how work at these types of institutions differs. This information would

include how administrators conduct assessment at small colleges and universities. For example,

the role that the SSAO at the small college plays cannot be overstated. New employees may

have significant contact with the SSAO in the small college environment, unlike their colleagues

who work at larger institutions. Understanding how to navigate the SSAO's expectations,

including those related to assessment, is an important lesson for graduate students.

Graduate programs can also emphasize how to conduct all types of assessment. With at

least one quarter of participants reporting that they are not conducting outcomes assessment,

national standards assessment, or campus environments and student culture assessments,

graduate faculty can ensure that their graduates have a good understanding of both the

importance and the usefulness of these types of assessment. Having new graduates enter the

workforce with a solid basis for conducting all assessments may make a difference in how

assessment is conducted on campuses, especially in a small college environment where the

relatively small staff size allows one staff member to have a strong impact on practice.

Areas for Future Research

The exploratory nature of this study left several areas that researchers can address in the future. First, the questions the researcher asked in this study can apply to different sectors within higher education. Thus, future researchers can expand the study to include all types and sizes of institutions. Determining if participants from a variety of institution sizes have different perceptions about the presence of a culture of assessment and the types of assessment they conduct would yield an interesting perspective about how student affairs administrators conduct assessment across the landscape of higher education. Furthermore, understanding the motivations of staff to conduct assessment and their assessment skills and knowledge would yield important information for professional associations and their professional development offerings. Applying a similar methodology and using the same questionnaire with a wider population would provide baseline data about how student affairs administrators perceive and practice assessment throughout higher education.

Developing a scale with multiple factors that yields a single measure of a culture of assessment was beyond the scope of this study. Instead, the researcher chose to ask participants in a single question about their overall perceptions about the culture of assessment within their current student affairs divisions. Moreover, previous researchers have not attempted to empirically measure identifiable elements of a culture of assessment. Future researchers can seek to develop a scale whereby participants can determine the extent to which their division of student affairs or a subset of their division, like a department, has a culture of assessment. From a research perspective, having this comprehensive measure would enhance the strength of the analysis conducted regarding the overall culture of assessment.

A final area for future research involves gaining a more thorough understanding of the role that the SSAO plays in creating and sustaining a culture of assessment. Previous research (Seagraves & Dean, 2010) indicated that the role of the SSAO is crucial in divisions of student affairs that have a culture of assessment. In this study, the existence of expectations from the SSAO was a significant motivating factor for having the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment. Additionally, SSAOs reported having a greater perception than their non-SSAO colleagues about the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment. Future researchers may seek to establish more concrete characteristics that SSAOs can embody or strategies they can employ should they be interested in creating or sustaining a culture of assessment.

Conclusion

The researcher surveyed administrators who work in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities, who were members of the Southern Association of College Student Affairs and/or Region III of NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Participants in this study provided the researcher with important information used to better understand the types of assessment being conducted and the culture of assessment in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities. The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the types of assessment being conducted in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities, (b) assess the perceptions of administrators in these environments about the elements of a culture of assessment identified in the literature review, (c) determine whether there is a difference in these perceptions between SSAOs and non-SSAOs within divisions of student affairs, (d) determine which type or types of assessment activity best predict(s) the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, (e) determine which assessment skills and knowledge best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment, and (f)

determine which assessment motivation factors best predict the perception of the presence of a culture of assessment.

Findings from this study provided descriptive data for the types of assessment and the perceptions of the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment within small college and university student affairs divisions. Outcomes assessment, as a type of assessment and an assessment skill, played an important role in explaining the variance in participants' perceptions of the overall culture of assessment. SSAOs must focus on the role that staffing practices, including staff development activities, play in a culture of assessment. Moreover, SSAOs can capitalize the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to motivate staff to conduct assessment.

Student affairs administrators at small colleges and universities cannot afford not to engage in assessment activities. In fact, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) considered conducting assessment a "matter of quality" (p. 12) and a "matter of survival" (p. 7). Assessment helps administrators ensure they are regularly seeking to improve programs and services for students (Seagraves & Dean, 2010; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Assessment also provides data that measures the impact of programs and services on students. Assumptions that small colleges do not have the number of staff or the staff expertise to conduct assessment are inaccurate. In fact, the results from this study indicated that student affairs administrators at small colleges and universities are indeed conducting assessment. Creating excuses to avoid conducting assessment cannot be tolerated in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities.

SSAOs need to assert their influence in the process of creating a culture of assessment within their divisions. The results of this study indicated that staff are motivated to conduct assessment by the expectations from their SSAOs. SSAOs need to set high expectations for assessment and hold staff members accountable for meeting them. Furthermore, SSAOs would

be wise to capitalize on the assessment knowledge that new professionals entering their organizations bring with them from graduate school. Building a culture of assessment, especially at a small college or university, requires the involvement of all staff in the process. SSAOs failing to exercise their influence and set expectations may be the greatest roadblocks to creating a culture of assessment in their divisions.

From a literature perspective, the field of student affairs has moved beyond exploring the basics of how to conduct assessment; many quality resources exist to help practitioners learn good practice (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Schuh & Associates, 2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The research focus must shift to developing a clearer understanding of what assessment is being practiced and why assessment is being practiced throughout the field. Replication of this study across the other sectors of higher education would yield important baseline data to inform how future professional development activities and publications address assessment.

Furthermore, much of what the field uses to establish best practices related to assessment is anecdotal or situational in nature. Scholars have traditionally identified best assessment practices using a non-codified and often unidentified set of standards. The CAS Standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009) serve as a set of standards for administrators to use when measuring the effectiveness of specific functional area practice. However, there are no established or verified measures or standards in place to gauge the effectiveness of a particular organization's assessment practices. Assessing the assessment practice may seem redundant and irrelevant to a staff member's daily job responsibilties. However, failing to determine whether or not administrators are conducting assessment most effectively can lead to routinely poor practice. Furthermore, having this information will allow

for a more targeted approach to establishing best practices that can be replicated throughout the field.

This study served as the basis for understanding assessment practice and the culture of assessment in one particular type of environment, the student affairs division at small colleges and universities. This study established a first attempt to collect quantifiable data related to the types of assessment being conducted and the presence of the elements of a culture of assessment. The results from the study have the potential to impact practice in small college and university student affairs divisions, including promoting a better understanding of the role that outcomes assessment plays in creating a culture of assessment and the role of SSAOs in establishing clear assessment expectations for staff. However, the results also have the potential to impact how future scholars conceptualize the study of assessment practice, including how they can shift the focus in the literature from how to conduct assessment to what and why assessment is being conducted.

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL INVITATION TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

[Date]

Dear [Participant's First Name]:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Laura A. Dean in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled "Assessment Practices in Student Affairs Divisions at Small Colleges and Universities" (UGA IRB Project #2011-10475-0). The purpose of this study is to explore the types of assessment being conducted and the culture of assessment in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities.

Your participation will involve completing the following questionnaire and should only take about 10-15 minutes. To participate, please click the link below. You will be directed to a consent form that articulates your rights as a participant. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to respond to this email.

[Insert Link Here]

Please complete the questionnaire before 5:00pm April 19, 2011. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Beau Seagraves

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

<u>Consent Form</u>

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled "Assessment Practices in Student Affairs Divisions at Small Colleges and Universities," under the direction of Dr. Laura A. Dean in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at The University of Georgia. The purpose of this study is to explore the types of assessment being conducted and the culture of assessment in student affairs divisions at small colleges and universities.

Your participation will involve completing the following questionnaire and should only take about 10-15 minutes. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The data resulting from your participation will be treated confidentially and maintained in a secure electronic database. Please note that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once we receive the completed surveys, we will store them in a password-protected database. There are no identity links within the instrument. The results of the research study may be published, but no identifiable information will be used. The findings from this study will provide beneficial information on the types of assessment being conducted and the culture of assessment within the small college and university environment. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. If you are not comfortable with the level of confidentiality provided by the Internet, please feel free to print out a copy of the survey, fill it out by hand, and mail it to Beau Seagraves at the address given below, with no return address on the envelope.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call Beau Seagraves at (706) 614-2437, send an e-mail to <u>beaus@uga.edu</u>, or mail to 500 Memorial Hall; University of Georgia; Athens, Georgia 30602.

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu. Please feel free to print a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you agree to participate in the above described research project, please select "yes" below. If you prefer not to participate, please select "no" below.

○ **Yes**

○ **No**

APPENDIX C

INSTRUMENT

Small Colleges & Assessment

Types of Assessment

Directions: Select the response that most reflects the extent to which the following assessment activities are conducted within your department/unit within student affairs. If you are responsible for more than one department/unit, please indicate your overall understanding of the assessment activities across the departments/units. If you mark "occasionally practiced" or "routinely practiced," please provide a brief example or examples of the activity. For example, if you mark "routinely practiced" for tracking usage, you could write, "Count number of students who attend programs."

Tracking usage (services, programs, and facilities)

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [_____]

○ Routinely Practiced [_____]

Student needs assessment

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [_____]

○ Routinely Practiced [_____]

Student satisfaction assessment

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [_____]

○ Routinely Practiced [_____]

Campus environments and student cultures assessment

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [_____]

○ Routinely Practiced [_____]

Outcomes assessment

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [   ]

○ Routinely Practiced [   ]

Benchmarking: Comparable institutions assessment

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [   ]

○ Routinely Practiced [   ]

Using nationally-accepted standards to assess

○ Not Practiced

○ Occasionally Practiced [   ]

○ Routinely Practiced [   ]

Organizational Culture

Directions: Select the response that best characterizes your perception of your current division of student affairs.

The division of student affairs at my current institution has an organizational culture whose values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors reflect a shared appreciation of assessment practice.

○ Strongly Disagree

○ Disagree

○ Agree

○ Strongly Agree

The division of student affairs at my current institution has:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Support from upper-level administration for assessment activities.	○	○	○	○
Assessment responsibilities as part of job descriptions.	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A common language among staff regarding assessment.	○	○	○	○
Ongoing educational opportunities for staff regarding assessment.	○	○	○	○
An orientation for new staff regarding assessment expectations.	○	○	○	○
Strong relationships across campus that support assessment.	○	○	○	○

The division of student affairs at my current institution:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Builds confidence among staff regarding assessment practice.	○	○	○	○
Infuses assessment into existing institutional processes.	○	○	○	○
Celebrates staff contributions to assessment priorities through ceremonies and recognitions.	○	○	○	○
Uses assessment results in decision-making opportunities.	○	○	○	○

ACPA ASK Standards Needs Assessment
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This section is asking about your level of skill and knowledge related to ACPA's ASK Standards, which is a set of content standards identified as important for practitioners doing assessment work.

For each of the following ASK content standards, indicate your level of skill and knowledge:

	No experience	Beginner	Intermediate	Accomplished
Assessment Design	○	○	○	○
Articulating Learning and Development Outcomes	○	○	○	○
Selection of Data Collection and Management Methods	○	○	○	○
Assessment Instruments	○	○	○	○
Surveys Used for Assessment Purposes	○	○	○	○
Interviews and Focus Groups Used for Assessment Purposes	○	○	○	○
Analysis	○	○	○	○
Benchmarking	○	○	○	○
Program Review and Evaluation	○	○	○	○
Assessment Ethics	○	○	○	○
Effective Reporting and Use of Results	○	○	○	○
Politics of Assessment	○	○	○	○
Assessment Education	○	○	○	○

Assessment Motivations

Directions: Using the scale below, select the response that best characterizes why you conduct assessment within your current role.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I conduct assessment because of the expectations placed upon our institution by our regional accreditation agency.	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because of the professional standards outlined by CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education).	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because of the professional standards outlined by other professional organizations (NASPA, ACPA, SACSA, ACUHO-I, etc.).	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because it is an expectation of my direct supervisor.	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because it is an expectation of my Senior Student Affairs Officer (Vice President, Dean of Students, etc.).	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because the results help staff improve programs and services for students.	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because it supports the educational mission of the institution.	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because the results provide justification when developing policies or making decisions.	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because the results provide justification for the existence of certain programs and services.	○	○	○	○
I conduct assessment because the results help me be a good steward of institutional resources.	○	○	○	○

Demographics

Directions: Select the response that is most appropriate.

Current Job Level

○ I am the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) (or highest ranking student affairs administrator).

○ I report directly to the SSAO.

○ I am neither the SSAO nor report to the SSAO.

Highest Degree Earned

○ High School

○ Associates

○ Bachelors

○ Masters

○ Specialists

○ Doctorate (or other terminal degree)

Length of Time in Current Position

○ 0-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ More than 15 years

Length of Time at Current Institution

○ 0-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ More than 15 years

Length of Time Working in Student Affairs

○ 0-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ More than 15 years

Current Institutional Size (Total # of Students)

- ○ Fewer than 1,000
- ○ 1,000-1,999
- ○ 2,000-2,999
- ○ 3,000-3,999
- ○ 4,000-4,999
- ○ 5,000 or more

Please indicate your primary job function(s) (choose all that apply):

- ☐ Academic Advising
- ☐ Admissions
- ☐ Admissions/Enrollment Mgmt
- ☐ Adult Learner Services
- ☐ Assessment/Research
- ☐ Career Planning/Placement
- ☐ Commuter Services
- ☐ Counseling
- ☐ Disabled Student Services
- ☐ Financial Aid
- ☐ Food Services
- ☐ Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Awareness
- ☐ Graduate Preparation Program Coordinator
- ☐ Greek Affairs
- ☐ Health/Drug & Alcohol
- ☐ International Students
- ☐ Intramural/Recreation Sports
- ☐ Judicial Affairs
- ☐ Leadership Development
- ☐ Multicultural Affairs
- ☐ Orientation
- ☐ Religious Programs
- ☐ Residence Life

- ☐ Service Learning
- ☐ Student Activities
- ☐ Student Affairs Administration
- ☐ Student Union
- ☐ Teaching Faculty
- ☐ Women's Resources
- ☐ Other: _____